



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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# **REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK DEGREE TRAINEE SCHEME 2003 - 05**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|           |   |            |
|-----------|---|------------|
| <b>1.</b> | <b>INTRODUCTION AND REMIT</b>   | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1       | CONTEXT   | 2          |
| 1.2       | THE REGIONAL SOCIAL WORK DEGREE TRAINEE SCHEME  | 3          |
| 1.3       | METHODOLOGY   | 3          |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>PROFILE OF THE TRAINEES</b>  | <b>4</b>   |
| 2.1       | AGE   | 4          |
| 2.2       | GENDER  | 4          |
| 2.3       | ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS   | 5          |
| 2.4       | LENGTH OF PREVIOUS RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE   | 5          |
| 2.5       | PREVIOUS SALARIES   | 6          |
| 2.6       | PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL CARE OR RELATED EMPLOYMENT  | 6          |
| 2.7       | ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO COMPLETE THE SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATION  | 7          |
| 2.8       | QUALITY OF TRAINEES   | 8          |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE TRAINEE SCHEME</b>   | <b>9</b>   |
| 3.1       | INTERFACE BETWEEN THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR THE REGIONAL TRAINEE SCHEME AND THE BACHELOR IN SOCIAL WORK (BSW) | 9          |
| 3.2       | MAIN CHALLENGES   | 10         |
| 3.3       | BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE THREE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES TO DATE   | 11         |
|           | 2003  | 11         |
|           | 2004  | 11         |
|           | 2005  | 12         |
| 3.4       | FEEDBACK FROM TRAINEES RE APPLICATION AND RECRUITMENT PROCESS   | 12         |
| <b>4.</b> | <b>PRE-DEGREE YEAR</b>  | <b>14</b>  |
| 4.1       | TRAINEE FEEDBACK  | 14         |
| 4.2       | NECESSITY OF PRE-DEGREE YEAR  | 14         |
| 4.3       | SUPPORT IN THE PRE-DEGREE YEAR  | 14         |
| 4.4       | LINE MANAGERS' FEEDBACK   | 15         |
| <b>5.</b> | <b>SOCIAL WORK TRAINEES ON THE BSW PROGRAMMES</b>   | <b>167</b> |
| <b>6.</b> | <b>RELATED SCHEMES</b>  | <b>18</b>  |
| 6.1       | THE SOCIAL WORK FAST TRACK GRADUATE RECRUITMENT SCHEME  | 18         |
| 6.2       | COMPARISON OF THE TWO SCHEMES   | 18         |
| 6.3       | DIPLOMA IN SOCIAL WORK BY DISTANCE LEARNING   | 20         |
| 6.4       | ACCESS COURSE IN THE EHSSB  | 21         |
| 6.5       | TRAINEESHIPS IN THE REST OF UK  | 22         |
| 6.6       | NSPCC SCHEME  | 23         |
| <b>7.</b> | <b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>  | <b>25</b>  |
| 7.1       | KEY FINDINGS  | 25         |
| 7.2       | RECOMMENDATIONS   | 26         |
|           | THE SCHEME  | 26         |
|           | PRE-DEGREE YEAR   | 27         |
|           | SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATION   | 27         |

# REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK DEGREE TRAINEE SCHEME

## 2003 - 05

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### 1. INTRODUCTION AND REMIT

This report was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety to review the Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme and to identify any other employment linked to the Degree in Social Work schemes.

The report reviews whether the Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme has met its stated aim of recruiting into social work training people who reflect the need for more mature recruits, and who would have been unlikely to enter social work training through conventional entry routes in colleges. It also audits related employment schemes, both in Northern Ireland and the rest of GB.

The review presents an analysis of the recruitment process and intakes from the first three years of the scheme, 2003, 2004 and 2005.

Trainee, line manager and course provider's views all inform the report

#### 1.1 Context

The late 1990s witnessed a decline in applications for qualifying courses in social work. In recent years employers have been concerned about both recruiting and retaining an adequate number of suitably qualified social workers to allow for the full implementation of legislation. From September 2004, the Degree in Social Work has become the recognised professional qualification for all social workers in the UK. This degree replaces the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) and previous social work qualifications awarded in the UK by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. The professional social work qualification was upgraded from diploma to honours degree level to ensure that social workers are able to meet the responsibilities of their role, and the changing needs of users and carers. In Northern Ireland, the government associated the introduction of its new degree curriculum with a requirement that new graduates complete an assessed year in social work employment as an additional support to the beginning social worker.

The Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) and all its predecessor equivalents continue to be recognised by the Department, NISCC and employers, as an appropriate qualification for social work and for registration on the social work part of the Social Care Register. Final entries to DipSW courses in Northern Ireland took place in 2003 and February 2004. Again in Northern Ireland, the government introduced its "PQ1 Policy" whereby all new holders of DipSW from 2003 are required to undertake the first part of the current post qualifying framework to assist them in tailoring their competence to the demands of their first 2 years in practice.

The DHSSPSNI with HSS Boards, Trusts and the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland have a long history of supporting access for suitable mature people with relevant experience, from a range of social and educational backgrounds to complete professional social work training. This is in line with general government policy widening access to further and higher education to create a more diverse workforce.

A social worker needs a range of personal qualities such as patience, determination and the ability to help people face painful and distressing problems. Life and work experience frequently offer challenges and opportunities to develop these attributes. Support for programmes designed to enable mature people to become qualified social workers has been based on the belief that social workers benefit from having a variety of life and work experience. The introduction of the degree in social work suggested the potential that the entrants to the degree would be nearly exclusively school leavers, and the diversity of applicants which has been valued in social work might be lost.

In the past the Diploma in Social Work (Employment Based programme) and its predecessor Certificate in Social Services (CSS) operated as a partnership between employers and Colleges of Further Education. It offered a valuable opportunity for experienced workers to progress into professional training on a part time basis and also made a significant contribution to meeting the workforce need for qualified social workers. When the DipSW converted to degree in 2004 the previous employment based route to the professional qualification discontinued as well. It was therefore decided to re-create an employment route (albeit one adapted to the advent of the degree) by the introduction of a trainee scheme.

## 1.2 The Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme

The regional Trainee Scheme has recruited annually from 2003-2005 with recruitment currently under way for a fourth time.

In contrast to the Employment Based Programme for the DipSW, the post of Trainee was open to all who met the criteria and not confined to employees in social care organisations in specific posts. The Trainee Scheme was advertised openly in newspapers. There were between 50-60 trainee posts available within the Northern Ireland Health and Personal Social Services Trusts and Voluntary Sector Social Services Organisations each year. (This compares favourably with the intakes to Employment Based Diploma which averaged between 50-60 intakes in the mid to late 1990s).

| YEAR OF RECRUITMENT | NO. OF APPLICATIONS | NO. INTERVIEWED | NO. IN POST |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 2003                | 217                 | 86              | 51          |
| 2004                | 445                 | 88              | 50          |
| 2005                | 542                 | 159             | 49          |

SOURCE CSA AND ADSS REPORT 2005

Trainees are employed by a Trust within a Board Area or by a Voluntary Sector Social Services organisation on a fixed term contract that requires them to achieve the Honours Degree in Social Work (BSW), normally within 5 years of their appointment to the post.

To be short listed for the Trainee scheme, applicants must meet the academic requirements for Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) in one of the two Universities in Northern Ireland. In addition they must have not less than 3 years regular and sustained paid or voluntary work experience in social care or a related field within the previous five year period. The starting salary in 2003 was £14,196 with 2 increments while training. It is £15,015 in 2006.

In addition they must demonstrate they have the potential to train for social work at degree level and are suitable to be registered as a social work student with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

Following appointment trainees spend up to one year in employment with their sponsoring employer, prior to commencing the BSW. During this time they are expected to obtain a place on an approved BSW programme in Northern Ireland. Currently all the BSW programmes in Northern Ireland are offered on a full time basis only although course providers are seeking to develop part-time provision in line with the Department's policy for flexible routes as part of the Reform of Professional Social Work Training.

