The views of Step Up to Social Work trainees: cohort 1 and cohort 2

Research report

January 2014

Dr Mary Baginsky and Professor Jill Manthorpe - Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College, London

This evaluation was completed shortly before the publication of the reviews of social work education by Sir Martin Narey and Professor Croisdale-Appleby OBE.

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

Acknowledgements

This evaluation was funded by the Department for Education (DfE). We are extremely grateful to officials in the Social Work Reform Unit in the DfE, particularly Paul Harper and Beverley Wilson who managed this research. They were supported by Claire Teague, Jo McCarey Egan and Umar Hyatt all of whom provided the team with information and practical support at various points.

Janet Robinson in the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College London prepared the contents pages with great care - a laborious task for which we are very grateful.

But finally our greatest thanks go to both cohorts of Step Up to Social Work trainees. Without the time they gave to completing the survey and sharing their experiences we should not have had such rich data with which to work.

Executive Summary

Background to Step Up to Social Work and the evaluation

The first two Step Up to Social Work (Step Up) programmes have been a master's level professional qualifying training route into social work over an 18-month period in England. The programme was intended to attract academically high achieving candidates with experience of working with children and families into the social work profession. The intention was also to allow employers and universities to develop the training within the requirements set by the then General Social Care Council (GSCC). The first Step Up programme involved eight regional partnerships (RPs), bringing together 42 local authorities, and 185 trainees started the training in September 2010. The second programme involved ten partnerships of 54 local authorities, and 227 trainees embarked on the training in March 2012.

In the first programme each RP was linked with one of two universities – Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and Salford University – commissioned to validate the training provision in line with GSCC's requirements and award the master's degree. On the first Step Up programme these universities also provided the teaching directly in some RPs but in others a different university did so. By the second programme only one of the by then ten RPs adopted the former model with most working directly with MMU or Salford or with another university.

Questionnaires were distributed to both cohorts at four points: at the start of the training (T1), after six and 12 (T2 and T3) months, and then at the end of the 18 months (T4). The data reported here are in terms of the number of respondents to the questionnaires rather than the whole Cohorts.

This evaluation was designed to capture the experiences of the first two cohorts of trainees. A report on the experiences of first cohort of trainees was published in Spring 2013 (Baginsky and Teague, 2013). This present report records and compares the experiences of both cohorts but as the earlier report explored the views of **Cohort 1** trainees, greater emphasis is placed here on the experiences of **Cohort 2** trainees. The earlier report also reported the views of **Cohort 2** respondents on their pre-course experience of recruitment and appointment (T1) so in this report greater emphasis is placed on their T2 to T4 experiences.

Background of respondents

All applicants were required to have at least an upper second class degree and relevant experience of working with children and families, either in an employed or volunteering capacity.

- Fifteen per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents had obtained a first class degree at the end of their undergraduate studies and 11 per cent had a post-graduate qualification; 19 per cent of **Cohort 2** had a first class degree and 39 per cent had a post-graduate qualification.
- Thirteen per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents and 29 per cent of **Cohort 2** already held a professional qualification.
- Eighty two per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents and 95 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents were employed in a post considered relevant to social work when they applied for a place on Step Up.
- Just under 20 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents and 29 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents had ten years or more paid employment or mixed employment and voluntary work experience which may be considered relevant to social work.
- Although the majority of respondents in both cohorts said they had considered a career in social work it was evident from their comments that most of this group would not have followed a career in social work without being able to access the financial support offered by the Step Up programme. Some participants in **Cohort 1** had reported that the publicity around the programme had opened their eyes to the possibility of becoming a social worker but the financial support stands out as a key feature of Step Up, more so for **Cohort 2** since more of these trainees had already been considering a social work career and possibly because they were slightly older on average and had work experience in this area.

Respondents' views on recruitment processes and assessment centres

Respondents in both cohorts:

- rated the recruitment, application and assessment centre processes highly. A quarter of **Cohort 2** respondents would have liked more information at the application stage about the recruitment and allocation processes and to have had access to an advice centre or similar.
- thought the assessment centre approach was appropriate and rigorous but those in **Cohort 2** were far more positive about the arrangements.

A recruitment agency had supported the process on the first programme and their involvement had drawn many complaints, whereas the assessment centres for the second programme were organised entirely by the RPs.

Respondents' views on regional partnerships, local authorities and universities

- **Cohort 1** respondents were generally satisfied with the support they received from the RPs, although there was considerable variation across the RPs.
- In both cohorts some respondents had a low awareness of the role of the RPs but there was a clear correlation between trainees' levels of satisfaction and their reports of receiving responses to questions or concerns regarding any part of the programme and to perceived poor communications between the RPs, trainees, local authorities and universities.
- Respondents in both cohorts expressed a higher level of satisfaction with their local authorities than with their RPs. However, concerns over whether or not their authorities would employ them and the processes associated with gaining employment were a major concern at T4 for both groups, but particularly for **Cohort 2** for whom there were not as many employment opportunities as for **Cohort 1**.
- **Cohort 1** respondents who were registered with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) recorded the highest level of satisfaction, particularly amongst those who were also taught by that university. Throughout the training respondents were more likely to be satisfied with the support they received when the university where they were registered was also delivering the course. With the exception of those in the NW Midlands, **Cohort 2** trainees only had a relationship with one university, who accredited and delivered the training. The overall level of satisfaction with their universities was higher at T2, T3 and T4 amongst **Cohort 2** respondents, but again this does disguise considerable variation across the RPs.
- Both cohorts were usually complimentary about the teaching input provided by practitioners and external agencies, but wanted speakers to be adequately briefed about both the course and trainees' previous experiences.

Respondents' satisfaction with academic and practice elements

- The proportion of **Cohort 1** respondents who were unreservedly satisfied with the academic input remained low throughout. At T2, T3 and T4 the level of satisfaction with their academic input amongst **Cohort 2** was higher than that of **Cohort 1**. At T2 and T3 over half of **Cohort 2** respondents recorded a positive response and by T4 nearly three-quarters did so (see Table 4.1 of full report). Once again there were considerable differences between the RPs.
- **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents were consistently more positive about the practice input than about the academic input and there was also more consistency across the RPs.
- At T4 only just over a quarter of **Cohort 1** thought theory and practice of social work had been integrated whereas more than three fifths of **Cohort 2** thought they had.
- At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to provide details of the placements that they had experienced in the course of their training.[1] Of the 159 trainees in **Cohort 2** providing information all had undertaken at least one long placement in a statutory children's social work setting and 97 had both 'long' placements in statutory settings. The majority of **Cohort 2** had undertaken a placement in an adult setting. Three-fifths of **Cohort 2** said their host teams were well-prepared for them and a further quarter said they were adequately prepared.

Respondents' views on preparation for practice

At T4 both **Cohort 1 and Cohort 2** respondents were asked to say how well prepared they felt in relation to 13 key knowledge areas. These were:

context of social work; social work values and ethics; social work theory and methods; application of social knowledge; social work with adults; social work with children and families; anti-oppressive practice; research methods and evaluation; social work roles and responsibilities; issues of power and discrimination; interpersonal communication; human growth and development; the legal system.

[1] This information was not collected from Cohort 1.

- Over 70 per cent of **Cohort 1** said they were well prepared in relation to six areas. These were values and ethics; issues of power and discrimination; the context of social work; social work with children and families; anti-oppressive practice and inter-personal communication. Sixty per cent or more felt well prepared/very well prepared on social work roles and responsibilities, the application of social work, and social work theory and methods, and over 50 per cent on research methods and evaluation. In three areas under half of respondents felt very well prepared or well prepared. These were human growth and development (48%), the legal system (42%) and, least of all, social work with adults (25%).
- At T4 in 12 of the 13 areas a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents[2] than those from **Cohort 1** said they had been 'well prepared'; the exception was anti-oppressive practice. In the three areas where under 50 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents had not felt 'well' prepared' – human growth and development, the legal system, and social work with adults – a higher proportion of those replying from **Cohort 2** said they felt well prepared.
- For eight of the 13 areas a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents said that they had been well / very well prepared by the practice element of the training than by their universities.

At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were also asked to say how well prepared they felt in relation to 13 key skill areas. These were:

assessing need; developing plans; assessing and managing risk; reflecting on practice; working with children and young people; working effectively with families; working with those reluctant to engage; working with groups; dealing with aggression, hostility and conflict; record keeping; leadership and management; the evidence base of what works; accessing services / resources that might help services users.

- With the exception of 'reflecting on practice' a higher proportion of respondents said they were well prepared as a result of the practice element rather than the university input.
- Ninety two per cent and 90 per cent respectively thought they had been well prepared by practice to work with families *and* with children and young people, but only 55 per cent and 63 per cent thought their universities had prepared them to this level. Over 80 per cent of

[2] **Cohort 2** respondents were asked at T4 to distinguish between preparation by their universities and their placements/practice experiences. The higher score for each aspect has been used when reporting **Cohort 2** responses.

respondents said they were well prepared by their placements to assess need (88% and 42%);[3] assess and manage risk (88% and 42%); develop plans (87% and 24%); and record keep (82% and 36%). Over 70 per cent of respondents thought they had been well-prepared to access services and resources (74% and 29%) and to work with people who are reluctant to engage (72% and 35%).

- While nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents thought their placements had prepared them well to deal with aggression, hostility and conflict only one in five thought their universities had done so. There were also three areas where under half of respondents thought they had been well prepared. These were understanding the evidence base for what works (48% and 44%); working with groups (48% and 38%); and leadership and management (31% and 19%).

Respondents' views teaching and learning methods

At T4 **Cohort 2** were asked for their views on the teaching methods that had been used. The overall ratings were generally positive. The highest ratings were for academic lectures, presentations by practitioners and those from other agencies, and scenarios / case study materials. E-learning materials were well rated. Many of the students had experience of distance learning and they usually viewed it favourably. However, some considered that more thought should be given to which subjects that it was appropriate to teach in this way and to those that should be taught face to face. Child protection was considered to fall into the latter category. Shadowing experienced social workers was also very well rated. Role-play or simulation 'laboratories' were not well rated by the respondents but one in five and one third respectively had no experience of the methods. Only a quarter rated IT training, as 'good' but an equal proportion had no experience of it.

Respondents' views on assessment methods

Just over three-fifths of respondents were satisfied with the way their academic work had been assessed, although this varied considerably between RPs and dissatisfaction was often attributed to perceived inconsistency. A higher proportion (90%) was satisfied with the way in which their practice had been assessed.

[3] Practice figure is given first then university figure.

Respondents' reflections at end of the training and their plans

- Almost the same proportion of both cohorts (96% and 97% respectively) considered they had been adequately prepared to practise as newly qualified social workers.
- At the end of the training the overwhelming majority of respondents from both cohorts identified their placements and their practice educators as the aspects of the training that had gone well.
- When asked to identify the things that had not gone well, over two-thirds of **Cohort 1** respondents mentioned matters to do with the delivery of the course, such as timings and organisation, as well as quality issues. **Cohort 2** respondents' replies were very similar but with an even greater emphasis on concerns about the quality of the academic input.
- **Cohort 2** were asked to say if their expectations had been met and over half thought their expectations had been largely or fully met and a further third thought they had been met to some extent.
- By the end of the training 93 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents had accepted posts as social workers; the figure for the whole of **Cohort 1** was 82 per cent. The data on **Cohort 2** respondents were not as clear. At the point at which they replied to the survey, 79 per cent of respondents had been offered and accepted a social work post, with many of the rest waiting to hear about the outcome of applications.
- **Cohort 2** trainees were asked if they saw their longer-term careers as being in social work. Just over 70 per cent of respondents did intend to stay in social work; 60 per cent of respondents wanted to remain in statutory children's services or a related area.

Section 1: Background to the evaluation of trainees' views on the Step Up to Social Work programme

1.1 The Step Up to Social Work Programme

The Step Up to Social Work (also referred to as 'Step Up' in this report) training route was launched in the autumn of 2009, and the first cohort started in September 2010 and the second in March 2012. It was intended to:

- improve the quality of social workers entering the profession
- enable local employers to shape initial training for students to address local needs.

It was aimed at:

- attracting high achieving candidates into the social work profession, with the
  expectation that they will have the skills and experience necessary to train as

  social workers working with families and children;
- allowing employers to play a significant role in the training of these candidates, in partnership with accredited higher education institution (HEI) providers.

The programme was designed to allow trainees to complete a master's degree in social work within 18 months.

Groups of local authorities in the same geographic region formed regional partnerships (RPs). The partnerships differ in size but each one has a lead local authority.

There were eight RPs in the first Step Up programme and ten in the second programme. When referring to the partnerships in the report they are named in full but sometimes just their initials are used in tables.

Fig 1.1: Step Up Regional Partnerships (2010-12 and 2012-13)

Step Up 1 (Sept 2010 - March 2012)	Step Up 2 (March 2012 - August 2013)
Central Bedfordshire and Luton (CBL)	Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire (CBLH)
East	East
East Midlands (EM)	East Midlands (EM)
Greater Manchester (GM)	Greater Manchester (GM)
Learn Together Partnership (LTP)	Learn Together Partnership (LTP)
West London Alliance (WLA)	NW Midlands (NWM)
West Midlands (WM)	South East (SE)
Yorkshire & Humberside (Y&H)	South East London (SEL)
	West London Alliance (WLA)
	Yorkshire & Humberside (Y&H)

Tables A2.1 and A2.2 in Annex 2 provide details of the local authorities in each partnership.

Eight RPs were involved in the first Step Up programme. The number of local authorities hosting trainees in each RP varied and the total number of local authorities involved was 42. Recruitment for the programme began in February 2010 and over 2000 applications were received. The selection process comprised of an initial screening exercise and those who were successful were invited to a one-day regional assessment centre event that was organised by a recruitment agency. This agency, alongside local authorities, universities (higher education institutions - HEIs) and service users, were involved in the selection process. Over 200 offers of places on the programme were made and 185 successful applicants started as trainees in September 2010. Of this first group - termed **Cohort 1** - 168 of 185 (91%) completed their training.

One of the Regional Partners did not take part in Step Up 2 but three new Regional Partnerships (RPs) joined the programme and the number of local authorities taking part rose to 54. Tables A1 and A2 in Annex 1 provide details of the RPs involved in both cohorts and the constituent local authorities. The recruitment processes around the second Step Up programme were essentially the same but with two key differences. There was a far larger role for the RPs in short-listing the candidates invited to the assessment centres

and in arranging their own assessment centres without the support of a recruitment agency. In late 2011 230 trainees were recruited to **Cohort 2**; 227 started their training in March 2012 and 214 (97%) completed it in summer 2013.

1.2 The evaluation

This evaluation captures the feedback of trainees enrolled onto the first and second Step Up to Social Work programmes from the time they embarked on the training until the point at which they qualified as social workers. The evaluation was intended to:

- support a wider decision on whether or not the programme represents efficient use of resources in relation to the training of social workers
- demonstrate the extent to which the programme has achieved its objectives
- inform any future implementation.

The evaluation was initially based in the Children's Workforce Development Council but when that organisation closed it moved with the senior evaluator into the Department for Education (DfE). It has subsequently moved with that evaluator to her base at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College London, but the DfE continued to fund the final stage of the Cohort 2 work.

1.3 Methodology

The reasoning behind the methodology underpinning this evaluation is set out in more detail in the report on the experiences of the first cohort (Baginsky and Teague, 2013). The same approach was applied to the evaluation of the experiences of the second cohort. That is, it was designed as a longitudinal study that would generate data collected from trainees by surveys at four points in the training and, as such, it conforms with Ruspini's (1999) definition of a longitudinal study as one where:

- data are collected for each item or variable for two or more distinct periods;
- the subjects or cases analysed are the same or broadly comparable;
- the analysis involves some comparison of data between or among periods.

The survey instruments were designed to capture feedback on the issues that would be relevant to the trainees at the points at which they were completing them. So, for example, the first explored their views on the application and recruitment process and the final one asked them to reflect on the training and provide details of what they would be doing after the training ended. Other questions explored the trainees' responses to specific aspects of the course and curriculum. The questions were drafted in consultation with those teaching on social work courses in universities not taking part in the Step Up programme. This was done to capture views on what social work students may be expected to cover and to determine if this was the case even though the Step Up training was shorter. It would have been helpful to have been able to survey a cohort of students on a 'traditional' master's course to explore any similarities and differences and this is a limitation of this evaluation.

At each stage the survey instruments were piloted to ensure that the questions were understandable, unambiguous and would not cause problems for respondents or researchers. Many of the questions were used across both cohorts in order to allow comparisons to be made but additional questions were asked of **Cohort 2**. Sometimes these were inserted to explore specific issues in more detail and sometimes to capture feedback on an area not covered with **Cohort 1** respondents. This report makes it clear where the questions were the same or where there were differences or insertions.
In August 2010 an electronic survey was sent to the email addresses of all those who had been offered a place on the Step Up programme and who, it was thought, would be starting the training in the September of that year. So although 189 received the mailing only 185 started the training. Respondents were asked for permission to re-contact them; where someone asked not to be involved in the evaluation their name was removed from the dataset. However, if someone did not respond at any stage they were included in subsequent distributions. The same approach was adopted in relation to **Cohort 2** who started their training in March 2012.

The report uses the shorthand terms T1, T2, T3 and T4 to reference the four points at which a survey was conducted.[4] At T1, T2 and T3 **Cohort 1** received the questionnaire as an email attachment. At T4 the survey was available on-line but an electronic version was also attached to the email that provided the access details. The responses from both modes of completion were merged into one data file. **Cohort 2** respondents were able to complete the survey online at all points but they were also sent an electronic version. At each stage between 85 and 90 per cent of respondents chose to complete the

[4] For Cohort 1 this was in August 2010 (T1); March 2011(T2); September 2011 (T3); and March 2012 (T4). For Cohort 2 this was March 2012 (T1); August 2012 (T2); February 2013 (T3); and October 2013 (T4).

survey online. It is worth noting that the responses to the open ended questions were much more detailed in the electronic responses than in those completed online, even though there were no limitations on the number of words that could be entered.[5]

Respondents from both cohorts were told that the data would be reported without identifiers and that no individual would be identifiable, either directly or indirectly. They were also told that all information collected from individuals would be kept strictly confidential (subject to the usual legal limitations) and confidentiality, privacy and anonymity would be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material. Assurances were given to respondents that only anonymised research data would be archived and the information they supplied would not be used in any way that would allow identification of individuals. Consent was implied by respondents returning the questionnaire and providing a preferred email or postal address. At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were informed that the anonymised quantitative data from that stage would be passed, at its request, to the DfE. The response rate was slow at this stage and additional personalised reminders were sent. In the event the response rate was in line with the other three surveys of **Cohort 2**, although ten individuals contacted the research team to say that because the data would transfer to the DfE they were not returning the survey. Assurances over confidentiality were provided and some did go on to complete the survey. However 11 per cent of respondents made the return anonymously, which had not happened previously.

1.4 Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were inputted into the SPSS version 15 and subsequently version 21 for Windows, a computer software package for statistical analysis. The analysis of quantitative data included investigation of frequencies, cross-tabulations and some statistical testing. It is important to remember that the percentages quoted in this report relate to the respondents to the surveys and not the whole cohort.

Respondents' free text comments were analysed using coding frameworks developed for each set of comments. The framework was based on aligning the comments with the options available for the quantitative data and initially recording the responses as positive, negative or mixed. It also allowed significance to be attached to the themes and patterns that emerged. As a result reporting could reflect the extent to which a particular comment fitted in with the range of responses as well as to contextualize any unusual incident.

[5] Respondents were able to save their answers and return to the survey as many times as they wished.

1.5 Response rates

Table 1.1 summarises the response rates for each stage (T1 to T4) for both Cohorts 1 and 2.

Table 1.1: Response rates by Time (T) and by Cohort

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
T1	78% On basis of 185 trainees starting on Step Up T1 (August 2010)	77% On basis of 227 trainees starting on Step Up at T1 (March 2012)
T2	71% On basis of 174 trainees still on Step Up at T2 (March 2011)	81% On basis of 221 trainees still on Step Up at T2 (August 2012)
T3	64% On basis of 171 trainees still on Step Up at T3 (September 2011)	83% On basis of 217 trainees still on Step Up T3 (February 2013)
T4	71% On basis of 168 trainees still on Step Up at T4 (March 2012)	80% On basis of 214 trainees who were still on Step Up at June 2013 (October 2013)

The **Cohort 2** response rate was higher than that of **Cohort 1** at three of the four time points, the exception being T1. While the response rate was good for **Cohort 1** it was extremely good for **Cohort 2**. The levels reflected a very high commitment on the part of both cohorts of trainees to the evaluation.

Table A2 in Annex 1 contains detailed response rates for each Regional Partnership.

1.6 Reporting

It is not appropriate to give percentages at RP level because the numbers are too small and they also vary considerably between partnerships. Percentages for the whole cohorts are provided but proportions rather than percentages are used where appropriate to describe any differences between partnerships.

Section 2: Profile of respondents

2.1 Age of trainees

Just over a third of the whole of **Cohort 1** was aged under 25 when they started the training, compared with just eight per cent of **Cohort 2**, which represents a very sharp drop; 63 per cent of **Cohort 1** were 30 years or under compared with 54 per cent of **Cohort 2**. The proportions in the other age bands (see Table 2.1) were similar across the two cohorts although **Cohort 2** was overall slightly older. The age profiles of the respondents in both cohorts were generally in line with the overall cohort profiles at all stages.

Table 2.1: Age of Trainees and of Respondents by Cohort

	Under 25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51+	Not stated	
All Cohort 1 trainees	36%	27%	14%	8%	11%	3%	1%	-	100% (n=184)
									78% response rate
Respondents	46% (n=65)	27% (n=39)	14% (n=20)	6% (n=9)	3% (n=5)	3% (n=5)	1% (n=1)	-	100% (n=144)
All Cohort 2 trainees	8%	46%	15%	9%	8%	6%	5%	3%	100% (n=227)
									77% rate response rate
Respondents	9% (n=16)	50% (n=88)	11% (n=20)	9% (n=15)	11% (n=20)	7% (n=12)	2% (n=3)	1% (n=2)	100% (n=176)

2.2 Gender profile of trainees

As with all social work students, both cohorts contained far more female trainees than male. Over four-fifths of **Cohort 1** respondents were female (83%) and it was even higher (92%) for **Cohort 2**. The respondent profile matched the gender profile of **Cohort 1** exactly; in **Cohort 2** it was close but a very slightly higher proportion of females / lower proportion of males responded (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Cohorts 1 and 2 by Gender – whole Cohorts and Respondents

	Female	Male
Cohort 1 – whole n = 184	83%	17%
Cohort 1 – respondents n = 144 *	120 / 83%	23 / 16%
Cohort 2 – whole n = 227	89%	11%
Cohort 2 – respondents n = 176	162 / 92%	14 / 8%

* One Cohort 1 respondent did not provide details.

Information on other personal characteristics was not collected for this study although such data were collected about all applicants.

2.3 Qualifications and experience

Step Up to Social Work was designed to attract graduates with a first class or upper second degree, who had experience of working with children and young people. The experience was not defined in terms of years or the capacity in which the experience was gained. A higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents had a first degree that could be classed as relevant to social work than did **Cohort 1** respondents (68% to 58%) and there was also a slightly higher proportion with a first class honours degree (19% to 15%). **Cohort 2** respondents also contained a higher proportion of respondents already holding post-graduate degrees (39% compared with 11%) most of which were relevant to social work (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Academic Qualifications of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Respondents

	Undergraduate degree					Post-graduate degree		
	1st	2.1		Relevant [6]	Not relevant	Relevant	Not relevant	None
Cohort 1- whole N = 184	15%	85%		Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Cohort 1 – respondents N = 144	21/ 15%	123 / 85%		83 / 58%	61 / 42%	9 / 6%	7 / 5%	128 / 89%
Cohort 2 – whole N = 227	19%	81%		Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Cohort 2 – respondents N = 176	34 / 19%	142 / 81%		120 / 68%	56 / 32%	58 / 33%	11/ 6%	107 / 61%

Twenty nine per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents already had a professional qualification, compared with 13 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents. Where these were relevant they were usually in teaching or youth work (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Prior Professional Qualifications of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 respondents possessing a professional qualification

	Relevant to social work	Not relevant	None
Cohort 1 respondents	7%	6%	**87%**
Cohort 2 respondents	19%	10%	**71%**

As far as **Cohort 1** was concerned, 118 of the 144 respondents (82%) were employed in a relevant post when they applied for a place on Step Up and two were volunteering in a relevant field. The majority was employed in the public (66%) or voluntary (19%) sectors. All **Cohort 2** trainees were employed (95%) or volunteering (5%) in a relevant post prior to taking part in Step Up.

Details of respondents' previous employment / volunteering and length of relevant experience are contained in Tables 2.5 and 2.6 respectively.

Table 2.5: Employment Background of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Respondents

Employer	Cohort 1 respondents (n = 144)	Cohort 2 respondents (n = 176)
Public sector	66% (n = 95)	54% (n = 95)
Voluntary sector	19% (n = 27)	36% (n = 63)
Other	14% (n = 20)	10% (n = 18)
Not stated	1% (n = 2)	-

[6] Relevant was defined as youth and early years studies, education, sociology, law, criminology and psychology.

Table 2.7 summarises respondents' overall level of relevant experience, gained in employment and / or by volunteering. While there was a great deal of experience amongst the respondents in both cohorts, it was significantly higher amongst those in **Cohort 2** where 29 per cent had over ten years' experience in a combination of employment and volunteering, compared with 19 per cent of **Cohort 1**, and a further 40 per cent of **Cohort 2** had between 5 and 10 years similar experience compared with 29 per cent of **Cohort 1**.

