

**REVIEW OF THE
DIPLOMA IN SOCIAL WORK**

**Report on
the content of the DipSW
conducted as part of the
Stage Two Review of CCETSW**

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SUMMARY

1. There has been criticism of the training of social workers, both during the 1998 Prior Options review of CCETSW and more generally.
2. The Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) is the qualifying education for social work and will form the basis for registration under the new General Social Care Council in England and the equivalents in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The DipSW is unusual amongst professional education in the involvement of employers in programme partnerships which manage the delivery of the education and in the range of flexible routes and qualification levels available to social work students - many of whom are mature, and some in current employment.
3. We have reviewed the DipSW with the purpose of recommending whether any changes are needed in the qualification to meet the future needs of social work. In the course of this, we held consultation meetings in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and received written views from more than 200 individuals and organisations.
4. We have found that many of the criticisms reflect broader issues related to well-publicised concern at the performance of some social work practice. The qualifying education is clearly relevant to this, but we cannot attribute all the ills of social work to the qualifying education which has been in place in its current form for little more than five years.
5. In fact, good work has been done by CCETSW and others to develop the DipSW within acknowledged constraints. There is a good basis to build upon, and there are examples of excellent courses and outcomes. However, not all courses are at this level and our review identifies the need for a significant upgrading of several aspects of the qualifying education including:
 - the selection of students
 - the content of the curriculum
 - the relevance and integration of the practice education
 - the way the DipSW is managed and delivered
 - the way that employers induct and support newly-qualified social workers.
6. We recommend a significant strengthening of the curriculum which will have the effect of requiring a three-year course leading to a degree. This is needed to develop the competences for safe and effective social work, and to develop the critical thinking abilities and professionalism that social workers now require.
7. An important part of this strengthening is a reinforcement of the value of practice learning which mainly takes place within statutory and independent social work agencies. This needs to be better planned and assessed, and supported by an improvement in the “learning environment” within these agencies.
8. Our recommendations need to be seen in the context of (and should be mutually supportive with) those of the other Stage Two projects.

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is a report on the review of the content of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). The DipSW is awarded by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) and will be the required qualification for registration as a social worker under the new General Social Care Councils.
- 1.2 We were commissioned by the four UK health departments to conduct a UK-wide review of the DipSW, and our report is addressed to all four countries. The aim of our recommendations is to improve the outcomes of social work practice through improvements to the qualifying education of social workers in a cost-effective way.
- 1.3 Our review was conducted at a strategic level and makes recommendations which are addressed to the regulatory bodies, to CCETSW, to government, to employers, and to providers and managers of education programmes. In general, these recommendations are also at a strategic level and, in some areas, further work will be needed to develop the details of how they can best be implemented in the different circumstances of each of the four countries.
- 1.4 CCETSW are due to review their requirements for DipSW during 1999 as part of their quinquennial review and this will be one of the ways in which our recommendations can be taken forward.
- 1.5 This report is part of a broader review of CCETSW (Stage Two Review) which includes other projects whose outcomes are relevant to this content study. While our report is self-contained, we have tried to take account, as far as we are able, of the findings of the most relevant parallel reviews – those of the Regulation of DipSW; of Post-Qualifying Education and Training; of Practice Teaching and Learning; and of the delivery arrangements for the DipSW.
- 1.6 We began work in the Autumn of 1998. After some initial research we prepared a discussion paper which was circulated widely in each of the four countries in December 1998. During January and February 1999 we attended consultation meetings and seminars in each country at which a broad spectrum of those with an interest in DipSW were present. We also received more than 200 written responses to the discussion paper. A list of those we met during the preparation of, and consultation on our discussion paper is included at Appendix A, and a summary of the written responses to our consultation is at Appendix B.
- 1.7 Our work has been guided by a steering group with representatives of each of the four health departments. We are grateful to them, and to all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to this project.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

General context

- 2.1 The Government has recently announced the creation of new regulatory structures for social work – the General Social Care Councils (in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Together with the new National Training Organisations (NTOs), these will take over many of the functions of CCETSW.
- 2.2 There are about 50,000 social workers within the much larger workforce (approximately one million) engaged in the personal Social Services. Most social workers now have the DipSW qualification.
- 2.3 Workforce planning for social work is not well developed and will be the role of the new NTOs. However, UK-wide there appears to be a reasonable balance of supply and demand for DipSW qualified staff, albeit with shortages in some particular areas or specialisms. A less clear issue is whether a significantly different proportion of social care jobs or tasks should require a social work qualification. CCETSW has sought a broad target of about 5,000 newly-qualified staff a year. This has not quite been achieved in recent years and the target has recently been reduced to 4,000.
- 2.4 Students can qualify for the DipSW at sub-degree, degree and post-graduate levels and at a range of institutions from FE colleges to leading research universities. There are also employment-based routes and open learning routes. The average age of entry to DipSW programmes is 32 – ie a predominantly mature entry. Many students have family commitments; a considerable number undertake paid employment during term time.
- 2.5 The DipSW came on-stream fully in 1993. It replaced two former entry routes:
 - the work-based route (CSS), and
 - the academic route (CQSW).
- 2.6 The DipSW introduced a central role for employers (a big advance over CQSW); external assessment by CCETSW; and the principle of a single generic qualifying training for all social workers (with scope for focus on particular areas of practice). The DipSW was reviewed and significantly restructured in 1995. DipSW recently ceased to be the entry route for probation officers in England and Wales, but remains so in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- 2.7 CCETSW defines requirements for qualifying programmes in terms of knowledge, skills and values and makes clear that all of these must be assessed in relation to their application to social work practice. A key element of this is the six core competences which might be described as practice standards. CCETSW also sets requirements for programme providers (the partnerships which manage the delivery of DipSW programmes) and quality assures the programmes themselves.

Background to the review of content of the DipSW

- 2.8 During the Stage One review of CCETSW, a number of comments were received which were critical of the current training of social workers, and it was part of our remit to consider these. We found that, in general, such comments were concerned with issues broader than the curriculum ('content') of the DipSW. They are part of a wider debate about the performance of social work which reflects public, media and official and ministerial concern at the performance of some social work practice.
- 2.9 We have not had to examine these broader issues in any depth, but few would question that social work needs to raise its level of competence and effectiveness, and its status and public confidence. The issue for our review is to assess how far these improvements in social work practice can or should be brought about by changes in the content of its qualifying education.
- 2.10 Our conclusions on this could be summarised as follows:
- a. while change in the DipSW is needed, it would be unduly simplistic to blame all the ills of social work on the initial qualifying education which has been in place in its current form for little more than five years;
 - b. a lot of good work has been done by CCETSW and others to develop the DipSW within acknowledged constraints. The DipSW has some particular strengths which include the concept of partnership, the emphasis on practice education; the competence-based framework; and the continuing emphasis on the values of a caring profession. In these and other respects, the qualifying education for social work can offer a useful example to other professions and there are examples of excellent courses and outcomes.
- 2.11 We are clear that changes in the DipSW are needed, but it would be false to expect that changes in the content of the DipSW alone could achieve the significant improvements in public confidence in social work that we all seek.
- 2.12 This will require action on a broader group of issues which include the selection of students; the content of the qualification; the relevance and integration of the practice education; the way the DipSW is managed and delivered; and the way that employers induct and support newly-qualified social workers.
- 2.13 Action on this broader front means that the recommendations in this study need to be viewed in the broader context of the other Stage Two reviews and will require a consensus about the way to "modernise social work". Social work currently lacks a strategic focus, and the diversity of interests and the absence of a recognised centre of excellence makes it more difficult to generate such a consensus. There is an opportunity to change this associated with the creation of the GSCCs and NTOs, and possible changes in the role of NISW, although the challenge is greater because devolution could further fragment the debate.