While on the degree programme trainees must return to work in their sponsoring agencies during vacation time from Colleges (although the requirement may vary linked to trainees particular training needs).

On graduation there is a requirement to seek employment as a social worker in the Northern Ireland Personal Social Services, in either statutory or voluntary sectors for at least two years.

The scheme has run over three years linked to the introduction of the degree in 2004 and is currently recruiting for the fourth intake. Ongoing monitoring by the Assistant Directors of Training in the four Boards has informed changes from year to year in an effort to continually improve and refine the scheme. Some of the first trainees recruited in 2003 currently completing the Relevant Graduate route to the Social Work Degree are due to graduate in June 2006.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Evidence was gathered through a number of sources. Documentary evidence from previous reports compiled by Assistant Directors of Social Services (Training) in the four HSS Boards are referenced. This information was gathered as part of monitoring of the schemes over the last three years. Figures were received from the Central Services Agency who provided administrative support for the recruitment for the Trainee Scheme. Some information on the profile of the general social work student population completed by Elspeth Rea was obtained from the Regional Body.

The reviewer completed some primary research. 74 Trainees at various stages on the scheme completed questionnaires. Also 24 line managers also completed questionnaires. In addition four focus groups were organised across the region with some 60 trainees, 24 line managers and 13 representatives from training teams in attendance at different times. Feedback was also received from the two main providers of social work education.

Information was gathered about other related schemes in the UK through direct and telephone contact with organisers and the use of the internet and reference to reports completed by them.

## 2. PROFILE OF THE TRAINEES

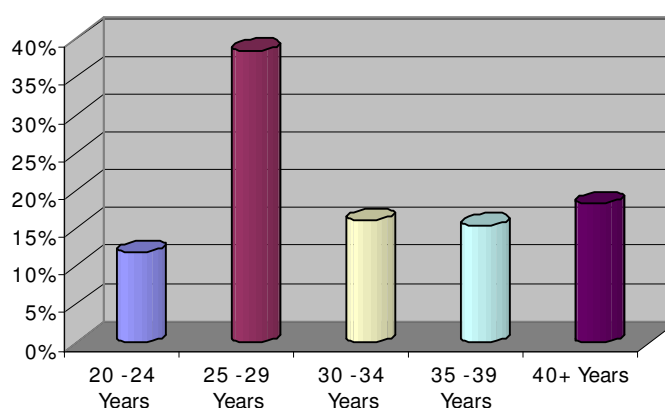
In order to assess whether the Trainee Scheme is recruiting mature people into social work profession a profile of trainees was completed.

### 2.1 Age

The agreed definition of mature students accepted by nearly all universities is 21 years of age. This table demonstrates that out of 143 returns out of a possible 150, 38% (n=55) were between the ages of 25 years and 29 years.

In fact 87% were over the age of 25 years, with 18% being over the age of 40..Evidence suggests that older trainees were bring recruited in 2005 than in 2003 when 17% were under the age of 23 years.

**Age Distribution - Trainees 2003 -05**

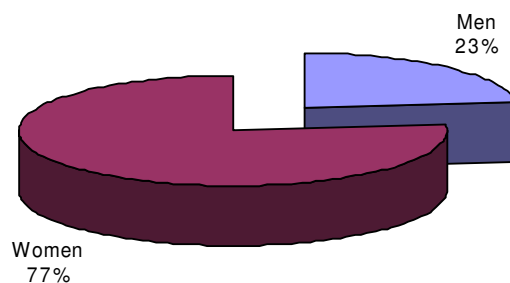


SOURCE: ADSS REPORT 2005

### 2.2 Gender

The gender imbalance generally reflected in recruitment for social work is reiterated in recruitment for the social work trainee scheme. Over three quarters of the Trainees were female. However the gender breakdown does not seem to be any different to that already reflected in the profession at social work practitioner level and indeed is similar to that of other parts of the UK. 76% social workers in Scotland were female in 1998. Clearly barriers to recruitment of men to social work must be addressed on a wider societal level.

**Gender Mix - Trainees 2003 -05**



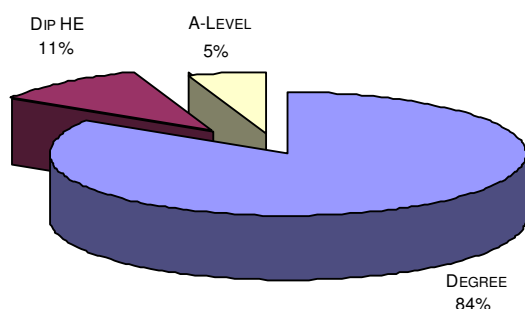
SOURCE: ADSS REPORT 2005

Evidence from the general intake to the BSW in 2004 suggests that it is failing to attract males. Only 10% of applicants accepted on to the BSW in 2004 (Rea 2004) were male. This is a significantly lower percentage than the 23% accepted on to the Trainee Scheme

## 2.3 Academic Achievements

Although the Trainee Scheme is not a graduate scheme and accepts applications from candidates with A level or equivalent qualifications, nonetheless the vast majority (84%) of trainees hold a primary or higher degree. This cumulative percentage was up from 75% in the intake of 2003. In contrast only 5% have A levels as their highest academic achievement. Degrees must be at honours level to meet the requirements for accessing the relevant graduate route. Not all of the degrees were considered to be relevant degrees giving access to the fast track route to the social work degree. Those with non relevant degrees joined the three year route.

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS - TRAINEES 2003 - 05

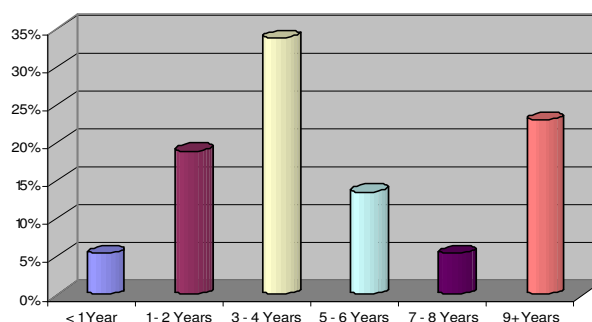


SOURCE: CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

## 2.4 Length of Previous Relevant Work Experience

Trainees are required to have at least three years regular and sustained paid/voluntary work experience in social care or a related field on application. 76% had more than 3 years paid work in a social care or a related field, with nearly one in four having had 9 years or more.

Relevant Paid Work Experience

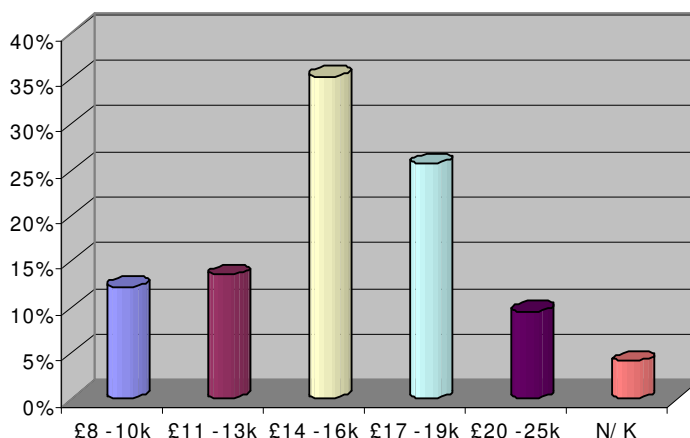


SOURCE: CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

## 2.5 Previous Salaries

Information on the previous salaries of trainees demonstrated that the majority (61%) were on a salary of £16,000 or less when they commenced the traineeship. Over a quarter (26%) was on a salary of £13,000 or less. For the third who took a drop in salary they reported in the focus groups that their ability to proceed was influenced by many factors including financial responsibilities for dependent children or children at university, ability to supplement their income with part time work, and the length of the traineeship. While this may be predictable it does beg the question of how many mature and suitable men and women may wish to enter social work, but feel they cannot pursue this option due to being unable to live on the trainee salary. It seems reasonable to assume that the fixed salary affects more mature people than younger applicants. It may also affect those who wish to change careers more as they are more likely to be on higher salaries.

