An Audit of Baseline Resources for Social Work Research:
Finances
Staff
Teaching

June 2008
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Part 2: An audit of research capacity of Social Work educators

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Aim
The second part of the project involved an audit of research capacity of UK Social Work Educators. Both the ESRC demographic survey (Mills et al, 2005) and the JUC SWEC Research Strategy (see Orme & Powell, 2007) raised issues about the capacity and capability of academic researchers. The aim of this strand of the study is therefore to scope the research capacity of social work academics.

Objectives (from the proposal)
The objectives of this audit were to investigate:

i. the research skills and qualifications of social work academics;
ii. the extent and balance of activity between research and pedagogical activities;
iii. the support available to social work academics to undertake research; and
iv. the nature of relationships between academics' characteristics and those of their institutions' in respect of research.

Methods
The objectives were met by undertaking a survey of a sample of social work academics in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) covering areas of: demographics; qualifications; research experiences; research training and research activity over the past two years.
The survey was also designed to explore social work academics' access to, and take up of, training and research networks.
Confidential telephone interviews provide in depth information on motivations, workloads, career development as well as personal and professional experiences that may impact on the views and perception of barriers and opportunities to involvement in research.
The sampling frame will reflect demographics and HEI variables, as well as UK representation, and accounts will be explored in relation to HEI characteristics in terms of type/size and student composition as well as relationships with other research communities. Interviews will be analysed thematically.
The analysis (utilising SPSS) will explore any relationships between staff characteristics (demographics, experience, role etc) and different perceptions/plans and expectations and will link to HEI factors.

SUMMARY

1. A database of social work academics working in the 104 HEIs offering social work qualifying courses was created. All identified academics were sent a short questionnaire asking about their recent experiences of undertaking research. A sub-sample of respondents was selected to take part in a telephone interview.

2. Two hundred and forty one (241) replies were received from the 754 people identified as being eligible for the study, a survey response rate of 32 per cent.

3. The mean age of respondents was 52 years for men and 48 years for women. The mean age for entering the workforce was 37 years. This confirms the analysis in the ESRC demographic review (Mills et al, 2005).

4. The increase in the proportion of respondents with PhDs (56%) compared with earlier research (Lyons, 2000) is a positive finding. However less than 33% of those with a PhD were under 50 years of age.

5. Another positive finding is the high proportion of respondents (82 per cent [n=198]) reporting that they had undertaken research in the past two years. Although this varied considerably. Over 20% reported that they spent less than 10% of their time on research while less than 10% of respondents reported spending over 50% of their time on research. Spending a higher proportion of working time on research was associated with working in pre-1992 universities.

6. Sixty per cent (n=145) of respondents reported that they supervised research students. Two thirds of these were supervising students on masters’ programmes. However, almost as many (64 per cent, n=92) were supervising PhD students (including 13 per cent supervising professional doctorate students).
7. Thirty nine per cent (n=93) of survey respondents reported receiving research training in the past two years, although over half (57 per cent, n=137) had delivered such training.

8. Views of support for research were mixed, although a range of informal and formal support mechanisms were described, including research leave and writing groups.

9. Four clear themes were identified in terms of facilitating greater involvement with research:
   - Time and relief from teaching responsibilities
   - Better infrastructure for social work research
   - Increased funding, including more small grants from funders for pump priming
   - Access to research training

10. There was strong evidence that the division between research and teaching continues to be problematic. The study suggests that access to training, support mechanisms and resources continues to limit social work research capacity.

11. The study showed the enthusiasm of respondents for research, which suggests the importance of increasing the emphasis on enhancing skills as part of the process of developing social work capacity.
Background
Recent years have seen greater recognition of the need to build capacity in social work research and the adoption of various initiatives aimed at achieving this (Shaw et al., 2004), such as the project aiming to improve methodological expertise in social work funded through the Researcher Development Initiative (RDI) (Economic and Social Research Council, Undated). However, commentators have also noted that progress has been hampered by the existence of a number of barriers. These include:

- A debate about whether social work should be recognised as a distinct discipline (Shaw et al., 2004)
- The need for social work academics to balance research activity with responsibilities for professional education and training (Fisher & Marsh, 2003; Lyons, 2000; Orme & Powell, 2007 advance access)
- The comparatively small size of the social work academic workforce, which has been estimated to consist of fewer than 600 permanent staff (Mills et al., 2006)
- The age profile of the workforce, which suggests that there may not be enough younger staff to replace those nearing retirement. This is partly explained by the expectation that they will have already worked as a practitioner (Mills et al., 2006).