3 DISCUSSION, FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The nature of social work

Is it a profession?

- 3.1 Social Work is an emerging discipline. It does not have all the attributes of the more established professions, but we believe that it can and should have similar aims in terms of excellence of practice; an ethos of service to clients and the public; an evidence/research base for action; and the ability and will to create and operate to a regime of high standards and continual improvement. We are certain that the public expect this.
- 3.2 We are aware from our consultation that a few interests may resist the idea that social work should develop as “a profession”. This may reflect understandable concern about some of the weaknesses of the health professions, and a desire to ensure that social work follows a different path. It may also reflect some employers’ views about the type of staff they need (see below).
- 3.3 However, there is no need to assume that all professions have to develop in the same way. We believe that social work and its clients badly need the attributes listed in paragraph 3.1 which, in our experience, can best be developed through a professional type of framework. The key element of this is that it places a responsibility on individual social workers to be accountable for their practice and for their own continuing professional development. This has implications for their education.
- 3.4 In respect of this issue, we conclude that:
 - a. social workers in future need to work to a framework of individual accountability, standards and ethics, continuing education and development and research and evidence based practice and, in this sense, need to become recognised as “professional”
 - b. the development path for social work should not be the same as that of the more established professions, and in particular social work needs to develop a more inclusive and flexible professional structure. This is entirely compatible with the work already done in developing the new GSCCs and NTOs.

What sort of social workers do we need?

- 3.5 Workforce planning for social work is not yet well developed (although it will be addressed by the new NTOs). When it is, it may be possible to define:
 - what tasks and roles social workers are required to undertake
 - how many are needed.

- 3.6 At present, there is not a systematic basis for answering either of these questions and this weakens the ability of social work to specify its educational requirements. Part of the reason for this is that social work is part of a larger spectrum of social care, much of which is appropriately delivered by staff without a DipSW or other “professional” qualification. Some employers may therefore perceive that “many social work tasks are relatively routine” and may indeed question the need for a “professional” workforce.
- 3.7 In this view, which has variously been described to us as “care management” or “service delivery”, social workers could be seen as operating under supervision within a pre-determined framework of procedures and not required to exercise independent judgement. This implies that their employers or managers and those who determine the procedures would be primarily accountable for their performance.
- 3.8 However, there is a very different view, which appears to be much more widely held, that social workers need similar qualities of independent thought and critical analytical skills to those normally associated with health professionals. The main points which we have heard in support of a case for this are as follows:
- a. social workers have to make complex multi-factor assessments on behalf of clients (eg of personal health, family circumstances, financial problems and housing/environmental factors); to support clients in making their own decisions; to gain client ownership of intervention strategies
 - b. social workers have to make critical decisions (eg in mental health, and child protection) which require mature and independent judgement
 - c. social workers have to work alongside other professionals in multi-professional and multi-agency teams and need to be able to work on behalf of their clients from a position of equal confidence and esteem.
- 3.9 What these arguments are all saying is that social workers do not just need a given set of competences, but that they also need the critical thinking, analytical, and inter-personal attributes which are normally associated with “professionalism”. These enable the person who has them not just to perform competently in routine situations, but to challenge, question and adapt their practice to the needs of particular clients and circumstances. This includes having the self-confidence to know when they are not able to perform safely and effectively and must seek help.
- 3.10 We are convinced that this is what the public and Ministers expect of social workers. Moreover, the fact that social work is likely to undergo significant change and turbulence in the coming years (and continue to operate in a very public arena) makes these skills more necessary. We believe that social work has a vital role in future health and care policy and it will need mature confident and analytical practitioners and good strategic leaders to take it forward in partnership with other relevant interests – including working on an equal footing with health and other professions.

- 3.11 In accepting the “professional” model for social work, we are not implying that social workers are free of the constraints of working within a managed service, nor that social work has to be regarded as “a profession” in the same way that (eg) medicine or nursing is. There is no implication of elitism or exclusivity – which we know would rightly concern some. The essential point is that this model has implications for the education required for social work and is therefore a critical starting point for this review.

The qualifying education for social work

Expectations at qualification

- 3.12 We believe that the purpose of qualifying training is to equip intending practitioners with the threshold level of knowledge, competence, skills and behaviour to enable them to practise safely and effectively and therefore to be registerable by the GSCCs.
- 3.13 All professionals are expected to continue to learn and to develop their competence beyond this threshold level. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is achieved by a combination of practice and reflection, of further formal (PQ) or informal education, and for some also through mentoring, teaching or research. CPD is a part of the normal expected updating and development of any professional (and is a condition of continuing registration for many).
- 3.14 No newly-qualified professional can be expected at the point of registration to be fully competent across the whole range of circumstances they may subsequently encounter. Nor should they be expected to work without supervision, to undertake difficult or complex tasks without support; or to exercise specialist skills (unless their previous experience enabled them to do this). They would not either be expected to be fully conversant with arrangements in the particular employment context they may join.
- 3.15 This implies that the role of any post-qualifying (PQ) framework is to take forward and develop competences beyond the threshold level attained at registration – it is not to bring practitioners up to a basic ‘competent’ standard.

The employers role

- 3.16 It is normal to expect that the newly-qualified will receive supervision, guidance, and mentoring in the early months. This is a responsibility of the employer and it is good practice for all employers to have proper policies and arrangements for the induction of newly-qualified staff. CCETSW has specified its “Expectations of Employing Agencies”, and the GSCCs might take an interest in such arrangements. Some professionals undertake a formal probationary period during their first few months of practice. An extreme version of this is a pre-registration year, as for example experienced by doctors, in which registration is not granted until a period of properly supervised and assessed practice has been completed.

- 3.17 We have found that those who employ social workers do not always have a realistic view of what can be expected of the newly-qualified. The statutory sector is only a part of this picture, although a very important one. Changes and pressures in local government have meant that not all statutory agencies have invested sufficiently in the creation of a “learning environment” for their staff. By this we mean one in which all staff, and particularly the newly-qualified, can enjoy the levels of support, supervision, mentoring, thoughtful allocation of tasks and job-rotation, and facilitation of CPD which is required.
- 3.18 Figures are often quoted showing that the total investment in training in the statutory social services sector is lower than even the modest levels of the average of UK industry as a whole. There are of course examples of good practice within this overall picture. We would note that there are also good examples in the independent sector, which sometimes seems able to demonstrate a greater commitment to human resource development.
- 3.19 We understand the pressures that have affected local authorities in England and other statutory social work employers in recent years, and that there may be particular difficulties with resourcing levels in the parts of the voluntary sector as well as, for example, in smaller unitary authorities, and others. However, we see good human resource development policies as helping to respond to these pressures, rather than as an additional burden on agencies. We have found a strong and widely-shared view of many of the practitioners we have met in all four countries that this aspect needs improvement, and we agree.
- 3.20 A related issue here is the way that agencies regard placements which can come to be seen as a chore and a burden and this may lead to their effective “marginalisation” from the mainstream of service delivery by making them the responsibility of dedicated practice teachers. Although practice teachers play a valuable role in placements, we think this attitude to placements is unfortunate as agencies are thereby denying themselves the opportunity for a number of benefits including:
- stimulation/challenge/CPD opportunities for existing staff
 - contact with latest ideas and research
 - opportunity to get to know potential recruits.

Outcomes required

- 3.21 Based upon our research and consultation, we believe that the qualifying education for social workers in the future should lead to the following main outcomes:
- a. It should develop confident and competent practitioners who can carry out the tasks required.
 - b. It should develop mature and reflective practitioners who understand the evidence base for their actions; who are able to adapt and develop their practice, to challenge poor or inappropriate practice, and to work imaginatively on their clients behalf, rather than always following pre-determined procedures.