Previous Salary - Trainees

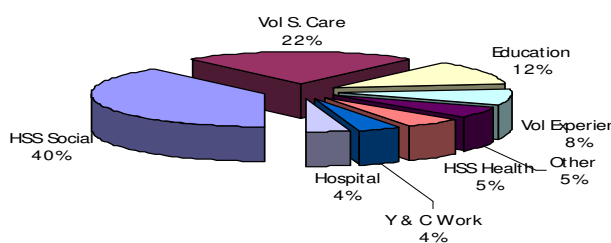


SOURCE: CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

## 2.6 Previous Experience in Social Care or Related Employment

While the Trainee Scheme is not confined to employees in HSS voluntary or statutory organisations the majority of trainees (62%) have been employed in social care posts in the statutory or voluntary sector in Northern Ireland prior to being trainees. Despite the salary issues raised above, a small number of trainees had availed of the scheme to change careers. There were four teachers, a lecturer and two classroom assistants, among the 74 trainees consulted to inform this report.

Trainees by Recent Relevant Experience



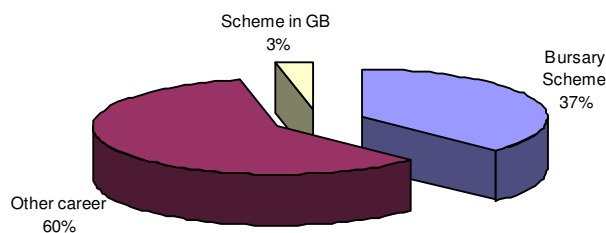
## 2.7 Alternative Ways to Complete the Social Work Qualification

Trainees were asked about the other realistic options to social work qualification available to them, had they not been successful on the Trainee Scheme. They were asked to choose one of four fixed options

The majority (60%) of the social work trainees stated clearly that they could not have pursued a social work degree in any other way than through the Trainee Scheme. Another 37% would have considered supporting themselves by accessing the DHSSPS (NI) incentive scheme, and provisions from local Education and Library Boards. A very small number (3%) would have looked to similar trainee schemes in the rest of the UK. In conclusion a clear 63% of trainees could not have accessed social work as a career without the support of the Trainee Scheme.

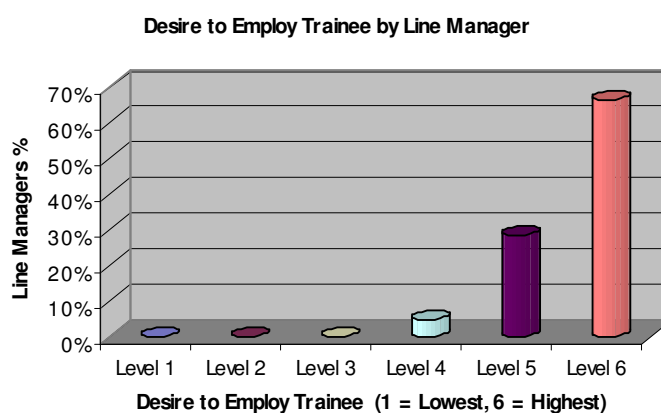
8 of the 74 Trainees to complete questionnaires had applied to complete the BSW some time prior to applying for the Trainee scheme. They were all successful in gaining a place. The reason that 7 of them did not take up the offers was varied, and included health and financial issues. One person had been successful in gaining a university place in Scotland but did not wish to move. Another trainee did commence the course but failed the placement in first year. That person subsequently left the course and applied for the Trainee Scheme.

Alternative Options if Not Appointed as Trainee



## 2.8 Quality of Trainees

The line managers' desire to employ the trainee as a permanent member of their team on qualification was used as a measure of the trainee's potential to be a competent social worker. An overwhelming 95% of line managers would be happy (29%) (or very happy (67%) to employ the trainee as a member of their team. In addition over half indicated that the trainee had made a very good or excellent contribution to the team in their pre-degree year. In focus groups the majority of line managers commented on the high standard of the trainees. This is consistent with a survey of trainees recruited in 2003 when 26 out of 33 line managers surveyed were very positive about the trainees' competence and contribution to the team.



### **3. APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE TRAINEE SCHEME**

The Trainee scheme has been a very popular scheme. The steep rise in applications from 2003 to 2004 was due to a better advertising campaign and dissemination process in agencies. Targeted advertising in local newspapers in the WHSSB area produced good results. Also potential candidates employed in HSS Trusts were more aware of the benefits of the scheme. Applications have continued to rise and in the last recruitment process in 2005 the ratio of applications to trainee posts was approximately 11:1. In all three intakes to date the vast majority of candidates not short listed had not met the academic requirements.

#### **3.1 Interface between the Application Process for the Regional Trainee Scheme and the Bachelor in Social Work (BSW)**

While the recruitment selection process to the Trainee scheme was reported to be satisfactory by trainees and Training Team members in the consultation groups, the following issues have remained consistently challenging despite efforts to improve.

The greatest challenge for the Trainee Scheme has been trying to recruit social work trainees who will meet the academic requirements to be accepted on to the social work degree in the following academic year.

Recruitment and selection for the Trainee scheme and the BSW in the Colleges are naturally separate and different processes. The trainee scheme is recruiting for a time limited post in employment, while the Colleges and partners are selecting for a place on a university course. Both processes are bound by different policy, procedures and even legislation

The trainee selection process is two staged:

- **Application for the post which includes the completion of a personal statement and clearly outlines academic achievement.**
- **Interview**

Failure to meet the required standard at either of these stages can result in the applicant being declined.

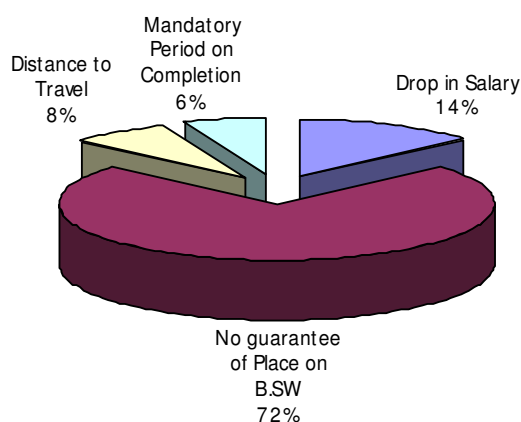
Following appointment trainees spend up to a year in employment in a social care organisation, prior to commencing a degree in social work. During this year they must normally be accepted on to a degree course in Northern Ireland by successfully passing through the three staged College process as outlined below.

- **Application through UCAS (University Central Application System) which requires a record of academic qualifications completed (or predicted grades) and a short personal statement**
- **Additional Personal Statement in relation to social work to the Universities**
- **Interview**

Again each stage is assessed and applicants can be declined at any point of the three staged selection process.

In essence the recruitment and selection process for trainees strives to appoint candidates who will meet the academic requirements for a BSW in Northern Ireland in the following academic year, and also be capable of successfully completing both the personal statement and the college interview to secure a place on the BSW. Failure to do so has considerable implications for trainees involved. If a trainee is appointed and then is unsuccessful in getting a college place, they either have to repeat their pre-degree year in employment (if agreed by their employer) and apply again to the BSW the following year, or terminate their trainee contract. This is especially difficult for trainees who have resigned from permanent posts and taken a decrease in salary. Within the terms of the trainee contract they may have one chance to repeat the pre-degree year.

**Prime Concern of Trainees on Application**



### 3.2 Main Challenges

Academic requirements are a direct result of the demand and supply of places on the BSW and this can fluctuate from year to year and from college to college. Academic requirements for the trainee scheme are set on the basis of college requirements for the BSW in the year of their appointment as a trainee.