In addition, it is thought that proportionally fewer social work academics hold doctorates than their counterparts in other disciplines (Kornbeck, 2007; Lyons, 2000).

In terms of the research that they undertake, there is some evidence on the levels of social work research activity carried out in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) as measured by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) (Fisher & Marsh, 2003) but little is known about, how much, if any, is undertaken outside this framework.

Taken as a whole, this picture highlights the need for further work looking at individuals’ experiences of undertaking research and the resources and support that they receive in order to do it.
Aims
This study aimed to provide baseline information on research capacity among social work academics that would build on the picture presented in the Demographic Review of Social Sciences (Mills et al., 2006). Its objectives were to provide information on the:

- profile of social work academics' research skills and qualifications;
- extent and balance of activity between research and pedagogical activities;
- support available to them; and
- the nature of the relationships between academics' characteristics and those of their institutions' in respect of research.

Methods
The project consisted of three stages of which the first comprised establishing a database of staff identified as involved in teaching or researching social work in 104 HEIs offering social work qualifying programmes in the UK. They were sent a short questionnaire that could be returned by post or by email asking about their recent experiences of undertaking research. Respondents were also asked if they would be prepared to talk about their experiences in more detail and a sub-sample of those agreeing were selected to take part in a telephone interview. The chief advantage of using telephone rather than face to face interviews was increased speed in terms of data collection and the need to include participants from across the whole UK (Carr & Worth, 2001). Fieldwork took place between March-May 2008.

Sampling frame
There is no central database of social work academics. Furthermore, few HEIs have dedicated social work departments. In some HEIs, social work academics work alongside colleagues in sociology and social policy; in others, they are positioned in faculties of health and community studies, alongside nursing and other forms of professional education.

The Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) provided the research team with a membership list. A list of contacts for social work programmes was compiled using publicly available information on the websites of the four Care
Councils in the UK. In addition to being sent a questionnaire for completion themselves, members of these lists were also asked to provide details of other staff teaching or researching social work in their department. Where these lists were unavailable, searches were made of departmental websites. The resulting database consisted of 794 people, of whom 40 were not eligible for the study either because they had retired, were on study leave or long term sickness, or had been mistakenly included (for example, some programmes have administrators as the named contact on the Care Council websites). It is important to acknowledge that this method of recruiting respondents is likely to underestimate the numbers of part-time teaching staff employed on sessional contracts who often work from home and whose role is extremely unlikely to include any opportunities to undertake research.

Respondents selected for a follow up interview were selected on the basis of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002), in which there is a deliberate intention to capture as many phenomena that differ from each other as possible. Thus, in addition to including staff from all four UK countries, we aimed to achieve variation in terms of:

- demographic differences in age, gender and ethnicity;
- the length of time they had worked in the academic sector;
- their seniority within the organisation;
- whether they were experienced or less experienced in undertaking research; and
- the type of HEI in which they worked.

The small scale nature of this project meant that it was not feasible to record and transcribe interviews so detailed notes were taken during the interview and written up as soon as possible afterwards.
Results

Response rates

Two hundred and forty one replies were received from the 754 people identified as being eligible for the study. This represents a response rate of 32 per cent, and exceeds the planned target of 200 replies. A FREEPOST envelope was included with the questionnaire (Edwards et al., 2007) and email reminders were sent to non-responders after three weeks. However, the scale of this project meant that it was not possible to increase response rates by, for example, telephoning those who had not replied. It is also important to acknowledge that data collection took place over the Easter period when people may have been on holiday and during the beginning of the examination marking period so this may have affected the response rates.

Over half (n=126) of all survey respondents gave their consent to be contacted for an interview. This was considerably greater than the intended target of 30 and suggests that respondents saw the topic as being both relevant and timely.