Table 2.6: Immediate Previous Employment (or similar) of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 Respondents

Support work - children		Support work - adults		Teaching		Teaching assistance [or similar]	
Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
38 (26%)	65 (37%)	23 (6%)	-	9 (6%)	10 (7%)	21 (15%)	26 (15%)
Residential - children		**Youth worker**		**Connexions**		**Community work**	
Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
3 (2%)	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	21 (12%)	4 (3%)	6 (3%)	3 (2%)	13 (7%)
Youth Offending Teams		**Training - adults**		**Other professional - relevant**		**Other professional – not relevant**	
Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
1 (<1%)	12 (7%)	4 (3%)	2 (<1%)	2 (1%)	6 (3%)	1 (<1%)	-
Other not relevant		**Post graduate study**		**Volunteering**			
Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2		
22 (15%)	-	1 (<1%)	-	2 (1%)	9 (5%)		

Table 2.7: Duration of Relevant Experience of Respondents in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2

	10+ years paid relevant employment or mixed relevant employment and voluntary work	**5-10 years relevant paid employment or mixed relevant employment and voluntary work**	**1-4 years relevant paid employment or mixed relevant employment and voluntary work**
Cohort 1 respondents	n = 26 (18%)	n = 39 (27%)	n = 56 (39%)
Cohort 2 respondents	n = 48 (27%)	n = 67 (38%)	n = 28 (16%)
	OR	**OR**	**OR**
	10 + years volunteering	**5-10 years voluntary work**	**1-4 years voluntary work**
Cohort 1 respondents	n = 2 (1%)	n = 2 (1%)	n = 13 (9%)
Cohort 2 respondents	n = 4 (2%)	n = 4 (2%)	n = 15 (9%)
Cohort 1 respondents	**19% of respondents had this level of experience**	**29 % of respondents had this level of experience**	**48% of respondents had this level of experience**
Cohort 2 respondents	**29% of respondents had this level of experience**	**40% of respondents had this level of experience**	**25% of respondents had this level of experience**

* It was not possible to define experience for four per cent of C1 and six per cent of respondents of C2

2.4 Consideration of social work as a career

At T1 respondents were asked if they had previously considered a career in social work. The majority of the 144 respondents in **Cohort 1** – 88 per cent (126 of 144 replies) – said that they had considered pursuing social work as a career. However it was evident from their commentaries that only a minority of **Cohort 1** would have done so. Most identified at least one barrier to entering the profession, usually a financial one, particularly where they were supporting families and / or where they were already repaying a student loan. Nonetheless it was not usually the sole factor. Two other deterrents were mentioned. One was a negative perception of social workers amongst the public; the other was an absence of information on routes into social work for 'outsiders'. There were 18 respondents (12%) who had not previously considered a career in social work and were attracted by the opportunity to study for a professional and academic qualification while being paid and where they were able to build on past experience.

A slightly higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents (92% / 162 of the 176 replies) said they had considered a career in social work but again finance was a major consideration.[7] It was not clear how many would have gone on to train without the programme; possibly more would have qualified at some point than would have been the case for **Cohort 1**, given the higher level of experience and involvement in relevant careers, but that is only speculation. No clear differences emerged from the responses of the two cohorts, including from those who said they had not considered entering the profession.

2.5 Awareness of Step Up to Social Work Programme

Over a third of **Cohort 1** respondents had become aware of the programme by either receiving an email alert from CWDC as a result of registering for information during the *Be the Difference* campaign or seeing it advertised on CWDC's website. One fifth had been told about it by a family member or by an acquaintance and another fifth had seen it advertised elsewhere. The absence of a national campaign to accompany the launch of **Cohort 2** application process meant that far more reported hearing about the Step Up programme by word of mouth, a general internet search or local authority alert (see Table 2.8).

[7] It has been suggested that as CWDC maintained a site where people could register an interest in a future programme some respondents, who were on that log for some time, may have counted that as "previously considered a career in social work". It would be possible to determine if this was the case but this would take considerable resources.

Table 2.8: Awareness of Step Up to Social Work Programme by information source

How respondents became aware	Number (%)	
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
CWDC's website or email	51 (35%)	30 (17%)
Word of mouth	28 (20%)	50 (28%)
Newspaper article / advert	28 (20%)	17 (9%)
Local authority website / email	12 (8%)	17 (9%)
Direct alert by local authority	-	19 (10%)
Careers events	6 (4%)	-
General internet search	13 (9%)	35 (20%)
Other	4 (3%)	5 (5%)
No information	2 (1%)	3 (2%)
Total	**144 (100%)**	**176 (100%)**

2.6 Application process

Approximately two-thirds of respondents in both cohorts were positive about the application process and there was little difference in the responses across the two groups, although a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents held mixed views (17% compared with 10%). **Cohort 1's** criticism was mainly confined to the word restrictions when completing the on-line questionnaire and to a lack of clarity around when they would be informed of the decision on whether or not they had been invited to an assessment centre.

As with **Cohort 1** the majority of **Cohort 2** respondents thought the application process was straightforward. This time most of the criticism focused on issues of access to the website and slow software responses and as a result there were calls for a downloadable form that could be submitted electronically. However, about a quarter of **Cohort 2** suggested that more information about the structure and contents of the course was needed at this point, alongside access to an advice centre that was able to provide timely and reliable advice. So, although the majority was content with the whole process, about a third of respondents in both cohorts, whom it has to be remembered had come through this successfully, expressed negative or mixed views about the form and accompanying processes.

2.7 Assessment process

One of the distinguishing features of the Step Up programme is the 'assessment centre' approach where a series of tasks and interviews is used. These were designed in an attempt to build up a complete picture of each candidate's abilities and potential in relation to social work. Assessment centres were held in different parts of England to reflect the RP locations. The main difference between the approaches experienced by **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** was that in Step Up 1 a recruitment consultancy, PENNA, was engaged to support and administer the process whereas in Step Up 2 RPs and their constituent local authorities did this.

Nearly all **Cohort 1** respondents were either wholly positive about the assessment centre process (50%) or they held mixed views (49%). It was welcomed as an attempt to apply rigour and fairness to the process. Many respondents had been interviewed for courses or posts before and found this to be a far more intensive process, but thought this was appropriate in view of the demands made on professional social workers. Most of the criticism that ran through the 'mixed' responses from **Cohort I** respondents focused on their experiences of dealing with PENNA on the day, as well as before and after the event, and these experiences clearly had a significant impact on their level of satisfaction with the process. But many respondents were also critical of the way the tasks had been organised at some of the centres and of the fact that there were two interviews, where the same or similar questions had been asked.

The proportion of exclusively positive responses about the assessment centres was much higher from **Cohort 2** respondents than from **Cohort 1** respondents (see Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: Satisfaction with Assessment Centres by Cohort

Response	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Positive	72 (50%)	132 (75%)
Negative	1 (<1%)	12 (7%)
Mixed	71 (49%)	29 (16%)

The majority of comments from **Cohort 2** respondents indicated that they thought it had been a well-organised and rigorous process, where they had been able to show their strengths as well as meet other candidates. Many of them remembered enjoying the day:

"This was intense, and at the time I thought it was a really bad day!! However since joining the course I think it was a good introduction to how intense the

course is. I am now able to see what the assessors were looking for in the candidates, and those skills and values are really important for the course and the future role" (East)

"Again this was a tough day but quite enjoyable at the same time and good to be with other candidates. The interviewers and staff working with us during the assessment day were encouraging and helpful, which made us feel comfortable. I feel that the assessment criteria were pitched just right. If someone were having second thoughts about being a social worker then certainly this day would have confirmed that they were following the wrong career path" (Learn Together Partnership)

A minority had not had such a positive experience. Their comments usually related to what they perceived to be poor organisation of the whole day or an aspect of it or to finding particular tasks extremely difficult or poorly executed:

"The assessment centre had strengths and weaknesses. There was a lot of waiting around which considering the pressure of the situation made things more difficult. The tasks themselves however were varied - and the role-play was challenging - but I suppose they gave an opportunity to highlight strengths in different fields. They also provided the opportunity to reflect on performance and highlight knowledge and skills that may not have been properly demonstrated in task was an additional positive" (West London Alliance)

"This was disorganised and the failure to keep to time meant the pace was very uneven and some aspects were rushed. The group exercise involving service users was not well conceived, planned or explained" (SE London)

Summary Profile of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2

- The age and gender profile of respondents in both cohorts was in line with that of all trainees in both intakes.
- The age profile of **Cohort 2** respondents was of a slightly older group than **Cohort 1** with far fewer under 25 years and there was also a higher proportion of females (89% to 83 %).
- Twenty nine per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents had a professional qualification compared with 13 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents.
- A higher proportion of **Cohort 2** (than **Cohort 1**) respondents had been employed in some form of support work with children, as well as in youth and community work in general and in Youth Offending Teams specifically.
- None of **Cohort 2** respondents had been working in the area of *support work with adults* compared with six per cent of **Cohort 1.**
- Fifteen per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents had been working in a non-relevant role compared with none of the **Cohort 2 r**espondents.
- While both cohorts had a great deal of relevant experience it was higher amongst **Cohort 2** respondents than across **Cohort 1**. Twenty-nine per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents had more than ten years' experience gained in employment and / or volunteering and 40 per cent had five to ten years.
- A high proportion of respondents in both cohorts said they had considered becoming social workers (88% and 92%).
- A high proportion of respondents in **Cohort 1** had become aware of the programme as a result of publicity on dedicated websites or advertisements in the media. There was very little advertising to recruit **Cohort 2** and respondents were more likely to have heard about Step Up from a colleague or family member or through an internet search.
- Two-thirds of respondents in **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** were positive about the application process.
- A higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents were unreservedly positive about the assessment centre process than **Cohort 1** respondents (75% compared with 50%).

Section 3: Satisfaction with regional partnerships and local authorities

3.1 Trainees' satisfaction with support from regional partnerships T2 –T4

3.1.1 Survey data on support from regional partnerships

At the three time periods T2, T3 and T4 **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to say how satisfied they were with the regional partnership (RP) in which they were based (see Table 3.1).

Over half (57%) of **Cohort 1** respondents were satisfied with the support they received from their RPs at T2, but by T3 this had fallen to just over a third. However the proportion of trainees that were not satisfied also fell from one in five to one in ten, with the biggest shift being to the 'mixed' response. The satisfaction level rose between T3 and T4, but did not reach the level achieved at T2.

Table 3.1: Trainees' satisfaction with support from regional partnerships by Cohort by Three Time Points

	T2	T3	T4
Satisfied			
C1	69 / 57%	38 / 36%	57 / 48%
C2	119 / 66%	117 / 63%	89 / 53%
Mixed			
C1	24 / 20%	51 / 48%	51 / 43%
C2	49 / 28%	51 / 27%	57 / 33%
Not satisfied			
C1	26 / 21%	10 / 9%	11 / 9%
C2	12 / 6%	17 / 9%	23 / 14%

The pattern of the feedback from **Cohort 2** respondents was slightly different from that of **Cohort 1**. Their level of satisfaction overall was higher at all time points. However the returns showed a downward trajectory rather than a fluctuating one. The proportion claiming to be dissatisfied doubled between T2 and T4 whereas it declined in **Cohort 1's** responses; once again there was a shift to the 'mixed' category, where a third of ratings were recorded.
Table A2.2 records the trainees' responses according to the RPs where they were based. At T2 all **Cohort 1** respondents in the East were satisfied with the support they had received, as were two-thirds of those in Yorkshire &

Humberside, Greater Manchester and West Midlands, and half of those in the East Midlands. The lowest level of satisfaction was amongst those in Learn Together Partnership and West London Alliance.[8] The East was, however, alone in maintaining a reasonably high level of satisfaction across T3 and T4 although by T4 the levels in East Midlands and West Midlands had returned to or exceeded the T2 level. This left five of the eight RPs with low satisfaction ratings. Although the number recording 'dissatisfied ' fell between T2 and T4 the shift was to the mixed category. The comments that accompanied these choices make it evident that a shift to a mixed response often disguised a substantial level of dissatisfaction.

As far as **Cohort 2** respondents were concerned at T2 in seven of the ten RPs at least three-fifths (and usually many more) were satisfied. The remaining three - Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, South East and North West Midlands - were either new or newly configured partnerships and had relatively lower levels of satisfaction.

Between T2 and T3 the pattern emerging from the responses from **Cohort 2** was somewhat different from the one that emerged from **Cohort 1** respondents, where the trend had generally been downwards. The levels of satisfaction increased in five RPs – East, East Midlands, West London Alliance, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and South East - while they declined sharply in three partnerships – Learn Together Partnership, SE London and North West Midlands. In one of them – Learn Together Partnership - the overall response rate was much lower and this may have contributed to the decline, but this was not the case in the other two. By T4 the overall level of satisfaction fell. It stayed at very low levels in North West Midlands and SE London but it also fell in five other partnerships. While in most cases this was not a significant drop, apart from in Greater Manchester, where no positive replies were received, it would have been enough to have further depressed the overall level if it had not risen in the South East and Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and stayed high In West London Alliance.[9]

[8] The satisfaction levels of those in CBL were also low throughout but the very small numbers involved make it difficult to make meaningful comparisons.
[9] Table A2 in Annex 1 provides a breakdown in terms of numbers for each partnership

3.1.2 Commentaries on support from regional partnerships

Cohort 1's comments about their RPs at T2 covered three main areas. These were 1) the adequacy of their induction and how well they had been welcomed and supported into the local workforce and workplace; 2) the quality of communication between the trainees and the partnerships; and 3) an awareness that not all those on the Step Up programme enjoyed the same terms and conditions which led to some frustration and even anger when the terms and conditions of contracts varied between authorities in the same partnership. Not surprisingly, there was a higher level of satisfaction when respondents thought they understood what the partnerships expected and where the partnerships responded to questions and concerns in those early months; where responses were delayed or not perceived to be adequate the opposite was true. At T3 and T4 satisfaction levels continued to be high where partnerships responded swiftly to queries, and where support was available and accessible. Many of the negative comments arose from situations where the trainees had been dissatisfied with the teaching or other arrangements at their universities and had sought the support from RPs, which had either not been forthcoming or where they were unable to provide a solution. This was one aspect of the continuing problems around communication and support that ran through so many responses from T2 to T4.

Although the overall level of satisfaction of **Cohort 2** respondents was higher than that of their **Cohort 1** counterparts, as only just over 50 per cent were unreservedly positive by T4, it is not surprising that there were a number of problems that were consistently raised in the responses from T2 to T4. Many of those who commented on their RP at T2 admitted to having a low awareness of what the RP did and, as with those who did not comment at all, this often translated into a positive rating. One issue that emerged at T2 from **Cohort 1** respondents in several partnerships was delayed bursary payments. While there were a few mentions of similar problems it was far less significant amongst the **Cohort 2** responses. A bigger problem was communication between the trainees and their RPs, as it had been for **Cohort 1**. This was present to some extent in responses from across the RPs but it was most pronounced in those from three of the new RPs – Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, South East and NW Midlands. The three had received relatively low satisfaction ratings and the comments indicated that this was strongly linked to specific communication issues involving their universities, rather than more general issues. The following illustrate problems that were repeatedly identified:

“There has been a lot of support for one to one issues. However communication between and across the partnership and university has been poor, alongside with the planning and preparation for skills days and taking into account student previous experiences” (CBLH)

“The regional partnership team has been extremely supportive but at times I have felt they sided with the university on issues which the students were unhappy about and where we could have done with backing”. (NW Midlands)

“I think communication could have been improved.... I think that the partnership have not understood the amount of work we have to do both for the university and placement and have tried to fill up any 'free' days, without realising that there is a lot of reading to do and not much allocated time to do it” (South East)

Between T2 and T3 trainees in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and in the South East became far less critical of the two RPs and even though there was still a great deal of frustration with the university – both were working with the University of Bedfordshire – the support and training provided by their RPs were obviously appreciated. Trainees in the East, East Midlands and West London Alliance recorded the highest levels of satisfactions with their RPs. There were very few comments to explain why this was the case with the exception of those in West London Alliance (WLA), many of whom had found the RP based training, in particular, to be extremely useful:

“I feel that as the structure of the course became more familiar, I was also able to appreciate the input from the WLA fully. The classroom-based skills development days have been really relevant and informative” (WLA)

“The classroom-based skills development days have been relevant to practice and given us the opportunity to meet various professionals. They have also funded a peer group supervision to reflect on our practice once a month whilst in placement, which I find really helpful” (WLA)

Although **Cohort 1** respondents had been critical of the support and approach of West London Alliance (WLA) this was not the case for **Cohort 2.** Many, but not all, of the problems had arisen over frustration and dissatisfaction with the university arrangements that existed between the partnership and the two universities – the University of Hertfordshire and the University of Salford. The direct involvement with just one university was welcomed and the relationship was well evaluated and that may have given the trainees greater confidence

in the partnership. However it was clear from the trainees' comments, such as the one used as illustration below, that it was not just a better relationship with the university that accounted for the high level of satisfaction but that this went alongside the partnership's commitment to the programme:
It is great to be part of the WLA as it feels as though there is a huge support network across a number of boroughs with lots of key people coming together to plan how the step up placements work. (WLA)

At T3 the majority of respondents from Greater Manchester was satisfied; very few provided comments to explain this but those that did spoke in general terms of the support they received or specifically of the high quality training they received from the partnership. The small number of Yorkshire & Humberside respondents who did comment had clearly valued the training that was provided by the partnership but there were also references to poor communication between all parties and to a general lack of awareness of the intended role of the partnership.

As noted above (see Section 3.1.1) in three RPs satisfaction ratings fell dramatically at T3. These were the Learn Together Partnership, SE London and North West Midlands. The response rate from Learn Together Partnership was quite low and only a few provided comments, none of which explained the decline as they either referenced support or not having needed to have contact with anyone from the partnership. In contrast, those responding from SE London and NW Midlands were very clear about what was making them dissatisfied. In NW Midlands the problem arose from a high level of dissatisfaction with their two universities, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the University of Staffordshire, but particularly with the latter. The RP was heavily criticised for not trying hard enough to resolve problems as they arose as well as a lack of transparent communication with trainees. On the other hand specific staff members were said to have been very supportive of individuals but this did not make them view the RP as a whole very positively.

In the SE London partnership respondents at T3 were clearly very angry about contract and future employment issues which they did not think had been handled well. The comments made by this trainee were typical of others:

"We have collectively and individually asked for clarification and often given responses which skirted around the issues. We have attended two feedback sessions … this feedback was given to the board. The board came back to us with responses which were unsatisfactory and dismissive of our points. I certainly felt disheartened by the opportunity to give feedback- it felt tokenistic

and that we weren't really being listened to" (SE London)

By T4 respondents' overall satisfaction level fell quite considerably (from 63% to 53%). Those in the Learn Together Partnership (LTP) continued to report a relatively low level of satisfaction but, unlike previously, they provided an explanation of why this was the case and once again it came down to communication. This left most feeling disconnected from or indifferent to the RP with these comments being typical of many others:

"I did not receive any support/communication from Learn Together Partnership during this period or at all"

"I don't think I have ever had contact with the LTP since the very start of the course"

The situation for those in the NW Midlands and SE London did not appear to have improved between T3 and T4. In SE London the problems with the contract and future employment opportunities had continued and had taken up a great deal of time. Although only the trainees' opinions are captured, the message was consistent and is summed up by this trainee:

"The Board was trying to suggest that we would be liable to paying the whole bursary back if we were unsuccessful at interview - this was in the context that we had been informed by the local authorities that there were not enough jobs for us to interview for, meaning that some students would not get offered positions, and therefore be liable to pay back £22,500. I have documents and emails sent through…. We have since been informed unofficially that this was the Board's attempt to ensure none of the students tried to mess up their interviews so they were no longer obliged under the contract. This felt quite underhand as the students have all committed to Step Up and fulfilled their roles, responsibilities, passed placements, and all had good feedback from local authorities in regards to practice. The Step Up Board had to retract this condition later due to it a) not being in our contracts, and b) being an amendment to the contract that was not legal. On top of this, the Board was not forthcoming or clear about the employment process throughout, and particularly towards the end of the course (between May and August 2013) when all students were undertaking the end of final placements, dissertations and the anxiety associated with employment. This was an extremely difficult period, and many of the students raised several complaints to the Step Up Board, who provided inadequate responses on most occasions. The whole area of employment was very poorly managed" (SE London)

In the NW Midlands the respondents continued at T4 to report difficulties that focused on poor communication and mixed messages as well as a perceived lack of continuity across the partnership, particularly in relation to employment opportunities. However they continued to mention specific individuals in the partnership who had provided good support. This was most evident amongst those in one authority in the RP that was in intervention following a poor Ofsted report. While trainees questioned the wisdom of placing students in what was described more than once as a dysfunctional authority and criticised the RP for allowing the arrangements to continue, they praised the support they had received from individuals in the partnership. However, it was not only in relation to this one local authority and its problems where trainees thought the RP could have been more proactive in resolving difficulties.

At T4 not one of the 10 respondents from Greater Manchester was completely satisfied, although most settled for a 'mixed' rating. As with the Learn Together partnership the feelings reflected a disengagement from a body whose purpose was seen as unclear. A similar picture emerged from those in Yorkshire & Humberside and the East partnership by this stage, although far more were positive about them than was the case in Greater Manchester. Unlike the situations in SE London and NW Midlands, no burning issues were identified that had given rise to widespread dissatisfaction. It is possible that by this stage the activities that brought the partnerships in touch with the trainees had reduced considerably and the main focus was on the local authority teams they were leaving.

The ratings for Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and the South East maintained the reasonable level of satisfaction achieved at T3. Although there were a few comments referring to poor communication, there were far more citing the support provided by the RPs. However the dissatisfaction with the University of Bedfordshire continued to be reflected in the comments and it did seem that without that element the two partnerships would have been rated more highly:

"I feel that the university continues to let down the partnership. Whilst messages have been clearer from the partnership it has not been as coherent and consistent as I would have liked"
(South East)

"I still feel the partnership should have taken a stronger line with the university and I don't know why our concerns did not trigger a stronger response"
(CBLH)

This left two RPs that had been well regarded at T3 – the East Midlands and

West London Alliance. Their ratings continued to be positive through to T4 but in the case of East Midlands the respondents did not provide comments that would have illustrated why this was the case. There was, however, more evidence from those based in West London Alliance but even here there were still those who did not have a clear idea of what the partnership did and those who thought the partnership should have worked more closely with the university and constituent local authorities. Nevertheless their comments provided a more consistent picture of support that had been there throughout the training and of high quality partnership based training, with any significant negativity reserved for the uncertainties in gaining employment:

“The training was excellent and a good supplement to what was provided by the university. However we were lead to believe that qualified positions at the end of the course were more definite than the reality. The recruitment process I experienced was stressful and local authorities were less certain that there would be jobs which was a very different position than the one WLA had asserted at the outset” (WLA)

3.2 Trainees’ overall satisfaction with support from local authorities T2-T4

3.2.1 Survey data on support from local authorities

Throughout their responses **Cohort 1** trainees consistently expressed a higher level of satisfaction with their local authorities than with their RPs, although it declined over the periods T2 to T4 (see Table 3.2). At T2 in 29 of the 41 authorities all the respondents were satisfied with the support they had received. Although by T3 and T4 the number of authorities where everyone was satisfied had fallen to 14 and 15 authorities respectively, in all the other cases only a minority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. By T4 two thirds of respondents were satisfied with their local authorities and the overall level of dissatisfaction had fallen from 12 per cent to a very small 2 per cent, with an attendant rise in the numbers saying they held ‘mixed’ views. No pattern emerged across RPs and this suggests that any dissatisfaction was linked to authority-specific issues (see Table A2.3).

In **Step Up 1** 42 local authorities were involved in Step Up and 54 in **Step Up 2**. Because of the very different numbers of trainees in each authority the following analysis should be treated with caution, but it is nevertheless interesting. As Table 3.2 shows, while there were differences in the responses of **Cohorts 1 and 2** they were small. Comparison of numbers across the two

cohorts should also be treated with some caution, as there were more local authorities involved in the second Step Up programme.

Amongst **Cohort 1** at all stages and across all partnerships respondents were more likely to consider the relationship with, and awareness of, the role and contribution of RPs more positively when the local authority where they were based was the lead authority. As time went on it is likely that trainees identified more strongly with the authority where they were based than a more remote 'regional partnership'. This remained the case for **Cohort 2** respondents at T3 and T4, but not at T2, although the relationship was not as strong as with **Cohort 1**. It was not clear what the reason for this was amongst **Cohort 1** but it may be linked to easier communication and more opportunities for face-to-face contact. [10]

Table 3.2: Trainees' satisfaction with support from local authorities by Cohort and Time

	T2	T3	T4
Satisfied			
C1	95 / 78%	76 / 71%	80 / 67%
C2	130 / 72%	132 / 63%	121 / 71%
Mixed			
C1	12 / 10%	22 / 21%	37 /31%
C2	40 / 22%	46 / 27%	39 / 22%
Not satisfied			
C1	15 / 12%	3 / 3%	2 / 2%
C2	10 / 6%	8 / 9%	11 / 6%

3.2.2 Commentaries on support from local authorities[11]

At T2 **Cohort 1** respondents had recorded a high level of satisfaction with authorities strongly related to their assessment of the teams where they were based and the welcome they had received. Any criticisms were reserved for teams that had not been prepared for a Step Up trainee or for issues that were, in fact, RP or university responsibilities. The generally high level of satisfaction continued through T3 and T4. At T3 the majority were satisfied with their placements and their practice educators and also, where appropriate, with their learner guides, but not surprisingly there were problems where placements had not gone well and where they had been arranged late. By T4 the majority of comments from trainees focused on the success or

[10] Table A2 in Annex 1 provides a breakdown in terms of numbers for each partnership.
[11] Comments from the trainees are not linked with authorities in order to protect identities but the respondents' RPs are given instead.

otherwise at securing employment and the anxieties that often seemed to have surrounded the processes.

While the general level of satisfaction of Cohort 2 with local authorities recorded in the survey was high throughout, at T2 there were very few detailed responses to explain this. It is also interesting that even though the survey data showed that highest levels of satisfaction for local authorities in the East Midlands, Greater Manchester and in the Learn Together Partnership, while the lowest were in NW Midlands and SE London, this was not always confirmed by the comments. Respondents reported both good and bad experiences with local authorities across the RPs.