However there can be no certainty about the actual academic standard that will be required by the universities in the following year when the cohort of trainees will actually be applying.

Secondly the interpretation of academic equivalences has been particularly problematic for the Trainee Scheme short listing panel. At times this has been exacerbated by the fact that both universities did not always agree on equivalences, although work is continuing to seek to harmonise the social work degree requirements at least across Northern Ireland.

Although considerable help has been forthcoming from the Admission Officers of both Universities and staff from the F&HE Institutes, the Panel is aware that any applicants who consider that they have been treated unfairly have recourse to a range of employment legislation including industrial tribunals.

### **3.3 Brief Synopsis of the Three Recruitment processes to date**

#### **2003**

In this first year the academic criteria for the trainee scheme were informed by the predicted academic requirements of one provider. As the degree was so new only one university had published predicted grades at the time that the Trainee scheme was going to advertisement. The selection process for the Trainee Scheme and the Universities were separate in this year. In the first round of offers five trainees failed to get a place on the BSW, due to a mixture of reasons including failure to be awarded sufficient marks for their personal statement or at the College interview. Following all offers being made only one trainee had failed to get a place on the degree. This was due to not being successful at the college interview stage. So, in the end, academic requirements did not prove to be a stumbling block in the first year.

#### **2004**

Feedback from 2003 trainees highlighted their concern about leaving permanent posts without knowing if they would be accepted on to a BSW programme. In response to this real concern negotiations ensued with the Universities through the Regional Body to marry certain aspects of both selection processes to obviate the need for two personal statements or two interviews for trainees.

It was agreed that academic representatives would join the trainee selection process to accredit it on behalf of the Universities by taking part in both short listing and interviews. As a result the personal statement was requested and marked as part of the Trainee Scheme selection and the trainee interview was similarly accredited by the universities obviating the need for a separate course interview later in the process.

It was anticipated that this would substantially decrease the risk of a trainee not being accepted on to the BSW as two parts of the college selection process would have been completed prior to the trainee taking up post.

Trainees would still have to meet academic criteria which could change, but experience to date had demonstrated very few had been refused on this criterion alone

However due to the high number of applications to the BSW for 2005, places were only allocated to applicants who had scored very highly in their interview. This unexpectedly left some trainees without places due to a lower score at interview they had completed some 10 months prior to other college applicants.

This initially left 15 trainees without places on the degree. This meant that 30% of trainees did not get an offer of a place on a degree programme. Well planned efforts to minimise risk had apparently not succeeded.

There was shock and distress among this significant group of trainees. Fortunately as the course selection process rolled out places were offered and declined by other candidates. As a result many of the trainees were eventually offered places, though not necessarily in their college of first choice. Again, in the end, most trainees succeeded in starting the degree.

## 2005

The trainees recruited in 2005 completed the personal statement as part of their application process. In response to monitoring and feedback processes in the Scheme academic achievements of applicants were short listed by a small expert panel including admissions officers from the universities and several agency representatives. The need for an expert panel had been accentuated by the additional necessity to assess academic requirements using UCAS points introduced in that year. This expert panel worked very well.

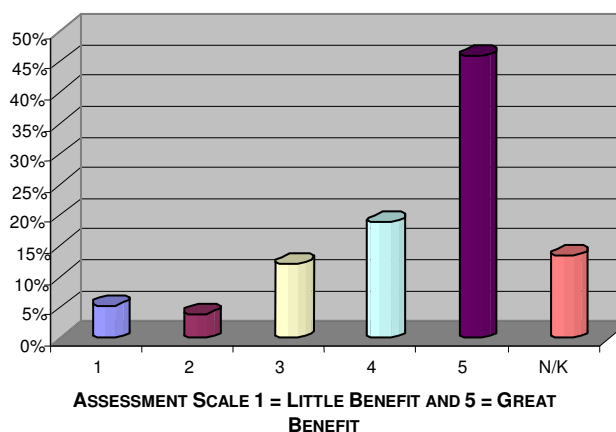
The decision has already been taken this year that trainee recruitment selection process will remain separate from the course application process. Therefore trainees recruited in 2005 will be considered separately as part of course recruitment processes for a place on the degree. This is a reversion to the 2003 recruitment process and continues to carry some risks that trainees will not be offered places.

### 3.4 Feedback from Trainees re Application and Recruitment Process

Each cohort of trainees experienced a slightly different recruitment / selection process but in general trainees in the consultation groups were positive about this part of the scheme. However they expressed significant concerns about the interface between the trainee selection process and course selection process for the BSW. Most understood from the outset that there was a risk that following appointment as a trainee they may still not meet the criteria for a place on a BSW, though others felt that this risk should have been highlighted and made more explicit in the recruitment information.

Nearly three in four trainees (72%) identified the uncertainty about securing a university place as their prime concern and biggest disincentive on applying for the post.

**TRAINEES ASSESSMENT OF BENEFIT OF EMPLOYMENT YEAR**



This was particularly acute for those who were more mature, previously employed in other careers on higher salaries and/or with dependent children. Two people in the focus group from 2004 cohort who had left higher paid jobs indicated that if they had understood the risk more clearly, they would not have become trainees.

Trainees who had completed a separate college interview commented on the very short duration of the interview, and consequently were sceptical about the effectiveness in assessing suitability for social work.

The majority thought that recruitment and selection for the Trainee Scheme was well organised and efficient. However a number did complain about the length of time between interview and hearing from organisations where they were to be placed and their starting date. Several felt that trainees should be afforded more choice of employment. Trainees in the focus groups did comment that the application selection process by the course was unclear with a lack of timely information. This of course is a matter outside the Trainee Scheme and applies equally to all applicants for the degree.

While none of the line managers at the consultation groups were directly involved in the recruitment process for the trainees they were very aware of the selection process for the BSW as the trainees were placed with them during this period. They commented on the stress experienced by trainees about whether they would be successful in securing a place on the BSW and the distress experienced by those who were not offered places in the first round of offers from the colleges.

Feedback from one Course provider confirmed that there have been problems in the interface between both selection processes and much of the course admissions and academic staff time has been consumed by trainees who had not been successful initially in securing a place on the BSW.

## 4. PRE-DEGREE YEAR

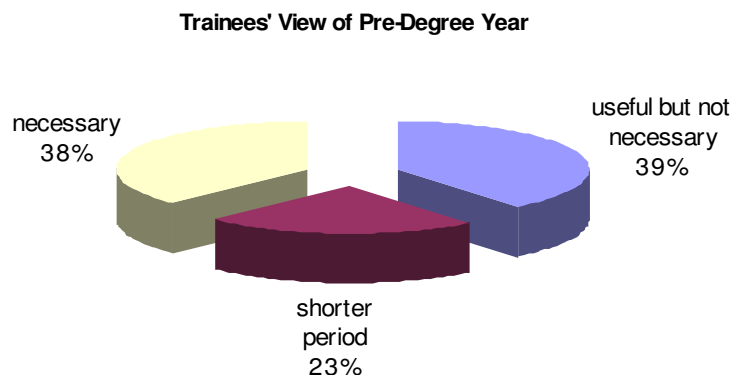
### 4.1 Trainee feedback

The main issues raised by the trainees attending the consultation groups in relation to the pre-degree year were workload, support and distance place of employment and home.

Clearly the vast majority of trainees found their pre-degree year of great benefit in preparing them to go on to professional training. However it was evident from the consultation groups that there was a large variation in both the volume and complexity of work allocated to them. Many trainees reported carrying caseloads similar to a student on a practice learning opportunity, but a small number had difficulty in relating what they were doing to the social work role. They felt that this variation in workload was due in part to a lack of clarity on the part of line managers and their teams about the role of the trainee, as opposed to a student, or a new unqualified member of staff. Sometimes when trainees were placed in teams experiencing staff shortages the trainees felt they were used in place of permanent staff despite the fact that they were supernumerary.