Comparisons between achieved and actual sample

Overall, based on the information that we were able to collect, the characteristics of those completing questionnaires were broadly similar to non-responders. Fifty one per cent of those responding (n=123) worked in pre-1992 universities compared with 44 per cent (n=105) working in post-1992 universities and five per cent (n=12) working in colleges of higher and further education. This represented a slightly higher proportion of respondents from pre-1992 universities than we would have expected from the sampling frame in which they comprised only 44 per cent (n=333). It may be that these respondents were more likely to see the questionnaire as applying to them. Seventy six per cent (n=576) of people included in the sampling frame were based in England, 18 per cent (n=134) in Scotland, four per cent (n=32) in Wales and two per cent in Northern Ireland (n=12). In terms of responses, the proportion of responses from England (77 per cent, n=186) was almost identical to that found in the sampling frame but, at 14 per cent (n=34), there were slightly fewer responses from Scotland and slightly more

1 Another eight replies arrived after the deadline for submitting this report so they could not be included.
from Wales (six per cent, n=15) and Northern Ireland (three per cent, n=6). A similar survey was taking place in Scotland at the time of this project and it may be that this affected the response rate. There was no difference in the proportion of men and women taking part in the survey.

Demographics

Mills and colleagues (2006) commented that, at 60 per cent, social work contains the highest proportion of women among the social sciences. Sixty per cent (n=142) of respondents to this survey were women, an identical proportion. Women respondents tended to be younger than men. At 48, their mean age was a full four years younger than that of men (F=8.1, p=0.005). Twelve per cent (n=26) of respondents were aged 60 or over. Men were significantly more likely to be in this age group (φ=0.185, p=0.006).

Eighty one per cent (n=189) of the sample defined themselves as White British. The next largest category (six per cent, n=15) was those describing themselves as ‘White Other’. Just seven respondents defined themselves as coming from an Asian background. Another seven defined themselves as Black Caribbean or Black African and six stated that they were White Irish. Four people defined themselves as being of mixed heritage.

These results highlight two important ways in which the demographic profile of social work academics appears to differ from that found within the profession as a whole. Within the social work workforce (Local Authority Workforce Intelligence Group, 2006; Smyth, 1996), we would expect to see over 10 per cent of staff from a Black or ethnic minority group (excluding White Irish or White Other people) and only 20 per cent of men. Thus, these results suggest that, compared with the social work profession overall, men appear to be over represented among social work academics and people from Black and minority ethnic groups are under represented.

Academic and professional qualifications

Eighty five per cent (n=203) of respondents had a professional social work qualification and, of these, 67 per cent (n=133) were registered as a social worker with one of the four UK Care Councils. The mean age at which they had entered the academic sector was 37 and this did not differ significantly between men and
women, confirming earlier research (Mills et al., 2006) that most social work academics acquire professional experience before moving into higher education. Forty five per cent (n=106) reported that they had a PhD. Slightly more men than women reported having a PhD but this was not statistically significant. This is substantially higher than the proportion reported earlier by Lyons (2000), when only around a fifth of those responding to her survey in the late 1990s held a PhD. PhD holders tended to be older. Less than a third (n=33) of those under the age of 50 had PhDs compared with just over half (n=66) of those aged 50 and over ($\varphi=0.168$, $p=0.013$). It was clear from the survey responses and interviews that some respondents were studying for a PhD. Taken together, these findings suggest that the majority of social work academics acquire a PhD at a later stage than their counterparts in other social science disciplines. This is certainly consistent with other work (Scourfield & Smalley, 2008 Unpublished) which concluded that the majority of social work doctoral students were aged 40 and over and were studying part time, in contrast to the general postgraduate population within the UK. Although the questionnaire did not ask respondents whether they had achieved a PhD by dissertation or by publication, it appeared that the former was the preferred option:

*Academia was always something that interested me. Also, [becoming an academic] would allow for me to do my PhD alongside teaching within the sector. That means I develop, and can still keep tapped in to social work issues, which was the area I worked in for sixteen years previously.*

Although the number of professional doctorates in social work is growing but, as a comparatively recent development, it was not surprising that only two respondent held professional doctorates. One interviewee who, somewhat atypically, had studied for a PhD at a younger age commented:

*[HEI] had advertised a…fellowship that involved a reduced teaching load while studying for a PhD. It was like a training post for research…[I] worked every evening but [I am] a bit workaholic. If I had to, I would recommend it in terms of capacity building…[but] the post
was pitched in salary terms at a younger person – a person with 20 years experience would not want to do it.