There were many comments about individual practice educators, most of which were very positive. As was the case with Cohort 1 respondents comments were made about communication of information around arrangements and timetables but in most cases the problem seemed to have originated elsewhere. However, the most negative views specifically linked to local authorities were in relation to placements, usually where trainees felt that preferences and views on placements had been canvassed and then apparently disregarded. This left some feeling that what they were learning about social work values was not being put into practice:

“I am not at all happy however with the location of placement in relation to my goals upon qualifying. My views and wishes were heard and completely disregarded which I find slightly ironic given that we are training to be social workers. Maybe applying social work values to this process in future would be an idea” (NW Midlands)

At T3 although the survey data showed a dip in satisfaction from 72 per cent to 63 per cent the overwhelming majority of comments were positive. These quotes from three trainees refer to many of the issues touched on by others and in a tone that reflected that of many others:

“We have had a single point of contact in the LA Learning and Development Department and regular progress meetings as well which has also been about checking out how we have been getting on. We have an additional mentor who has been allocated us from day one so it has been useful to have someone who has seen us through the whole programme. They have kept us informed throughout and we were well resourced. Simple things like being set up with usernames/ log in details promptly and being supplied with a laptop from our first placement. We also feel lucky that they have put quite a bit of thought into placements, ensuring we have had plenty of useful and challenging experiences. On the whole we have received good notice about

where we will be placed for placements which has helped us feel more prepared. We were also allocated an additional financial top up for transport and books which has been welcome" (Yorkshire & Humberside)

"I was able to contact my local authority and arrange to visit the team in December and a number of opportunities were arranged for me to get to know the team and shadow the work. When I began my placement the LA arranged a number of excellent training days to support the beginning of placement and ease us in to the work atmosphere and boost our knowledge and confidence". (CBLH)

"The LA has always been consistent and easy to liaise with. There has been an element of honesty across the whole placement". (LTP)

However it was possible to detect an emerging issue that was not identifiable in the **Cohort 1** responses. Several respondents mentioned the impact of financial constraints under which local authorities were operating. They were all based in metropolitan authorities and the immediate impact was that staff, who would have previously been dedicated to Step Up support, were having to take on additional responsibilities:

"(Name of authority) is experiencing a great deal of financial difficulties which is greatly impacting on the ability of the Step Up coordinator to be dedicated to Step Up trainees' training and development in this authority. We have not had the work-based days we should have and at times it feels like the planning is very last minute" (Greater Manchester)

By T4 the number of comments dropped considerably and focused on problems respondents had encountered. Many of those who were satisfied clearly did not find it necessary to say why this was, although fortunately a few did:

"I felt supported with manageable caseload, regular supervision, opportunities for training and development. I felt that my supervisor occasionally lacked confidence to push me to reflect critically and sometimes supervision felt too task-based but this was indicative of her role as supervisor. I had long arm practice assessor and it was useful to have a senior practitioner to observe and work with, and to have good opportunities to co-work more complex cases during later part of placement" (SE London)

In addition to the relatively small number of specific comments there were general references to supportive authorities and individuals, as well as

specific mentions of individuals. However a problem that has been described at RP level, namely problems relating to appointment – and non-appointment – to permanent posts and the processes attached to this, was echoed at authority level:

“There was some confusion over our pay when we were negotiating our contracts initially that took some challenging. The recruitment process was vague. We had to wait a week to even hear if we would be offered a position. This caused unnecessary stress and anxiety to us applicants. Once we had been told we had been successful we were then not told what teams we were in for weeks. I found this stressful. In the time I was in the Child Protection team, they recruited several NQSWs that had also been on placement in the team. This then lead to a shortage of places for us Step Up students due to the level of support NQSWs require. Consequently, I was placed with a different team to my host team. Whilst I anticipate a challenge and diversifying my experience and skills, I am now not going to be working in the team I spent six months training with and developing contacts with, which was my understanding of the point of the host team. I feel that I am going to be starting all over again in my new team once I start” (WLA)

In some cases respondents had not been offered posts when they had expected to be and this led them to question why so much had been invested in them:

“My ultimate goal was to secure employment within the local authority where I undertook my placement and I was unsuccessful following my interview. I feel a huge disappointment that as a Step Up Student I did not secure employment, especially given the whole purpose of the programme was to invest in and develop candidates to become front line Social Workers. It feels somewhat senseless to be able to 'walk away' on completion of the course especially when the Government has paid a large amount of costs in bursaries and tuition fees to students similar to myself” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

Another problem emerged at T4 from some respondents in the NW Midlands at T4 that had not been identified earlier. Throughout the Step Up 2 programme one authority in the NW Midlands had been on an improvement notice after Ofsted found its safeguarding and looked-after children’s services were inadequate. Respondents in that authority had wanted the RP to intervene more actively to ensure the quality of their experiences. But it was only by this final stage of the evaluation that the consequences seemed to be

having a significant impact on trainees who complained of poor experiences, inadequate supervision and an all-pervading negative atmosphere.

3.3 Summary of views of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 trainees on their regional partnerships, local authorities

- By the end of the training 48 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents and 53 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents said they were completely satisfied with their RPs.
- By the end of training 67 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents and 71 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents were unreservedly satisfied with their local authorities.
- At the end of the training **Cohort 2** respondents in eight of the ten regional partnerships - East, East Midlands, Greater Manchester, Learn Together
  Partnership, West London Alliance, Yorkshire & Humberside, South East and Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire – were reasonably well satisfied with both the RP and their constituent local authorities. However, in the NW Midlands and SE London respondents expressed a lower level of satisfaction with both the partnership and the authorities involved.
- In the early stages of the programme both **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents were more likely to have a low awareness and understanding of the role of the RP and to be critical of the level and quality of the communication between the RP and the trainees and others. A lower level of satisfaction was evident at later stages where respondents thought that communications continued to be a problem.
- A higher level of satisfaction was evident amongst **Cohort 2** respondents in RPs where they were able to access supplementary training.
- There was criticism from **Cohort 2** respondents of those RPs that were said to have held out the promise of employment opportunities that were then either not available or had not been confirmed at the point when the survey was returned.
- For both **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** satisfaction with local authorities was closely aligned with the quality of both placements and practice educators and supervisors.
- As with RPs there was some criticism from **Cohort 2** respondents of local authorities that had not made as many offers of employment as had been expected, usually because budgets had been reduced.

Section 4: Satisfaction with and higher education institutions (universities)

4.1 Trainees' overall satisfaction with support from universities T2 –T4

Trainees were asked to record how satisfied they were with the support they received from the university where they were registered. In the first Step Up programme four of the eight RPs had chosen one of the two universities approved both to award qualified social work status through an approved MA programme and also to deliver the training. The other four had chosen a different university to provide the training. When the arrangements for the second Step Up programme were announced only one of the ten partnerships – NW Midlands - chose to adopt the 'two university' model. So while comparisons are drawn across the two cohorts the situation was very different and this needs to be borne in mind when reading the analysis of the responses.

4.2. Survey data on satisfaction with universities[12]

Half of **Cohort 1** respondents registered with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) were satisfied with the contact at T2 compared with just one in five of those registered with the University of Salford. By T3 the proportion satisfied with MMU dipped to just over a third, returning to the T2 level by T4. The proportion satisfied with Salford rose slightly at T3, although still only to one in four of all respondents, but by T4 the proportion had fallen to its lowest point at just one in eight. Trainees in West London Alliance were the least satisfied at T4 with only four of the 23 respondents expressing unqualified approval. Through T2 to T4 **Cohort 1** respondents were more likely to be satisfied with the support they received when the university where they were registered was also delivering the course.

As explained above the situation was very different for most of **Cohort 2** who only had a relationship with one university. Table 4.2 provides an overview of how satisfied respondents were with their university.

[12] It should be noted that researchers did not collect data on whether any universities adapted their programme between C1 and C2 and neither were we given any information on this. However informal contacts have indicated that there were modifications between the two cohorts.

Table 4.1: Trainees' overall satisfaction with support from accrediting universities by Time and by Cohort

	T2	T3	T4
Satisfied			
C1	42 / 35%	34 / 32%	37 / 31%
C2	100 / 55%	84 / 45%	71 / 42%
Mixed			
C1	21 / 17%	74 / 46%	43%
C2	68 / 38%	74 / 40%	50/ 29%
Not satisfied			
C1	44 / 36%	28 / 18%	26%
C2	12 / 7%	28 /15%	50 / 29%
Limited contact			
C1	15 / 12%		
C2			

The overall level of satisfaction with their universities was higher at the three time points amongst **Cohort 2** respondents. However, given the complex arrangements that were in place for **Cohort 1,** and to allow valid comparisons to be drawn between the two cohorts, the data have been aggregated in Tables 4.2 to 4.3 to allow the views of similar arrangements to be compared.

Four RPs maintained the same arrangements across both cohorts. The East and East Midlands partnerships only worked with MMU and Yorkshire & Humberside and Greater Manchester partnerships with University of Salford. Table 4.2 summarises the responses from both cohorts who had been based in these four partnerships. The levels of satisfaction expressed about MMU by **Cohort 1** respondents in the East were partly reflected in the responses received from **Cohort 2**. The number of respondents in the East was much smaller at T4 than had been the case for **Cohort 1** and the level of satisfaction was not quite as high. However, in the East Midlands there was a higher response rate and by T4 18 of the 23 ratings were wholly positive and the remaining five were mixed.

The much lower levels of satisfaction with University of Salford that were seen amongst those replying from Yorkshire & Humberside and Greater Manchester's **Cohort 1** were repeated by **Cohort 2**. By T4 the response rate from those in Greater Manchester was quite low but the ten that did reply were either dissatisfied or had mixed views. The response rate was much

better in Yorkshire & Humberside but only a minority of these respondents was satisfied.

It is interesting to compare the responses from respondents from both cohorts who were based in the Learn Together Partnership and West London Alliance. In the first Step Up programme both had one university delivering the training and another awarding the degree and qualification. In the case of West London Alliance the University of Hertfordshire provided the training and the awards were made by University of Salford. The Learn Together Partnership had MMU as the awarding university and the University of Chester delivered the training. When these partnerships decided to take part in the second round of Step Up they also decided to change these arrangements. The Learn Together Partnership appointed Liverpool John Moores University to accredit and provide the training and West London Alliance appointed the University of Hertfordshire.[13]

The number of the Learn Together Partnership's respondents from **Cohort 2** was much lower than that of **Cohort 1** throughout the study so the proportions must be treated as indicative at best, but a higher proportion of them was satisfied with the university at all three time points. By T4 while one in five **Cohort 1** respondents were satisfied, by the same point two-thirds of **Cohort 2** respondents were satisfied. An improved level of satisfaction is even more evident in West London Alliance. Throughout their responses **Cohort 1** trainees expressed a very high level of dissatisfaction with the training arrangements and the institutions involved. For example, at T2 not one of those who replied was satisfied and, although it improved at T3, by T4 only a fifth was satisfied. However **Cohort 2** respondents from West London Alliance were extremely satisfied at all time points and by T4 all of them were.

The two paragraphs above have explored and contrasted the responses across both cohorts in six partnerships, all of which were involved in **Step Up 1** and **2**. Two other partnerships took part in the **Step Up 1** programme. West Midlands had linked with MMU and the University of Coventry did not continue into **Step Up 2**. The other partnership was Central Bedfordshire and Luton, linked with the Universities of Salford and Bedfordshire. In both areas most **Cohort 1** respondents had reservations and concerns about both universities across the time periods. Central Bedfordshire and Luton did continue into Step Up 2 but was part of a much larger partnership when joined by Hertfordshire County Council. So even though the newly configured partnership contained some experience of **Step Up 1** it was decided for the

[13] University of Hertfordshire had provided the training for Cohort 1 but had not awarded the degree / qualification.

purpose of this evaluation to place Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire with **Step Up 2's** three new partnerships, South East, South East London and NW Midlands. Overall the levels of satisfaction amongst respondents in these partnerships with their universities were not high.

Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and South East partnerships both appointed the University of Bedfordshire as the sole partner university. At the three time points the majority of their **Cohort 2** respondents were either not satisfied or had mixed views about the University of Bedfordshire and at T4 only one respondent in both partnerships was positive.

In the SE London partnership at T2 all respondents had either been satisfied or had mixed feelings, but by T4 only one of the 13 respondents was entirely satisfied with their university, Goldsmiths, University of London.

In **Step Up 2** the NW Midlands was unique amongst both the new and the established partnerships in adopting the spilt approach to accreditation and delivery of the training. As far as MMU is concerned trainees' views shifted overtime towards higher levels of dissatisfaction or mixed views, so that by T4 only one of the 22 responses was positive. Respondents' views on the University of Staffordshire also fluctuated over the three time periods. At T2 and T4 the majority were dissatisfied, although at T3 a small majority had expressed mixed opinions.

Although satisfaction with MMU was generally high throughout this study it was lower in Step Up 1 in partnerships (West Midlands and Learn Together Partnership) where MMU validated the qualifications but another university provided teaching input.

4.3 Commentaries on satisfaction with universities

Throughout the three rounds of questionnaires (T2 – T4) **Cohort 1** respondents were more likely to be satisfied with the support they received when the university where they were registered was also delivering the course. Positive responses were linked with good programme organisation, lecturers that were considered to be interesting, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and efficient channels of communication between the lecturers and trainees. The problems that were reported were mainly concerned with accessing university websites, libraries and other facilities, as well as poor communication between RPs and universities. These were not confined to those situations where two universities were involved, but they seemed to be particularly acute where that was the case.

The issues for those registered with MMU appeared, from the comments, to have been less serious than for those registered with the University of Salford, and they seemed to be even more intense where the University of Salford was not teaching the trainees. Trainees in West London Alliance, for example, were not uncritical of the delivery university, the University of Hertfordshire, but there was some sympathy expressed for the fact that staff members there were dependent on timely information and course materials arriving from the University of Salford and this had not always happened. Similarly the few trainees based in Central Bedfordshire and Luton were taught by staff from the University of Bedfordshire but the training was validated by the University of Salford. Perhaps because there was so few of them they did feel, for much of the time, that the course was bolted on to other provision in the University of Bedfordshire rather than designed for the Step Up programme, and they also felt disconnected from the University of Salford which trainees did not consider to be quality assuring the training.

Particularly at T3 and T4 respondents raised concerns about the quality of the teaching input. Again these were raised more often by those associated directly or indirectly with the University of Salford, but they were certainly not confined to these partnerships. This area is covered in more detail in Section 5 on feedback on academic input.

As the survey data show (see Tables 4.3 and A2.4), **Cohort 2** respondents were more satisfied with their universities than those from **Cohort 1**, but the improvement was not evenly spread across the partnerships. Unfortunately, across T2 to T4 where respondents were satisfied they were far less likely to provide a comment.

At T2 **Cohort 2** respondents from the East, East Midlands, Greater Manchester, Learn Together Partnership, South East London and West London Alliance RPs recorded few comments but where they did, these were generally positive, although they did not usually go beyond saying they felt supported. There were references to universities changing arrangements at the last minute in many of these areas, which trainees found annoying but it did not seem too serious. However, several respondents in two of these partnerships mentioned specific issues that concerned them. In Greater Manchester (University of Salford) it was a lack of co-ordination and briefing of external speakers who had either repeated subject areas already covered or which they considered to be irrelevant and time fillers. In SE London (Goldsmith's) where again there was a reasonably high level of satisfaction at this stage, some respondents began to express concern about the structure of the course which, in the words of one of them, 'appears to have been very poorly organised and there has been very little thought into the impact of the lack of organisation on the students'.

This left four RPs where, at T2, more significant concerns were expressed. The University of Bedfordshire provided the training for Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and the South East partnerships. The trainees in the South East were very clear about what was going wrong at this early stage. Some of the problems were linked to administration and communication issues but concerns about academic standards were also beginning to be raised:

"There has been a lack of communication about timetables, assignments and guidance for work completed, a lot of assumptions made about what students would already know about processes and admin based things"

Those in the Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire partnership expressed similar concerns:

"The administrative organisation of the University has been appalling. Information has almost always been sent last minute, we have constantly had to chase lectures for room numbers, starting times and topics of lectures, and for them to upload lecture notes prior to lectures as agreed. They do not keep us informed, i.e. when assignment feedback dates have been agreed they have missed them and not informed us. Lectures have not been delivered in a very exciting or stimulating way, and material is not always up to date - i.e. one module is simply read off pages and pages of a word document that has obviously been used for many years and not been updated prior to our lectures. This is generally - there have been some exceptions"

Table 4.2: Satisfaction with universities in four partnerships with consistent arrangements across Cohorts 1 and 2

Regional partnership	Yes		No		Yes and No		Total	
	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4
East **MMU**	14 → 8→16	12→12→8	0→ 0→0	0→1→1	1 → 8→5	2→4→5	15 → 16→21	14→17→14
East Midlands **MMU**	5 → 6→6	18→20→18	1 → 0→0	1→0→0	4 → 4→ 5	4→4→5	13 → 13→11	23[14]→24[15]→ 23
Yorkshire & Humberside **University of Salford**	8 → 2→3	9→6→8	9 → 4→2	4→3→11	6 → 11→14	14→16→5	23 → 17→19	27→25→24
Greater Manchester **University of Salford**	5 → 2→0	7→4→0	3 → 0→4	1→2→6	3 → 3→6	4→8→4	11 → 5→10	12→16→10

[14] Included one non-response
[15] included one non-response

Table 4.3: Satisfaction with universities in two partnerships with changed arrangements across Cohorts 1 and 2

Regional partnership	Yes		No		Yes and No		Total	
	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 1 T2 →T3→T4	COHORT 2 T2 →T3→T4
Learn Together Partnership **Cohort 1 MMU and University of Chester** **Cohort 2 John Moores University**	5 → 4→5	13→9→10	6 → 7→9	1→2→2	5 → 7→9	5→2→3	24[16] → 20→23	19→13→15
West London Alliance **Cohort 1 University of Salford and University of Hertfordshire** **Cohort 2 University of Hertfordshire**	0→10→4	20→22→23	17→5→13	0→0→0	3→8→6	1→4→0	23[17] → 25[18]→23	21→26→23

[16] Includes eight non-responses
[17] Includes three non-responses
[18] Includes two non-responses

Table 4.4: Satisfaction with universities in the four partnerships joining Step Up 2

Regional partnership	Yes	No	Yes and No	Total
	T2 →T3→T4	T2 →T3→T4	T2 →T3→T4	T2 →T3→T4
Central Beds, Luton and Herts **University of Bedfordshire**	4→5→1	2→1→8	9→8→7	15→14→16
South East **University of Bedfordshire**	1→1→1	3→9→3	10→6→7	14→16→11
SE London **Goldsmiths, University of London**	7→3→1	0→2→11	6→8→1	13→13→13
NW Midlands **Staffordshire University and MMU**	**MMU** 9→3→1	0→8→7	13→11→14	22→22→22
	Staffs 4→ 7 →3	15→3→13	3→12→6	22→22→22

In the case of Yorkshire & Humberside at T2 there were no wholly positive comments recorded, even though nine respondents had reported being unreservedly positive in the survey. A few trainees were satisfied but included reservations alongside the compliments:

“It’s been good but there have been times when I felt it could have been better, for example-lack of consistency about assignments and portfolios. Different tutors say different things which contradict one another”.

“There have been too many admin errors but on the whole good. It would be really useful to have more one to one tutorials as I find these really helpful”.

While there were references to support being good or adequate, the majority of comments focused on organisational and communication issues, both of which were considered to be poor:

“Salford's communication has been poor. They have changed the assessment rules after submission. Offer conflicting guidance on work and in general have left many students regularly confused”

“The service from Salford University has been shocking, delayed feedback from assignments, mixed messages from tutors, none replies to email communications. Cancelled lectures with no prior notice, badly organised guest lecturers. The saving grace within Salford has been (names a lecturer) who has responded where others have failed, is proactive in (their) approach and engages with us in a fashion which we believe means they actually want to be there teaching!”

The fourth partnership where respondents were expressing higher levels of dissatisfaction at T2 was NW Midlands. It was the one partnership that was working with two universities: MMU validated the training and the University of Staffordshire delivered it. Although this was a newly formed partnership the concerns mirrored those expressed by **Cohort 1** trainees who had experienced similar arrangements. The main problem was said to be conflicting or inaccurate information provided by the two universities to the trainees. This was happening with such regularity that it was proving to be extremely annoying and was undermining confidence in both universities:

“We shall have to work with both for the next year at least and what I have seen makes me very concerned. We have frequently had conflicting information between and from MMU and Stafford University about so many issues including placement portfolios and assignments. This has led to increased frustration from the cohort and it had given rise to a lot of anxiety.

We have begun to think that as Staffordshire Uni do not usually teach a master's programme, some of the lectures have not been at a standard expected"

The drop in respondents' satisfaction with their universities recorded in the survey data at T3 (see Tables 4.2-4.4 and A2.4) appeared to be even more intense when reading their comments. Those in the East, East Midlands, Learn Together Partnership and particularly West London Alliance were definitely the most satisfied. At this point, judging by what they said, they were feeling the most supported and were the least critical groups of the university input. There were positive statements such as the ones below about the materials and teaching:

"MMU administration is very efficient, staff are very supportive and accessible, the quality of teaching and the online modules is generally high. I feel very fortunate to have this learning experience" (East Midlands)

"Any time I contact any of the University Staff I get a prompt response and if the person in question is unable to assist with my query, they ensure that it is passed on to someone else that can help me" (East)

"The university has provided really high calibre guest speakers and the tutors lectures have been relevant and useful, in general. More importantly, the tutors have been available for tutorials and advice/guidance for academic and more personal issues" (WLA)

"Generally supportive – JMU has made an effort to bring practitioners from the workplace into lectures which has been really beneficial. University have also brought guest speakers from other organisations into lectures which has been interesting and helpful" (LTP)

Although a minority of comments reflected concerns about aspects of the academic input and teaching, the overall impression at T3 was that most trainees in these four partnerships were reasonably satisfied and, in the case of those in the West London Alliance, very satisfied.

Trainees in Yorkshire & Humberside did not paint as positive picture as in the four partnerships just described. However, positive examples of support and engagement were peppered through the responses that also contained accounts of continued disorganisation. As one trainee said:

"It is just okay. Some lecturers are good, sometimes you get a timely response. But too often things don't go well and we have sort of given up expecting things to reach the standard we had expected"

At T2 most respondents in Greater Manchester and SE London had seemed to be content with their universities but this was not the case at T3. In both cases, although there were individuals who felt well supported and thought that there were excellent lecturers in both universities, most referred to the ways in which the quality of teaching varied, the lack of attention given to the order in which subjects were covered and to superficial coverage of important issues:

“At times I have felt that lectures have been too basic and not gone into enough depth about important issues within social work. I would have benefited from more detailed lectures regarding the law and legislation. I felt that some lectures were timed inappropriately, such as receiving a lecture about recording, and a further one about confidentiality after we had started placement, by which time this had already been covered by our host authority's. I would have benefited from more guest lecturers who are currently working within social work, as they provided a wealth of current issues and practice ideas, which encouraged my learning” (Greater Manchester)

“The majority of the lectures have been very useful but certain workshops feel as though they should be longer, stretched out over a couple of days instead of crammed into one. This would give us more chance to put what is learnt into practice and feel more competent when using the skills with service users. The discussion seminars at times seem pointless as they are too short to really discuss issues in detail and the facilitator does not often provide any useful feedback that we can actually take on board and helps us develop as practitioners” (SE London)

In the other four partnerships – Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, South East, NW Midlands and Yorkshire & Humberside – where the T2 comments had reflected the low level of satisfaction recorded in the survey data the situation had stayed more or less the same at T3. The feedback on the University of Bedfordshire from those in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and South East partnership was very similar. A few said individual tutors were well regarded, both for their teaching and the support they gave. However the picture presented by most respondents was of a level of disorganisation that had undermined their confidence:

“Throughout the past year it has been a struggle. The quality of the academic work has not been very high but we have to attend to get through the course. It has raised questions for us about how this course got approved and how an institution called a university can allow all the things that have gone on – from

cancelled lectures through to work not being returned on time – alongside some very poor teaching. There is a lot that needs to be reviewed" (South East)

"I often felt that my questions were left unanswered. My essays have not been returned to me and no one knows where they are. Lectures have been cancelled or not cancelled and then no one has shown up. This was so far from what I expected and I assume what those funding this expected as well". (CBLH)

There were those who pointed out that despite their many complaints very little had changed but one respondent thought there had been some improvement:

"The uni has been more organised than last term but it could be better. We have been told that we are hard work for the tutors as they teach and tutor us as additional work to the existing programmes. At times we feel this and tutors lack time for us. The quality of the teaching is not great but it has been better this year - it actually feels that they have a plan rather than last term where it seemed to be made up as they went along!" (CBLH)

It was a similar picture in NW Midlands from the trainees' responses. There were several mentions of individual tutors who were well regarded but most comments were negative and focused on continued lack of communication between the University of Staffordshire and MMU and at this stage even more on what was considered to be poor teaching:

"The teaching is appalling, the staff are not prepared for lectures and instead regularly say let's catch up, continually being given mixed messages and the staff are very judgmental and unhelpful, I drive an hour to attend lectures where we are taught nothing, as the lecturer has not prepared a session"

"The have been a number of instances in which the university has given mixed messages regarding assignments and modules. This has caused a great deal of confusion at times. There appears to be great inconsistencies with marking of assignments. The research module left student unprepared for the dissertation"

Not surprisingly in view of the survey data and the comments received at T2 and T3 it was evident that by T4 the highest level of satisfaction with a university came from the West London Alliance respondents for the University of Hertfordshire, summed up by this comment:

“I couldn’t fault the lecturers at the uni. They seemed to go above and beyond their role as tutors and lecturers in order to support and guide us through this tough time. I found getting the academic work out of the way early and finishing the course as a practitioner to be helpful in making the transition to a NQSW. The timetable had been well thought out and our feedback from previous phases taken on board, e.g. in relation to online study days”

Respondents in the East, East Midlands and Learn Together Partnership were reasonably satisfied although there were more mixed comments about their universities, particularly in relation to the quality of feedback they received on written work.

Yorkshire & Humberside and Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire had not received high satisfaction ratings and by T4, despite a few positive comments, trainees were still expressing very mixed opinions on the quality of the input from their universities.

By T4 not one of the 10 respondents from Greater Manchester was positive about the relationship with the University of Salford which contrasts with the situation at T2 where there was a fairly high level of satisfaction, although it had declined by T3. The comments that they made at T4 indicate that perhaps the dissatisfaction was partly associated with their perception that the university withdrew from them at the placement stage; one person described this by saying ‘it was if they gave up on us’ and another said:

“The academic support I received throughout the course was minimal but this was particularly the case during the last phase was minimalistic – they have to be much more proactive and organised if there are future cohorts”

However, the comments received from those in NW Midlands, the South East and South East London were far more negative. Problems relating to communication and support continued to dominate many of the responses even at this late stage:

“Throughout the course, there has been a lack of clear, timely communication. Things like knowing when the exam board meet, when we get final marks, the appeals process if you fail etc all appear to be secret and then change on a whim or when challenged. I find this really sad as I actually thought the standard of some of the lecturing was quite high but the poor and inconsistent communication managed to foster resentment between students and the university” (SE London)

“Teaching and support from Staffordshire Uni has been variable; ranging from

poor to abysmal. We have suffered through irrelevant study sessions, conflicting tutor requirements, outright incorrect information provided by tutors, very slow feedback on modules, extremely slow (sometimes non-existent) replies to urgent (at least for us) emails - the list goes on" (NW Midlands)

Very few respondents in NW Midlands made any reference to MMU, the university validating the qualification, throughout the study. Those that did so commended the swift replies to their queries but thought the university could have done more to resolve the problems caused by poor communication between the two universities and with the regional partnership.