- c. It should exclude those who are not capable of meeting these standards.
- d. It should provide flexible routes to qualification so that social work can continue to attract a wide variety of entrants, including those with high intellectual ability and ambitions; those who have practised successfully in other professions; those with life skills and experience; and all those with the values, attitudes, and capabilities to make a safe and effective contribution to the needs of clients.

Scope of qualification

- 3.22 Most professions show a tendency to develop specialisms and divisions. This is healthy and normal, provided it is not driven solely by the needs of the careers of the professionals. For a small developing group like social work to fragment into sub-divisions is not necessarily in the public interest. We understand that different employers may have differing requirements or emphasis. The needs of residential care, child protection and mental health (for example) are not the same. However, the factor that makes social work a coherent and registerable activity (or profession) is the fact that there is a common core of generic skills, attitudes, knowledge and ethics which all social workers use in all these situations and in others. We think this is an important principle to be maintained.
- 3.23 There is currently a difference between the four countries of the UK about whether the DipSW is the appropriate qualification for work in the criminal justice system as probation workers (the DipSW is still the accepted qualification in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but not in England or Wales). We see no problems with this situation, but it emphasises the flexibility that will be required to allow variations in curriculum within a common statement of outcome standards.
- 3.24 As part of this flexibility, CCETSW requirements have allowed for students on the DipSW to gain experience of particular care settings or areas of practice as part of their initial qualifying education. We think this is a valuable feature (and one that we know employers welcome) provided it is on an elective basis and is not interpreted as restricting future employability or as advancing an individual in a specialist role, which as noted above we do not see as part of the initial qualifying education.
- 3.25 In summary, we believe that the DipSW should continue to be the common qualifying education for all social workers. It follows that it should be a threshold qualification (as defined above) and that specialist education should, in the main, take place at a post-qualifying level. However, this would not prevent students gaining some experience of particular areas of practice during the DipSW (or indeed consolidating or adding to such experience already gained in employment prior to taking the DipSW).

How well does the DipSW meet current requirements?

- 3.26 As part of our work, we have discussed the operation of the DipSW with many of those who have experience of it, in all four countries. We have read much of the current literature, including research studies (such as Readiness to Practise), Inspectorate reports, White Papers etc, and we have also received written comments from many organisations and individuals – see Appendix B.
- 3.27 The following observations on the DipSW are our own judgements, informed by this evidence and discussion. The key areas in which we have examined the operation of the DipSW are as follows:
- Partnership
 - Curriculum
 - Length
 - Academic level
 - Entry requirements
 - Routes
 - Pathways
 - Practice education
- 3.28 Other important aspects of the DipSW are dealt with in the other studies of the delivery of DipSW (eg helping to ensure quality placements; multi-professional and agency input; access and encouragement of use of best practice; how partnerships work) and of practice learning and PQ.

Partnership

- 3.29 We share the common view that partnership between employers and education institutions in the planning, management and delivery of the DipSW is one of the great successes of social work education. Having said this, experience of the working of partnerships varies significantly between the four countries, and particularly within England (where there are over 80 partnerships). The issues about the working of partnership at a detailed level are dealt with in other Stage Two projects. However, at a strategic level, the issues are common across all DipSW programmes;
- resource and other pressures on employers often lead to insufficient engagement at a strategic level – ie by senior line managers and directors/chief executives of agencies
 - pressures of teaching and research within universities and colleges make it difficult for academics to maintain up-to-date practice experience
 - tensions and administrative problems with arranging placements often take up too much time and energy
 - the geographic areas covered by partnerships are sometimes too small to gain benefits of “critical mass” in terms of excellence in teaching and research, or to attract the best level of representation and breadth of involvement (eg from the voluntary sector)

- a multiplicity of meetings, and duplication of and inconsistencies in procedures and methods between programmes leads to fragmented input from agencies and undue burdens on their staff
 - uncertainty about the roles, accountabilities and expectations of the various partners in key areas such as curriculum development; selection; assessment.
- 3.30 We wish to see the concept of partnership strengthened so that attention is focused on joint determination of outcomes and joint responsibility for planning and assessing the student experience. This happens in the best examples at present, but it will be necessary (in England at least where we have studied the arrangements in more detail) to adapt structures and processes so that they facilitate involvement by more senior managers at a strategic level of planning and monitoring the range of provision. Of equal importance will be the sharing of learning opportunities between partnerships to ensure a full range is available to all students. This will require increased collaboration between programme providers and greater consistency of procedures.

Curriculum

- 3.31 CCETSW's requirements are based on six core competences. This approach, and the competences themselves, received strong support during our consultation. However, alongside this was expressed equally strong concern over the current interpretation of the competences and the ability of programme providers to deal adequately with the content in the time available (often 18 months). This has meant restricted breadth and depth of coverage in many areas, and the outright exclusion of aspects in some programmes if they are not expressly mentioned in the competences.
- 3.32 There is currently little guidance on the detail of the curriculum in areas such as breadth, depth, care settings and client groups, complexity of work to be undertaken. There is no guidance on interventions/approaches (different theories of social work); and little on acquiring instrumental or interpersonal skills.
- 3.33 In the absence of such guidance, partnerships (and this often means HEIs) are left with great discretion about the content of their programmes. In many ways, this is a valuable feature and we would not wish to move to a much more prescriptive system. However, we have received many comments about inadequacies in the current curriculum.
- 3.34 The views we have received on the content of the DipSW were broadly consistent, and cover the following:
- a. inadequate integration of theory and practice
 - b. lack of (any) focus on research
 - c. lack of depth in many areas
 - d. inappropriate coverage in some areas
 - e. inadequate coverage of some particular areas.

- 3.35 Whilst the applicability of these to any particular programme will vary, the volume and consistency of the concerns convinces us that action is required.

a. inadequate integration of theory and practice

- 3.36 While the coverage of most courses is broadly appropriate, some areas are too superficial, especially to help students to integrate their theory and practice and to reflect on knowledge and to understand the evidence base.

- 3.37 Probably the most unanimous comments are about the need to strengthen the curriculum in the area that we might call consolidation of practice. This includes time for reflection and integration to:

- redress any mistakes in practice
- consolidate skills development
- reflect on contrasting placement experiences
- process information provided
- follow up appropriately research and practice studies
- integrate knowledge thoroughly with practice
- develop cognitive abilities for research and critical appraisal/reflection
- plan for future professional development.

- 3.38 Additional practice experience will also allow students to

- identify and balance competing demands and learn to assess complex situations
- develop the higher order communication skills required.

b. lack of (any) focus on research

- 3.39 Degree and post-graduate courses generally include a research focus - sub-degree courses do not. As for any professional, social work practice should be informed by research - students should understand the origins of their knowledge base; focus on evidence-based practice; carry out independent study using research techniques; prepare to help develop the research-based social work of the future.

- 3.40 All students should recognise the importance of research and research should be seen as the 'third arm' of their learning requirements - along with theory and practice. This should facilitate the development of 'thinking skills': research-mindedness; critical analysis; reflective practice.