### 4.2 Necessity of Pre-degree year

Trainees were asked to indicate their view of the pre-degree year by choosing one of four statements or by adding their own. Over a third (39%) indicated that though they had enjoyed their pre-degree year in employment they would have preferred to have gone directly on to the BSW. Nearly a quarter (23%) thought the pre-degree period in employment should be of shorter duration and the over a third (38%) felt that the pre-degree year was of great benefit and the degree would be difficult to complete successfully without this experience.



SOURCE: CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE WITH TRAINEES

### 4.3 Support in the pre-degree year

All trainees placed in Trusts had some link to support from their training teams though the structure, frequency and format differed considerably depending on where the trainees were employed. Most employers provided group support and induction training. Trainees placed in the voluntary sector seemed to lack opportunities to meet with other trainees.

The opportunity to learn without formal assessment was appreciated though a minority expressed the need to have more taught input in relation to policies, procedures and legislation prior to having client contact. Support to trainees was greatly appreciated by them and clearly enhanced their learning.

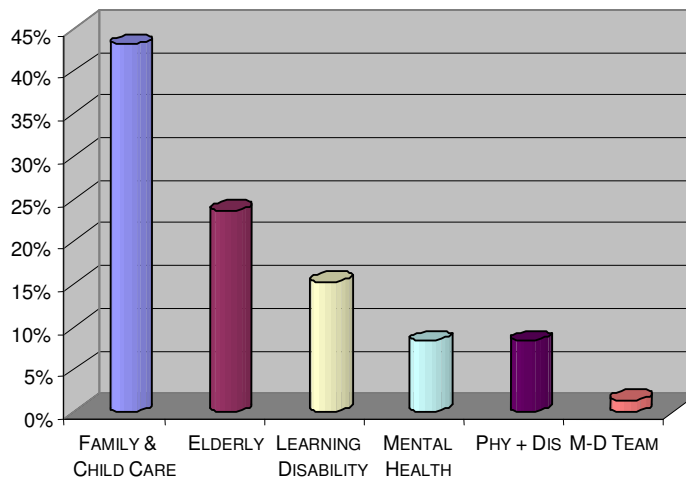
The highest proportion of trainees (43%) was placed in the family and child care programme of care with nearly a quarter being in the elderly programme.

For a small number of trainees their pre degree employment was a considerable distance from where they lived. This proved particularly difficult for those with dependents.

Suggestions from trainees to improve the pre-degree year included.

- **Having a choice of employment.**
- **More opportunities for group learning and support with other trainees.**
- **Time in pre-degree employment to be of a shorter duration or in the absence of this, having split employment over two sites to broaden experience.**

**TRAINEE EMPLOYMENT SETTING**



#### 4.4 Line Managers' Feedback

The vast majority of line managers who attended the consultation groups considered the standard of trainees to be excellent and a very useful resource to the team. Some line managers reported that they used the trainees in a variety of ways within the team. They reported that the volume and complexity of work was allocated according to the manager's assessment of the individual trainee's competence, and this changed over the course of the year. Several of the line managers were now managing their second trainee on the scheme. The success of the first employee encouraged them to seek to employ another trainee the following year.

Over half indicated that they had been allocated a trainee rather than volunteering to take one. It was emphasised that trainees placed on a multi disciplinary team needed to be attached to a professional social worker. Some managers did have difficulty deciding what level of work should be allocated, and in some teams the work allocated was similar to a social work assistant. However most line managers felt they understood the role of the trainee. This marks

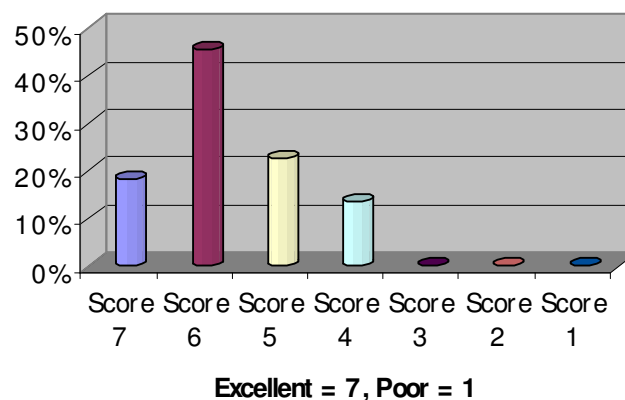
an improvement from 2003 when most line managers admitted confusion about the role of the trainee.

The amount of information received by line managers prior to the trainee commencing was considered by many to be neither timely nor adequate. In addition terms and conditions for trainees were unclear. When trainees left the team to begin their full time course managers were unclear about when they were coming back in holiday times. Some managers would have liked information from the courses on the trainees' progress.

Some line managers reported that trainees required far more in depth supervision than other new workers. This was necessary to equip them with the knowledge they needed to begin work with clients. Some managers suggested it would have been beneficial if trainees had some core knowledge in relation to legislation, policy and procedures before commencing the 'placement.' (This comment suggests there may still not be full understanding that trainees are, in fact, employees and not yet students. Induction is an employer responsibility.)

While line managers valued the contribution of the trainees greatly, some did question the necessity of having such a long period in employment prior to commencing the degree.

### Line Managers' Assessment of Trainees' Contributions



## **5. SOCIAL WORK TRAINEES ON THE BSW PROGRAMMES**

One provider described how the trainees in the undergraduate course contributed to the overall development of the college group through their relevant and recent work experience in a social service organisation. This was not as marked in the Relevant Graduate Route, where more students had previous relevant experience.

One main provider and trainees in the consultation groups did highlight a number of issues causing concern. There was a lack of consistency in relation to the expectation about trainees returning to their sponsoring organisation to work during vacation periods. The interpretation of this requirement seemed to be varying between employers. This was particularly problematic in the Christmas and Easter breaks from college. In reality both programme providers and trainees reported that some employers expected trainees to work in the breaks, others expected them to take annual leave and yet others gave study leave. Colleges considered that variations of this kind within the student group were unhelpful. They concluded that trainees can be disadvantaged compared to other students in relation to the length of time they were afforded to prepare for examinations, assignments etc. This seems to be a particular problem for those on the relevant graduate route where the course is very condensed.

Evidence from practice teachers from training teams comments on how much more prepared the trainees were in comparison with the younger students on the University courses during practice learning opportunities.

The other issue highlighted by providers was in relation to use of flexible learning days. One provider again was concerned that trainees were not getting the experiences they required or wanted, as they had to take these days in the summer months within their employing organisations.

Finally, some employers wished their trainees to return to them for their final Practice Learning Opportunity. This gave rise to two issues for providers. Firstly it appears to students that trainees returning to their organisations may be advantaged compared to the rest of the student group in the allocation of placements. Secondly one provider highlighted that this practice carried an inherent danger of a conflict of interests in the assessment process, if the student and the practice teacher were employed by the same Trust. Finally, it could of course restrict the range of experience essential for all students linked to the degree curriculum as prescribed in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work.

## 6. RELATED SCHEMES

### 6.1 THE SOCIAL WORK FAST TRACK GRADUATE RECRUITMENT SCHEME

The “Social Work Fast Track Graduate Recruitment Scheme” is the Scottish nearest equivalent to the Northern Ireland Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme. The Scottish Trainee scheme also commenced in 2003. It is a partnership between the Scottish Executive and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The nine universities that teach qualifying social work in Scotland and eighteen Local Authorities work in partnership. There are 150 places currently on the scheme. Voluntary organisations joined for the first time in 2005. Full details of the Scottish scheme are available on [www.sieswe.org.uk/fasttrack](http://www.sieswe.org.uk/fasttrack).