At T4 the trainees had been completing their dissertations and other assignments while they were on their final placement. Apart from contact over the work that they had to submit there was very little contact with the universities. As a result many trainees tended to focus on the specific work they were finishing and any involvement of their universities in that or in providing an overview of their experiences of their universities throughout Step Up so it is worth examining these separately.

In terms of the support that was available over dissertations (and similar) with very few exceptions all the comments from respondents in West London Alliance, the East and East Midlands were positive. The replies were far more mixed from those based in other partnerships. While some said they had received support over their dissertation there were more who said they needed additional support and greater consistency in the replies to their questions:

"The dissertation support module was very poor. There was a lack of consistence across the tutors and we generally felt that we were left to just do it. There was no formal, in-depth guidance provided in completing the dissertation. One tutor said 'if it looks like a duck, it most probably is a duck', this is not a helpful statement when we are all serious and want to do well in the dissertation" (LTP)

A respondent in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire provided a less graphic but nevertheless similar account that was similar to several others' experience:
"There was not enough clear explanation and support for the research paper, it was unclear what was expected of us and we were given differing responses by different lecturers"

The experiences of those in NW Midlands and SE London were almost entirely negative about the support they received over their dissertations as these two accounts illustrate:

"I have answered this as mixed as at times lecturers were supportive and contactable when needed. However, on other occasions I felt unsupported. An example of this was the dissertation. I felt I had poor guidance and mixed messages about what we should and should not be doing in a dissertation. The majority of the time I felt I had no idea what I was doing. Then when we were assigned dissertation tutors they just confused matters more and communication was poor. Different tutors worked differently; some would only look at 25 per cent of your work, others would look at the whole thing, some would say your dissertation was a big literature review, others would say differently, and the confusion went on and on. On average it would take 4-8 weeks to get a response/ feedback from my dissertation tutor which would often put me behind with my work. In between this time I would send emails to remind my tutor I was awaiting a response but this did not seem to help and the responses I got often consisted of "sorry for the late response, I am busy marking/ exams/ generally busy, I will get back to you next week", 2 weeks later I would still be waiting" (NW Midlands)

"The dissertation support was awful we were on our placements until July 9th but our tutors finished for summer at the start of July, so we had no support throughout the time when we could actually focus on the work" (SE London)

4.4 Commentaries on satisfaction with other training providers

Cohort 1 had usually been positive about the contribution of external speakers or agencies to their courses. Sometimes they thought the people or groups concerned had not been sufficiently briefed as to what had already been covered or that the input was inappropriate or superficial but that was the minority of reports. Usually the opportunity to hear from experienced practitioners in statutory and other services was very welcome.

Many **Cohort 2** respondents seemed to have had more structured training provided by their RPs so there were more accounts of external input in that arena as well as in their universities throughout the training. Once again it was usually very well regarded and welcomed. Amongst the most popular were presentations from those in practice in statutory children's services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) who were able to provide

contemporary accounts of the reality of working in their agencies. One example from the NW Midlands where an external agency had taught the module on 'addictions' had obviously been very well received, as had the contribution of social workers on child protection in SE London. However there were demands for some contributions to go further. For example, there was the suggestion from a respondent based in Yorkshire & Humberside that there was scope to invite health academics from the university to co-deliver sessions on early child development. The SE and Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire partnerships had commissioned a training provider and while the input was generally thought to be useful several respondents said they wanted them to have moved on from what was described by one as being '*very generic and repetitive and focussed on what the potential impact of various situations would be for a child'* to '*ways of addressing these issues in practice'.* This echoed other requests for practitioners to focus on the practical tools they used for dealing and communicating with differing service user groups, rather than an explanation of the issues they faced. Trainees wanted help to cope with the anticipated challenges of complex and often emotionally demanding work.

4.5 Summary of views of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 trainees on their universities

- At the end of the training **Cohort 2** respondents recorded the highest levels of satisfaction in relation to university providers in West London Alliance (Hertfordshire University); East Midlands (MMU) and Learn Together Partnership (Liverpool John Moores University). The East (MMU) also achieved reasonable levels of satisfaction. In the other six areas – Greater Manchester and Yorkshire & Humberside (University of Salford); Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and the South East (University of Bedfordshire); SE London (Goldsmiths, University of London); and NW Midlands (MMU and Staffordshire University) the low levels of satisfaction, evident throughout the training, were a cause for concern.
- By the end of their training more respondents (42 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents compared with 31 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents) said they were completely satisfied with their universities. One RP (NW Midlands) had adopted the model that was more common in **Step Up 1** with one university validating the qualification and another providing the training. In that case only one of the 22 respondents was completely satisfied with the university providing the training (University of Staffordshire).

- Respondents' satisfaction with courses was clearly linked to what they judged to be high quality academic input, as well to universities engaging with and responding to the fact that the Step Up to Social Work programme had specific features that distinguished it from a traditional post-graduate route into social work.
- Respondents' criticisms focused on two issues. These were their perception of poor quality academic input, especially where it was not seen to reflect contemporary practice, and to poor organisation in terms of matters such as timetabling, mixed messages, curriculum sequencing and poor communication.

Section 5: Preparation for practice (1): academic and practice input compared

5.1 Preparation for practice: satisfaction with academic input

The respondents' feedback on the academic input overlapped with their responses about their satisfaction with their universities and it would be difficult in a study of this nature to avoid that happening. For the most part the data recorded in Section 4 deal with satisfaction with all aspects of their universities while those recorded here are intended to focus on the curriculum and pedagogy.

5.1.1 Satisfaction with academic input: Survey data

At T2, T3 and T4 **Cohorts 1 and 2** were asked to say whether or not they were satisfied with the academic input they were receiving. The proportions of **Cohort 1** respondents who were unreservedly satisfied with the academic input remained low throughout. The responses from **Cohort 2** were however more positive. At each time point the level of satisfaction with their academic input amongst **Cohort 2** was higher than that of **Cohort 1**. At T2 and T3 over half of the respondents recorded a positive response and by T4 nearly three-quarters did so (see Table 5.1). In contrast to **Cohort 1** the overall level of satisfaction of **Cohort 2** respondents rose across the time periods.

Table 5.1 Trainees' satisfaction with academic input by Time and Cohort

Satisfied	T2		T3		T4	
	C1	C2	C1	C2	C1	C2
Yes	53 (43%)	98 (55%)	22(21%)	108 (58%)	37 (31%)	125 (74%)
No	25 (21%)	43 (24%)	20 (19%)	44 (24%)	16 (13%)	23 (13%)
Yes and No	44 (36%)	39 (22%)	57 (53%)	34 (18%)	46 (39%)	23 (13%)
No comment	-	-	8 (7%)	-	20 (17%)	-
Total	122 (100%)	180 (100%)	107 (100%)	186 (100%)	119 (100%)	171 (100%)

Table A2.6 in Annex 2 contains a breakdown of the data at RP level. During **Step Up 1** there had been sharp differences between the partnerships on this issue. The respondents in the East and East Midlands consistently voiced far more positive feedback on the academic input than elsewhere, while the partnerships where the University of Salford was accrediting and / or

delivering the training[19] and participants from the Learn Together Partnership consistently recorded the lowest levels of satisfaction.

There were also considerable variations in **Cohort 2's** responses across the RPs. Not surprisingly respondents in the four partnerships with the highest satisfaction ratings for their universities – West London Alliance, East Midlands, Learn Together Partnership and East [20] (see Tables 4.4 and 4.5 in Section 4) - returned the highest levels of satisfaction at all three time points.[21] At T3 and T4 there was a substantial gap between the satisfaction ratings on academic input in these areas and the other six partnerships. While the overall satisfaction level at T4 was very high compared with that returned by **Cohort 1** respondents at the same time period, the fact that the four areas received such positive ratings disguises the lower ratings elsewhere. The data do, however, highlight the fluctuations that occurred throughout the stages.

It is worth noting that two of the RPs where **Cohort 1** trainees had expressed most dissatisfaction about the academic input were the Learn Together Partnership and West London Alliance but with **Cohort 2** this was transformed into high levels of satisfaction.

5.1.2 Satisfaction with academic input: commentaries

At T2 **Cohort 1's** comments were largely confined to two areas. One was the difficulties that arose from the arrangements when two universities were involved and the impact of that on the delivery of the curriculum, where it had led to uncertainty about aspects of the curriculum. The other area was e-learning and the quality of the materials that were made available, both good and bad. By T3 comments on the 'two university' model still dominated the feedback but there were an indication that in some areas the difficulties experienced during the first year were beginning to be resolved. This was most evident in West London Alliance where the efforts of two lecturers were considered by the trainees to have brought about considerable improvement. At T4 respondents reflected on how the structure of the courses and the curriculum had sometimes not been adapted for an 18 month as opposed to a 24 month training course and called for some imaginative thinking to be given to how to achieve this. However, by the end of the training, the greatest criticism was reserved for those courses where trainees considered the academic input to be poor. Even though at T3 trainees in WLA had seen signs of improvement by T4 many were critical, as others were in the Learn

[19] Yorkshire & Humberside, West London Alliance, Central Bedfordshire and Luton and Greater Manchester.
[20] The university links are West London Alliance and University of Hertfordshire; East Midlands and East with MMU; and Learn Together Partnership with Liverpool John Moores University.
[21] It is worth noting that the assessment of academic input did not always coincide with what was said about their satisfaction with their universities.

Together Partnership and in Yorkshire & Humberside. It was also the case that one in eight respondents said they had struggled to identify the theoretical underpinnings of social work. This suggests that concentration was being given to providing them with the tools to do the job and with a professional skill base rather than theoretical insights.

The feedback that accompanied **Cohort 2's** ratings is helpful in understanding how they arrived at their decisions. In the early stages of the programme (T2), in addition to the four partnerships that maintained reasonably good levels of satisfaction throughout - West London Alliance, East Midlands, Learn Together Partnership and East – respondents in Greater Manchester appeared equally as content. Respondents in these partnerships were very positive and upbeat, with comments about the quality of both the teaching and the academic input far outweighing any criticisms. This selection is typical of what the trainees from these areas wrote:

"Overall the course is very good, well-structured and very well supported by the lecturers. The course is very intensive and at times there are some conflicting demands between practice and academic elements, which could have been avoided" (East)

"There have been some slight variations from module to module because of different lecturers but generally been high standard. Varied online learning materials provide lots of learning opportunities" (East Midlands)

"Really good academic programme. Thoroughly enjoying course". (Greater Manchester)

"The content and quality of the academic input has been very good. Some of the teaching materials are fantastic and give a really good overview of topics, which is helpful when we have such limited time to study" (LTP)

"Generally this has been good and to a high standard, with guest lecturers etc. Some areas I feel have only been touched on which we are now expected to 'know', however even with our own reading around subject areas some areas I do not feel I have gained enough knowledge due to the programme being so fast paced" (WLA)

While there were specific examples of things that were going well and not so well, which may be expected in the early days of any training course, there was nothing that gave rise to a significant concern. Elsewhere while the satisfaction level with the academic input at T2 was not as high in SE London, NW Midlands and Yorkshire & Humberside as in the five partnerships

previously mentioned, it was a positive/mixed reaction rather than a negative one, as evidenced by these quotes that are reasonably typical of those received from those in these partnerships:

“It has been mixed, we have had some excellent lectures from tutors with immense support however, some lecturers have been extremely poor. More lectures have been better than worse” (NW Midlands)

“It is generally okay – in fact some of it is very good, although there are gaps and I am not sure if they will be filled. Overall there has been good support, strong ethos, and a full and interesting programme even if it has sometimes been a bit disorganised administratively” (SE London)

“I have found the lecturers to all be very good. I have only become frustrated when different people relay different information about assignments etc. There have been some lectures i.e. the recording information ones, which I found incredibly dull and not useful because as part of my placement or previous work experience this was covered or I had been on training for. Overall the content has been interesting and useful and the guest speakers have been great” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

But in the two other areas - Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and the South East - the picture painted by trainees was dominated by concerns and dissatisfaction at T2. In both areas the same university – the University of Bedfordshire - provided the academic input and while there were individual lecturers who were said to be strong and supportive, their input alone was not enough and the same concerns were repeated across the two partnerships:

“It has not always pitched at the right level, not well coordinated with placement learning and timing has been poorly thought out. We are covering a wide range of issues and I appreciate it would have been difficult to fit all the required teaching in however it was organised, but the university does not instill the confidence that they really know what they are doing”

During the next year some things changed and some things stayed the same. At T3 and T4 trainees in the East, East Midlands, West London Alliance and, in most respects, also in the Learn Together Partnership remained satisfied with and confident in the academic input. In all four areas a minority of comments reflected on the variability in the quality of lecturers and the relevance of all content, but there was actually very little criticism other than of the balance of modules:

“Overall, all the sessions are well planned and organised with committed

professionals leading the modules. In my opinion, there has been inconsistency between some of the modules. For example, there was a huge input on the mental health module with much less input on the addictions module" (East Midlands)

"It's very intense and packed into a brief amount of time, which makes it very difficult to reflect on what we are learning. Future students will need to be prepared for this as it can be heavy going. I personally would have liked more academic input in the form of face-to-face lectures and more independent study time in this final phase to focus on our individual projects away from the rigours of the final placement" (WLA)

Greater Manchester had been in the same grouping as the four partnerships mentioned above at T2 but by T3 and T4 trainees were more critical of the academic input than at T2, as they were in SE London. Criticism focused almost entirely on how organisational issues had got in the way of good learning opportunities. So, for example, in Greater Manchester practitioner input was well regarded but because outside lecturers appeared not to have been well briefed their input was not always as helpful as many thought it could have been. Moreover, it seemed to some that the timetabling of their input had not taken account of the stage the trainees had reached and what they required for their placements:

"Good standard of teaching during lectures but sometimes guest speaker sessions were not as useful to us at this stage of the course. They could have been more in depth and intense than the level taught"

"Most of the time the academic side was okay but I am not sure anyone had sat down and planned what we needed to know and when. And neither had anyone given the outside lecturers proper briefings on our experience or stage – so could be a lot better but felt, at times, shambolic"

It was a similar story in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, South East and Yorkshire & Humberside. Trainees in all three areas reported both good and not so good experiences, with the 'good' experiences largely being attributed to the input by external speakers. Trainees thought that the two universities – Universities of Bedfordshire and Salford – could have provided more rigorous and stretching learning experiences. In all five cases they appeared by T3 to be just 'good enough' – and especially in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and South East some things seemed to have improved between T2 and T3.

By T4 in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and Yorkshire & Humberside although there were fewer comments than at T3 they were generally more positive in tone than at T3. Respondents in those partnerships reflected on the input overall and came to the conclusion that while not ideal the experience had been positive and, in some cases, good:

“The most valuable sessions as mentioned above were more related to the 'how to' do the job. I did enjoy some of the social work theory and contextual topics as this was intellectually stimulating, however at times it felt a bit more removed from practice. That said I really enjoyed being in the classroom with such a dedicated group of questioning students who were very engaged in the subject. This led to some wonderful debates and opportunities to reflect on the value base” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

“When discussing the content of the course with a student from the previous cohort of Step Up it very much sounds as if my programme of study was better. This is also true when discussing with other students from the university, not part of Step Up” (CBLH)

Although not overwhelmingly positive the South East trainees’ response at T4 indicated that that there had been some improvement in the way the academic input had been delivered towards the end of the training. Although the scale of improvement did not appear to be to as great as in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, the strong critical threat that had run through previous reflections had disappeared.

But similar views on improvements did not extend to Goldsmiths or to the University of Staffordshire. At T3 SE London trainees’ criticism of Goldsmiths had been balanced by an appreciation of elements such as an input on reflection, which meant that it had crept into the ‘good enough’ category. While the level of academic input was not considered to reach what they had expected of a master’s level degree there were some redeeming features. But at T4 much of the feedback on the academic input was very negative. Knitting this together the picture that emerges is one where trainees thought that Goldsmith’s had never properly ‘absorbed’ or ‘owned’ the programme and that little consideration had been given to remodelling a course to reflect the 18 month timescale. Rather it was seen to be the standard master’s course delivered over a shorter period and at not a very high level and as a result the trainees did not feel valued and, in turn, did not value the course.
At T3 the greatest criticism of the academic input came from trainees in the NW Midlands RP. The academic level was not well regarded by most trainees and, once again, it was not considered to reach their expectations of a

master's level degree as far as content and pace were concerned.

"I feel a little dismissive of some of the teaching received from Staffs Uni. The current module teaching feels slightly irrelevant and disorganised! Also, the teaching on the research module was not at all satisfactory, focusing on research methods we are unable to practice due to the tight time constraints of the course, yet with little and even no teaching regarding the research methods which were the suggested! This left me and other students feeling very confused and abandoned regarding our dissertation! On a positive note, the addictions and mental health units[22] were both excellent!" (NW Midlands)

The strength of negative feedback continued through to T4, where the comments continued to be dominated by accounts of academic input regarded as poor, badly organised and lacking clear focus.

[22] Both taught by outside agencies.

5.2 Preparation for practice: satisfaction with practice input

5.2.1 Satisfaction with practice input: Survey data

Both cohorts were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the practice input (see Table 5.2). Although the levels did fluctuate across the time periods **Cohort 1** respondents were consistently more positive about the practice input than about the academic and this continued to be the case with **Cohort 2** respondents. The level of satisfaction recorded by the latter was significantly higher than that of **Cohort 1**, although the high level of non-response to this question area amongst **Cohort 1** should be noted.

Table 5.2 Trainees' satisfaction with practice input by Time and Cohort

Satisfaction	T2		T3		T4	
	C1	C2	C1	C2	C1	C2
Yes	93 (76%)	165 (92%)	66 (62%)	162(87%)	79 (66%)	150 (88%)
No	12 (10%)	4 (2%)	4 (3%)	7(4%)	8 (7%)	6 (3%)
Yes and No	13 (11%)	11 (6%)	22 (21%)	17(9%)	12(10%)	15 (9%)
No response	4 (3%)	-	15 (14%)	-	20 (17%)	-
Total	122 (100%)	180 (100%)	107 (100%)	186 (100%)	119 (100%)	171 (100%)

Cohort 1 respondents registered their highest level of satisfaction with the practice input at T2. It dipped at T3, sometimes reaching quite a low level as in the East and Greater Manchester. By T4 it improved but did not reach the T2 level.

As with the academic input **Cohort 2's** level of satisfaction was higher throughout. Although it declined slightly between T2 and T3 it stayed steady between T3 and T4. It was high across most partnerships; NW Midlands and SE London recorded the lowest levels (see Table A2.7 in Annex 2).

5.2.2 Satisfaction with practice input: commentaries

At T2 most **Cohort 1** trainees had enjoyed their placements and felt well supported by practitioners. The highest levels of satisfaction were evident where the practice educators understood the principles and structure of Step Up and where trainees had been able to discuss the theory underpinning an intervention or assessment. Any criticisms were reserved for two situations: teams where they had not been prepared for a Step Up trainee or did not seem to have understood the principles of the Step Up programme and where the previous experience of the trainees was not acknowledged or valued.

These criticisms continued throughout the stages of the feedback, although not at such an intense level as at T2. At T3 the majority of respondents were still enjoying their placements and many commented on the value they placed on the practical experience they were gaining and the high quality support provided by practice educators and other professionals they encountered. The quality of supervision emerged strongly at T3 and T4 as a critical factor in the level of satisfaction with placements. Those who reported satisfaction with their placements were more likely to comment that they received regular, developmental and instructional supervision. Without this support trainees were more likely to feel unprepared for practice and disappointed with their experiences. However, by T4 more commented on missed supervisions and their reluctance to bother supervisors or other colleagues because of the pressures already on them. The minority recording a negative response did so when they considered they had been under-used in a placement; placed in a setting they considered to be inappropriate and that would not help them when applying for a job; or where they had either failed to develop a constructive relationship with their supervisor or other key person, including situations where that person had left unexpectedly.

By T2 many **Cohort 2** respondents had already experienced a short 30 or 40 day placement. There were very few criticisms of these other than those that referred to placements in a non-social work setting or where a social worker was not on site. Where this had happened it had made them question how appropriate such experiences were within a professional training course. However by the time they reported at T2 they had started their first 'main' placement and, as with **Cohort 1**, the majority was extremely positive, usually as a result of the quality of their practice educators in settings where they said their learning had been extended and enriched:

"Case holding and shadowing has been invaluable for introducing me to social work. Lots of learning and reflection on practice has helped me to recognise skills and learning needs. Confidence has developed through practice opportunities" (East Midlands)

A minority of respondents expressed concerns at this stage about the frequency and quality of supervision and about the limited awareness of practice educators of the structure and requirements of Step Up, but these concerns were developed more fully by respondents at T3 and T4.

Most respondents continued to be satisfied with the practice element of the course through T3 and T4 and there were numerous accounts of how grateful individuals were for the quality of the placement and input they had experienced. The vast majority of field practice educators were said to be

accessible and the irregular supervision was usually said to be the result of workload problems, where practice educators were under significant pressure. There were two partnerships where the overall level of satisfaction was lower; these were NW Midlands and SE London. At both T3 and T4 the majority of respondents in both areas were satisfied and there were few complaints about individual practice educators or teams. In most cases criticism focused on the lack of preparation for, and understanding of, Step Up[23] :

"We have raised the issue of supervision at the review session. The supervision template that is being followed (names authority) is the template that is used for qualified staff members and focuses mainly on case management. I feel that I have not received effective supervision in order to balance the issues I stated above and there has not been much guidance or reflection for NOS (National Occupational Standards[24]) work or academic work. I do not believe that this is the fault of my practice assessor, as she too is very pressured with her workload and I feel she needs guidance with regards to this issue. I believe this needs to be addressed from an organisational level, and I suggest that maybe a new template of supervision for students could be devised by board members. This is a suggestion that has been put forward by us students previously at the review session. However, again I feel this has been brushed aside by board members" (SE London trainee at T3)

"I am not sure how it came about, but the authority does not really understand Step Up so we are seen as typical social work students. So we get support but we had to explain the structure and arrangements over and over again which probably means the partnership or the university have not engaged properly" (NW Midlands trainee at T4)

"There was, however, an added factor in the NW Midlands. As mentioned previously, one of the local authorities had received an 'inadequate' rating from Ofsted and there were several comments about how this judgement, and the general situation in the local authority, had contributed to poor placement experiences:
Although technically I had a practice educator, the knowledge and experience which was shared with me was truly minimal. Onsite, I felt under-supervised and vulnerable and had limited measurable progression from start to finish. It was a case of sink or swim... I just about stayed afloat. My experience was seriously poor!"

[23] See also Section 4.3.
[24] The 2002 National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Social Work listed the tasks social workers are expected to be able to do. NOS have now been replaced by the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) on which social work curricula are now based.

"I had a very poor first placement. No real training with adult social problems. I feel completely inadequately trained in adult social care and do not believe I could successfully apply for an adult social worker post. (Name of local authority) has practice educators who are very poor at their jobs, rely on old, out of date practices and were completely unreliable in terms of supervision, portfolio checking and direct observation work".

5.3 Trainees' placements reviewed

Cohort 2 respondents were asked at T4 to provide details of the placements that they had experienced in the course of their training. This information was not collected from **Cohort 1**. At the point at which the courses were validated by the GSCC they had to conform to the Department of Health's *Requirements for Social Work Training* (Department of Health, 2002) which then required all social work students in England to spend '*at least 200 days gaining required experience and learning in practice settings'* (p3). Each student had to have experience in at least two practice settings and of "statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions". They also had to provide services to at least two user groups. The structure of placements could, however, differ. Six of the ten partnerships offered trainees two placements, each of 100 days. The other four offered three placements; either a 40 days plus 60 days plus 100 days combination (Yorkshire & Humberside; Greater Manchester and West London Alliance) or 30 days plus 70 days plus 100 days, as in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire.[25]

Twelve respondents did not provide sufficient information to be able to judge where they had spent their placements but it was possible to determine that everyone else (n=159) had at least one long placement (i.e. 100 days) in a statutory setting and 97 of them had undertaken both their long placements in statutory settings. This was the case for the majority of respondents in East Midlands, Greater Manchester, the Learn Together Partnership, West London Alliance, South East and SE London partnerships.

The majority of respondents (71%) had a placement in an adult setting as well as in a children's setting. Most of the adult services placements (n = 96 / 61% of all respondents) were in a specific adult service, as opposed to one providing services to adults as well as children / young people. A minority of respondents (22%) said they had only had experience of children's settings while on placement, most of whom were based in East Midlands, Greater

[25] All those partnerships offering three placements had done so in **Step Up 1** (CBLH was the CBL) and had originally offered training that was validated by the University of Salford; as Y & H and GM still did.

Manchester and SE London partnerships.[26]

Many **Cohort 1** trainees had commented on the fact that the teams where they were based were not prepared for a Step Up trainee, either in terms of understanding how Step Up differed from traditional training routes or for the fact that many trainees had relevant experience that had not been acknowledged. As a result it was decided to ask **Cohort 2** at T4 to indicate the extent to which the agency / team was prepared for a Step Up trainee. Their responses are recorded in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Teams prepared for Step Up trainee –Cohort 2 trainees' views at T4

Very well / well	103 (61%)
Just adequately	44 (26%)
Very little	12 (7%)
Not at all	12 (7%)
Total	171 (100%)

Just over two thirds of respondents said that their teams had been well or very well prepared for a Step Up trainee. When the data were examined to see if there were variations between RPs, Greater Manchester and LTP emerged as the RPs where teams were reported to be best prepared for their arrival:

"I think the team were well prepared for a Step Up Trainee as they had a previous Step Up participant in the last cohort. They seemed to be aware of the demands of balancing university alongside the placement itself and definitely differentiated between 'Step Up's and other Local Authority students" (LTP)

"The team had already had a trainee so they knew what it was all about and from day 1 it was brilliant – they knew when my academic work had to be completed and they did not let me come off the ball but they were definitely sympathetic" (Greater Manchester)

The ratings from NW Midlands and SE London respondents fell well below the average with only a small minority of their trainees saying they went into teams that were prepared for them, which reflects many of the comments that trainees in these partnerships made about the practice input (see Section 5.2 above). The two partnerships were new to the programme, as they had not taken part in Step Up 1. A comment such as that recorded below was not exclusive to these areas, or to authorities that had joined established RPs, but far more common from trainees based in them:

"Neither the practice educator nor the onsite supervisor had received any

[26] The missing 7 per cent did not provide any or sufficient information.

specific training on the Step Up students' needs or portfolio requirements but as they were already experienced in supervising students they were able to adapt previous knowledge. I do recommend that to make the experience smoother for students and supervisors alike, all practice educators and onsite supervisors should have to attend the training days" (NW Midlands)

5.4 Trainees' views on the integration of theory and practice

5.4.1 Integration of theory and practice: survey data

This section explores respondents' views on the processes that link acquiring knowledge to the application of knowledge in practice. Both cohorts were asked to reflect on the way in which theory and practice had or had not been integrated. At T2 almost two thirds of **Cohort 1** respondents believed they had been but this fell to just one third at T3 and just over a quarter by T4 (see Table 4.4).