- 3.41 These are essential attributes of a professional - and as well as giving confidence and flexibility of thought, and a basis for continuing professional development, should equip social workers for a career of continuous change. They need to be able to adapt to new social policies and challenges, as well as having the ability to analyse these changes to inform practice in the most appropriate way.

c. lack of depth in some areas

- 3.42 Courses vary significantly in length, but the depth of academic content is considered too light in most. Students need to obtain a strong grasp of the academic disciplines which will underpin their capacity to evaluate and use evidence from research. They require a significant knowledge not only of social work, but of the knowledge bases which underlie social work, primarily in the social sciences - sociology, psychology and social policy.
- 3.43 Many respondents asked for a more indepth understanding of the policy contexts and organisational contexts of social work. For example, the organisation of social welfare; the co-dependence between the statutory, voluntary and private spheres of social care.

d. inappropriate coverage in some areas

- 3.44 There are some concerns about particular coverage - that academics have the latest practice experience; that they cover the most relevant legislation, and evidence-based techniques.
- 3.45 Lecturers, practice teachers and students, should draw upon the relevant outcomes of key research to form the basis of the learning experience.

e. inadequate coverage of some particular areas

- 3.46 A number of areas are specifically mentioned as needing more attention:
- multi-discipline, multi-agency working
 - social work within differing political and social contexts
 - a broader range of care settings
 - community development
 - individual and family development
 - assessment, risk analysis, interventions and evaluation
 - professional conduct and accountability
 - record keeping, report writing, communication
 - management skills
 - values.

multi-discipline, multi-agency working

- 3.47 This is already of importance, and will become increasingly so. In Northern Ireland in particular, social services are delivered within an integrated Health and Social Services structure. Social workers are increasingly being employed in multi-disciplinary settings, working in partnership with other professions in the delivery of social care services.

- 3.48 There is significant employment of social workers in voluntary sector agencies (20% in Northern Ireland, for example and more generally this sector makes up a growing part of the total delivery of care); in criminal justice (Scotland and Northern Ireland); in education welfare. Social workers are responsible for the assessment and care management of clients through the use of independent sector services.
- 3.49 Students should be familiar with working within and across organisation and professional boundaries.
- 3.50 There are a number of techniques available for students to do this - placements, joint learning, lectures from another professional, being taught directly about other agencies and disciplines. However, it should be done in a way that will inform all areas of competence, not just as a particular piece of learning.

social work within differing political and social contexts

- 3.51 Understanding of, and compatibility with, European and international experience is important. Social workers should have an understanding of social work within the political and social context of Europe. This is especially true in Northern Ireland where collaboration with the Republic is already a significant part of social work practice, but more generally it is needed to support movement of staff and clients across borders and we expect this dimension will become increasingly important.
- 3.52 Moreover, as devolution is worked through, an awareness and understanding of national-specific issues and perspectives will be required by all students, particularly those who may work across or near borders. They will need to be cognisant of the differences in law and policy across the UK, and, broadly, of the different organisational and funding frameworks.

a broader range of care settings

- 3.53 The requirements are considered (or are interpreted to be) too fieldwork based, and some requirements are difficult to evidence in groupcare settings.
- 3.54 In this area, the greatest concern expressed during our consultation concerned the areas of residential social work and care management. The current competencies do not reflect the full range of duties performed by qualified staff in, for example, residential settings. Overall, the competences need to be more flexible (or more obviously capable of being interpreted in this way) to make them more relevant to care management and residential social work. We discussed above electives in year three (for example) that would help to meet this need.
- 3.55 Minimum requirements could also be set for all students, for them to have particular types of experience such as:
- an unaccompanied home visit;
 - a child client;
 - working within both statutory and independent sectors;
 - working different settings (office, fieldwork, residential, day care etc)

- 3.56 Even if these do not become requirements, there should at least be a requirement that each student's experience should be stated clearly at end of their programme.

community development

- 3.57 The curriculum needs to acknowledge the community development roles which are an increasing feature of social workers' functions in both statutory and voluntary agencies. This includes recognition of the skills needed by workers in the voluntary sector where community development work is more widely used. It also involves the development of closer links with the community requiring community development perspectives.
- 3.58 Within this context, it is important that the DipSW promotes empowerment and socially inclusive forms of welfare.

individual and family development

- 3.59 Social workers need to have knowledge and understanding of human growth and development; of family work and of relationships. Their clients may be affected directly, or through family members, by substance use/abuse, HIV/AIDS; they may have specific impairments and disabilities.
- 3.60 They need to be able to place their practice in context (eg of social policy) - for example by understanding the interplay between the individual and society;
- 3.61 They need knowledge of the development of social problems which social workers are required to address, and of the importance of context to understanding client problems

assessment, risk analysis, interventions and evaluation

- 3.62 Many comments were received on the need for more teaching on social work models and methods. Familiarity with a range (and the right range) of techniques and methods appears to be too often lacking.
- 3.63 Students should be familiar with, and be prepared to use, structured decision-making processes to support professional judgements. They need to understand the rationale for particular decisions and approaches, e.g. to assessment, care planning and intervention, risk management. These approaches - eg assessment and intervention - need to be taught as part of a whole social work activity, not artificially separated. Students should have the ability to demonstrate that they are evaluating their interventions using recognised and valid methods of evaluation.
- 3.64 The extent to which interpersonal therapeutic skills should be covered or developed needs to be clarified.

professional conduct and accountability

- 3.65 We have mentioned above the need for professionalism in outlook and behaviour. As part of achieving this, programmes should include elements designed to inform and develop professional ethics, and a commitment to professional codes of conduct and professional accountability.
- 3.66 One aspect of a professional is the maturity of their outlook and behaviour. Many social work programmes require previous relevant experience before joining their course. Most students are mature in age. Age can bring increased motivation and (demonstrably in social work) a good retention record. Many applicants have life experiences, however we would note that these alone are not useful – they important point for selection is what they have learnt from them.
- 3.67 We would consider it equally important that younger applicants are eligible for social work education - they can bring particular contributions to social work as they often question accepted practice, and can offer significant academic potential, a commitment to learning, and a high level of enthusiasm. However, many may need to be provided with appropriate development opportunities to assist their attaining the maturity and other attributes of a professional.
- 3.68 Above all, perhaps, all students need to understand what they don't know (and what to do about it); and to gain the capacity to cope with the changes and stresses of social work. They need to be able to work effectively as part of a team; to work to deadlines; to deal with aggression; to be prepared for the complexities and conflicts of the role of a social worker. They must show initiative; be flexible (in the context of continuing organisational and social changes); be able to work under pressure.

record keeping, report writing, communication

- 3.69 Like most professionals, social workers need a reasonable basis of the normal skills required for working with clients. These include inter-personal skills, interviewing skills, report writing and recording practices.

management skills

- 3.70 The management of services and care management has been raised by many as a gap. This encompasses variously: supervision of social care workers; assessment and planning of care needs; management of social care and management of provider services (including increasing use of independent social care agencies). At least some aspects of care management should be included in the DipSW.
- 3.71 There is a growing need for management skills in social work - and these need to be incorporated into students' learning experiences if necessary. Finance and resource management, budgeting, contracting, IT skills have been mentioned by many respondents as areas needing more attention.

values

- 3.72 Whilst we have been emphasising the gaps seen in social work training; we would note that there are no areas that were mentioned as being superfluous. On the contrary, these were referred to as vital parts of the education process that must not be lost. Key amongst them is values. These must be reinforced and thoroughly integrated, countering anti-oppressive practice, anti-discriminatory practice, anti-racist practice, anti-sectarian practice; ageism, sexism, and so on.

In summary

- 3.73 Most of the above is we believe, not controversial. The competences reflect the desired outcomes, but at present they are given a different emphasis in different programmes, and they are interpreted differently. There is currently too great a range in the level and depth of evidence required to demonstrate competence.
- 3.74 The competences are expressed in a way that is generally considered to be, and is, acceptable. However, their basis, occupational standards, is not understood by some, and is over-emphasised by others in a way that focuses on tasks to the detriment of integrated research/ knowledge/practice and of a 'reflective practitioner' exercising judgement in their work.
- 3.75 The main problem is however related to the length of many of the courses, and the amount of learning experience that can realistically be included in a two-year programme. Essentially, the requirement to attain specific technical knowledge defined in the competences, has squeezed out the time also needed for the broader theoretical underpinning without which the competences may not be exercised in the safe and professional manner that we have specified above.
- 3.76 At present there is a requirement for 130 days of placements (140 in Northern Ireland) and there has been some discussion of the balance between college and placement time which was originally intended to be 50/50 (but the practice element has been eroded in some cases). We comment further on practice education below and we suggest that this needs to be better integrated and delivered in a more flexible range of modes (both of which make precise specification of the number of days less relevant). However, in terms of relative importance, we suggest that the principle of equal contribution of both college-based and practice-based experience is appropriate.
- 3.77 In summary, we see a need for significant extension of the curriculum. It is not for us to design this in detail. However, given the importance of the outcomes, and the large number of providers involved (over 80 in England alone), we see scope for giving clear guidance in the form of **standard or model curricula** (for each main level or route).