Another interviewee pointed out that the transition from practitioner to academic could be difficult:

*The main message I want to get across is the difficulty with the transition from practice to research. People new to academia need the opportunity to build on their CV’s. They do not necessarily get that opportunity if [they are] shoved straight into teaching. It can be very daunting when coming into the academic world after being a rigidly controlled [local authority] environment.*

**Employment status, funding and time spent on research**

Eighty four per cent (n=188) of respondents were in full time paid employment. As was to be expected, part time working was more frequent among women, especially those aged 25-49, of whom around 20 per cent (n=13) worked part time. Eighty seven per cent (n=194) reported that their post was funded by one of the three higher education funding councils in Great Britain or the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) in Northern Ireland. Research grants, central government funding, secondments, and consultancies made up the other sources of funding. Although the small numbers mean that this finding should be interpreted with caution, half of those (n=15) whose posts were not funded through the higher education funding councils were working part time, compared with 90 per cent (n=173) of those salaries were covered by the higher education funding councils. This is consistent with earlier findings (Marsh & Fisher, 2005; Shaw *et al.*, 2004) that social work research has not featured strongly in the total UK research funding base.

Across all respondents, the mean percentage of their working time that they estimated was spent on research was 25 per cent (SD 23) compared with 33 per cent (SD 21) on teaching, 31 per cent on administration and 10 per cent (SD 20) on other activities, such as consultancy. However, as the size of the standard deviations show, these figures conceal a wide range of answers. Over a fifth (n=53) of respondents spent less than 10 per cent of their time on research while less than 10 per cent (n=34) spent fifty per cent or more. Almost all respondents
were involved in teaching with just eight per cent (n=19) reporting that they did no
teaching and five per cent (n=13) spending between 1-9 per cent of their time on
teaching. Administration took up a high proportion of respondents’ time, and 68
per cent (n=146) estimated that it accounted for more than a quarter of their
working time. One informant not funded by a funding council pointed out that this
brought some advantages:

*I’ve got this dream job. I don’t have any teaching – apart from odd
sessions - or admin. I’m only one two committees instead of a 102 and
I’m doing hands on research and training.*

However, he pointed out that his position was exceptional. Programme leaders
were especially conscious of their administrative workloads. These were not just
because of their responsibilities within the HEI but because of the large number of
links that needed to be maintained with the regulatory body, the General Social
Care Council (GSCC) and partner agencies who would be providing placements for
their students. As one interviewee pointed out:

*Programme directors] in social work always have a high admin load.
It’s all the outside links that need to be made - contacts with the GSCC.*

While Heads of Department interviewed also spoke of difficulties associated with
their administrative workloads, they were more likely to report that they had
protected time for research.

*I decided to take on the role and it really did put a big cramp on your
research time. The Head of Department is supposed to take 60 per
cent, it’s not full time. The other 40 per cent is supposed to be research.*

In some cases, respondents used the protected time themselves; in others, it was
used to ‘buy in’ junior researchers.

For interviewees in more junior positions, administrative loads were smaller but
they had greater obligations in terms of teaching commitments. This was
especially difficult for respondents who were new to teaching but were also
studying for a PhD as part of their career development:

*The problem is we have this workload balancing thing. You have to
have so many hours teaching and my teaching was spread over each
semester, the front and the back end of each semester…[What made it
more difficult was the fact that it’s all new, so I am writing my teaching materials rather than [being] at the stage of updating them… Allegedly we get a 20 per cent reduction in workload but I have had five days [in the past eight months]… I tried hard to get a week[’s annual leave] at Easter but there was a really interesting conference came up in that week… and I had to attend that and cut my holiday short.