### 6.2 Comparison of the two schemes

The stated aim of the Scottish scheme is to address the training needs of local authorities in meeting the qualification requirements for registration of staff and the national shortage of qualified social workers. Unlike Northern Ireland there is no stated intention to recruit mature candidates, but by virtue of the fact it is a graduate programme all trainees are over the age of 21 years. While the majority of trainees in Northern Ireland have a primary degree the Scottish scheme is confined exclusively to graduates or those with degree equivalent qualifications. In contrast to the NI scheme the Scottish scheme has no requirement for a minimum amount of relevant experience. However at short listing individual employers may introduce this as an additional criterion if they have a large number of applicants. Initially in Scotland trainees were recruited in a national assessment centre. This has now been modified and while recruitment is on a regional basis, short listing and interview is at individual local authority level.

| TRAINEE SCHEME COMPARISON                                       | SCOTLAND  | N. IRELAND |
|---|-----------|------------|
| ADVERT IN NEWSPAPERS  | ●         | ●          |
| REGISTER INTEREST ONLINE  | ●         |            |
| INFORMATION DAYS - COLLEGES AND LA EMPLOYERS                    | ●         |            |
| APPLICATIONS RECEIVED   | ●         | ●          |
| SHORTLISTING BY EMPLOYERS - DIRECT                              | ●         |            |
| REGIONAL SHORTLISTING - REGIONAL PANEL OF BOARDS                |           | ●          |
| INTERVIEW OF TRAINEES - EMPLOYERS & UNIVERSITY                  | ●         |            |
| INTERVIEW OF TRAINEES - EMPLOYERS                               |           | ●          |
| TRAINEE OFFERS MADE   | ●         | ●          |
| CONFIRMATION OF COLLEGE PLACE                                   | ●         |            |
| PRE-COURSE PLACEMENT COMMENCES - UP TO 10 WEEKS                 | ●         |            |
| PRE-COURSE PLACEMENT COMMENCES - UP TO 52 WEEKS                 |           | ●          |
| CONFIRMATION OF COLLEGE PLACE - 30 WEEKS                        |           | ●          |
| COMMENCE SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATION                              | ●         | ●          |
| RETURN TO EMPLOYER DURING VACATIONS                             |           | ●          |
| GRADUATION  | ●         | ●          |
| MANDATORY RETURN TO EMPLOYER FOR 2 YEARS                        | ●         |            |
| MANDATORY WORK IN N. IRELAND FOR 2 YEARS                        |           | ●          |
| TIME LAPSE BETWEEN PLACING OF ADVERT AND COMMENCEMENT OF COURSE | 35 WEEKS  | 87 WEEKS   |
| MINIMUM TIME LAPSE BETWEEN ADVERT AND QUALIFICATION             | 139 WEEKS | 191 WEEKS  |

In Scotland it is recommended that trainees spend a period of 2-3 months in placement in their sponsoring local authority prior to commencing their social work qualification. In reality many spend considerably less time. In contrast trainees in Northern Ireland are recruited over a year in advance of the BSW and spend on average of 9 – 12 months on placement in their sponsoring organisation.

The first cohort of trainees in Scotland was targeted at Children's Services. However this then opened to other areas of statutory social work and a proportion (approximately 20%) of existing graduates employees. Of late Scotland has attempted to include the voluntary sector, residential child care and positive action to support black and minority ethnic trainees in the scheme.

Scotland has introduced an additional stage in their recruitment process, where potential applicants register their interest on line. This is followed up by information sessions where individual local authorities and their partner universities meet prospective applicants and give information on the scheme in their authority.

Following this prospective trainees submit a formal application and indicate first and second choice of employer. This information giving process has managed to filter out half of the non eligible prospective applications prior to the short listing phase. In 2005 this saw a drop from 1,700 to 860 in formal applications and consequently a much better use of resources.

The Scottish scheme is funded differently than the Northern Ireland one. The Scottish executive funds each trainee by £10,000. Only £2,000 goes to the employer for the trainee's salary and £7,308 goes to the university.

Trainees in Scotland are bound by contract with their employer to return to work for them for at least 2 years following graduation.

In Northern Ireland trainees must work in the region for at least two years but are not bound by contract to any one organisation.

The most significant difference between the schemes is the interface between the Trainee recruitment selection process and the Universities application selection process. (Please see diagram above for elaboration).

In Scotland each employer can set their own terms and conditions including salary, holidays, travel etc. It is recommended that trainees are paid between 12k and 14k per annum. In reality most are paid on the social work assistant scale which is 16K-17K. Some local authorities pay above this. In Northern Ireland trainees are all paid on the same scale and have the same terms and conditions.

The difficult issue in Northern Ireland of trainees taking up appointment without the guarantee of a place on qualifying training does not arise in Scotland as trainees have their places confirmed prior to taking up their posts. This is possible due to two factors

Firstly trainees spend a considerably shorter length of time in pre-degree placement.

Secondly the fact that many qualifying programmes in Scotland are at post graduate level or distance learning means that they do not have to process applications through UCAS and adhere to their timescales.

Trainees in Scotland do not return to their employers during vacation times from universities either at Christmas Easter or summer. The rationale is that most students are on fast track programmes and need the time to complete the programmes successfully.

### **6.3 Diploma in Social Work by Distance Learning**

The review will consider another scheme internal to one Trust in the EHSSB. It was initiated to address specific issues in that Trust. Six workers from that Trust are currently completing the final stages of a Diploma in Social Work by distance learning with the University of Lincoln in England. It is the Diploma in Social Work, Open Learning (Flexi-DipSW) part-time, provided by Hull School of Health and Social Care.

The scheme demonstrates the possibility of distance learning programmes offering a more flexible route to social work education although considerable adaptation to any existing DipSW programme would be needed to reflect the longer learning period and raised academic level of the degree in social work.

Six workers commenced the DipSW programme in early January 2005. These workers had completed an NVQ level IV in social care within the Trust. The original intention in completing this NVQ was to have their prior experiential learning accredited to enable them to have an accelerated entry into the DipSW (Employment Based Programme) at year II in a college of further education in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately they were not able to proceed on to the EBP as the final intake of the First Year had passed and agreement could not be reached for the candidates to proceed on to the second year. As the DipSW was replaced by the degree in social work and universities did not recognise NVQ level IV as an entry level qualification, it was considered by the employer that this scheme represented a way to social work qualifications for this particular group of staff.

Therefore the Trust agreed to support these workers to complete the Diploma in Social Work on a distance learning programme based at the University of Lincoln at Hull.

The programme is delivered by the University of Lincoln in partnership with the NSPCC and after negotiations with the Trust the two partners agreed to include the staff from the Trust.

In the first year most taught sessions were at the NSPCC National Training Centre in Leicester. Students travelled there eleven times, staying for one day each time. Each student had a tutor assigned from the university in addition to a mentor from the Trust training team. In second year the students completed an 80 day placement in their own Trust.

All six are reported to have progressed well and are due to be awarded their diplomas in July 2006. The costs were as follows (not including staff replacement costs) £16,750 for first year and £10,280 for second year. The advantage for students has been that they have retained their salary and continued to work in their substantive post throughout the programme with the exception of the 80 day placement. The programme minimises the time away from work and family. No sponsored candidates has dropped out of this distance learning programme.

However, the students have completed a course no longer deemed sufficient preparation for social work and the employer will need to take account of this, ensuring appropriate continuing development opportunities.

It has to be recognised that there were implications for regional practice learning provision which, of necessity, has to be a tightly managed system if it is to deliver practice learning for the full quota of students studying social work in Northern Ireland.

## 6.4 Access Course in the EHSSB

Following the replacement of the Diploma in Social Work (EBP) by the Bachelor in Social Work in 2004, academic entry requirements rose. Increased demand may have been a result of the DHSS Discretionary Incentive Scheme which was introduced to remedy the drop in applications to social work courses in previous years and seems to be succeeding in its own. A group of experienced social care workers who previously may have been accepted on to the Diploma in Social Work, found that they did not meet the academic criteria to apply for the BSW and or for the Trainee Scheme. Some social care workers had completed National Vocational Qualifications in social care but these were not acceptable for entry to degree level courses in Universities in Northern Ireland.

In 2004 some experienced social care workers, were supported by EHSSB to attend a Castlereagh College of Further Education access to higher education course.