- 3.78 These would cover the skills, knowledge and values gained both in practice and in college-based learning. They should indicate both learning experiences and assessment strategies for each year of the course. However, we stress that they should be indicative of good practice, not a prescriptive requirement.
- 3.79 We note that occupational standards in other areas related to social work (eg probation) are much more specific than the DipSW requirements. As already noted, we would not wish to remove the flexibility for HE providers to adapt and innovate in the DipSW curriculum, but they must bear in mind the need to provide a continuum of qualifications with appropriate ladders and bridges between NVQ and DipSW competences.

Length

- 3.80 The length of HE courses is not as simple as it appears. Most students now work part-time in the sense that even so-called Full-Time students are often in paid employment during term time. Many courses are semesterised and modular and there is an increasing emphasis on self-directed learning. Existing 2-year DipSW courses are in fact only 18 months long and they vary significantly in the actual length of time spent in formal education.
- 3.81 Overall, it is clear that two years is not enough to develop the outcomes specified above. It is less than most comparable professions and occupations, and the evidence on curriculum (above) shows that more time is needed. One option is a straight lengthening of the course to three years. This would be preferred by many of those consulted, but some would be concerned at the cost and service delivery implications, and the possible negative impact on student recruitment.
- 3.82 Another possibility is to adopt a different structure for the programme (often referred to as a 2+1 route). This could enable students to spend three years in qualifying education, but with the third year primarily focused on work-based experience, consolidating their practice and contributing to service delivery as a probationary social worker before registration. This will not suit all students or employers, but it could be attractive to some.
- 3.83 These two options may not be as different as they at first appear. In both, we would expect:
- a minimum of three years in qualifying education
 - a larger content of both theory and practice education across the three years as specified above
 - students to gain some “real-life” experience of service delivery working to a line manager (as opposed to someone who is predominantly a practice teacher), and receiving academic input as well as service-led supervision and teaching.

3.84 We expect that both these, and other, models will exist in practice. Many respondents have also advocated a “3+1” route and there will also continue to be a variety of other flexible approaches. We could envisage a range of possibilities which could include:

- students in social services employment taking two (fuller) years seconded to an HEI to do the first part of the course and returning to their employer for the third year of supervised practice;
- “traditional” students doing a three-year degree with a long practice placement in the third year;
- students doing a three year degree of which the third year would be spent on a short-term contract with an agency as a probationary social worker at a reduced salary (compared to a permanent qualified social worker);
- various part-time and employment based routes;
- variations on the above, tailored to give credit for previous learning and experience, including for example shorter post-graduate routes where the first degree was relevant.

3.85 There are other possibilities. It is neither possible nor desirable for the regulator or the government to specify exactly how the qualifying education is to be structured and this will probably vary between and within the countries of the UK to reflect local circumstances.

3.86 There are challenges for higher education here. How to ensure that the various flexible routes such as 2+1 are genuinely so integrated that they earn as much academic credit as the three-year route; and how to deliver flexible programmes to meet the needs of students in different employment circumstances. We believe that many HEIs are already moving in the direction of a more “tailored” and modular approach to student programmes (with the huge increase in part-time and mature and employed students).

3.87 The only requirement that needs to be specified with regard to length or structure of programmes is to reflect the minimum length of student learning that is required to accommodate the curriculum and outcomes required for registration. We are clear that most programmes will need to be equivalent to three years and that, in some cases at least, this means “longer” years than the current short “academic year”.

Academic level and entry requirements

3.88 One of the successes of DipSW, which is important for social work, is that it permits a wide variety of types of student entrant, including those without traditional university entry qualifications. There is widespread support for this inclusivity and it is not in conflict with our other requirements. However, there has also been a tendency in some courses to create an environment in which practice teachers and others effectively find it impossible to fail students. This can be very damaging to the reputation of social work – and potentially to its clients.

- 3.89 The professional model which we have adopted requires a threshold standard of education, competence and self-awareness, critical judgement and analytical and inter-personal skills for safe practice. This level can be achieved by a variety of entrants and is normally associated with qualification at graduate level. Many occupations now require a degree and many of those consulted would wish to see the same for qualifying as a social worker. A significant proportion of all DipSW students now qualify at degree level (and a significant proportion of those who qualify at DipHE level already hold a degree in another subject). We think it is right to specify that a degree is a necessary requirement for registration as a social worker.
- 3.90 A wide variety of students can be assisted to achieve this level, but it is not in the interests of social work or of public safety to lower the standards to admit those who are unable to achieve them. It is also important not to “pass” students who may be academically sound but lack the necessary skills, values and human and professional qualities for safe practice.
- 3.91 We believe that if social work is to improve its performance and its reputation with the public it must be willing to set and enforce standards in all areas (student selection; academic outcomes; practice learning; professional conduct). Associated with this requirement, we would wish to require all partnerships to have policies on access so that entrants without normal university entrance qualifications who are capable of reaching degree level can be assisted through foundation modules and otherwise to achieve the level required.
- 3.92 It is also important to require firm, but fair, selection and assessment processes so that students unable to achieve the outcomes are not either mis-led into attempting what is beyond their capabilities or facilitated to pass at a lower standard.
- 3.93 Finally, as part of locating the DipSW within a Dearing-style framework of qualifications, it is important and necessary to sort out the equivalence and AP(E)L arrangements to allow clear and accessible progression from S/NVQ levels 3 and 4 to a DipSW, and similarly to provide diversion and exit routes for students who are unable to qualify at degree level.
- 3.94 Existing social workers without degrees should not feel threatened by these recommendations as we assume that the GSCCs will develop appropriate transitional (“grand-parenting”) arrangements to facilitate their registration.

Routes

- 3.95 A strong feature of DipSW is the number of routes – part-time/full-time; employment-based, open learning etc. The number of routes reflects the diversity of student intake which everyone agrees is a desirable feature. In recent years, the number of students sponsored by employers has reduced considerably, but this is still an important route in some countries (eg Northern Ireland). In common with other parts of the HE system, we might expect to see further routes opening in future as developments such as private universities, employer-led schemes, resource-based learning etc continue.

- 3.96 We do not see any problem in this. In principle, all routes should be equally acceptable if they meet a student demand, do not impose unreasonable costs or burdens on the State, and lead to the outcomes required. We have found no evidence of the relative effectiveness of different routes, although there is some research in this area particularly of the PG route.
- 3.97 Disquiet has been expressed over some routes, particularly by some about the newer open and distance-learning routes including the Open University (OU) route. We have not examined this in detail, but the OU approach obviously offers the opportunity of a well-resourced and high quality programme delivered in a way which may prove cost-effective and accessible for some students and employers. There could be concern that such routes might be seen as undermining the concept of local partnership, but this does not need to be so. Our report on delivery in England suggests that the local dimension may have been over-played in some respects and what is needed is local employer involvement and accessible delivery (and robust placement planning) rather than an education provider located in every town.
- 3.98 We see no reasons in principle why the Open University or other distance or open-learning providers should not collaborate with relevant regional NTO groupings and with local provider partnerships (as re-defined in the report on delivery of the DipSW in England) to ensure that all students taking this route have access to a suitable range of opportunities and experience (including of course practice placements and group discussion).
- 3.99 There is probably a case for some further examination of the balance between different routes and their value for different types of student – including of this last issue - but we think this would best be done as part of the broader strategic and workforce planning which the NTOs will be undertaking. We comment more extensively on this in our report on delivery of the DipSW in England.