Another interviewee explained that in her HEI, teaching staff were expected to do 892 hours a year on teaching, giving tutorials and marking. This could act as a disincentive for undertaking research because:

*If I could have six hours a week for research, you end up being under your [teaching] hours. There is no incentive, because you [would] end up [adding the hours to your week].*

Unsurprisingly, spending a higher proportion of working time on research was associated with working in pre-1992 universities. Only 17 per cent (n=17) of respondents working in post 1992 universities spent more than 40 per cent of their working time on research, compared with 32 per cent (n=39) of those working in pre 1992 universities and this difference was statistically significant (\(\phi=-0.176, \ p=0.008\)).

**Types of research done**

Despite the low proportion of their time that many respondents were able to give to research, 82 per cent (n=198) reported that they had undertaken research in the preceding two years. The difference in proportions of those undertaking research in pre and post 1992 universities was not statistically significant, suggesting that there is now a higher profile for social work research across the sector as a whole. In keeping with the policy driven nature of much social work research (Shaw *et al.*, 2004), the most common type of research reported was service evaluation. Fifty three per cent (n=107) of those who reported having undertaken any research during the past two years had undertaken this type of research. The next most frequently reported type of research was desk research/literature searches (42 per cent, n=85). Fewer respondents had undertaken one-off surveys (33 per cent, n=45) or longitudinal research (n=16 per cent, n=31). Perhaps surprisingly, given that the majority of respondents were involved in teaching, only 24 per cent (n=49)
of those undertaking research had been involved in an evaluation of teaching. However, participants may not have seen activities such as comparing module evaluations as constituting research. Other types of research reported included capacity building with service users and documentary analysis of court records. Consistent with earlier research (Shaw et al., 2004), central government departments, national charities, and local authorities had been the main funders for these projects and only a few respondents (n=17) had received Research Council funding. In some cases, respondents had not actually received any funding for research at all and had undertaken it in their own time. One interviewee explained that the HEI in which she worked placed more emphasis on teaching and so her role did not specifically include any time that could be spent on research.

What’s happened…over the course of time is that the time we had for development and scholarship has been eroded…[The HEI] expect us to teach more, and research is not on the agenda…I still manage to do research, but only by working weekends and evenings.

Naturally, work carried out in this way will, by its very nature, tend to be on a smaller scale. Table 1 looks at the likelihood that respondents had received funding from a research council, government department of national charity. It suggests that access to larger amounts of funding in terms of support from Research Councils, central government and national charities tended to be concentrated among respondents from pre-1992 universities and respondents who spent more than 40 per cent of their time on research. Univariate and bivariate analyses suggested that years of experience in the academic sector and holding a PhD were also statistically significant but this was not the case when once multivariate statistics were used. This seems to suggest that it is institutional factors, rather than the personal qualities of researchers which help in access to funding and this will be discussed later in a section outlining respondents’ ideas of the type of support that would help them become more research active.
Table 1: Results of logistic regression testing probability of receiving funding from central government, Research Council or national charity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables in model</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Odds ratio 95% CI</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in academic sector</td>
<td>0.333</td>
<td>1.018 0.982 1.018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds PhD</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.701 0.380 1.294</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992 university</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>2.435 1.341 4.421</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends less than 40 per cent time on research</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
<td>0.248 0.125 0.494</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.658</td>
<td>1.240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

219 cases included in the analysis; method=enter; Nagelkerke $R^2=0.211$; Hosmer–Lemeshow test: $\chi^2=5.573$, df=8, $p=0.695$; Omnibus test: $\chi^2=37.509$, $p=0.0001$.

**Research training**

Thirty nine per cent (n=93) of survey respondents reported that they had received research training in the past two years. The training most frequently reported was in qualitative data analysis, which had been received by almost half (n=47) of those receiving any training. Data from the interviews suggested that this training was most commonly in the form of using software for data analysis such as NVivo.

By contrast, only 12 per cent (n=29) had received training in quantitative data analysis. This was an area where some respondents identified a lack of expertise:

> I learnt a lot from [doing my PhD but] I would like training in quantitative methods and statistics. I would like to learn about them as they are my weak area and I feel I can only really do half a job.