For Step Up 2 at T2 a far higher proportion of **Cohort 2** than **Cohort 1** respondents thought the two areas were well aligned. Although the proportion thinking this was the case was lower at T3 and T4 than it had been at T2, the ratings remained consistently much higher than **Cohort 1** respondents and by T4 just over three-fifths agreed that the academic and practice elements had been integrated. It was not possible to distinguish any real differences between responses obtained from **Cohort 1** or **Cohort 2** in relation to the partnerships in which they were based, other than at T4 when a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire replied positively while a much lower proportion of those in the Learning Together Partnership and in SE London did so.

5.4.2 Integration of theory and practice: commentaries

As noted above at T2 the majority of **Cohort 1** respondents was positive about the way in which theory and practice had been brought together, but this declined over time. Supervisors and practice educators emerged as key to the process of integration in encouraging trainees to think critically and reflect on their practice. It also required them to understand not only what was being taught at university but also the sequencing. A substantial number of **Cohort 1** trainees did not think their teams or practice educators were sufficiently aware of the Step up programme and so this may well have impacted on the way in which they were able to support the integration.

Cohort 2's responses were very similar, but more emphasis was placed on

the quality and appropriateness of the placements to support the integration of theory and practice and again on the extent to which teams understood the Step Up programme. Not surprisingly there was a clear link between satisfaction with their placement experiences and trainees considering that they had opportunities to integrate theory and practice. At T3 these trainees very much represented the majority who were positive about the integration process:

“My first placement was based in mental health - this really allowed me to understand the extent and impact of attachment on our emotions and how these manifest in mental health issues. Furthermore, being in a team which comprised professionals advocating for both medical and social models I was able to understand the importance of a biopsychosocial model” (East)

“My placement was brilliant and we have given extensive feedback to the RP on this. In my opinion it was the individual practice educators who ensured it was a valuable experience, rather than the local authority directly. I was fortunate that my Practice Educator was very knowledgeable and adapted to my needs and learning style brilliantly, so I felt very supported although also academically and professionally challenged with new situations, pressures and issues” (NW Midlands)

“I was extremely lucky in my placement in that at the end of every piece of work I sat with my supervisor and reflected on the theories and policies we had encountered. The placement treated me like a professional and allowed me to access all levels of work but still provided constant guidance” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

In a few cases specific arrangements had been made which trainees found very helpful:

“My second placement was in the mental health team…, and it was very well organised and delivered, mainly due to the quality of my practice educator there. We did a lot of work on linking theory to practice and she set up a theory discussion group for the students on placement there and the newly qualified social workers” (WLA)

At T4 the examples provided by respondents were very similar to those at T3 and even though the proportion overall who were positive or who held mixed views remained reasonably constant the one fifth who did not think this had happened provided more examples of what had gone wrong and why. The ability and interest of the practice educator were still considered to be very

important, and there were suggestions as to why this did not work as well as intended:

“This is a weak area for social workers in statutory settings. In my experience, social workers in the field have limited time to develop their knowledge of theories and methods due to high caseloads” (LTP)

But the trainees responding also introduced two additional reasons. The pace of work in some teams impacted on the time available for supervision and its contents:

“My second placement was very fast paced and I managed very complex cases. There was not as much time to make the links between theory and practice as explicitly as I did during placement one” (LTP)

There were also references to the different perspectives of universities and practice, something that had not been raised before:

“I think what I had learned about the important/key aspects of social work did not always necessarily align with practice. For example, I learned a great deal in university about the importance of using research and different theories and methods, however this was not necessarily seen in the same way in practice. However other things such as the importance of reflecting upon practice, understanding law and child development, were aligned”

Table 5.4 Trainees' views of integration of academic and practice input by Time and Cohort (C1 and C2)

	T2		T3		T4	
	C1	**C2**	**C1**	**C2**	**C1**	**C2**
Well Aligned	80 (65%)	135 (75%)	35 (33%)	113 (61%)	34 (28%)	104 (61%)
Adequately aligned	18 (15%)	25 (14%)	37 (34%)	39 (21%)	12 (10%)	34 (19%)
Not aligned	18 (15%)	20 (11%)	19 (18%)	34 (18%)	52 (44%)	33 (20%)
No response	6 (5%)	-	16 (15%)	-	21 (18%)	-
Total	**122 (100%)**	**180 (100%)**	**107 (100%)**	**186 (100%)**	**119 (100%)**	**171 (100%)**

As evidence-based practice embeds it becomes ever more important for practice educators to be able to help their trainees make connections between the social work knowledge, values, and skills learned in the classroom and their practice based experience. There were a few trainees who recognised the challenges that some practice educators faced in making the transition from practitioner to teacher. They recognised that a social worker's practice will be based on knowledge, experience and values developed over time and that they too need ongoing support, as opposed to training, to make and sustain that transition.

5.5 Overview of trainees' satisfaction with academic and practice input

- **Cohort 2 respondents'** overall satisfaction with the academic input was substantially higher at all points than that of **Cohort 1.**
- **Cohort 2** respondents in four partnerships were *very* satisfied with the academic input. These were East, East Midlands, Learn Together Partnership and West London Alliance. But this high level of satisfaction in these RPs did keep the overall level of satisfaction high even though there was a great deal of dissatisfaction within some partnerships.
- The level of satisfaction with the practice input was consistently high across both cohorts but higher amongst **Cohort 2** respondents.
- Of the 159 trainees in **Cohort 2** providing information all had undertaken at least one long placement in a statutory setting and 97 had undertaken both 'long' placements in a statutory setting.
- A minority of **Cohort 2** respondents (22%) said they had only had experience of children's settings while on placement, most of whom were based in East Midlands, Greater Manchester and SE London partnerships
- The majority of **Cohort 2** had undertaken a placement in an adult setting.
- Three-fifths of **Cohort 2** said their host teams were well-prepared for them and a further quarter said they were adequately prepared.
- At T4 only just over a quarter of **Cohort 1** thought theory and practice of social work had been integrated whereas more than three fifths of **Cohort 2** thought they had.

Sections 6 and 7 report the views of trainees on how well they felt prepared in relation to knowledge and skill areas of social work. There were 13 knowledge areas and 13 skill areas of social work that were explored.

Knowledge areas cohorts 1 and 2	Skill areas cohort 2
Context of social work	Assessing need
Social work values and ethics	Developing plans
Social work theory and methods	Assessing and managing risk
Application of social knowledge	Reflecting on practice
Social work with adults	Working with children and young people
Social work with children and families	Working effectively with families
Anti-oppressive practice	Working with those reluctant to engage
Research methods and evaluation	Working with groups
Social work roles and responsibilities	Dealing with aggression, hostility and conflict
Human growth and development	Record keeping
The legal system interpersonal communication	Leadership and management
Issues of power and discrimination	The evidence base of what works
Interpersonal communication	Accessing services / resources that might help services users

Section 6: Preparation for practice (2): Feedback on 13 knowledge areas of social work

6.1 Background

At T3 and T4 **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to say how well prepared they felt in relation to 13 key knowledge areas of social work (see p74 for the list). **Cohort 2** respondents were also asked to do this at T2 and the data relating to this are reported in Table 6.1 and in a section at the end of paragraph 6.3. At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to distinguish between preparation by their universities and their placements / practice experiences.

When developing the instruments for **Cohort 1** the areas that were explored were agreed after consulting with staff teaching on a number of social work courses. At T3 both cohorts were responding when they were 12 months into the 18-month training programme and at T4 they were completing the course or had just done so. Trainees were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale where 1 equated with not feeling prepared and 5 equated with feeling extremely well prepared. For reporting purposes it was decided to band these ratings into three groups: well-prepared (points 4 and 5); adequately prepared (point 3); and ill-prepared (points 1 and 2).[27]

It is important to remember:

- that **Cohort 1** respondents were asked to say how well they were prepared in these 13 areas overall and not to rate this preparation by their university and placement, as was the case with **Cohort 2**.
- to facilitate comparisons, the higher rating for each component, whether the university or practice, has been taken from **Cohort 2** responses.[28]

[27] http://statisticscafe.blogspot.com/2011/05/how-to-use-likert-scale-in-statistical.html
[28] An alternative would have been to average the two but that would have provided a rating not provided by the respondents. The higher rating is taken to be a more reliable indicator of how prepared respondents were feeling. There is no way of knowing what the results would have been if an overall rating had been provided rather than the two.

6.2 Feeling *well prepared* for practice in 13 areas of social work knowledge: Cohorts 1 and 2

The results for **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** are summarised in Fig 6.1. Table 6.1 compares the data for **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** at T3 and T4 in relation to respondents feeling well prepared.

6.2.1 Well prepared: Comparing the views of Cohort 1 and 2 on the 13 areas

Cohort 1 respondents at T3 were clearly feeling most well prepared in relation to social work values and ethics and issues of power and discrimination (over 70%); these areas were followed by anti-oppressive practice and the context of social work (over 60%). Over half felt very well prepared or well prepared for work with children and families (59%), on roles and responsibilities (55%), on interpersonal communication (53%), and on human growth and development (52%), while under half felt they were being well prepared on research methods and evaluation (43%) and the application of knowledge (41%). The areas where the fewest reported feeling well / very well prepared were social work theory and methods (36%), the legal system (36%), and, in particularly low numbers, social work with adults (17%). By T4 Cohort 1 respondents were feeling more *well prepared* than they had been feeling at T3 in 12 of the 13 areas. The exception was human growth and development where the proportion fell from 52 per cent to 48 per cent. However, overall by T4 there were three areas where those under 50 per cent of Cohort 1 respondents had not felt 'well' prepared' – human growth and development, the legal system, and social work with adults.

Comparing **Cohort 2**'s responses at T3 with those of **Cohort 1** at the same time, the proportion saying they were well or very well prepared was higher for every area with the exception of human growth and development. In many of the areas the increase was marked (see Table 5.1). So, for example, 36 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents at T3 said they were well prepared on social work theory and methods, but this rose to 58 per cent of those from **Cohort 2**; and while 59 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents at T3 said they were well prepared for working with children and families this rose to 82 per cent of **Cohort 2** replies.

At T4 in 12 of the 13 areas a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents said they had been 'well prepared' compared with their counterparts in **Cohort 1;** the exception was anti-oppressive practice. As for the three areas where under 50 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents had not felt 'well' prepared' –

human growth and development, the legal system, and social work with adults – a higher proportion of those replying from **Cohort 2** said they felt well prepared in all three areas. The percentage reporting it in relation to human growth and development and work with adults moved to over 50 per cent and for the legal system it leaped to over 70 per cent. It is certainly worth noting that over 90 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents said they were well prepared for work with children and families, as well as understanding of the context of social work.

Cohort 1 respondents in the East returned above average scores in six of the 13 areas and those from the East Midlands in five of them. **Cohort 2** replies indicate that the trainees in these partnerships still considered they were being well prepared but there were more 'above the average' scores in the East Midlands than the East, notably in relation to the preparation by their university. There were no above average scores in any of the 13 areas from **Cohort 1** respondents in Greater Manchester, Learn Together Partnership or what was then Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Those responding from West London Alliance and Central Bedfordshire and Luton recorded below average scores in five areas and those in Learn Together Partnership in four areas.

The results from **Cohort 2** replies were far more positive in all those areas, particularly in West London Alliance. Central Bedfordshire and Luton is now part of the Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire partnership where there was a reasonably good set of ratings. Although the situation would seem to have improved in Greater Manchester there were still six areas of social work practice that were below the 'average' as far as the university preparation and feeling *well prepared* were concerned.

For eight of the 13 areas a higher proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents said they that they had been well / very well prepared by the practice element of the training than by their universities. The breakdown of these data by regional partnership and area is reported in Table A2.5 in Annex 2.

6.2.2 Well prepared: Cohort 2's views on the 13 areas by universities and practice

When the **Cohort 2** data are disaggregated according to the RPs where respondents were based they revealed some interesting patterns. The comparisons have been made by taking the overall percentages, recorded in Table 6.1, and examining responses to see if they are in line with an average, or below or above. Given the comparatively small number of respondents from each partnership it is not appropriate to report ratings as percentages but it was always very clear if responses from one partnership were in line with or deviated from the 'average'.

The first stage was to consider the responses in relation to university-based preparation. The results of this exercise are reported in Table 6.2. More respondents from the East Midlands and West London Alliance considered that they were well or very well prepared by their universities in most of the areas examined; and in these two RPs there were no areas where it fell below the average. In most of the other partnerships the responses were spread, in various combinations, across the three categories. But it should be noted that in the South East and SE London partnerships their respondents met the average overall level being *well / very well prepared* by their universities in only four and six areas respectively.

A similar exercise was repeated on the responses about preparation in relation to the same areas by practice (see Table 6.3). There were far fewer areas of work where respondents' ratings were below the average and there was a much more even spread across the partnerships than emerged from the responses about the university preparation.

Fig 6.1 Trainees' views on feeling 'well / very well-prepared' across Cohorts 1 and 2 by Time

Cohort 1 at T3						
90% and over	**80% and over**	**70% and over**	**60% and over**	**50% and over**	**Under 50%**	**40% and under**
		Social work values and ethics	Anti-oppressive practice	Social work with children and families	Research methods and evaluation	Social work theory and methods
		Issues of power and discrimination	Context of social work	Social work roles and responsibilities	Application of social knowledge	The legal system
				Interpersonal communication		Social work with adults
				Human growth and development		
Cohort 1 At T4						
	Anti-oppressive practice	Context of social work	Social work theory and methods	Research methods and evaluation	Human growth and development	Social work with adults
	Issues of power and discrimination	Social work values and ethics	Application of social knowledge		The legal system	
	Social work with children and families	Interpersonal communication	Social work roles and responsibilities			
Cohort 2 at T3						
	Social work values and ethics	Context of social work		Social work theory and methods	Application of social knowledge	Social work with adults
	Social work with children and families	Anti-oppressive practice		The legal system	Research methods and evaluation	
		Social work roles and responsibilities			Human growth and development	
		Issues of power and discrimination				
		Interpersonal communication				
Cohort 2 at T4						
Context of social work	Social work values and ethics	Social work theory and methods	Anti-oppressive practice	Human growth and development	Social work with adults	
Social work with children and families	Social work roles and responsibilities	Application of social knowledge			Research methods and evaluation	
		Issues of power and discrimination				
		Interpersonal communication				
		The legal system				

Table 6.1: Proportion of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 trainees feeling well prepared / very well prepared across the areas of knowledge at T3 and T4

	Cohort 1			Cohort 2		
	T3	T4	T2 [29]	T3	T4	
					University	Practice
Context of social work	67%	78%	75%	75%	72%	92%
Social work values and ethics	74%	77%	85%	85%	82%	75%
Social work theory and methods	36%	60%	63%	58%	68%	53%
Application of social knowledge	41%	60%	55%	56%	60%	73%
Social work with adults	17%	25%	33%	31%	17%	47%
Social work with children and families	59%	87%	69%	82%	81%	95%
Anti-oppressive practice	68%	80%	80%	77%	67%	64%
Research methods and evaluation	43%	51%	25%	44%	42%	14%
Social work roles and responsibilities	55%	67%	71%	72%	67%	87%
Human growth and development	52%	48%	60%	46%	38%	53%
The legal system	36%	42%	70%	52%	66%	71%
Issues of power and discrimination	71%	81%	83%	77%	78%	69%
Interpersonal communication	53%	75%	72%	76%	59%	77%

[29] Cohort 2 respondents were asked this question at T2. Their responses are inserted for readers' interest at this point and recorded separately in more detail in a box on p84 as there are no comparable Cohort 1 data.

Table 6.2 Cohort 2 respondents feeling 'well/very well' prepared by universities by Regional Partnerships

Regional Partnership	Universities	No of areas of work below average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work above average re 'well / very well' prepared
East	MMU	2	10	1
Y & H	University of Salford	4	8	1
East Midlands	MMU	0	4	9
Greater Manchester	University of Salford	6	5	2
LTP	John Moores University	4	4	5
WLA	University of Hertfordshire	0	4	9
CBLH	University of Bedfordshire	2	6	5
South East	University of Bedfordshire	9	2	2
South East London	Goldsmiths, London	7	5	1
NW Midlands	University of Staffordshire	4	9	0

Table 6.3 Cohort 2 respondents feeling 'well/very well' prepared by practice by Regional Partnerships

Regional Partnership	No of areas of work below average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work above average re 'well / very well' prepared
East	1	7	5
Y & H	3	9	1
East Midlands	1	8	4
Greater Manchester	2	6	5
LTP	3	8	2
WLA	1	10	2
CBLH	3	9	1
South East	2	7	4
South East London	3	10	0
NW Midlands	1	10	2

6.3 Feeling adequately prepared for practice: Cohorts 1 and 2

6.3.1 Adequately prepared: Comparing the views of Cohort 1 and 2 on the 13 knowledge areas

The same data were explored to determine the proportion of **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents that believed they had been at least adequately prepared in these 13 areas. The data across T3 – T4 are set out in **Table 6.4**. At T3 **Cohort 2** ratings were higher than **Cohort 1's** in 12 of the 13 areas, but for the most part the differences between the two were usually very small. There were, however, two exceptions where the gap was much greater. The most obvious were social work theory and methods (74% and 87%); and the application of social work knowledge (77% and 92%). The area where the lowest proportion of respondents in both cohorts felt prepared was for social work with adults. At T3 57 per cent of **Cohort 1** viewed their preparation as adequate compared with 62 per cent of those in **Cohort 2.**

Once again the comparison at T4 is complicated by responses from **Cohort 2** being divided into preparation by university and practice. Nevertheless it is possible to identify similarities and differences across the two groups. There were six areas where the proportions considering they had been adequately prepared were more or less the same. These were context; application of social work knowledge; theory and methods; interpersonal communication; human growth and development; and the legal system. However it is important to note that the **Cohort 1** ratings were not consistently matched with the same setting. So, for example, while 94 per cent of **Cohort 1** said they were at least adequately prepared in relation to theory and methods and this was very similar to the 95 per cent of **Cohort 2** who stated this to be the case for their university preparation, only 88 per cent of **Cohort 2** considered this to be the case for the practice-based preparation.

In seven areas **Cohort 1** responses were higher than those of **Cohort 2** in terms of feeling adequately prepared: values and ethics; children and families; anti-oppressive practice; research methods and evaluation; power and discrimination; interpersonal communication, and human growth and development. In most of these the differences were very small. The exception was research methods and evaluation where the proportion of **Cohort 2** feeling adequately prepared by practice was only 41 per cent. The rating for feeling prepared by universities (71%) was also considerably below the **Cohort 1** figure of 89 per cent. The introduction of the split between university

/practice spread has given rise to a unstable element that makes some comparisons a little questionable. So, for example, although practice educators may be very involved in working with students on how to use evidence they would not usually be expected to prepare students in research methods and evaluation. The data are presented but the reader should exercise caution.

6.3.2: Adequately prepared: Cohort 2's views on the 13 knowledge areas -universities and practice

Respondents were trainees at the end of their training so it is important to explore the available data to understand more fully where they thought they had and had not been adequately prepared for the work they thought they were about to undertake.

When comparing the proportion of **Cohort 2** reporting that they considered they had been at least adequately **prepared by their universities** in relation to the 13 areas there were no noticeable differences between the respondents from different RPs in eight areas: context; values and ethics; theory and methods; the application of social work knowledge; work with children and families; roles and responsibilities; power and discrimination, and interpersonal communication. This means that in five areas differences between the partnerships did emerge (see Fig 6.2).

Fig 6.4 Cohort 2 respondents' views of adequacy of preparation by area of social work knowledge

Area	Overall average across all RPs	Regional Partnerships below average
Social work with adults	51%	In Learn Together Partnership, NW Midlands and SE London three-quarters of respondents considered they had been inadequately prepared
Anti-oppressive practice	91%	In Yorkshire & Humberside just under half of respondents considered they had been inadequately prepared
Research methods and evaluation	71%	In NW Midlands just over half the respondents considered they had been inadequately prepared
Human growth and development	82%	In SE London a third of respondents considered they had been inadequately prepared and in South East it was half of respondents.
The legal system	92%	In SE London half of respondents considered they had been inadequately prepared and in Y&H it was nearly two thirds.

When the same analysis was conducted in relation to the responses on adequate **preparation by practice** in only one area did sharp differences emerge between responses across partnerships and this was over preparation in the practice element for work with adults. While three-quarters of **Cohort 2** respondents thought they had been at least adequately prepared this dropped to two-thirds in NW Midlands, to a half in East Midlands and to one quarter in the Learn Together Partnership.

At T2 **Cohort 2** trainees were also asked to provide views on how well they thought they were being prepared and the data are contained in Table 6.1. Once again the fact that at T4 their responses covered both university and practice placement does mean that the comparison must be taken as indicative rather than definitive, as the higher rating at T4 has been used. In eight areas – context; social work theory and methods; the application of social knowledge; social work with adults; social work with children and families; roles and responsibilities; power and discrimination, and interpersonal communication - the proportion saying they were being well-prepared went up between T2 and T4. In one other – research methods and evaluation – it rose between T2 and T3 but fell back slightly at T4 and responses on the legal system stayed almost the same level. However in three areas the ratings for feeling well prepared fell back between T2 and T4. These were values and ethics; anti-oppressive practice, and human growth and development.

Table 6.5 Respondents' views by Cohort of adequacy and inadequacy of preparation in 13 areas of social work knowledge

AREA	Inadequate *							At least adequate *				
	Cohort 2 T2	Cohort 1 T3	Cohort 2 T3	Cohort 1 T4	Cohort 2 T4		Cohort 2 T2	Cohort 1 T3	Cohort 2 T3	Cohort 1 T4	Cohort 2 T4	
					Uni	Prac					Uni	Prac
Context of social work	4%	7%	4%	3%	7%	3%	95%	92%	95%	97%	93%	97%
Social work values and ethics	2%	4%	5%	-	4%	5%	97%	94%	95%	100%	96%	95%
Social work theory and methods	2%	26%	13%	7%	5%	12%	90%	74%	87%	94%	95%	88%
Application of social knowledge	8%	21%	7%	6%	9%	6%	92%	77%	92%	94%	91%	94%
Social work with adults	30%	41%	37%	41%	49%	25%	70%	57%	62%	59%	51%	75%
Social work with children and families	8%	6%	5%	1%	4%	5%	92%	92%	95%	99%	96%	95%
Anti-oppressive practice	6%	6%	6%	2%	9%	11%	94%	92%	94%	98%	91%	89%
Research methods and evaluation	46%	25%	24%	11%	29%	59%	54%	73%	75%	89%	71%	41%
Social work roles and responsibilities	4%	12%	5%	2%	7%	2%	96%	86%	95%	88%	92%	98%
Human growth and development	11%	15%	11%	12%	18%	13%	89%	84%	89%	88%	82%	87%
The legal system	10%	18%	12%	7%	8%	8%	90%	81%	88%	92%	92%	92%
Issues of power and discrimination	3%	7%	9%	-	4%	5%	97%	93%	90%	100%	96%	95%
Interpersonal communication	7%	18%	7%	3%	9%	4%	93%	82%	91%	97%	91%	96%

6.4 Commentaries from Cohort 2 on feeling well or adequately prepared for practice in the 13 knowledge areas of social work

At T4 **Cohort 2** were asked to provide a view on how the university and placement had contributed to their preparation in these 13 knowledge areas. The number of trainees who took the opportunity to do so was small for each heading and those that did this did not do so consistently across the settings or across the areas being examined. The responses are summarised in Table A2.8 (Annex 2).

6.5 Overview of the views of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 on their preparation for practice in relation to 13 knowledge areas of social work

- **Cohort 2** responses showed there was a higher proportion who felt well prepared in every area except for anti-oppressive practice, research methods and evaluation, and issues of power and discrimination.
- Over 90 per cent of **Cohort 2** said they felt well prepared for social work with children and families and understanding the context of social work.
- **Cohort 2** respondents in the East Midlands and West London Alliance thought they had been well prepared ***by their universities*** in most of the areas explored.
- By T4 over 70 per cent of **Cohort 1** considered they had been well-prepared in terms of the context of social work, social work values and ethics, social work with children and families, anti-oppressive practice, issues of power and discrimination and interpersonal communication. This was the same for **Cohort 2** with the exception of anti-oppressive practice where the proportion saying they were well prepared fell below 70 per cent. But there were three additional areas where over 70 per cent of **Cohort 2** considered they had been well-prepared. These were in the application of social knowledge, social work roles and responsibilities, and the legal system. Only 42 per cent of **Cohort 1** thought they had been well-prepared for the latter compared with 66 per cent (by university) and 71 per cent (by practice) of **Cohort 2**.
- At T4 there were three areas where less than 50 per cent of **Cohort 1** reported being well-prepared – human growth and development, the legal system, and social work with adults. Apart from social work with adults the proportion of **Cohort 2** feeling well prepared in these areas was over 50 per cent.

- At T3 the overall proportion saying they were at least adequately prepared in relation to 12 of the 13 areas was higher for **Cohort 2** than for **Cohort 1**. The difference disappeared at T4 where **Cohort 2's** 'averages' were depressed by responses from respondents in the South East and SE London, but also by those in Greater Manchester and NW Midlands, in relation to the preparation by their universities.

Section 7: Preparation for practice (3): Feedback on 13 skill areas of social work

7.1 Background

At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to say how well prepared they felt in 13 practice-related areas, many of which were more skill based than those examined in Section 6 (see p 74 for a full list). These data had not been collected across all areas from **Cohort 1** so it is not possible to draw comparisons. Information on six of these areas was collected from **Cohort 1** and these data are included in Table 7.1 and in a separate paragraph on page 90. Once again they were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale where 1 equated with not feeling prepared and 5 equated with feeling extremely well prepared and again these ratings were banded into three groups: well prepared (points 4 and 5); adequately prepared (point 3) and ill-prepared (points 1 and 2). As with the aspects reported in Section 6, responses were reported separately for university and practice preparation. This section is devoted to reporting the data collected from **Cohort 2** respondents at the point at which, it should be remembered, most were embarking on their social work careers. Table 7.1 sets out the areas explored and summarises the responses.