Pathways

- 3.100 There is currently some confusion over particular and general pathways, and where specialisms start. As noted above, we support the concept of elective pathways within a single generic qualification. These would include, for example, criminal justice (in Scotland and NI); mental health; child protection; residential care; and others as appropriate. They would be developed in the third year once the generic building blocks were well established.
- 3.101 Subsequently, specialist qualifications should be gained through PQ training and social workers should be able to transfer between specialisms (or to update and extend specialist skills) via appropriate short up-dating or conversion modules.

Practice education

current issues

- 3.102 Practice education is a critical part of DipSW but there is a widespread feeling that it currently fails to fulfil its potential in a significant number of courses. We think the reasons for this (and they vary between programmes) include:
- some confusion over accountability and responsibility - so that HEIs and agencies are not always fully in partnership over planning, delivery and assessment
 - the poor state of the art of assessment techniques for practice learning (which in turn may lead some HEIs to undervalue this component in allocating academic credit)
 - related to this, non-optimal planning of the length, location and purpose of placements, and of the preparation necessary to make them successful (and of course inability sometimes to find suitable placements)
 - agencies' tendency (in some cases) to devolve this area too completely to practice teachers, thus devaluing it in the eyes of senior managers, students and HEI partners
 - difficulties in the practice teachers scheme which leads in some cases to a high turnover of practice teachers and to practice teachers with limited influence and experience within their agencies.
- 3.103 A critical factor which can underly some of the above points is the resourcing of practice education. We comment more on this in the report on delivery of the DipSW in England. There does seem to be a general problem of a perceived imbalance in the resources available to colleges and agencies. There is no doubt that the resourcing of placement support in some agencies is inadequate, and there is a more general perception that finding placements is burdensome and costly for universities and colleges.
- 3.104 We would stress that there are examples of good practice in all these areas – but they are not the norm.
- 3.105 Our aim would be that, as part of the development of the illustrative curriculum discussed above, a much more rigorous scheme would be drawn up to cover the learning objectives of the practice education at each stage in the course, and the assessment methods to be used to test them.
- 3.106 Many respondents have commented on assessment, and suggestions include much more extensive use of student portfolios; use of feed-back from external assessors; direct assessment or demonstration of competences; involvement of academic tutors; double marking by college and agency staff. These ideas suggest to us that there is scope for a significant initiative here in which the HEIs should be playing a leading role and drawing on research and best practice in other fields.

a more flexible approach

- 3.107 Part of the difficulty here may come from the word placement itself. We recognise that it has become an accepted term, but it can imply something too inflexible. Requirements (and learning objectives) should clearly vary quite significantly between the first, second and third years of a course. A relatively passive familiarisation/observational “placement” may be appropriate for the first experience in Year One, but the concept should be a much more active “practice learning” for the subsequent Years when the practice education should be much more rigorously planned and assessed (jointly) as part of an integrated whole.
- 3.108 As already noted, the Year Three experience should be about consolidation of practice, taking forward learning preferences and developing understanding of particular areas of practice. Here the correct term would be something more like “work-based assessment”.
- 3.109 We would expect that good practice would involve regular visits by academic staff to students in the workplace and frequent contact with agency senior and line managers and recently-qualified staff as well as practice teachers.
- 3.110 Practice learning also needs to be delivered in a flexible way. It makes no sense to require students with a wide range of backgrounds and experience to all undergo a standard pattern. The ideal (which we accept is a challenge for both partners) is to offer each student a tailored set of learning and assessment opportunities which respond to his or her actual needs and interests, and take account of prior experience. While we understand the caution about “diluting the practice element”, we would certainly expect the practice learning to consider use of techniques such as observation, simulation, project work, case studies etc which can all contribute and add value to time spent on “placements”.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 In this chapter, we give our recommendations. They will need to be implemented in harmony with any changes that come out of the other Stage Two projects (especially those on delivery of DipSW and on PQ).
- 4.2 Social work education is a complex system, not readily subject to control or change by any single organisation. Any changes that address the broad agenda we have outlined in chapters 2 and 3 will take some years to achieve and will involve action by a number of different groups and organisations. In this report we cannot lay out a full route map to achieve all these changes in all four countries given the changing context of the developments in regulation and training in social care.
- 4.3 What we can do is to show our vision of the destination that we hope social work will reach, and to make some specific recommendations for action by the main interests who will take this forward – particularly the Health Departments; CCETSW; the GSCCs and NTOs and individual employers, and higher/further education providers.

Our vision for qualifying education

- 4.4 Our vision is that over a period of several years, there will be a series of inter-related developments in social work education and practice which include:
- a. **a strategic debate on issues about roles, education and practice standards, workforce planning and consequent education requirements, which encompasses all the interests and the whole learning continuum**
- (we see the development of the NTOs and GSCCs greatly aiding this, together with any developments in the role of NISW and the development of a more strategic focus within the partnership arrangements (as recommended in the report on delivery in England))
- b. **development of a culture within employing agencies, and particularly statutory social work departments, which recognises the imperative of investing in human resource development and has all the main elements of a “learning organisation” including proactive support for professional development of practice, staff and students as a means to improve service to clients**
- (we have recommendations about this below)
- c. **strengthening and further development of the principles of partnership and collaboration which already exist, including in England rationalising the pattern of provision to reduce costs to agencies and others who currently have to deal with large numbers of partnerships within a geographic area**
- (as recommended in the reports on delivery)

d. further development of the qualifying education, building on the foundations which already exist in the DipSW.

Item (d) is of course the main focus of this report, although it is important that it is supported by the developments at (a) to (c) as well.

4.5 Our vision for the DipSW includes:

- i. **a higher threshold level** required for qualification (and hence registration) as a social worker in terms of depth of underpinning knowledge, practical experience, and the integrating and critical analytical ability that we associate with professionalism;
- ii. **a broad entry**, facilitated by friendly and flexible arrangements for different applicants, and with full use of AP(E)L, credit transfer, and foundation modules to help all potentially registerable students to gain access to qualifying education;
- iii. **flexible delivery** (see other reports) recognising new routes including further development of the Part-Time, employment-based concept in which line managers will play a role in the underpinning and consolidation of practice experience; and taking full advantage of modern developments in flexible learning, new technology, etc;
- iv. achieving **a more consistent quality** across programmes with better dissemination and take-up of best practice, while streamlining external QA arrangements (mostly addressed by the delivery and QA projects);
- v. **a longer programme at degree level with more input of research, theory and practice and consolidation of practice skills before qualification** by ensuring proper learning outcomes from all components with integrated design and supervision; and consolidating/improving the involvement of both employers and HEIs in the design of learning outcomes and of assessment methodologies;
- vi. **making delivery more efficient** by reducing duplication and inconsistencies in developments and processes and improving the value added by the time that agencies can input into the programmes.

4.6 We would note that these elements build upon the work already done and that many of these aspects are already present in those programmes which are currently at the forefront of good practice. Nevertheless, taken together, this represents a significant strengthening of the qualifying education across the UK as a whole.