The interviews suggested that there was a need for access to different types of research training. The first would be aimed at supporting academics in the early stages of their academic careers:

> I only went on one course for six weeks called ‘how to write your PhD [which] taught writing styles. It was for six weeks, one session per week, and the school funded it. However, I would have like to have been supported and encouraged to do more training and the main thing preventing me from doing that is time.
The second would be aimed at those with responsibilities for managing research. This was something that very few respondents reported that they had received but its value was highlighted by one interviewee:

*I undertook two short modules…It was helpful and gave me time to reflect on how to manage and approach my own team of researchers.*

Over half (57 per cent, n=137) of respondents were involved in delivering training. Most often, this was to undergraduate or postgraduate social work students but also sometimes included practitioners. Only 22 per cent (n=32) of those who were involved in delivering training had been involved in teaching colleagues and this resonated with another theme to be discussed later – the wish to become more involved in sharing ideas and skills with colleagues.

**Supervision of research students**

In addition to research that participants completed themselves, another aspect of developing research capacity is supervision given to research students. Sixty per cent (n=145) of respondents reported that they supervised research students. Of those who did not, the overwhelming majority taught in HEIs that only offered undergraduate social work programmes. Of those who did supervise research students, two thirds (n=99) were supervising students on masters’ programmes. In most cases, they were supervising student dissertations on postgraduate social work qualifying programmes. However, almost as many (64 per cent, n=92) were supervising PhD students. In keeping with the increasing popularity of professional doctorates mentioned earlier (Scourfield & Smalley, 2008 Unpublished), 13 per cent (n=18) supervised professional doctorate students. Less than half (n=62) of those supervising research students only supervised one type of student; most 42 per cent, n=52) supervised two or even three types (seven per cent, n=17). Unsurprisingly, the most common combination was supervising masters and PhD students. Twenty nine per cent (n=42) of respondents supervising students came into this category.

**Involvement in networks and organisations**

One key way for research activity in any discipline to grow is through formal and informal networks (Meerabeau, 2001; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001) which offer a
chance to develop working relationships and ideas for joint bids across HEIs and disciplines. It is perhaps even more important for a practice discipline like social work for university staff to be connected to a wide range of networks both in the academic and practice sectors. Table 2 summarises respondents’ answers to a question listing different organisations and asking how they had been used, if at all.

Table 2: Use made of research networks and organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network or organisation</th>
<th>% reporting any use</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Association of Social Workers</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Sociological Association</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Policy Association</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services Research Group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Children's Bureau Research Network</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Association for the Study, Prevention and Care of Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Research Association (no longer in existence)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Society of Gerontology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group for the advancement of psychodynamics and psychotherapy in social work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Institute of Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Social Policy Network</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentions other organisation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None mentioned</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents*</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals sum to over 100 because of multiple responses.

Strikingly, the table shows that over a third of respondents did not report using any of these organisations. Of those that had used any networks, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) was the most common organisation mentioned and, and as an association representing social workers, it offers a
service more akin to that of a trade union than the other organisations on the list. Although a large number of other networks and associations were mentioned, each represented only a handful of respondents. This implies a level of involvement that is perhaps lower than would be needed in order to develop the required relationships to develop research capacity.

More positively, Table 2 also shows that respondents were in touch with a mixture of both academic and professional organisations and networks, suggesting that respondents were attempting to maintain links with both these worlds.

When asked in the interviews about networks and organisations, those respondents who reported not using any networks seemed to feel that it was time and lack of opportunity that had constrained their use of them, rather than a conscious decision that they were unhelpful. More unusually, one respondent had clear views about how to use relationships with organisations strategically and her comments emphasised the value of such networks in bring together researchers and practitioners from different disciplines and from different countries:

[One organisation] is helpful in being inter-agency so [I] meet professionals whom I would not meet otherwise and practitioners. There are good international links. [The other] is not primarily a research network but there are good contacts with voluntary organisations – it is national and has practitioners. So, it can be of use in developing bids. Both are very relevant as they are focussed on knowledge development and transfer.

Support to do research

Seventy one per cent of respondents (n=160) considered that they were given support to do research and over half rated the support that they received as ‘very good’ or ‘good’. However, a fifth of those answering this question (n=39) considered that they were poorly or very poorly supported. Colleagues were the most frequently mentioned source of support, although a few respondents gave examples of specific ways in which they had been helped through the use of, for example, research leave and writing groups. In some cases, support mechanisms had evolved informally:
Support is very poor. We have set up an informal writing group within the team. This has regular meetings and I can only attend some. Otherwise, I get no support...I would like more time, to be able to discuss research more, for it to be seen as part of my workload.