Access courses are a route to degree study for people without the usual entry qualifications like A levels. "Access to Higher Education courses" are specifically designed to meet the needs of adult students and are recognised by all universities as the academic entry standard to a degree programme. This course ran from May 04 until June 05. The EHSSB paid the tuition fees in respect of each candidate and also paid staff replacement costs to the Trust for the candidates weekly day release to Castlereagh College.

The access programme was open to employees in the four Trusts in the EHSSB who had been employed in a designated post for a year or more. Designated posts were residential worker (child care)/Senior Day Care Worker, Senior Care Assistant/ Social Work Assistant, Residential Workers, and Care Assistants. In addition candidates had to possess 5 GCSEs (at grade A-C) or NVQ level III. Places were allocated following interviews in the Trust which included personnel from Castlereagh College. Applicants also required line manager endorsement.

The candidate was released one day per week over a 12 week period to complete the taught element of the course. They also were required to attend one evening or a Saturday morning in their own time. Additional taught days or study time was out of the candidates own time. All support for the candidates was supplied by Castlereagh College and Trust training teams were not expected to provide any student support. The course also gave equivalences for Maths at GCSE grade C and English GCSE grade C which are requirements for access to the Degree in Social Work.

This access course gave an opportunity to some employees who were committed to becoming professionally qualified, to achieve the required standard for entry to the degree in social work.

Seventeen candidates successfully completed the access course and fourteen achieved a Certificate in Foundation Studies accredited by Queens University Belfast, at the required standard (70%+) for entry to the degree. Twelve got places on the undergraduate programme in Queens University and two on the BSW based in Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education and accredited through the University of Ulster. A special arrangement was negotiated whereby, as students and for the duration of the course, each would be paid a small salary, but would also be able to access the Department's Incentive Scheme and Education and Library Board assessed student support, including loans. The arrangement negotiated ensured parity with the trainee scheme. These access students commenced the degree in social work in September 2005.

## 6.5 Traineeships In The Rest Of UK

Scotland is the only other country outside of Northern Ireland to run a regional scheme. However the Local Authorities in England are allocated money through the Social Services National Training Strategy Grant annually to develop the social care staff and address the need for more qualified social workers in the workforce. This money is allocated through the General Social Care Council and topped up from the baseline budget in local authorities. The amount granted varies from local authority to local authority. Many have small trainee schemes but the terms and conditions vary greatly.

A significant number of local authorities have schemes, or are in the process of planning schemes to support people to become professionally qualified social workers and to encourage them to work for their local authority. The initiatives vary across the UK but included the following.

- **Traineeships, whereby a student works for a set period for the local authority, moves onto a full time degree programme (undergraduate or post graduate), then returns to work for an agreed period as a qualified social worker. Some of these schemes are targeted specifically at groups underrepresented in a workforce (e.g. Newham has a trainee scheme for Asian workers).**
- **Sponsorships/Golden hellos. Some employers recruit students, while they are still on their course, either by subsidising the final stages of their training, or by paying them a sum upon graduation, or a combination of both.**
- **Secondment. A few local authorities appear to offer the traditional form of support in which an employee is seconded on to a full-time course, on full salary with fees paid. The graduate is expected to return to work for the employer for an agreed period. In some schemes the employee is paid a reduced salary for the duration of their course.**
- **Additional work has been initiated by the unions ie UNISON to promote development for employees. There have been programmes in Suffolk, Essex, and the South London consortium and some development work with other authorities (Kent and Brighton and Hove), but there appear to be no other active programmes at the current time. This may be due to the fact that social care departments no longer have sufficiently large training sections. The Open University degree programme is currently active, but is only open to employees in agencies with whom it is in partnership.**

While the idea of traineeships was to attract new people into the workforce some authorities only offer traineeships to employees while others advertise the posts openly. For example in Gloucestershire this funding is used for the development of existing staff. Workers from residential, day care and support services with two years experience in the authority are eligible to apply for a traineeship. Applicants for the traineeships must have been accepted on to a qualifying programme in social work prior to application. Two to four traineeships a year are offered. A salary of £15,000 is paid, and during vacation trainees return to work in the authority. Other local authorities advertise openly to attract new people into the local authority.

Some other local authorities expect trainees to pay their own college fees from their salary. Most trainees complete the under graduate course in the nearest local university but some complete part time, post graduate, or distance learning courses. Gloucestershire is currently reviewing their scheme and indications are that they will explore a work based model with the local provider which will suit the needs of their workers better and can be adapted for the needs of other students as well. The academic requirements for the BSW in Gloucestershire are among the lowest in the country, some 80 UCAS points less than universities in Northern

Ireland. NVQ level III is accepted if accompanied by other qualifications. In contrast to the current requirement in Northern Ireland of academic achievement of three Bs at A level, only two A levels at D seem to be acceptable in Gloucestershire.

Suffolk County Council has four main routes to social work qualification. Three of the schemes are exclusively for those already employed by Suffolk County Council. Recruitment for all three schemes is a single process and applicants are advised which option would meet their needs. Between 30 and 39 students graduate each year.

The degree in social work is provided by a partnership between Ruskin College, Suffolk County Council and UNISON. This is an employment based programme initially developed as a 3 year DipSW course, but now offering the social work degree in 3½ - 4 years. It does not accept graduates and is specifically aimed at employees who could not have undertaken social work training by any other route.

The Open University, in partnership with employers offers a distance learning degree programme for employees. The course takes a minimum of 3 years but usually takes 3½ years. It is open to those who are competent to undertake a course with less formal support including graduates.

Suffolk College offer a work-based course, which requires students to attend college 2 days per week. It is open to both graduates and non-graduates and is suitable for those who are happy to travel to the college and those who prefer a more traditional approach to learning.

The University of East Anglia offers a MA in Social Work. It differs from the other programmes in that it is a graduate trainee scheme, with those selected having little or no prior connection with Suffolk Social Care Services. Originally set up in 2001, the scheme is open to graduates who are considering a career in social work but who require more practice experience before embarking on the MA in Social Work at UEA. Potential students are recruited to work in child care in Suffolk, in posts such as family support practitioner, on one year contracts. Subject to a satisfactory work reference the student then enters the 2 year MA programme. They are no longer a Suffolk employee but access a General Social Care Council Incentive Scheme grant. They are also paid a small retainer by Suffolk to encourage the student to return to paid employment in Children's services on completion of their studies.

There has also been an extension to this scheme which enables graduates already employed in social care in Suffolk County Council to be paid a half salary while completing the MA in Social Work programme in UEA. (Note: as the threshold for entry to the profession is set at primary honours degree level, M level is not necessary to practise social work or to be registered as a social worker.)

## 6.6 NSPCC Scheme

The NSPCC in Northern Ireland as part of a national initiative have advertised the post of Trainee Children's Services Practitioner. This scheme is associated with the Diploma in Social Work part time distance learning course referred to earlier in this report. During the first fourteen months of employment they will complete their NVQ level IV in care. The NSPCC has its own NVQ Centre which supports candidates. Achieving the NVQ level IV means that trainees can directly enter the second year of the degree programme. Therefore on successful completion of the NVQ level IV they will commence second year of their social work degree at the University of Lincoln in England in September 2007. They then complete the BA (Hons) Social Work, Distance Learning Programme. The course consists of two days per month of direct training, which takes place in Leicester. Trainees are paid on points 22-25 on the NJC

scale. On graduation trainees must remain with the NSPCC for a period of two years or return the cost of their training.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Key Findings

The Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme has proven to be very successful in attracting more mature recruits into the social work profession. The majority of trainees (87%) are over the age of 25 years while only 49% of ordinary entrants to the BSW in one main provider in 2004 were over the age of 24 years.