4.7 All the above should apply in principle UK-wide, but the details of the way they work in practice may vary between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Recommendations

Qualifying course – new minimum requirements

- 4.8 **Recommendation One:** The education outcomes required for registration as a professional social worker should be revised in the light of our analysis in chapter 3. This will significantly expand the curriculum; increase the rigour of learning in the practice components; strengthen assessment levels and methods; and incorporate the practice consolidation that is often now undertaken under PQ. It will normally require a student with no prior experience or learning to complete the equivalent of three years in higher education. The third year may be an employment-based year for some students.
- 4.9 We have not done an analysis of the “academic weight” of the credits implied by these extensions of the DipSW, but we expect most HEIs to conclude it implies a programme at degree level.
- 4.10 **Recommendation Two:** The GSCCs should build upon the work done by CCETSW in defining their requirements for registration in terms of experience and learning outcomes at the level of the competent and analytical professional practitioner. This implies a graduate level qualification, but attainable via a variety of routes so that social work can continue to benefit from the broad and inclusive entry that is so valued by many commentators.
- 4.11 **Recommendation Three:** The principle of integration of research, theory and practice, and of joint and unified assessment, should be retained and strengthened. The course should continue to include practice learning (eg placements or work-based assessment) in each year and these should be of equal importance to the theory (and research) learning. Theory learning should involve employer or practice inputs, and students on placements or in employment-based learning should retain an academic tutor or supervisor. The HEI and the placement agency should be jointly responsible for mentoring, tutorial instruction and assessment. In the first two years the HEI and practice teachers would play the lead role. In the third year, agency line managers should also be involved.

Entry requirements and routes

- 4.12 **Recommendation Four:** The entry and assessment requirements for the new DipSW should ensure that only students who can expect to achieve the required outcomes are enrolled and allowed to progress. There should however be flexible arrangements including foundation modules; AP(E)L (including from HNCs); proper ladders between S/NVQs and the DipSW; distance and open learning; to permit students with a broad range of entry qualifications to succeed. Programmes should be tailored to the needs and experience of each student and give due credit to appropriate prior learning and experience.

- 4.13 **Recommendation Five:** The current concepts of general and particular pathways should cease. The DipSW should be the single professional qualification with students achieving a general knowledge of all care settings and client groups. As well, they should take an (elective) choice of module and placement that provides them with more depth of understanding in one particular care setting or client group.
- 4.14 These elective-areas should not be regarded as specialisms; the introductory modules in the PQ framework that cover these would cease. Instead the PQ framework would cover higher and specialist levels of competence, that are achievable by a smaller number of the social worker population, as well as maintaining professional competence (CPD).

Illustrative curriculum

- 4.15 **Recommendation Six:** Illustrative curricula (both academic and practice) should be developed as an aid to programme managers and to help to ensure a greater degree of consistency across programmes. We would expect a small number of illustrative curricula to be available - for different levels of programme. These should not be mandatory but should provide a benchmark of good practice. Programmes which choose to depart significantly from these benchmarks would be expected (by partnerships and other regional consortia) to justify this.
- 4.16 **Recommendation Seven:** As part of this development, new guidance should be prepared on the planning, delivery and assessment of practice learning.

Practice environment

- 4.17 **Recommendation Eight:** We recommend that employers as a whole work to:
- recognise and demonstrate the value of professional development throughout the policies and practices of their agencies
 - raise their average level of investment and commitment to training and development
 - create the elements of a learning environment within social work departments
 - integrate practice teaching and supervision of students into mainstream of practice development in the agency.
- 4.18 **Recommendation Nine:** We recommend that Joint Reviews in England, and the equivalent inspections in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should explicitly comment on investment and progress in human resource development within the agencies they inspect.

Delivery arrangements

4.19 In our report on the Delivery of DipSW in England, we recommend that the delivery arrangements should be strengthened and clarified to ensure that:

- partnership operates at two levels: a strategic or planning level based on the NTO (TOPSS) Regions in England, and a delivery level based on a rationalised structure of local partnerships
- employers are more actively engaged at the Regional level in planning the numbers, quality, range of routes, and outcomes of the qualifying education
- accountabilities for delivery are clear with those providing college-based and employer-based education linked by formal contractual arrangements which make relative responsibilities clear
- all students (whichever HEI they attend) have access to a wide range of learning opportunities through their local partnership
- programme providers are challenged and supported to collaborate with others to bring their programmes up to the standards of best practice
- the administration of practice placements is treated as a support activity, probably managed on a sub-regional basis, leaving the partnership free to concentrate on aspects such as provision, selection and assessment.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF THOSE CONSULTED

During the review, we had discussions with representatives of the main interests concerned with the regulation, design and delivery of social work education, and with representatives of employers, user groups and others with an interest in the outcomes of the education. We also met a large number of individuals – often with more than one role or interest – at the series of consultation seminars and workshops which we held in all four countries of the United Kingdom.

We received written comments from more than 200 organisations and individuals, in response to our discussion paper. These are summarised in Appendix B. In addition, as part of our review of the delivery arrangements in England, we had written contributions from more than 170 members of DipSW partnerships in England, so that we were able to build up a very detailed picture of the way that partnerships operate in England.

It would be very difficult to list all these individuals and organisations – and also to include the range of different experience and roles which many of them bring to any such discussions. Below we simply list a selection of organisations which perhaps have the most direct interest. This is not intended to imply that any others, and the many individuals, were less important or helpful in our deliberations. We are grateful to everyone who contributed for the very great interest shown in the review.

The four UK Health Departments
Social Services Inspectorate
CCETSW – UK Council, National Committees, officers in all four countries
The GSCC Implementation Group
Local Government Association
Local Government Management Board
Association of Directors of Social Services
National Institute for Social Work
British Association of Social Workers
Joint Universities Council Social Work Education Committee
Association of University Professors in Social Work
Co-ordinating Group of F&HE interests in Education and Training for the PSS
Universities and colleges
Social Services Departments
Practice Learning Consortia

Main consultation meetings
Meetings were held with groups of relevant interests in:
Belfast
Cardiff
Llandidno
Dundee
Edinburgh
London
Bristol

APPENDIX B

Summary of responses
to the *Discussion Paper – Review of the content of the Diploma in Social Work*
by J M Consulting Ltd

Consultation process

The Discussion Paper was circulated by the health department in each country in early December 1998, with a response date of 12 February 1999. It was a comprehensive document, covering the context of social work education and training, and then fundamental and more detailed issues. It included a set of propositions and questions for ease in response. This appendix gives a brief summary of the main points arising from the responses.

General response

We received more than 200 responses from universities/colleges, statutory and independent sector agencies and consortia, and professional, education, regulatory and other national and regional bodies. Responses included many from individual practitioners and/or lecturers; and students. They covered all four countries of the UK.

Many respondents appreciated the breadth and depth of coverage, and the style and tone of the paper (“very impressed”; “paper well set out and argued and well designed for purpose”; “thorough”; “realistic”). Many of the respondents who had attended the workshops and seminar discussions (held in January and February around the UK), specifically commented how much they had appreciated the approach taken to the review. The (few) respondents who felt more negatively criticised the “pessimistic tone” of the discussion paper; its lack of firm recommendations; or its failure to define the role of a social worker (a necessary starting point). There was concern that the five stage two reviews (including content, this one) were being conducted separately (and in particular, that this review must be linked to the restructuring of the PQ framework).

We gained a considerable volume of useful ideas and information from the responses; and these were instrumental in developing our ideas and recommendations. Overall many of the points made in our paper were supported (and formed part of our recommendations given in the main part of this report – we do not repeat them here).

Length of DipSW

There was almost (but not quite) total agreement that a two year course was inadequate in terms of both college and practice content. There were three strongly-held views about how this should be taken forward :

- a three year programme (consisting of a two plus one or similar concept)

- a three or four year degree (with the reasons being equality with Europe and other health professions; and that the levels of reflection and critical appraisal are at that of a minimum of level 3, ie degree standard)
- a three year degree programme, plus one year licentiate/induction year

As a generalism the first was supported by many employers and providers of non-degree courses; the second and third by many other academic institutions and most respondents from Scotland.