In other cases, it was provided more formally within the HEI through establishing mentoring schemes, staff development programmes, or by setting up research groups. It was also suggested that employing staff in administration posts or junior researchers were an effective and practical way of freeing more experienced staff for other activities. One interviewee spoke of a scholarship within the HEI which included funding and a reduction in workload alongside help to apply for funding.

**Becoming more actively involved in research**

Respondents were asked to list three things that would help them to become more actively involved in research and these answers were organised into themes. Unsurprisingly, the first theme related to wanting more time and this topic was raised by almost two thirds (n=149) of survey respondents. Indeed, more than one respondent simply wrote ‘time, time, time’ to this question. A specific point made by respondents was the additional responsibilities experienced by those delivering professional education was the long teaching semesters or terms and the need to liaise with agencies and visit students while they were on practice placements. This could create conflicts in terms of making a balance between research and teaching time. One respondent to the survey considered that that while some HEIs saw cutting back contact time with students as a way of increasing research time, there was actually a need to increase it:

> Student to lecturer ratios have increased over the years...[and] the cutting back of contact time has serious implications. Also, the academic calibre of students is declining. They require more support.

An interviewee who was studying at a more research-led university while teaching in an HEI where there was very little research also emphasised the tensions between balance research and teaching activity:

> I am [studying] at a prestigious university, and they don’t [bother] about students [but]...I am being taught by some of the best academics...At [the HEI where I teach we are] really focused on students and valuing
diversity. If you come here as a student, this is about getting you through the course, which really fits my values. Though for me, I really want to be in an academic environment. It is really swings and roundabouts: neither is good or bad, just a different focus.

For many HEIs, the solution has been to create separate research and teaching posts:

*I expect you’ve heard all this already but social work tutors are under so much pressure. There’s so much troubleshooting. All my colleagues are very research motivated colleagues but the reality is they only get a week in August to do research so [research] development posts are probably the way forward.*

*We have concentrated on teaching and student support, but we have not had the experience of doing research.*

However, this has had implications for research capacity in that research components on social work programmes may be taught by people who have had very little experience of undertaking research, continuing the ‘circle of resistance’ (Orme & Powell, 2007 advance access, p6).

The second theme that emerged from responses to the survey were ideas about improving support and creating a better infrastructure for social work research, which were raised by about a half of respondents. Ideas put forward here included the more widespread use of mentors, developing networks of like-minded researchers, opportunities to collaborate between more experienced and less experienced researchers.

The third set of comments covered issues to do with funding, which were raised by over a third of respondents. Here, comments centred on the need for more sources of funding, the greater availability of small grants from Research Councils and other funders that could help in pump priming, and practical support in putting bids together:

*There is a research institute within the university, but no ‘pump priming so you have to be kind of a self starter.*
It is always a struggle to do research and takes up a lot of time and energy trying to source funding and that is before you have even started the project.

Widening the funding base for social work research was seen as an important way of developing social work knowledge:

Government departments invite research proposals and identify the research questions, which already means that the research methodology is dictated and there is little leeway for researchers to decide the research questions and methods. Epistemologically, most government proposals are concerned with policy initiatives and outcomes. We have applied [for it] – it’s a source of big money but I have grave concerns about casting research in terms of effectiveness. Sometimes, what the government says is the relationship between interventions and outcomes is not what I see as the relationship.

The final set of comments was mainly concerned with access to training and mentioned by about a quarter of respondents. As well as training on research methods or in specific software packages, training in writing bids was also thought to be helpful. Conferences were also thought to be helpful, especially if they were linked to research publications:

The department also has a policy of funding one national and one international conference a year, obviously linked to outputs.