7.2 Feedback on preparation in 13 skills areas: feeling well prepared

In 12 of the 13 areas a higher proportion of respondents said they were well prepared as a result of the practice element rather than the university input. The one area was reflecting on practice, but that was the only area where a high proportion (80%) attributed being well prepared to their universities. So while 92 per cent and 90 per cent respectively thought they had been well prepared by practice to work with families *and* with children and young people, only 55 per cent and 63 per cent thought their universities had prepared them to this level.

There were four areas where over 80 per cent of respondents said they were well prepared by their placements but where far fewer thought that this had happened as a result of university input. These were assessing need (88% and 42%)[30]; assessing and managing risk (88% and 42%); developing plans (87% and 24%); and record keeping (82% and 36%). Similarly, while over 70

[30] Practice figure is given first then university figure.

per cent of respondents thought they had been well-prepared for working with people who are reluctant to engage *and* to access services and resources, the proportions saying this had happened through their universities were much lower (72% and 74% compared with 35% and 29%). Nearly two thirds (63%) thought their placements had prepared them well to deal with aggression, hostility and conflict while only one in five thought their universities had done so.

There were three areas where fewer than 50 per cent of respondents thought they had been well prepared. These were understanding the evidence base for what works (48% and 44%); working with groups (48% and 38%); and leadership and management (31% and 19%).

7.3 Feedback on preparation in 13 skills areas: feeling adequately prepared

When the figures for well prepared and adequately prepared are combined it emerges that over 90 per cent of **Cohort 2** respondents felt at least adequately prepared in ten of the 13 areas, but in most cases a higher proportion attributed this to their practice experiences rather than to that of their universities' input (see Fig 7.1).

Fig 7.1 Cohort 2 Respondents' views on feeling adequately prepared by skills areas 1

	Assess need	Develop plans	Assess and manage risk	Reflect on practice	Work with children and young people
University	82%	61%	79%	97%	92%
Practice	98%	97%	98%	92%	99%
	Working with families	**Working with those reluctant to engage**	**Deal with hostility, aggression or conflict**	**Record keeping**	**Accessing services / resources that might help service users**
University	94%	77%	63%	62%	60%
Practice	99%	98%	92%	97%	97%

The three exceptions where under 90 per cent felt adequately prepared were the same as those where respondents had not felt well prepared: understanding the evidence of what works, working with groups, and preparation for leadership and management (see Fig 7.2).

Fig 7.2 Cohort 2 Respondents' views on feeling adequately prepared by skills areas 2

	Evidence base for what works	Working with groups	Leadership and management
University	73%	72%	45%
Practice	86%	76%	70%

The overall percentages are still reasonably high, with the exception of leadership and management, but it has to be remembered that the trainees are reporting that they have been adequately prepared for initial practice so they are worth noting.

7.4 Regional partnership variations over preparation in the 13 skills areas

When the data were examined differences emerged on the extent to which trainees considered they were well and adequately prepared according to the RPs where respondents were based.

As in Section 6 the comparisons have been made by taking the overall percentages, recorded in Table 7.1, and examining responses to see if they are in line with an average, or below or above. Given the comparatively small number of respondents from each partnership it is not appropriate to report ratings as percentages but it was possible to judge if the responses were in

line with or deviated from the 'average'.
The first step was to analyse the proportion of respondents in each RP whose responses indicated that they considered that they had been '***well prepared'*** by their universities in terms of the 13 skills areas. The data are summarised in Table 7.2.

- Respondents from West London Alliance and East Midlands returned above average ratings in 12 and 11 areas respectively when considering their preparation by their universities.
- In five partnerships there were no above average scores. These were East, Greater Manchester, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, SE London and NW Midlands, and two, Yorkshire & Humberside and South East where only one area was identified.

The data were then examined in terms of the proportion of respondents in each partnership that considered they had been ***at least adequately prepared*** by their universities in the 13 skills areas. The data are summarised in Table 7.3.

- Respondents from Learn Together Partnership, West London Alliance and East Midlands returned above average ratings in 9, 7 and 6 areas respectively when considering their preparation by their universities.
- There were two partnerships – Yorkshire & Humberside and Greater Manchester - where respondents returned above average ratings for one area of work.
- It is not clear from the trainees' additional comments why there should be such a discrepancy between the Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire ratings and those of the SE when the University of Bedfordshire teaches both. An examination of the organisational and structural arrangements might provide some explanation but that was beyond the scope of this evaluation.
- In the SE and SEL partnerships the ratings for the majority of areas fell below the average.

Table 7.1 Cohort 2 Respondents' views of adequacy of preparation by area of social work skill

SKILL AREA	Well prepared			Adequately prepared			Not adequately prepared		
	By university	By practice	Cohort 1	By university	By practice	Cohort 1	By university	By practice	Cohort 1
Assessing need	42%	88%	78%	40%	10%	18%	18%	2%	4%
Developing plans	24%	87%	65%	37%	10%	26%	39%	2%	9%
Assessing and managing risk	42%	88%	72%	37%	10%	22%	21%	2%	6%
Reflecting on practice	80%	71%	80%	17%	21%	13%	3%	8%	7%
Working with children and young people	63%	90%		29%	9%		9%	1%	
Working effectively with families	55%	92%	82%	39%	7%	12%	6%	1%	6%
Working with those reluctant to engage	35%	72%		42%	26%		23%	2%	
Working with groups	37%	48%	55%	35%	28%	23%	28%	24%	22%
Dealing with aggression, hostility and conflict	21%	63%		42%	29%		27%	8%	
Record keeping	36%	82%		26%	15%		37%	3%	
Leadership and management	19%	31%		26%	39%		55%	30%	
The evidence base of what works	44%	48%		29%	38%		27%	14%	
Accessing services / resources that might help service users	29%	74%		31%	23%		40%	3%	

Table 7.2 Cohort 2 Respondents feeling 'well/very well' prepared in skill areas by universities across regional partnerships

	No of areas of work below average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work above average re 'well / very well' prepared
East (MMU)	4	9	0
Y & H (University of Salford)	5	7	1
East Midlands (MMU)	0	2	11
Greater Manchester (University of Salford)	9	4	0
LTP (John Moores University)	0	8	5
WLA (University of Hertfordshire)	0	1	12
CBLH (University of Bedfordshire)	1	12	0
South East (University of Bedfordshire)	10	1	1
South East London (Goldsmiths, London)	12	1	0
NW Midlands (Universities of Staffordshire and MMU)	6	7	0

Table 7.3 Cohort 2 Respondents feeling adequately prepared in skill areas by universities across regional partnerships

	No of areas of work below average re 'adequately' prepared	No of areas of work average re 'adequately' prepared	No of areas of work above average re 'adequately' prepared
East (MMU)	4	9	0
Y & H (University of Salford)	2	10	1
East Midlands (MMU)	0	7	6
Greater Manchester (University of Salford)	6	6	1
LTP (John Moores University)	0	4	9
WLA (University of Hertfordshire)	0	6	7
CBLH (University of Bedfordshire)	1	12	0
South East (University of Bedfordshire)	10	3	0
South East London (Goldsmiths, University of London)	9	4	0
NW Midlands (Universities of Staffordshire and MMU)	5	8	0

7.5 Practice-based preparation and the 13 skills areas

The data on the respondents' views on their preparation for practice in these 13 areas were then examined and are reported in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4 Cohort 2 respondents by regional partnerships feeling 'very well / well' prepared in skill areas by practice experience

Regional Partnership	No of areas of work below average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work average re 'well / very well' prepared	No of areas of work above average re 'well / very well' prepared
East	0	11	2
Y & H	2	11	0
East Midlands	0	10	3
Greater Manchester	1	12	0
LTP	2	9	2
WLA	0	11	2
CBLH	4	9	0
South East	4	9	0
South East London	7	6	0
NW Midlands	4	9	0

As noted above, a much higher proportion of respondents said they were well prepared as a result of the practice element rather than the university input. As a result it is not surprising that fewer ratings exceeded the 'average'. In four RPs there were very high ratings for a few areas of work. However there were three partnerships – Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire; South East and NW Midlands - where the ratings fell below the 'average' in a third of areas and one, SE London, where this was the case for half of the areas (see Table 7.4). When the data were examined in relation to '**adequate preparation by practice'** no partnerships fell below the average.

Comparison with Cohort 1 responses

At T4 **Cohort 1** had also been asked to respond in relation to six of these areas: assess need; develop plans, assess and manage risk; reflect on practice; work effectively with families; and work with groups. Their responses are also recorded in Table 6.1. Once again it is important to remember that they were not asked to attribute their level of preparation to the university or practice input. In four areas – assess need; develop plans; assess and manage risk and work effectively with families the proportions of **Cohort 2** respondents saying they were well prepared were higher than those of **Cohort 1**. The same proportion (80%) of **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** said they were well prepared to reflect on practice and a higher proportion of **Cohort 1** said they had been well prepared to work with groups (55% compared with 48%).

7.6 Commentaries from Cohort 2 on feeling well or adequately prepared for practice in the 13 skill areas of social work

At T4 **Cohort 2** were asked to provide a view on how the university and placement had contributed to their preparation in these 13 skill areas. The number of trainees who commented was even smaller than for the 13 knowledge areas and the comments were not made consistently about subject areas or settings. The responses are summarised in Table A2.9 (Annex 2)

7.7 Overview of the views of Cohort 2 on their preparation for practice in relation to 13 skill areas of social work

Cohort 2 respondents were also asked to comment on how prepared they felt in relation to 13 skill areas:

- In relation to 12 of the 13 skill areas a higher proportion of respondents said they were well prepared by practice than by the universities.
- 92 per cent reported being prepared by practice to work with families and 90 per cent for work with children and young people, but only 55 per cent and 65 per cent respectively thought they had been well prepared for these areas by universities.
- Respondents from West London Alliance and East Midlands returned the highest ratings in terms of being well prepared in the majority of areas.
- Respondents in the East Midlands and West London Alliance thought they had been well prepared ***by their universities*** in most of the areas explored
- While the majority of respondents thought they had been well prepared the averages across the areas were lowest in the East, Greater Manchester Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire, SE London, South East and Yorkshire & Humberside.
- There were two areas where trainees' ratings gave rise to particular concerns about level of preparation ***by their universities***. These were the South East and SE London partnerships. There were other partnerships, most notably NW Midlands and Greater Manchester, with lower than average ratings.

- The largest numbers of areas of work where the responses fell below the average were in the South East and SE London in terms of feeling ‘well prepared’ ***and*** ‘adequately prepared’ by their universities.
- There was not the same variation across the RPs in relation to preparation by practice as there was for university input on the areas. In most of the 13 areas respondents felt better prepared by the practice element than by the university input.

Section 8: Feedback on teaching, learning and assessment methods

At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to provide feedback on teaching and learning methods **and** assessment of their academic work and practice. These questions were not asked of **Cohort 1** so there are no comparisons to be drawn.

8.1 Trainees' views on teaching and learning methods

8.1.1 Findings from the survey on teaching and learning methods

At T4 **Cohort 2** respondents were asked to indicate the teaching and learning methods that they had experienced *and* how they rated them in terms of quality of the learning opportunity. The results are summarised in Table 8.1. The same question was asked when the new social work degree was evaluated (Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team, 2008[31]) and it would be possible to allow the two sets of responses to be compared.[32]

At this stage, however, the data were examined to see how many of **Cohort 2** said they had experienced a method and to consider their views on the quality of this. For this purpose the 'good' and 'very good' categories were combined and the methods have been roughly grouped under headings adopted by the team who worked on the evaluation of the social work degree. Although the heading 'not used' did attract some responses with some notable exceptions they were very few and usually were not consistently identified by respondents from the same partnerships. The results have been divided into two broad groups, 'didactic methods' and 'interactive methods', in line with the groupings used for the evaluation of the new social work degree (see above)[33].

Didactic methods including academic lectures: e-learning materials from their universities; e-learning materials from other sources; presentations and talks from service users and/or carers, and computer/IT training

[31] Evaluation of Social Work Degree in England Team (2008) Volume 1: Findings, London: King's College London, Social Care Workforce Research Unit.
Evaluation of Social Work Degree Qualification in England Team (2008) Volume 2: Technical Appendix, London: King's College London, Social Care Workforce Research Unit.
[32] The two samples are of very different sizes and further analysis may be done in the future to see if it is possible to explore areas in more detail.
[33] These two groupings may not match what traditionally might appear under these headings but are retained for the sake of future comparison.

- 74 per cent of respondents rated academic lectures and presentations and talks from service users and / or carers as good / very good;
- 74 per cent also rated e-learning materials in general as good and 61 per cent e-learning materials from their universities as good or very good.
- Only 24 per cent rated IT / computer training as good / very good, but 25 per cent said they had no experience of such training.

'**Interactive' methods** including seminars/small group discussions; skills laboratories (practice simulation/s); workshops; student presentations; classroom exercises; feedback from teaching staff; feedback from fellow students; use of scenarios and case study materials; role play and class exercises

- *Scenarios*/*case study materials* were also rated as good or very good by 79 per cent.
- 70 per cent of respondents rated *workshops* as good / very good; 62 per cent gave this rating to classroom exercises and 48 per cent to role play. Eighteen per cent had not experienced role play on their courses.
- 68 per cent rated *seminars/ small group discussions* as good / very good but only 36 per cent gave this rating to *skills laboratories*. Nearly one third said they had not used skills laboratories.
- *Student presentations* and *feedback from fellow students* were rated at 57 per cent and 67 per cent respectively and *feedback from teaching staff* at 56 per cent

Shadowing of an experienced social worker for one day and longer than one day.

- 69 per cent of respondents rated shadowing an experienced social worker for a day as good/very good and 72 per cent did so for the experience of having shadowed an experienced social worker for longer than one day.

Written tasks including reflective exercises, essays, tests, portfolios and exams

- 65 per cent thought the *reflective exercises* they had conducted were good/very good, as did 63 per cent for both *essays* and *portfolios*, but only 27 per cent for *tests* and 20 per cent for *exams*. Nearly half, 44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively, had no experience of traditional tests

and exams in the training.

Table 8.1: Cohort 2 respondents' reports of incidence of and views on teaching and learning methods used

	Excellent, very good	Good	Neither good nor poor	Poor	Very poor	Not used
e-learning: Social Work study materials from your own College/ University Intranet	9%	52%	24%	9%	2%	4%
e-learning: online materials from other sources	12%	62%	20%	3%	-	3%
Academic lectures	13%	61%	17%	7%	2%	-
Presentations/talks from service users and/or carers	29%	45%	21%	3%	2%	-
Workshops	18%	52%	22%	3%	1%	4%
Role play	8%	40%	25%	6%	3%	18%
Seminars/ small group discussions	9%	59%	17%	6%	-	9%
Skills laboratory (e.g. practice simulation/s)	4%	32%	28%	4%	2%	30%
Student presentation/s	7%	50%	21%	3%	2%	17%
Class exercises	5%	57%	28%	7%	1%	2%
Use of Scenarios/Case Study materials	16%	63%	12%	6%	3%	-
Feedback from teaching staff	11%	45%	21%	15%	4%	4%
Feedback from fellow students	14%	53%	23%	3%	-	7%
One-day shadowing of an experienced Social Worker	22%	47%	11%	5%	-	15%
Shadowing of an experienced Social Worker – longer than one day	36%	36%	16%	2%	-	10%
Reflective exercises (e.g. diary, learning log)	12%	53%	23%	9%	2%	1%
Computer/IT training	1%	24%	41%	7%	2%	25%
Essay / assignment writing	5%	58%	24%	9%	2%	2%
Test/s	4%	23%	24%	5%	-	44%
Portfolio/workbook	5%	58%	29%	6%	-	2%
Exam/s	2%	18%	27%	7%	-	46%

8.2 Commentaries on teaching and learning methods

The comments that accompanied these ratings fell into three types. There were those that focused purely on teaching and learning methods. Most of these were about distance learning that had been more evident in some courses than others, although there was an element in all. A few comments merely referenced the quality of the materials, be they good or bad, but others went beyond this. The trainees in the East and East Midlands had a large element of distance learning and for the most part they thought it worked out very well, although they did appreciate the times when they came together with other Step Up trainees. But even here there were requests, echoed by those in other RPs, for more discretion to be applied when considering using direct or indirect online teaching methods. The method was thought to be fine for some subjects, but trainees wanted subjects such as child protection and intervention to be taught face to face, and those in universities that used a

high volume of self-directed learning also made a similar plea:

“Way too much self directed study, why oh why would a course specializing in creating front line social workers in children’s services have child sexual abuse, the child protection process and long term planning as self directed study modules, we are all students we don't know we need to be **taught** this not just thrown together to guess our way through” (SE London)

“I enjoyed most of the distance learning but I did not feel it had always been thought through as to which subjects lend themselves to this more impersonal way of teaching and which need to be supported by live interaction” (East Midlands)

There were also trainees who said they thought more attention should be paid to introducing distance-learning methods for those who had not previously used them. Those who most disliked the distance learning they had been offered were usually in universities that did not use the method very much, which may reflect the fact that familiarity and greater exposure were linked with greater satisfaction or that institutions that use the method more frequently were more adept at developing suitable materials.

The second group of comments was on face-to-face teaching in the universities. Not surprisingly this was said to range from the very good through to the unacceptable. While the courses where the teaching was generally regarded as poor were also those that attracted the lowest levels of satisfaction, the range of good to poor was also often applied to the same course:

“We have been extremely fortunate to receive lectures from some fabulous professors and lecturers which we have found excellent. The problem has been that the delivery of so much by so many has been dire” (NW Midlands)

“The overall picture with regards to teaching was very mixed. We had some excellent lectures – but too few. The university relied quite heavily on 'Study Units'; independent learning with no clear assessment at the end. Independent learning is obviously to be encouraged on a master’s course, but did leave us wondering whether we could have just opened a textbook rather than undertake a master’s. The bits that we appreciated most were definitely the input from experienced professionals” (SE London)

“The teaching that was provided by external speakers, including practitioners, was usually well regarded so long as they had been briefed before about the focus of their input and the experience of the audience”

The third group of comments was all about more active learning, especially about shadowing and role-play. In general the former was warmly welcomed and everything from apprehension to strong dislike attached to the latter, except where it was mediated by a theatre group or other experts.

These comments sum up so many others in identifying a range of methods and the positive and more challenging aspects:

“The role play with the theatre group was superb. Getting to try out situations with characters that wouldn't break character was really effective” (SE London)

“The role-play was a disaster – it did not feel safe. It should have been used to develop our confidence and competence. Instead we did not learn from it because there was no element of reflection nor any debrief” (CBLH)

“I enjoyed the lectures and writing essays. There was a good mix of teaching and learning styles. The essays were the best form of learning and they encouraged me to do lots of my own research and to understand specific areas in much more depth” (WLA)

“Some of the lectures were very good – some were the pits. I enjoyed making the links between what we were taught and the practice I encountered on placement. The university could do more – even though it was a flawed course it was definitely more academic than vocational and I think that does need to be rethought. On reflection the teaching methods that I gained most from were shadowing team members and discussing my cases with experienced practitioners, especially in supervision” (NW Midlands)

It is also worth noting that some responses drew attention to how much had to be covered in a comparatively short period and that made any decision on the method of delivery even more crucial. In this case it was also the isolation the respondents felt, as a result of a course that was mostly taught remotely, that made it even more difficult:

“Something that I have consistently highlighted in the feedback is my amusement and frustration that there was continuous stress on the fact that reflection is critical in social work, yet the course was so tightly packed that there wasn't time to reflect on anything productively. The time constraints of the course were counter-productive in that I learnt things but did not retain them as well as I could have done, because there was no time to reflect on or discuss the materials. The amount of time studying alone contributed to this because there was little chance to discuss the learning, which may have

helped consolidate things" (East)

8.3 Trainees' views on assessment methods

Unlike **Cohort 1, Cohort 2** respondents were asked to say how satisfied they were with the way their academic work and practice had been formally assessed.

8.3.1 Assessment of academic work – survey data and commentaries

Overall 62 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the way their academic work had been assessed (see Table 8.2). Nearly two thirds were satisfied with the process and a quarter of respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 8.2 Cohort 2 Satisfaction with assessment of academic work

Very/satisfied	63%
Neither	24%
No	13%

In six of the ten partnerships at least two-thirds were content and this was substantially higher in the East, East Midlands, the Learn Together Partnership and West London Alliance. It fell below half in NW Midlands, the South East and Greater Manchester and to only two of the thirteen respondents in SE London (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 Cohort 2 Satisfaction with assessment of academic work according to the regional partnerships

Regional Partnership	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
East	11	2	1	14
Y & H	15	8	1	24
East Midlands	18	3	1	23
Greater Manchester	4	2	4	10
LTP	12	2	1	15
WLA	20	3	0	23
CBLH	9	6	1	16
South East	5	3	3	11
South East London	2	8	3	13
NW Midlands	10	4	8	22

Although nearly two-thirds of respondents in most partnerships were satisfied with the way in which their work had been assessed, as with so many areas, those who were happy rarely explained why they were, whereas those who were dissatisfied were more likely to provide an explanation. There was, however, a clear link between the detailed feedback and overall satisfaction with assessment which is not surprising. Even if a piece of work did not receive a wholly positive assessment, if the trainee could see how they could learn from it and improve they were more likely to be satisfied than where they had received little or nothing that explained why it had attracted either a good or poor mark. The main complaint that certainly attached to those who were neither satisfied or not and those who were clearly dissatisfied was the degree of inconsistency they encountered from different tutors marking their work. This had not featured to any extent in the responses from **Cohort 1** whereas it was very significant in those made by **Cohort 2**. It also appeared consistently in the responses from those in the Greater Manchester, NW Midlands and SE London partnerships and may be linked to the lower levels of dissatisfaction in those areas and indicates that the matter requires investigating

8.3.2 Assessment of practice - survey data and commentaries

A much higher proportion of respondents was satisfied with the way in which their practice had been assessed than with the academic assessments (see Table 8.4).

Table 8.4 Cohort 2 Satisfaction with assessment of practice

Very / satisfied	90%
Neither	6%
No	4%

Table 8.5 Cohort 2 Satisfaction with assessment of practice according to the regional partnerships

Regional Partnership	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
East	13	1	0	14
Y & H	22	1	1	24
East Midlands	22	1	0	23
Greater Manchester	10	0	0	10
LTP	15	0	0	15
WLA	23	0	0	23
CBLH	14	1	1	16

South East	9	2	0	11
South East London	8	5	0	13
NW Midlands	16	0	6	22

Given the high level of satisfaction it is not surprising that in seven RPs no respondents were dissatisfied. In two of the remaining three it was just one individual but in NW Midlands it was nearly a third of the 22 respondents (see Table 8.5).

Those that were satisfied spoke of the thorough way in which practice educators had assessed their practice and provided feedback. Some would have liked a mechanism for acknowledging the quality of work done on placement beyond a pass mark for the placement component of the portfolio. Those that were dissatisfied had often experienced changes of practice educators that, in turn, had led to confusion, incomplete and inaccurate reports and even failure to make assessments. The examples provided were very situation specific and would have led to the identification of individuals so further details have not been given here.

8.4 Overview of feedback on teaching and learning methods and assessment

- The survey feedback on teaching methods was generally favourable, particularly on academic lectures, presentations, workshops and seminars. However, this was somewhat modified by the qualitative comments received usually from those on courses where lower levels of satisfaction had been recorded (see Section 3).
- E-learning materials were generally well received but feedback was more positive about on-line materials from other sources than those from their universities.
- Opportunities to shadow experienced social workers were highly rated.
- Role-play and skills laboratories were not rated as highly as other aspects, other than where an expert group, such as actors, had been involved; but a significant minority had no experience of one or both of them.
- IT training was not rated very highly; a quarter of respondents had not had any IT training.
- Just under three fifths of respondents had experience of traditional tests and exams and opinion was divided on how useful they were.
- Ninety per cent of respondents were satisfied with how their practice

had been assessed but this fell to 63 per cent who were satisfied with the assessment of their academic work.

Section 9: Trainees' reflections at the end of their training

9.1 Trainees' summative assessment of how well they feel prepared to practise

At various points trainees have assessed their preparation for practice in a range of areas. At T4 both **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2**[34] were also asked to make a summative assessment of how well they thought they had been prepared overall to practise as a newly qualified social worker.

- Over a quarter of **Cohort 1** respondents – 27 per cent – said they believed they were very adequately prepared and a further 69 per cent thought they were adequately prepared.
- The proportion of **Cohort 2** respondents considering they had been very adequately prepared was higher at 37 per cent and 60 per cent said they considered they had been adequately prepared.
- The proportions in both cohorts considering they had been 'at least adequately' prepared were nearly identical at 96 per cent and 97 per cent respectively.

The number saying they felt prepared is, perhaps, surprising given the comments from a substantial minority of trainees throughout this report, especially about the quality of the academic input on their courses. However this is probably best understood within the context in which many phrased their reflections on their rating. They either viewed 'preparation' in terms of the starting point of their careers or looked forward to the support they would receive during the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, or they viewed it in terms of work with children and acknowledged their lack of preparation for work with other groups.

I would suggest that I am adequately prepared to practice in the areas in which I did my placements. While I hope that the knowledge and skills I obtained can be transferred to other areas of Social Work - the latter is dependent on employers having the willingness and commitment to employ someone with narrow practice experience. (South East)

[34] See Table A2.1 for full details of response rate but overall response rate at T4 for Cohort 1 was 71 per cent and for Cohort 2 it was 80 per cent.

“I feel that this course has prepared me well for the job I am now in but there has also been a significant gap in my knowledge due to the lack of quality university input” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

Many of the responses also contained a reference to how their rating was informed by their prior experience:

“I feel adequately prepared because of my previous experience (especially three years in front line local authority child protection). I would not feel this prepared by the course, which I did not feel adequately, reflected the challenges of practice, not did it adequately acknowledge the instances of good practice, which I have experienced (e.g. good supervisor/manager)” (East)

“I feel it is important to point out that I consider other factors, such as my experience in previous roles before undertaking the course, have contributed greatly to my preparedness to practise as a NQSW and therefore the course cannot be fully credited with producing my response” (Greater Manchester)

9.2 What went well?

Both cohorts were asked to identify up to five things about the programme - particularly over the previous six to seven months - they considered had gone well.