Some additional variants on these included:

- respondents, supporting the 2+1 model, who linked the third (licentiate) year to the PQ framework (the current PQ Stage 1 consolidation module) rather than necessarily to the DipSW itself
- a number of respondents who were concerned at the multiplicity of awards and recommended a new qualification framework for the DipSW, setting it at undergraduate level, with PQ at masters (this would help “drive the qualification to fit with tasks and roles”; or, would stop the current confusion which is “actively disadvantaging students (in financial terms) and undermining the growth of the PQ framework”). Others felt the PQSW should be post-graduate certificate; the AASW a masters award.
- separating the responsibility for practice and academic input (because of the confused accountabilities and resource allocation policies) throughout the course (i.e. a new type of ‘programme partnership’) with sub-regional employer-led consortia taking responsibility for practice assessment, including in the new third licentiate year. Some went further than this, and sought a separate academic qualification followed by an agency-based competence qualification.

Except where this ‘third year’ was seen only as induction; most recommended that it should not only cover practice, but also some academic input (integrated). It should not be confined to the statutory sector. Those who felt that entrance to the DipSW could be at different levels of qualification felt also that a single-tier DipSW was important (ie all newly qualified, whatever level, should be able to fulfil the same roles).

Generic qualification

There was agreement that the DipSW should be a generic qualification. However many respondents (particularly employers), whilst disliking the current concepts of particular pathways (“not particularly helpful”), wished their newly qualified staff to be more closely identified with (‘fit for practice’ in) particular areas. The methods of achieving this were variously suggested as electives; specialism (in the new third year); through PQ; or ‘simply’ ensuring the report on the student (their ‘learning profile’) was clear about their experience or focus.

Competences and outcomes

Most respondents supported the competences as described by CCETSW. However, some felt that they should be as detailed as the NVQ4 (and link with this qualification; citing the new probation award as a good example of this). Conversely, others felt that they were “too

broken down” (“students can take individual steps but cannot put them together into a walk”). Values were emphasised as being equally important as knowledge and skills.

There was almost total agreement on the need for ‘professional’ attributes (‘graduateness’ was not considered an appropriate alternative term). Concern was frequently felt that the current competences do not adequately lead to the analytical /reflective practitioner that is required.

However equally important were to address the perceived deficiencies in the competences/curriculum – multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working; range of interventions; community care; IT; budgets; ability to write reports; and others (as summarised in chapter 3 of our report) were commonly mentioned. There was lack of consensus on how care management should be covered. There were many (different) suggestions as to the inclusion of a multi-disciplinary learning requirement (specific module; practice placement; integral throughout; left to PQ).

Content of curriculum

Many commented that the learning was too geared to local authority fieldwork settings and should be broadened to incorporate other settings (eg groupcare settings/ independent workplaces) or to include some setting-specific competences. (In a similar vein some requested guidance on the situations that should be assessed – individual; group; family; network; strategic or immediate situations.) The residential care sector was highlighted by a number of respondents as being inadequately served by the competences (“need to be more flexible”).

The design of a standard curriculum was suggested by many – although that this should not be prescriptive (and that details should be the prerogative of each programme). It was felt that this would address, in particular, the variable quality of students and programmes – much less latitude would be possible. The inclusion of guidance on which elements required assessment, and the required levels of attainment were felt as useful as content. It was widely felt that there was much scope to identify and disseminate good practice (but this would require resources).

Particular emphasis was given in the responses to:

- the inclusion of research as a third arm to theory and practice – research and evidence based practice underpinning both
- students coming from different backgrounds with differing needs and learning requirements
- the need to continue to improve the integration of ‘college-based and employer-based learning’. This term was used in preference to ‘theory and practice’, both of which should be covered in an integrated way in both college and placement

and slightly less frequently:

- the role of senior practitioners and line managers in helping to provide the underpinning knowledge (NISW: “our research and development work is showing that first line managers are the people who set standards for professional practice”);

- the need for academics to be up to date with good practice and current social work issues (with recognition given to the increased demands in other areas, eg to be increasingly active in research).

‘Maturity’ was discussed by many, with a common view that maturity is a reflection of abilities and outlook, not age. Older applicants (with ‘relevant life experience’) were generally valued, and there was concern at their financial circumstances (often straitened) which is seen to have a significant impact on their learning experience. At the same time there was considerable support for younger applicants: many indicated that it should be possible to accommodate both types of entrant in social work.

Other main concerns

There was considerable concern at:

- the lack of ladders and bridges between the NVQ framework and, (less frequently expressed) the need for exit routes and credit transfers between programmes
- the problems practice teachers have in failing students (variously attributed to a lack of confidence; easier to refer; ‘fear of appeal’; time-consuming to prepare and justify a fail report; that “progress (of a student) is always possible”)
- (linked to this) the selection procedures – concern over the low drop-out rate. Suggestions included a employer involvement in selection (many did have this already); written selection examination (to ensure basic literacy); a minimum of two years prior experience
- universities still not recognising and expecting employer priorities and input to the programmes, and accepting that these are of at least equal importance as their own (“programmes must heed employers comments”; “employer input into teaching and learning strategies needs to be increased and more formalised”; “agencies need to be valued more than for the provision of practice placements”)
- the problems with finding quality placements and demands on agency staff time (programme providers should have “common expectations and collaboration requirements from agencies”; “(all) partners should be contracted to provide specific aspects”)
- the inconsistent quality of practice teachers – with problems over depth of their teaching experience; continuity; retaining good teachers; etc
- linked to this - the inadequacies of current methods of quality assuring practice education and employer-based learning which was expressed strongly by some respondents who pointed out the two-tier standards of practice teachers/agencies and lack of minimum standards. (However, a significant number of other respondents commented how strong their partnership arrangements were in assuring high quality placements, including assessment procedures).

Practice environment

The lack of an appropriate learning environment in agencies was raised as a very serious issue by many. This was evidenced by a lack of adequate support for practice education (and teachers) in the statutory agencies (in particular the lack of workload relief or too implicit link with career progression) and the insufficient amount of supervision available to newly qualified staff. Some agencies, however, commented that their priorities had to be the bulk of their staff who have no or inadequate qualifications. Conversely, many others specifically commented that their agency had good induction, supervision, and practice placement

support. Generally, however, practice training was not considered to be closely enough allied to the agencies' core business.

Resource issues were raised in connection to practice teaching support, and (broadly) on the additional demands of a licentiate year. They also surfaced particularly in our suggestions of staff swops, practitioner input to teaching etc (“resource implications must be formally recognised in partnership agreements”).

The 50:50 college:practice balance was considered appropriate by most (but, as pointed out, often does not exist at the moment). A significant number wished the balance of placements reviewed – the main three suggestions for this were:

- more academic input in the first three years, but not more practice time (often from those proposing the ‘3+1’ model)
- a longer first placement in the year one (and better preparation for it)
- a gradually increasing practice component (eg, on a three year programme, 20:80; 50:50; 80:20 practice:college)

More guidance (and good practice) was requested on the style of assessments (many recommended portfolios); the involvement of tutors in practice assessments (and conversely, practice teachers on assessment panels and even on academic/whole student assessments). More flexibility in the gaining of practice experience was requested (e.g. work-based assessment, demonstrations, case studies etc as well as placements). Some would prefer concurrent rather than block placements, but pointed out that this was currently prevented by the DfEE ‘sandwich course’ classification of social work.

Routes

Whilst most supported the diversity of the range of current routes on offer, there was no consensus on whether all routes were equally effective – most commented that there was insufficient evidence of this (and that this needed to be assessed through their suitability for different individuals). Those who criticised specific routes generally had concerns over the appropriateness of the open learning routes and employment based routes (“serious concerns”; “should look for evidence of the integration of theory and practice”; and in entirely distance learning routes: the “loss of opportunity to discuss...is a deficit difficult to address”).