- In addition the trainee scheme has been twice as successful in attracting men into social work as the degree alone. 23% of trainees are men compared to 10% of entrants to the degree in 2004.
- The standard of trainees recruited under this scheme has been very high. Line managers of trainees in their pre-degree year rate them very highly and nearly all (96%) would be pleased to employ them as permanent members of their team.
- This is supported by informal feedback from long arm practice teachers in training teams who confirm that trainees are substantially more competent while on practice learning opportunities.
- Trainees have reached high academic standards with more than 8 out of 10 (84%) being honours graduates. The proportion has increased since the beginning of the scheme in 2003
- The Trainee Scheme has had an extremely low drop out rate to date, with less than 3 out of 100 of trainees who took up post subsequently dropping out. This is a very high success rate to date and compares most favourably with other schemes.
- The Trainee Scheme has offered opportunities to those already employed in social care to develop their careers. Over a half of trainees (62%) had been employed in social care posts prior to becoming a trainee and 40% were employed in community Trusts.
- There is evidence that the Trainee Scheme has offered good opportunities to some people to change careers, bringing alternatively experienced people into the profession. 17% of trainees had changed careers from one sector to another, 12% were previously employed in education and 5% in health.
- As the Trainee Scheme has a minimum requirement for experience it is reasonable to assume that trainees have longer experience in social care or a related field than many of those entering the degree directly.
- The majority of trainees do not take a salary decrease to become trainees. A third of trainees took a drop in salary to take up their posts. It is difficult to ascertain how many people are unable to apply for the trainee scheme as they cannot afford to take a salary drop. This is most likely to affect those who wish to change profession eg nurses and teachers etc, where they will suffer a greater loss in earnings.
- The major incentive for people to become trainees is to get a salary while completing their BSW. The majority of trainees (63%) of trainees could not have entered the social work profession without the support of the Trainee Scheme. A further 38% would have considered availing of the DHSSPSNI Social Work Degree Incentive Scheme to become professionally qualified had they been unsuccessful in gaining a place on the trainee scheme.
- Approximately 10% of trainees had already applied and been successful in getting a place on the BSW but had declined for a variety of reasons, including an inability to fund the course.
- Over a third of (38%) of trainees found the pre-degree year beneficial but not essential and would have preferred to go straight on to the degree. A similar number of trainees (39%) felt that commencing the degree would have been very

difficult without having the pre-degree year in employment, and a nearly a quarter (23%) highly valued the pre-degree time in employment but felt that a shorter duration would have been sufficient.

- There was quite a variation in the volume and complexity of work allocated to trainees, and for a very small number they had difficulty in seeing the relevance to social work.
- The prime concern of nearly 3 out of 4 trainees (72%) on taking up post was the uncertainty of getting a place on a BSW course in Northern Ireland. This was a very serious and live issue for trainees particularly those who were more mature, and had given up permanent jobs. It is impossible to know from this research how many potential applicants were diverted due to this issue.
- Support for trainees during their pre-degree year was highly valued and most would request more group support and preparation for client contact.

## 7.2 Recommendations

These recommendations are informed by the research underpinning this report and also investigation and dialogue with the other schemes in UK.

In summary the Regional Degree Trainee Scheme has been very successful in achieving its aim of recruiting more mature recruits into social work. It has attracted a high standard of older and experienced trainees who have met high academic standards, and also has attracted a higher proportion of men. It has clearly promoted diversity within the professional workforce.

- The Trainee Scheme should continue to build on the past success, but consideration should be given to the following to maximise effectiveness and outcomes.
- The Trainee Scheme has a unique contribution to make by opening access for more mature recruits from a range of social and employment backgrounds. It is the only scheme in Northern Ireland to enable access for mature new people to move to social work.
- Following three intakes of the Trainee Scheme and while awaiting the first cohort of graduates it may be timely to review the Scheme in the context of wider workforce planning and in the context of recruitment patterns to the social work degree over the last three years (2004, 2005 and 2006).

### THE SCHEME

- The Trainee Scheme should continue to be an integral part of the wider strategy to recruit and retain social workers.
- It may be an opportune time to review and re-target the Trainee Scheme. Targeting of the scheme as they do in Scotland and Suffolk could contribute towards meeting some of the recruitment issues facing social care organisations by offering traineeships in particular areas of work where recruitment and retention are problematic eg Children's Services. On graduation trainees could return to this particular area of work in their sponsoring organisation for two years.
- There needs to be a greater diversity of social work programmes on offer for trainees and other mature people to attend. Currently in Northern Ireland there are only full time courses available for the BSW. Clearly this does not meet the needs of all students including trainees particularly those who are mature with family responsibilities or who cannot afford to give up their full time job completely. Nor does it fulfil the policy aim of the reform of social work education to have flexible routes available.

## PRE-DEGREE YEAR

- Given that applicants for the Trainee Scheme are required to have a minimum of 3 years relevant social care experience and there is no such requirement for applicants for the degree in social work to have the same, the purpose of the pre-degree year in employment should be reviewed. The trainees' feedback in relation to this should be taken into account.
- The requirement to complete a pre-degree year in employment should be based on the need to bring a trainee to the level required for acceptance on to a degree programme. Investment in the pre-degree year needs to be justified and may not be necessary in every case.
- Consideration should be given to establishing the optimum amount of time for trainees to complete in employment in the pre-degree year prior to commencing the degree. Cognisance of the schemes in other parts of the UK should inform this. In no other scheme are those currently employed in social care required to complete a pre-degree period in employment, although it has to be recognised that experience in social care is not the same as experience in social work.
- Despite significant obstacles to being able to confirm trainees have a place on the BSW prior to them giving up their permanent post, efforts should continue to arrange recruitment and selection to facilitate this in as many cases as possible.
- Trainees completing a pre-degree period in employment need support including an opportunity to meet with other trainees and access to training to meet their needs.

## SOCIAL WORK QUALIFICATION

- The change to degree level education for social work was deemed essential to ensure social workers are equipped for the job. As a consequence of policies to increase the number of applications to Northern Ireland courses, the demand for places has risen with a consequent rise in the calibre of students accepted. The change has implications for anyone who wishes to become a social worker, including existing social care staff.
- Unlike many of their counterparts in the rest of the UK, the universities in Northern Ireland do not accept National Vocational Qualifications as an entry level qualification for the BSW. A considerable amount has been invested to date by DHSSPSNI in supporting social care workers to achieve these work based qualifications. A pass degree is not accepted by either university in Northern Ireland as an entry level qualification for the BSW. Neither university in Northern Ireland accepts any equivalence for mathematics grade C at GCSE other than as part of an access course and neither offers a separate maths test as other universities in England do.
- The Trainee Scheme has been a very successful scheme for graduates. It is extremely good to be attracting graduates into social work. It may also be appropriate to offer development opportunities to those experienced and committed to entering a career in social work and already in social care employment in Trusts and voluntary sector organisations.
- Evidence from employment based schemes nationwide has indicated that retention rates among this group of staff are high. This may in part be due to the fact that they tend to be older and often less mobile due to family commitments. Also it is important to promote a culture of continuous development for workers, although this does not necessarily have to involve a move from a career in social care to a career in social work.
- The Access Scheme in the EHSSB reviewed above has proved that selected employees can bridge this gap if supported by their employers to do so. Relevant courses which offer the appropriate academic credits for entry to degree level education should be investigated and if possible support offered to committed suitable workers to complete.

- Local authorities like Suffolk have a number of qualifying courses for employees and trainees and others to achieve social work qualification. In Northern Ireland there needs to be greater flexibility in the range of courses available from distance learning to part time courses to maximise outcomes and facilitate more people to complete. Also providers that accept NVQ as an entry level qualification and/or have robust APEL arrangements like the University of Lincoln should be considered.
  
- There are some minor issues in the current scheme which need clarification for the employers and trainees and colleges in particular in relation to work during vacation periods, study leave, flexible learning days, and the potential for a guarantee of employment on graduation.
  
- The Trainee Scheme should continue to be regularly monitored against specific measurable aims to ensure that it continues to develop to meet the need for a competent flexible workforce of social workers across programmes of care.