By T4 over three-quarters of **Cohort 1** respondents mentioned their placements and their practice educators, many saying the experiences had provided valuable insights into practice and prepared them for their future careers as social workers. Just over a third mentioned something linked to their academic experience, especially the support that they had received from their dissertation tutors. Again, peer support and the lectures delivered by practitioners were identified as having gone well, but by this stage the focus was very much on placement and academic experiences.

Cohort 2’s responses were very similar. Just under four-fifths mentioned their placements and two-thirds mentioned the contribution of their practice educators. One third mentioned the quality of the academic input and a similar proportion mentioned the support they had received from their universities. And finally just over a fifth mentioned the support received from their peers.

9.3 What did not go well?

The two cohorts were also asked to identify up to five things that had not gone well. Just fewer than 70 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents identified at least one issue relating to the delivery of the course that needed to improve. These included the timings of assignments and submission dates (especially towards the end of the course), the order in which some lectures had been delivered and the quality of the academic input. The submission of the dissertation or extended essay caused a particular strain, although academic burden had not been an issue throughout most of **Step Up 1**. A minority referred to the level of work as overwhelming at this stage of the course and many called for greater consideration to be given to the deadline and pressures placed upon them at the end of the course.

Cohort 2's responses also focused on the academic input, but there were fewer references to the quantity or burden of work. Three-quarters of responses contained at least one issue relating to the academic side of the course, which was said to need attention. Over 50 per cent of respondents referred to quality issues, either in terms of the standard of the overall programme or to the teaching, or more specifically to individual aspects of the curriculum, most commonly research and evaluation input and teaching on human growth and development. Nearly as many commented on the structure of the course or timetabling issues that were considered to make combining the practice and academic elements of Step Up harder than it needed to be. However, one issue was mentioned by over a third of respondents that had not emerged in the **Cohort 1** replies; that was the perceived inconsistency in the marking of assignments and other work by university staff.

9.4 Were expectations met?

Cohort 2 trainees were asked to reflect on their expectations when they secured a place on the Step Up to Social Work programme and to comment on the extent to which these had been met. They were asked to do this on a five-point scale where 1 represented 'not at all' and 5 meant they had been met in full. Table 9.1 summarises their responses.

Table 9.1 Cohort 2 Expectations met

Not met at all	Met to a limited extent	Yes and No - balanced	Largely met	Met in full
0%	9%	36%	28%	27%

The majority, 55 per cent, thought their expectations had been largely or fully met and just over a third (36%) thought they had been met to some extent.

Just under ten per cent of those who responded said they had largely been unmet but no one said they had not been met at all.

At least three-fifths of respondents in Yorkshire & Humberside, East Midlands, Greater Manchester, the Learn Together Partnership, and West London Alliance said their expectations had been fully or largely met. Typical comments that were made referred to a desire to qualify as a social worker while having their previous experiences recognised; they had expected it to be demanding and it was, but in hindsight they were satisfied with their experiences and their expectations had either been fully, or to a large extent, met:

“I wanted to be able to use my skills and experience in another arena and Step Up has enabled me to do this. I knew it would be hard going and I do wonder how I would have coped without that experience – and resilience – to draw upon?”

“I did not have any real knowledge of social work at all prior to securing a place on the programme. Step Up has, overall, exceeded my expectations and I am truly grateful that I was successful in obtaining a place on the programme which has enabled me to change career”.

The proportion responding that their expectations had been fully or largely met fell to around half of those in the East, and less than half of those in the South East, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire and SE London. However the area with the most negative response was the NW Midlands where only three of the 22 respondents said that their expectations had been largely met. The failure of expectations to match reality was always linked to what trainees’ viewed as poor organisation, poor academic input and too few opportunities:

“I knew that the course would be demanding but was not really prepared for just how demanding and stressful it became especially having a family to care for in addition. I do feel, however, a lot of this stress could easily have been reduced. The issues were usually small (except the assignment issues which have had a huge impact) which could easily have been improved through good organisation and this would have reduced stress” (NW Midlands)

“I had expectations that as it was a MA it would be the same standard as the MAs my friends have been doing. I also expected to feel I was being prepared for a profession. It certainly wasn’t rigorous – in fact the standard was below that of my first degree. It lacked cohesion and depth and that was a surprise.

And it did not feel like professional training. I expected to come out feeling you have acquired a professional base and I don't" (CBLH)

9.5 Where are they working?

At T4 respondents from both cohorts were asked to provide details of whether or not they had secured a post as a social worker. Of the 119 **Cohort 1** respondents, 109 had secured a post either in the local authority where they had been based (n = 94 / 79 %) or in another local authority in that partnership (n = 15 / 12%). Two respondents had been offered posts as social workers by another authority or agency. This means that 93 per cent of **Cohort 1** respondents held posts as social workers by late spring 2012. This was higher than the figure for the whole of that cohort. Of the 185 who embarked on the first Step Up to Social Work programme in September 2010 168 completed the course (91%) in March 2012 and it was known that 82 per cent were subsequently employed as social workers.

As far as the destinations of **Cohort 2** is concerned at the time of writing the data were not as clear as for **Cohort 1**. The majority - 122 / 71% of the 171 respondents - replied that they had secured a post in the local authority where they had been based (n = 115 / 67%) or in another authority in the same partnership (n = 7 / 4%). Fourteen others (8%) had secured a post in another authority outside the partnership or in another agency. This means that 79 per cent of respondents were moving directly into a social work post. There were 227 trainees who started the second Step Up to Social Work programme. Along the way 14 withdrew and by January 2014 18 still had to complete some part of the course. However, in January 2014 the DfE had been informed that 182 (80%) were working as social workers.[35]

There were differences linked to the RPs where the **Cohort 2** respondents were based. At the time of replying about four-fifths of those based in the Learn Together Partnership, West London Alliance, the South East and SE London had secured posts in their partnership; elsewhere it was in the region of three-fifths, except in the East Midlands where it was slightly higher. This may reflect vacancy levels or recruitment priorities in different parts of the country.

A small number of respondents mentioned the delay and uncertainties about job offers at the end of the training which, in turn, had impacted on where they had been employed:

[35] This is two months after the data were collected from respondents,

“I felt that (local authority) messed me about regarding a job and therefore I have found a job at another local authority, however I have had to move to begin this post” (Greater Manchester)

“The local authority initially guaranteed (verbally) students jobs on completion however this did not materialise. I was asked to apply for a job but there would be a number of months gap from completing course to starting paid social work post. I am instead employed in the same authority but in another service area on a grade higher than a social worker would be in front line practice” (East Midlands)

A few respondents (n=3) said they were going to do something outside social work and 32 (19%) were not sure what they were going to do at the point they completed the survey.

9.6 Future intentions

Cohort 2 respondents were also asked if they had longer-term expectations of a social work career. Just over half (89 / 52%) said they intended to stay in statutory social work in children’s services and a further 15 (9%) wanted to practise in another children’s social work setting:

“I would like to progress within a frontline social work team and eventually become a practice educator. I would also like to try other teams such as family assessment teams” (CBLH)

I” am very ambitious and hope to pursue a career in management either in a social work environment or related field” (LTP)

A very small proportion (2%) intended to move into the adult sector and a further eight per cent said they would stay in social work but gave no further details on the setting or client group.

A small number (4%) did not intend to stay in social work and an even smaller proportion (2%) intended to move into another career. Even though only six per cent did not intend to stay in social work far more comments contained a reference to spending a time-limited period in social work in the children’s sector, usually around two years:

“I do not intend to stay in social work for longer than 2 years. I intend to work with young people in another less confrontational context” (WLA)

“I feel I need a career that allows for more direct work with families, and I want to move into therapeutic work” (Yorkshire & Humberside)

“In many ways, the programme did help to equip me for a career in Social Work, but the current budget cuts and high caseload post-qualifying have made the prospect of a job less appealing” (LTP)

But at the same time most made it clear that they would be using their experiences in another related setting.

9.7 Views on the Step Up to Social Work programme

This was another area where the range of views expressed by respondents about so much in the rest of the survey was not reflected when they were asked to sum up their views on the Step Up programme. When they were asked to add any further comments about their experience the responses were almost entirely positive. While acknowledging how demanding the course was and how it was sometimes difficult to balance studying, ‘working’ and a normal home life there was a great sense of gratitude for the opportunity to study to become a social worker:

“I honestly felt like I'd won the lottery when I secured a place on this course. I love working with people and children in particular and knew that I wanted to support and assist people through their problems. I can honestly say - I've had the best 18 months of my life, I've met hundreds of people and I've learnt from every one, both professionals and service users. I would recommend the course to anyone who wants a future in this career!” (East)

“I have thoroughly enjoyed the programme and I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to train as a social worker. Although the programme has been intense and extremely demanding, I have found the combination of practice learning and academic learning very useful and I feel well prepared for practice in statutory social work” (LTP)

In hindsight the programme was seen to have been successful and to have brought some people into social work that would not have entered otherwise; the financial support that accompanied it enabled people with family responsibilities and student debts to make a career change or development. It was also designed to attract people with relevant experience. Although some trainees did not always think their own experience had been used as much as it could have been it was seen by many to be integral to the success of the programme:

“It has been the most amazing and challenging experience. I feel proud to have been a part of this ground-breaking route into social work and I hope it continues to provide similar opportunities for future cohorts. There has been criticism of fast-track programmes such as Frontline. Step Up has never felt like it was cutting corners or a 'production-line' approach to social work. I think it has benefitted from the fact that applicants had already had experience in working with children and families in some context and so were coming from a background where we had social work values and ethics. The training has been intensive, in-depth and challenging. I feel proud to have completed the Step Up Programme” (WLA)

While a positive element ran through responses received from trainees in all the partnerships, in those areas where trainees had been less satisfied with their experience – and this was usually with aspects of the academic input - the criticisms had not gone away but respondents separated their own journey from the aspects that they believed could be improved:

“Step Up is a fantastic opportunity and enabled me to retrain in an area I really wanted to work. I feel very fortunate to have been on Step Up and be allocated such a good placement. However, the academic side of the training has been so disappointing and I think this area needs to improve to get the best out of high quality enthusiastic step uppers!” (CBLH)

“While I have been fairly negative about the programme - I must also add that I have (nearly) passed - just waiting on my dissertation results - and am in full time employment as an NQSW, therefore, the programme has worked for me. I have made some excellent friendships which I hope to maintain following completion of the course and have at times, thoroughly enjoyed myself. Without the opportunity to do the Step-Up programme, I would not have been able to undertake the social work qualification, as I could not have afforded it. Therefore, overall, I must say that the course has fulfilled my expectations and while not without **some** issues it has enabled me to gain both a master’s degree and a social work qualification” (NW Midlands)

9.8 Overview of trainees’ reflections at end of the course

- The proportions of **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents who considered they had been adequately prepared for practice were both very high and very similar - 96 per cent and 97 per cent respectively.
- When identifying things that had gone well a large majority of both

Cohort 1 and **Cohort 2** respondents placed their placement experience and the contribution of their practice educators at the top of their lists.

- Identifying things that had not gone well led to **Cohort 1** respondents being extremely critical of organisational issues relating to the training. They also had criticisms of the academic input but not to the same level as **Cohort 2** trainees where over half of all responses contained a reference to a quality issue around the academic input.
- The majority of **Cohort 2** respondents (55%) thought their expectations had been largely or fully met and just over a third (36%) thought they had been met to some extent.
- A very high proportion of **Cohort 1** respondents (93%) were immediately moving into posts as social workers on completion of their training; the figure for the whole of **Cohort 1** was 82 per cent. The data on **Cohort 2** respondents were not as clear because nearly a fifth were not sure what they would be doing next. However, at the point at which they replied to the survey, 79 per cent of respondents had been offered and accepted a social work post.
- **Cohort 2** respondents were also asked if they had longer-term expectations of a social work career. Seventy one per cent replied that they did. Three-fifths of respondents intended to stay in statutory social work in children's services or to practise in another children's setting. A very small proportion intended to move into the adult sector and others said they would stay in social work but gave no further details on the setting or client group. (One fifth of respondents did not answer this question.)

Section 10: Discussion and conclusion

All those involved in the first two Step Up programmes have been put under the microscope in a way that few other social work courses have been – and, indeed, not many other degree or training routes. The study has provided valuable data on how the trainees viewed their experiences but the evaluation of the Step Up cohort 2 training route has been purely through their eyes. The first Step Up programme was evaluated by taking account of the views of regional partnerships and the universities, but this was not the case for the second Step Up programme. As a result there are at least two consequences. The first is that while we know about the changes in the arrangements with universities that were made by some RPs (see Section 3) these data are not able to reveal information on the changes that RPs and universities may have made to the content of the courses. The second is that the RPs, universities and local authorities have not had the opportunity to contribute their views. It is extremely important that the findings are located within this context.

Both cohorts attracted candidates with good academic qualifications and considerable experience. Candidates were required to have at least an upper second in their first degree and to have experience of working with children and young people. There is an absence of reliable national data against which these two cohorts could be judged. There are, no doubt, social work courses that make similar demands of their candidates and most master's courses require prior experience. The two Step Up cohorts contained a very high level of relevant experience but it is not possible to say whether this differs from other contemporary master's social work students. They went through a rigorous selection process (which may be similar to other selection routes) but they were told that they were embarking on a challenging course, designed to be completed within an 18-month period as opposed to the usual 24-months. When this is combined with the fact that most had left a job to take up the place it is not surprising that they had high expectations of what was to follow.

The programme was always intended to put employers (local authorities) in the 'driving seat' as far as the training was concerned. This was to be achieved not only by having the trainees based with local authorities rather than in universities, but also by providing the opportunity for the RPs to co-design a course with a university. The latter was intended to help to address the criticism that some employers often direct towards the initial training of social workers when they claim it is too divorced from practice (see, for example, Baginsky et al., 2009). The programme was introduced at a speed that would have made co-designing difficult, but there was also an element of deference by the partnerships to the universities on curriculum matters (see

Smith et al., 2013). However, as the training proceeded, perhaps a greater confidence began to emerge in some RPs. It would be interesting to know if and how those RPs that have been involved in both **Step Up 1** and **2** are now able to wield greater influence on the university content of Step Up and what form this takes; and, if in turn this accounted for or contributed to the significant shifts in the way trainees viewed some courses.

A pilot study is intended to test a model and gather information that would inform implementation of a wider roll out and improve the quality of that stage. It can provide valuable learning and it can also reveal deficiencies in the design and barriers to change (Jowell, 2003). The information and outcomes achieved from a pilot can re-define the approach used in the development and implementation of the programme. Pilot programmes are usually regarded as having a consistency that rarely exists in practice. In this case there was considerable variation across the RPs in the manner in which programme was delivered. As part of the commitment to evidence based policy it is vital to identify the facilitators and challenges associated with the process of implementation and to reflect on what the trainees' views contribute to the future of the Step Up programme, as well as to social work education more generally. The summaries at the end of each section provide the detail but there are also wider lessons that are worth noting.

The responses indicate that the most satisfied trainees were located in RPs that had been involved in both Step Up 1 and Step Up 2. In part this may have had something to do with the growing maturity that comes with participating in a pilot over a period of time, resulting in increased confidence among RPs and local authorities to be engaged partners in preparing the next generation of social workers. But it may also be associated with RPs building on strengths that had existed in the first rollout, as well as addressing specific issues that had caused difficulties. The most significant of these resolutions was the decision by those RPs who had been linked with two universities during Step Up 1 to move to a direct relationship with just one institution that provided the training and validated the qualification.

The improvements that were reflected in trainees' responses may also indicate the importance of local authorities supporting the involvement of their staff in activities such as Step Up where they develop expertise and, in turn, contribute to the evolution of the pilot. Trainees obviously appreciated the support from RPs and local authorities – and missed it when it was not seen to be available. At a time of increased pressures on local authorities, sustaining dedicated posts and providing support for experienced staff to continue their engagement are matters that need to be recognised.

It was evident that respondents appreciated the efforts by both the RPs to provide additional training and their universities to tailor their courses to the Step Up programme. Universities that had merely adapted existing courses to fit Step Up's 18-month timetable came in for considerable criticism across both cohorts, as did those that failed to take account of trainees' experiences or where they arranged external speakers without briefing the speakers appropriately. RPs and local authorities also have a responsibility to ensure that those coming into contact with Step Up trainees, and especially those with direct responsibility for their mentoring and supervision, understand how the programme varies from more traditional training routes and are prepared for the different demands this will make and opportunities it provides. There were **Cohort 1** respondents who reported being placed in teams with a low awareness of Step Up. When their counterparts in **Cohort 2** did so they were usually in the RPs that were new to Step Up and were in teams with little or no knowledge of the programme or the details that needed to be negotiated and resolved when the programme was being implemented.

The academic content of the courses also attracted considerable comment from both **Cohort 1** and **Cohort 2** respondents. As mentioned above it is possible that having identified Step Up as a fast track route for high achieving graduates there were great expectations of the academic input that were not always met. The comments about the highs and lows of academic input and teaching across the RPs were too consistent to dismiss. Also, as reported above, some RPs appeared to have achieved considerable improvement between the two programmes and these were clearly identified in the responses. Some of these improvements may be a result of RPs' demands on the universities with which they were working but it may also be related to their search for the right university with which to work. This, in turn, focuses attention on the importance of selecting the right partner. All programmes should have high academic standards and many have a record of providing excellent professional social work education, but if one is to take part in an activity such as a Step Up programme the faculty needs to be able to adapt to the demands of the new form of programme and to work in a different type of partnership with local authorities.

The feedback from trainees on how they had been prepared for practice indicated areas where those involved in leading Step Up programmes might direct their attention. The lack of consistency over what is taught on social work qualifying programmes has drawn a great deal of attention over recent years from a number of sources. The aftermaths of the death of Victoria Climbie (see Laming, 2009) and then of Peter Connolly (Moriarty et al., 2010)

led to a questioning of the adequacy of the curriculum that students received to work as newly qualified social workers in child protection services. This was followed by the reforms initiated by the Social Work Task Force (2009) then the Social Work Reform Board (2011), the review conducted by Professor Munro (2011), the developments led by The College of Social Work, most significantly the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), and the reviews of social work education conducted by the Department for Education and the Department of Health. Cutting across all of this is the on-going debate between employers and educators on the purpose of initial professional education summarised by Moriarty and Manthorpe (2013) as 'a fundamental distinction between those who view qualifying education as developmental and those who view it as a product' (p 1351). Taylor (2013) has raised the question of whether greater prescription flowing from an increasingly competency-based approach will lead to greater consistency and there are those that would question whether increased consistency is, in fact, something worth having. Overall the majority of both cohorts felt prepared for practice. However, given that newly qualified social workers in children's services frequently have to deal with complex cases, even with the support of the Assessed and Supported Year in Practice (ASYE) the views of trainees on the areas where they feel well or inadequately prepared remain important, as is their feedback on the differences between courses on the time and emphasis devoted to specific subjects or skills.

A more rigorous approach to training requires an equally rigorous approach to its evaluation. The co-operation of over 300 trainees across both cohorts has provided an opportunity to contribute to this knowledge and practice base. It also provides significant data to inform not only the development of the Step Up programme but social work education and training more widely.

References

American Public Human Services Association (2005) *Report from the 2004 child welfare workforce survey: State agency findings.* Washington, DC: American Public Human Services Association.

Baginsky, M., Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., Stevens, M., MacInnes, T. and Nagendran, T., (2010), *Social Workers' Workload Survey. Messages from the Frontline. Findings from the 2009 survey and interviews with senior managers*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families; Department of Health.

Baginsky, M. and Teague, C. (2013) *Speaking from experience: the views of the first cohort of trainees of Step Up to Social Work.* London: Department for Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205617/DFE-RR289.pdf (accessed 18 January 2014)

Department of Health (2002) *Requirements for Social Work Training*. London: Department of Health.

Evaluation of Social Work Degree in England Team (2008) *Volume 1: Findings.* London: King's College London, Social Care Workforce Research Unit.

Harris, J., Manthorpe, J. and Hussein, S. (2008) *What Works in 'Grow Your Own' Initiatives for Social Work?* London: Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London and General Social Care Council.

Jowell, R. (2003) *Trying It Out: The Role of Pilots in Policy Making. Report of a Review of Government Pilots*. London: Cabinet Office.

Laming, .H. (2003) *The Victoria Climbie Inquiry Report*. London: Department of Health.

Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., Stevens, M., Hussein, S., Sharpe, E., Orme, J., MacIntyre, G., Green Lister, P. and Crisp, B.R. (2010) A depth of data: research messages on the state of social work education in England. *Research, Policy and Planning*, 28, 1, 29-42.

Moriarty, J. and Manthorpe, J. (2013) Shared expectations? Reforming the social work qualifying curriculum in England. *Social Work Education*. Advanced Access, 32, 7, 841-853.

Munro, E. (2011) *Munro Review of Child Protection, Final Report: A Child-Centred System*. Available online at www.education.gov.uk/munroreview (accessed 19 January 2014)

Ruspini, E. (1999) Longitudinal research and the analysis of social change, in E. Ruspini (ed.) Longitudinal analysis: A bridge between quantitative and qualitative social research. Special issue of *Quality and Quantity*, 33(3), July - August.

Smith, R., McLenachen, J., Venn, L., Weich, H., and Anthony, D. (2013) *Step up to social work programme evaluation 2012*. London, Department for Education, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205617/DFE-RR290.pdf (accessed 18 January 2014)

Social Work Reform Board (2012) *Improving the quality and consistency of initial qualifying social work education and training*. Available online at www.collegeofsocialwork.org/resources/reform-resources/ (accessed 19 January 2014)

Taylor, I. (2013) Discretion or Prescription? Exploring Confidence in Qualifying Social Work Education. *British Journal of Social Work*. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bct124 (accessed 19 January 2014)

Annex 1: Regional Partnership arrangements

Table A1.1 Regional Partnerships and Local Authorities - Step Up to Social Work 1 programme (Cohort 1)

Regional Partnership	Local authorities[36]		Number of Trainees at start of SU	Lead/accrediting HEI	Delivery HEI
Central Bedfordshire and Luton	**Central Bedfordshire** Luton		6	University of Salford	University of Bedfordshire
East	**Norfolk** Cambridgeshire Southend-on-Sea	Suffolk Thurrock	25	Manchester Metropolitan University	Manchester Metropolitan University
East Midlands	**Leicester** Derby Northamptonshire	Nottingham Nottinghamshire	25	Manchester Metropolitan University	Manchester Metropolitan University
Greater Manchester	**Salford** Bolton Manchester	Bury Wigan	15	University of Salford	University of Salford
Learn Together Partnership (LTP)	**Wirral** Halton Knowsley Liverpool	Sefton St Helens Warrington	38	Manchester Metropolitan University	Chester University
West London Alliance (WLA)	**Hammersmith & Fulham** Brent Ealing Harrow	Hillingdon Hounslow Westminster	33	University of Salford	University of Hertfordshire
West Midlands	**Coventry** Solihull Warwickshire		9	Manchester Metropolitan University	Coventry University
Yorkshire & Humberside	**Sheffield** Calderdale East Riding Kirklees Leeds	North Lincolnshire North Yorkshire Rotherham	31	University of Salford	University of Salford

[36] Lead authorities are shown in bold

Table A1.2 Regional Partnerships and Local Authorities - Step Up to Social Work 2 programme (Cohort 2)

Regional Partnership	Local authorities[37]		Number of Trainees at start of SU	HEI
Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire	**Hertfordshire** Central Bedfordshire and Luton		18	University of Bedfordshire
East	**Norfolk** Essex Southend-on-Sea	Suffolk Thurrock	20	Manchester Metropolitan University
East Midlands	**Leicester City** Derby City Derbyshire Northamptonshire	Leicestershire Lincolnshire Nottingham City Nottinghamshire	33	Manchester Metropolitan University
Greater Manchester	**Salford** Bolton Manchester	Bury Wigan	15	University of Salford
Learn Together Partnership (LTP)	**Wirral** Cheshire East Knowsley	Cheshire West and Chester St Helens	24	John Moores University
NW Midlands	**Stoke-on-Trent** Sandwell Staffordshire	Telford and Wrekin Worcestershire	25	University of Staffordshire and Manchester Metropolitan University
South East	**Buckinghamshire** Oxfordshire Milton Keynes		18	University of Bedfordshire

[37] Lead authorities are shown in bold

South East London	**London Borough of Bromley** London Borough of Bexley London Borough of Lewisham		14	Goldsmith's University of London
West London Alliance (WLA)	**Hammersmith & Fulham** Brent Ealing Harrow Kensington and Chelsea	Hillingdon Hounslow Westminster	27	University of Hertfordshire
Yorkshire & Humberside	**Sheffield** Calderdale Kirklees Leeds NE Lincs	North Lincolnshire North Yorkshire Rotherham Doncaster	33	University of Salford

Annex 2: Tables

Table A2.1 Overall response rates

	T1		T2		T3		T4	
	Cohort 1	**Cohort 2**	**Cohort 1**	**Cohort 2**	**Cohort 1**	**Cohort 2**	**Cohort 1**	**Cohort 2**
East	17 of 25	17 of 20	15 of 25	14 of 20	16 of 25	17 of 18	21 of 25	14 of 18
Y & H	28 of 31	28 of 33	23 of 28	27 of 33	17 of 28	25 of 31	19 of 28	25 of 31
East Midlands	17 of 25	17 of 33	13 of 23	23 of 33	13 of 23	24 of 33	11 of 23	23 of 33
Greater Manchester	13 of 16	10 of 15	11 of 15	12 of 15	5 of 15	14 of 15	10 of 15	10 of 15
LTP	34 of 39	14 of 24	24 of 35	19 of 24	20 of 35	13 of 24	23 of 35	15 of 23
WLA	23 of 33	15 of 26	23 of 31	21 of 26	25 of 31	26 of 26	23 of 31	23 of 26
West Midlands	8 of 8		7 of 8		6 of 8		8 of 8	
CBH * / CBLH	4 of 6	15 of 18	6 of 6	15 of 17	5 of 6	14 of 17	4 of 6	16 of 17
South East		15 of 18		14 of 16		16 of 16		11 of 14
South East London		14 of 14		13 of 13		12 of 13		13 of 13
NW Midlands		21 of 25		22 of 25		22 of 24		22 of 24
Response rate	**78%**	**77%**	**71%**	**81%**	**64%**	**83%**	**71%**	**80%**

Table A2.2 Satisfaction with support from regional partnerships – Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 – T2 to T4

	Cohort 1						Cohort 2				
	YES	**NO**	**MIXED**	**OTHER / NO RESPONSE**	**Total**		**YES**	**NO**	**MIXED**	**OTHER / NO RESPONSE**	**Total**
East	15→13→18	0→0→0	0→1→3	0→2→0	15→16→21		9→14→7	0→0→0	5→3→7	0→0→0	14→17→14
Y & H	15→3→8	3→2→0	3→9→11	2→3→0	23→17→19		16→12→11	5→7→5	6→6→8	0→0→8	27→25→24
East Midlands	6→5→8	2→0→0	5→6→3	0→2→0	13→13→11		18→22→18	2→1→0	3→1→5	0→0→4	23→24→23
Greater Manchester	8→2→2	2→0→1	1→2→7	0→1→0	11→5→10		11→10→0	0→0→2	1→4→8	0→0→0	12→14→10
LTP	10→6→7	9→1→3	4→11→13	1→2→0	24→20→23		16→8→7	0→0→5	3→5→3	0→0→0	19→13→15
WLA	9→2→8	5→6→6	9→17→9	0→0→0	23→25→23		18→23→20	1→0→1	2→3→2	0→0→0	21→26→23
West Midlands	5→3→5	2→1→1	0→2→2	0→0→0	7→6→8						
CBH * / CBLH	1→2→1	3→0→0	2→3→3	0→0→0	6→5→4		5→7→9	0→0→1	10→7→6	0→1→0	15→14→16
South East							5→10→9	2→4→0	7→2→2	0→0→0	14→16→11
South East London							9→4→1	0→2→5	4→6→7	0→0→0	13→12→13
NW Midlands							12→7→6	1→3→5	9→12→11	0→0→0	22→22→22
Total	**69→36→57**	**26→10→11**	**24→51→51**	**3→10→0**	**122→107→119**		**119→117→88**	**11→17→24**	**50→48→47**	**0→1→12**	**180→183→171**

Table A2.3 Satisfaction with support from local authorities – Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 – T2 to T4

	Cohort 1						Cohort 2			
	YES	NO	MIXED	OTHER	Total		YES	NO	MIXED	TOTAL
East	15→13→ 14	0→0→0	0 →2→7	0→1→0	15 → 16 →21		9→10→9	1→0→1	4→7→4	14→17→14
Y & H	17→9→ 12	3 → 0→0	3 → 6 →7	0 → 2→0	23 → 17 →19		23→16→19	2→2→0	2→7→5	27→25→24
East Midlands	11→ 9 → 8	1 → 0→1	1 → 3 → 2	0 → 2→0	13 → 13 →11		20→17→19	1→1→1	2→6→3	23→24→23
Greater Manchester	8 → 2 → 7	2 → 0→ 0	1 → 2→3	0 → 1→0	11 → 5 →10		8→12→7	1→1→0	3→1→3	12→14→10
LTP	17 → 15 → 17	4 → 1→1	3 → 2→ 5	0 → 2→0	24 → 20 →23		17→10→13	0→0→0	2→3→2	19→13→15
WLA	20 → 20 → 13	1 → 1→ 0	2 → 3→ 10	0 → 0→0	23 → 24 →23		11→17→15	3→2→1	7→7→7	21→26→23
West Midlands	5 → 4 → 6	2 → 0→2	0 → 2→ 0	0 → 0→0	7 → 6→8					
CBH * / CBLH	2 → 2→3	2 → 1→0	2 → 2→1	0 → 0→0	6 → 5→4		10→12→12	0→1→1	5→2→3	15→14→16
South East							10→10→8	0→0→1	4→6→2	14→16→11
South East London							6→9→6	1→1→1	6→2→6	13→12→13
NW Midlands							16→19→13	1→1→5	5→2→4	22→22→22
Total	**95→ 74→80**	**15 →3→4**	**12 → 22→35**	**0 →8→0**	**122 → 107→119**		**130→132→ 121**	**10→9**→11	**40→44**→**39**	**180→183→171**

Table A2.4 Satisfaction with support from Universities – Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 – T2 to T4

	Cohort 1						Cohort 2			
	YES	**NO**	**MIXED**	**OTHER**	**Total**		**YES**	**NO**	**MIXED**	**TOTAL**
East	14→8→16	0→0→0	1→8→5	0→0→0	15 → 16 →21		12→12→8	0→1→1	2→4→5	14→17→14
Y & H	8→2→3	9→4→2	6→11→14	0→0→0	23 → 17 →19		9→6→8	4→3→11	14→16→5	27→25→24
East Midlands	5→6→6	3→0→0	4→6→5	1→1→0	13 → 13 →11		18→20→18	1→0→0	4→4→5	23→24→23
Greater Manchester	5→2→0	3→0→4	3→3→6	0→0→0	11 → 5 →10		7→4→0	1→2→6	4→8→4	12→14→10
LTP	5→4→5	6→7→9	5→7→9	8→2→0	24 → 20 →23		13→9→10	1→2→3	5→2→2	19→13→15
WLA	0→10→4	17→5→13	3→8→6	3→2→0	23 → 25 →23		20→22→23	0→0→0	1→4→0	21→26→23
West Midlands	5→2→3	1→1→1	0→3→4	1→0→0	7 → 6→8					
CBH * / CBLH	0→0→0	5→2→2	0→3→2	1→0→0	6 → 5 → 4		4→5→1	2→1→8	9→8→7	15→14→16
South East							1→1→1	3→9→3	10→6→7	14→16→11
South East London							7→3→1	0→2→11	6→7→1	13→12→13
NW Midlands							9→3→1	0→8→7	13→11→14	22→22→22
Total	**42→34→ 37**	**44→19→ 31**	**22→49→ 51**	**14→5→0**	**122 → 107→119**		**100→85→71**	**12→28→50**	**68→70→50**	**180→183→171**

Table A2.5 Respondents feedback on feeling well-prepared in 13 areas of social work

	Prepared by university				Prepared by practice		
	Below average	**Average**	**Above average**		**Below average**	**Average**	**Above average**
Context of social work	East; SEL	EM; GM; NWM; SE; Y & H	CBLH; LTP; WLA			All RPs	
Social work values and ethics	CBLH; NWM; SE	East; EM; GM; SEL; Y & H	LTP; WLA		CBLH; SEL	EM; LTP; WLA; Y & H	East; GM; NWM; SE
Social work theory and methods	GM; SE; SEL	CBLH; East; NWM	EM; LTP; WLA; Y and H		GM; Y & H	CBLH; East; NWM; SE; SEL; WLA	EM; LTP
Application of social knowledge	GM	East; LTP; NWM; Y & H	CBLH; EM; SE; SEL; WLA		SE; WLA	CBLH; East; GM; LTP; SEL	Y & H; EM; NWM
Social work with adults	LTP, SE; SEL	East; EM; GM; NWM; Y & H	CBLH; WLA		EM; LTP; NWM	East; SEL; Y & H	CBLH; GM; SE; WLA
Social work with children and families	SE	East; CBLH; GM; LTP; NWM; SEL; Y & H	EM; WLA			All RPs	
Anti-oppressive practice	GM; LTP; SEL; Y & H	CBLH; EM; NWM; SE; WLA	East		Y & H; SEL	CBLH; EM; GM; LTP; NWM; SE; WLA	East
Research methods and evaluation	East; LTP; SE; NWM	CBLH; SEL; Y & H	EM; GM; WLA		GM; LTP; SE	CBLH; East; EM; NWM; SE; SEL; Y & H;	WLA
Social work roles and responsibilities	GM; NWM; SE	CBLH; East; SEL; Y and H	EM; LTP; WLA			All RPs	
Issues of power and discrimination	GM; SE	East; LTP; NWM; Y & H	CBLH; EM; SEL		SEL	CBLH; EM; GM; LTP; NWM; Y & H	East; SE
Interpersonal communication	GM; NWM; SE; Y and H	CBLH; East; LTP; SEL	EM; WLA		CBLH; SEL; Y & H	EM; NWM; WLA	East; GM; LTP; SE
Human growth and development	CBLH; LTP; SE; SEL; Y and H	East; GM; NWM; WLA	EM		CBLH; LTP; SE	NWM; SEL; WLA; Y & H	East; EM; GM
The legal system	SEL; Y and H	East; NWM; WLA	CBLH; EM; GM; SE; LTP		East; SEL	CBLH; LTP; NWM; SE; WLA; Y & H	EM; GM

Table A2.6 Comparisons between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 respondents at T2, T3 and T4 on satisfaction with academic input

	Cohort 1 T2	Cohort 2 T2		Cohort 1 T3	Cohort 2 T3		Cohort 1 T4	Cohort 2 T4
East	10/15	14/14		2/16	13/17		9/21	13/14
Y & H	10/23	8/27		2/17	14/23		4/19	15/24
E Midlands	6/13	20/23		5/13	20/24		6/11	21/22
Gtr Manchester	5/11	4/12		2/5	7/16		3/10	5/10
LTP	11/24	16/19		2/20	10/13		3/23	12/15
WLA	5/23	20/21		8/25	22/26		4/8	21/23
West Midlands	6/7			2/6			7/23	
CBLH	0	5/15		1/5	7/14		1/4	11/16
SE		4/14			0/16			7/11
SE London		4/13			8/15			4/13
NWM		4/22			7/22			15/22

Table A2.7 Comparisons between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 respondents at T2, T3 and T4 on satisfaction with practice input

	Cohort 1 T2	Cohort 2 T2		Cohort 1 T3	Cohort 2 T3		Cohort 1 T4	Cohort 2 T4
East	10/15	13/14		7/16	13/17		9/21	14/14
Y & H	16/23	25/27		14/17	18/23		13/19	21/24
E Midlands	11/13	22/23		8/13	23/24		8/11	21/22
Gtr Manchester	7/11	11/12		1/5	13/16		6/10	9/10
LTP	20/24	18/19		15/20	13/13		15/23	15/15
WLA	19/23	20/21		14/25	22/26		6/8	21/23
W Midlands	6/7			3/6			15/23	
CBLH	0/6	13/15		4/5	12/14		4/4	15/16
SE		12/14			15/16			10/11
SE London		11/13			10/15			9/13
NWM		20/22			18/22			14/22

Table A2.8: Views on preparation by universities and practice in relation to 13 knowledge areas of social work

Knowledge area	University and Placement
Context of social work	Context was interpreted in two different ways. Some took it to mean the origins of social work and social work history, as in University of Hertfordshire / West London Alliance; some found it interesting while others did not think it was necessary. More trainees took it to mean how social work is practiced and there was agreement across the responses that practice was better able than academia to achieve this, given that so many lecturers had not been in practice for some time. *"I was very disappointed by the course in setting the context. The teaching was generally disorganised and hardly prepares me for social work practice at all. The two modules on Law and Social Work Practice were excellent but they were the two shortest modules. They were the only two I learnt anything from. The rest was very basic theory".* (CBLH) *"Working directly with children and families has helped to see social work in its current contex"* (WLA) *"I feel well prepared but only in the context of the particular team I was in. Although I understand it is not possible for a student to experience all areas of social work, I think there could have been more done to shadow workers in other teams, even for a short period"* (NW Midlands)
Social work values and ethics	Trainees' responses indicated that most universities had covered values and ethics at various points in the training; it was generally regarded as well taught. Coverage seemed to be more hit and miss on placements. In some settings it was said to be fundamental to practice and trainees gained a deeper understanding of what the academic input meant, but in other settings they were rarely if ever discussed. *"We had a whole module on ethics and values which could have had us discussing all sorts of ethical dilemmas for SW issues but rarely touched on them. We spent far too much time looking again at the theory of ethics rather than addressing our values and how they will impact specific issues in SW" (*CBLH) *"My second placement in a mental health team gave me excellent preparation around values and ethics, due to the context and the tendencies of my practice educator - this was something we explored a lot in supervision"* (WLA) *"You come across so many difficult situations in practice but you also see the values that the university goes on about ignored every day"* (Greater Manchester)
Social work theory and methods	There were some very positive comments about how social work theory and methods had been taught almost exclusively made by those in the East Midlands and West London Alliance. *"This played a big part in the university programme and the reading we did supported this"* (WLA)

	Online learning blocks on this were fantastic and very detailed. Learning was reinforced well by practice educator. (East Midlands) Elsewhere there were references to an over emphasis on certain theories to the exclusion of others and to a superficial coverage of too many. Trainees also referred to failure to connect theories to practice, sometimes attributed to the fact that lecturers had been out of practice for some time leading to theories being taught in a vacuum: "We covered theory and methods but this element seriously lacked any tools or teaching as to how we would approach different issues. For example we covered the cycle of change, but not about how to use this when working with victims of domestic violence. We learnt about mental health stats and the possible impact on children of parental mental health but again nothing on how to work with people with MH problems. I found this part very basic and it has not helped me in practice"(CBLH) The comments on how the practice element had supported their understanding of social work theory and methods fell into two groups. There were those who referred to how learning logs and supervision had been used by their practice educators to deepen their understanding: *"In both long placements my practice educators took the time to help me to link theory to practice and identify the different approaches I was using"* (Yorkshire & Humberside) *"It has been incorporated into the portfolio and reflective logs and it was easy to see which theories were relevant to particular situations and it was a good way to focus this into the placements"*. (West London Alliance) *"On my second placement, the ethos was very much focused on attachment theory which was excellent …. This placement strongly enabled me to see the correlation between theory and practice and I was able to put theory into practice"*(NW Midlands) But there were more comments about the surprising absence of reference to theories during their placements and a stronger emphasis on reliance on practice guidance than on theory: *"I was somewhat dismayed that the teams in which I worked did not seem to openly utilise theory and methods. I don't feel I got a chance to put into practice on placement anything I leant at University"* (Greater Manchester*)* *"Only mentioned a few specific methods as very task led e.g. assessment formats so I learnt new methods - direct work tools, genograms. There is not always time to plan to build methods into assessment planning*" (SE London)

Application of social knowledge	There were very few comments about the university or practice input on this area, perhaps because there was some overlap with the comments about social work theory and methods, although it drew out comments about the value of input from practitioners on the courses which were usually seen in a very positive light. Most responses were very short and lacked much detail but it is worth noting this one that reflected on both the university and practice contribution: *"*Most of the application was done on placement. Some of the most useful sessions at uni were those delivered by practitioners in the field who could give a real sense of the day to day job. More of an opportunity to look at resources would have been good eg assessment tools currently in use. The court skills session v useful. I would have liked a session delivered by a health visitor/ midwife to complement some of the child development and multi agency stuff. Maybe even police safeguarding officers to help understand the different roles in multi agency work*". (Yorkshire & Humberside*
Social work with adults	Once again there were few examples of university-based teaching on this apart from references to input from external speakers on mental health issues and even more comments about the training being almost exclusively oriented to work with children. One exception was the one respondent from West London Alliance who linked this heading with the work on families and it may indicate that others were segmenting their answers to reflect the headings they were given. The WLA respondent, however, wrote: *"The 2nd Phase was 'Think Parent' and looked at the issues that impact on parenting capacity and so the teaching reflected this really well and we had some excellent guest speakers who were very knowledgeable about their subject".* The absence of detail about the university input was compensated for by many examples of how placements in an adult setting had helped to address a deficit in their knowledge and provided much needed and appreciated knowledge and experience: *"*My first placement (in an adult setting) completely changed my mind regarding the direction I wanted to go in once qualified. I had never previously worked with Adults, having working with children for 12 years - and loved every minute of it - so much so, that I am now employed in adult services. I could not have wished for a better placement to offer me the opportunity of adult work, together with the experience and knowledge of staff" (NW Midlands) *"I had an adult focused placement and I found it really beneficial although it was a voluntary substance misuse service rather than a statutory setting"* (Yorkshire & Humberside)
Social work with children and families	Once again there were more comments about the practice element's contribution than about that of their universities. Those that did refer to the university input usually focused on what they would have liked to have been covered rather than what

	they felt had prepared them for practice. Their suggestions focused on their perceived need for more preparation on how to conduct assessments where there are child protection concerns and how to deal with additional risk factors such as parental substance abuse. It was evident that most of those who commented thought that they had gained most of their understanding in this subject from their placement experiences: Despite the confidence ratings returned there were a number of comments that reflected nervousness about their preparation to start practice in this area. *"My last placement consolidated lots of my learning and prepared me well for practice"* (LTP) "My placement in (children's setting) was fabulous, and gave me a greater understanding of attachment theory, and a real sense of what social work with children who were in foster care and adoptive placements was about. The opportunity to work in a multidisciplinary team was fabulous. However -as the placement was not statutory, I did not feel confident on going into a child and family safeguarding role. I am not knowledgeable about the legal aspects though I would like to go into fostering work in the future, would not want front line work" (Greater Manchester)
Anti-oppressive practice (AOP)	Again very few comments about input from either sector but those that did followed similar lines of thought. The university teaching was either considered to be good and little explanation followed or it was judged to be divorced from current practice, relying too heavily on texts from the mid to late twentieth century ignoring more recent studies. With a few exceptions respondents who referred to their placement experience had encountered little or no discussion of AOP and some said they had been shocked by the anti oppressive practice they saw while on placement. However it is worth recording the feedback from the 'exceptions': *"Throughout the placements, I was able to reflect on the impact of my work with service-users and what pre-conceptions I might have. Using the reflective process was very beneficial"* (WLA) *"My practice educator in my final placement focused a lot on anti-oppressive practice"* (Yorkshire & Humberside) *"We would discuss power issues, although I felt the university was more passionate about this area. There is a delicate balance however; an anti-oppressive approach to parents could actually lead to oppression towards the child"* (SE London)
Research methods and evaluation	There was only one respondent who said anything positive about the way universities had approached this subject; this was someone who had been in SE London and had found the overview helpful but not engaging. Elsewhere the input was described in varying ways as 'simplistic', 'appalling' and 'inaccurate'.

	Placements were generally seen to have provided limited input on this apart from a few respondents who said they had been in very research aware teams where they had gained an enormous amount: *"There was a strong focus in the placements on research findings - I have found it harder to bring it into actual assessments but am working on how to do this without the assessment becoming an essay and overly academic in tone"* (WLA)
Social work roles and responsibilities	The few respondents who commented on the university preparation interpreted this in different ways. Some took a holistic view in terms of the total preparation offered, while others referred to specific aspects such as an understanding of the (then) National Occupational Standards or how specific skills could have been developed by focusing teaching on practice: "Towards the end some of the training was made a lot more directly applicable to a statutory role, but in the beginning it was quite abstract. The 'assessment' module for instance should be done in the manner of a Core Assessment, or possibly a Mental Capacity Assessment for adults, but it wasn't" (SE London) *"I found a Q and A session with a group of young care leavers one of the most powerful experiences of the course. The session helped me to evaluate from a young person's perspective the roles and responsibilities of a social worker"* (LTP) Given the generally high level of satisfaction with placements it is not surprising that many more references were made to how they had contributed to their understanding of social work roles and responsibilities. A few examples include: *"The opportunity to experience social work in statutory settings is essential and invaluable"* (Yorkshire & Humberside) *"My placement made it all click into place – I think it will take a while for me to understand everything but I do think I have made a start"* (East) However their final placements had brought home to many of them the level of complexity with which they would be dealing, particularly in relation to thresholds: "My final placement I have gained much greater understanding of children's social care, however I have also experienced different managers having very different thresholds and this can make it very difficult to understand social work roles and responsibilities" (WLA)
Human growth and development	This was another area where there were far more responses about the university than about placements. **Cohort 1** had thought the input on human growth and development was insufficient and it was a similar response from **Cohort 2.** The insufficiency was viewed both in terms of the time devoted to it and the subject matter covered as these two typical

	observations illustrate: *"*Again I thought this was very disappointing and focussed far too much on the theories of development, rather than anything on assessing development, and disappointingly didn't cover any neuroscience which is so crucial to our knowledge today". *(*CBLH) "Good coverage of attachment theory although I felt other theories were skimmed over at the beginning - many of which were new knowledge and I didn't feel I got a comprehensive enough understanding of this unit" (SE London) There were fewer, but still very useful, comments about how the subject was covered on placement. A few respondents said that it was so fundamental to practice that their supervisors expected them to know more than they did about child development, which meant they had to catch up very quickly. Others had been with practitioners who appeared very knowledgeable about certain theories which had led to useful discussions and the opportunities to extend their learning: "Different practitioners use different theories however I tend to rely on Bowlby and attachment as it seems to be the most dominant. I was offered lots of child observation opportunities an the time to read expert reports which helped me understand development more then I previously have" (SE London) *"I probably learned more during my academic studies at university, however I gained an insight via other professionals such as health visitors which was so useful"* (Greater Manchester)
The legal system	Once again more respondents chose to focus on the university experience than that of their placements. Overall teaching on the legal system was very well regarded. It was described as being focused and practical and usually very clearly presented. The very positive comments were nearly always juxtaposed with a comment about the timing on the course in relation to placements or other content or about the time allocated to the subject: *"This was really good, well delivered by a good, knowledgeable tutor who is still a practising social worker which made a real difference. It was a shame the module was so short and rushed"* (CBLH) *"It was very well taught but only one afternoon devoted to this subject that forms a large part of social work knowledge was disappointing*" (Y&H) *"It was a shame that is was right at the beginning and we did not have the opportunity to bring our placement experience to it"*(LTP)

	It was interesting that what was classified as 'too short a time' varied from two hours to three days. There were, however, a few comments that indicated that the teaching had been limited to too few areas: *Only covered S17 and S47. Did little about adoption or care proceedings*. (NW Midlands) "This was covered but in only one session, equal amounts on human rights and adult law which was less fundamental. Also would have been useful to go through what the different orders mean for children" (Y&H) Where respondents had had the opportunity to practise courtroom skills they had found it enjoyable, if sometimes challenging, but always useful. In relation to placements the few comments that were made indicated that the placements had taught them that the application of what had been covered in university did not always match their experience in the field: *"The legislation is integral to the work in a way that is not explored in university. I think that does need to be looked at" (*East Midlands) *There were numerous legal frameworks that social workers have to work within and that complexity is not covered on the course.* (South East)
Issues of power and discrimination	The comments that were made were often tied with those in relation to anti-oppressive practice. Respondents had preferred it when the university input had informed all the teaching rather than be restricted to a specific module and when it had dealt with contemporary issues such as the impact of current changes in the welfare system. Only a few respondents mentioned how this had linked with their experiences on placement. There were those who said that their practice educators / supervisors had incorporated it into supervision but there were also those who said it had not been addressed at all.
Interpersonal communication	Far more respondents commented on the university input than on what they had learnt on placement. There were examples of theatre groups and service users coming in which had clearly been both valuable and enjoyable. Some people liked certain methods more than others; so while there were calls for more role-play and simulation exercises they mad others feel comfortable. There were also requests for more support on how to deal with specific situations: *"There was some basic stuff on this but would've been useful to do more advanced and practical stuff like exercises to use with teens or sessions on difficult client".* (Y & H) *"We had some brilliant training from a theatre group, however the 'working with aggression' and 'personal safety' session*

	was quite weak" (SE London) Although there were very few comments on placements what was said was very positive: *"Placements highlighted the importance of relationships at work – both with the service-users and other professional"* (WLA) "Both placements offered opportunities for working in multidisciplinary teams, involving health, education etc and communicating with professionals from different backgrounds" (NW Midlands)

Table A2.9 Views on preparation by universities and practice in relation to 13 skill areas of social work

Skill area	University and placement
There were even fewer comments about the 'skills' areas than there were about the 'knowledge' areas (Table A2.8) so, while of interest, they do need to be treated with some caution.	
Assessing need	The consensus of opinion was that while universities covered the theory of assessment it was usually in isolation from practice. However there was a recognition that as so many factors contributed to assessments the input tended to get pushed to the end of courses when the respondents would have found it useful before going on placements: *Theoretical understanding is difficult when there are so many concrete factors needed to 'learn' assessment* (SEL) *More practical examples would have been beneficial. Sample assessments would have been valuable to look at.* (Midlands) While there were a few respondents who said their placement did not allow them the opportunity to develop their experience the majority of respondents had found their placements extremely useful: *Regular assessments undertaken to establish the suitability of carers and then assessing which children would best suit each placement*. (SE) *I had the opportunity to undertake various assessments in different contexts.* (Y and H) *My PMRs got a lot of scrutiny and feedback which I found really helpful*. (SEL)
Developing plans	Everyone who commented on the universities' input either said this aspect had been covered insufficiently or not at all. It was evident that most respondents who said they had covered the development of plans had done so, to any depth, while on placement.
Assessing and managing risk	The respondents indicated that the subject had been covered on their courses, but not in anything like the depth that they felt was necessary to prepare them for their placements. Placements had provided an opportunity for them to observe and share assessments and a few reflected that may be they were not a confident as they first thought in view of the seriousness of the processes.
Reflecting on practice	While there was hardly any detail provided in the responses the ratings recorded in the survey indicated that they had clearly covered this in university and on placement.
Working with children and young people	All respondents said they had had input from their universities and placements but there were requests in relation to this area and working with families for some details of tools and methods that they could deploy.
Working effectively with families	See above

Working with those reluctant to engage	Only a few respondents mentioned this at all and only in relation to specific workshops they had attended at university, which had been helpful.
Working with groups	The theme that ran through the responses from those few who chose to comment on this subject was the absence of opportunities to develop an understanding or skills with groups.
Dealing with aggression, hostility and conflict	As with the other areas there were very few comments on this subject but what there were referred to the university input which was judged to be too little in light of the experience of how it had dominated so much of their work on placement. However there were no comments about how their placements had developed their skills in this area.
Record keeping	Some respondents said how the development of their portfolios had helped them with record keeping but otherwise there was no further information on how the university or placement experiences had helped them.
Leadership and management	The only comments that were made indicated that it had not been covered by their universities or while on placement.
The evidence base of what works	The few respondents who commented on the university coverage would have liked more input on this rather than on research methods. Far more referred to their experience on placement where most had seen how practitioners use evidence in many forms to guide their practice: *"My team would look at possible approaches and interventions and discuss what might work – that was how I began to understand how evidence work"* (Learn Together Partnership) *"I am confident in the knowledge provided by my team and the continued support that they can offer me in practice now*" (NW Midlands) *"There was a big focus on attachment, and the ADAM project - although one of my bits of learning was finding out how other influential social workers disagreed with this approach"* (SE London)
Accessing services / resources that might help service users	None of the responses said this had been covered by their universities and most said it was something they had begun to pick up while on placement.

Reference: DFE-RR327

ISBN: 978-1-78105-321-8

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:
Socialworkreform.SG@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at
www.gov.uk/government/publications