Conclusions
Developing research capacity and capability in social work is necessary to ensure that there is best evidence for best practice associated with the provision of high-quality and effective services for those who require them (Orme & Powell, 2007 advance access). However, concerns have been expressed about whether there will be enough new social work academics to replace those reaching retirement (Mills et al., 2006) and the research and training needs of the workforce (Lyons, 2000; Orme & Powell, 2007 advance access). The results from this survey are consistent with earlier research (Mills et al., 2006), suggesting that the age profile of social work academics is comparatively mature and that people have moved into higher education via professional, rather than academic routes. The increase in
the proportion of respondents with PhDs compared with earlier research (Lyons, 2000) is a positive finding and is consistent with other evidence pointing to an increase in the number of social work doctoral students (Scourfield & Smalley, 2008 Unpublished).

Another positive finding was the high proportion of respondents reporting that they had undertaken research in the past two years. However, set against this, it must be acknowledged that small scale policy driven research (Shaw et al., 2004) continues to predominate and that pre-1992 universities and social work academics who spent the majority of their working time on research researchers appeared to be continuing to dominate access to larger scale projects funded by national charities, research councils, and central government.

Social work academics have traditionally found it harder to create an effective balance between teaching and research because of the comparatively large amount of student contact time and the existence of longer teaching terms or semesters on social work programmes. There was strong evidence that this division between research and teaching continues to exist and it is arguable how sustainable it can be in the long term in terms of developing research capacity. This suggests that there is potential for social work departments and HEIs to consider more carefully how social work academics’ teaching commitments compare with others and whether there are ways in which they might be supported to rebalance their workloads.

While many respondents wanted greater access to networks of researchers and opportunities to work with more experienced researchers, only a minority of survey participants currently accessed research networks or organisations. This suggests that there is potential for organisations to consider more closely how they can increase awareness of their activities among social workers.

In the same way, while respondents identified further training as an important way of helping them to become more actively involved in research, only a minority reported undertaking research training within the past two years. Although some respondents wanted training in, research methods, others pointed out that help in preparing and writing bids would also be useful. Examples of pump priming support were given and there is potential for these to be used more widely, especially among those who are less experienced in undertaking research.
Finally, although the results of this audit have highlighted some of the barriers to developing social work capacity, they also showed some of the enthusiasm that existed among respondents, many of whom had very limited resources to undertake research but often undertook small pieces of work within their own time. It is important that consideration is given to enhancing their skills as part of the process of developing social work capacity.

References


APPENDIX 1

Research Capacity among UK Social Work Academics: an Audit for the Economic and Social Research Council

We are asking for your help in a study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council which aims to look at capacity for social work research in UK universities and colleges. The JUC SWEC Social Work Research Strategy in Higher Education 2006-2020\(^2\) concluded that it was very important to increase research capacity in social work and your input will be essential in helping to take this work forward. This questionnaire is being sent to all academics working in social work departments in universities and colleges in the UK.

Your answers will be confidential and you will find more information about the study in the attached information sheet. We hope to publish our findings from this research in the summer.

1. In the last two years, have you undertaken work on a research project? (*Please tick or type ‘Y/N’ in brackets.*)

   Yes [ ] No [ ]

   If yes, please indicate what type(s) of research you have worked on and how it was funded. (Please tick or type ‘Y’ in the appropriate box to show type of research and how it was funded.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of research</th>
<th>Government dept</th>
<th>Research Council</th>
<th>University or college</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>National Charity</th>
<th>No external funder</th>
<th>Other (e.g. self)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of services</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desk/library, literature study</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-off survey</td>
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<td>Longitudinal research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Over the last two years, please would estimate, on average, the percentage of your working time you have spent on:

\(^2\) [http://www.swap.ac.uk/research/strategy.asp](http://www.swap.ac.uk/research/strategy.asp)
3. Over the past two years, have you supervised any research students? *(Please tick or type ‘Y/N’ in brackets.)*

Yes [   ] No [   ]

If yes, please indicate how many (if any) of the following kinds of students you have supervised *(please tick or type ‘Y’ in brackets.)*

- Postgraduate [   ]
- M Phil [   ]
- PhD [   ]
- Other [   ]

(Please specify) ...................................................................................................

4. Over the past two years, have you received any research training? *(Please tick or type ‘Y/N’ in brackets.)*

Yes [   ] No [   ]

If yes, please specify the area(s) in which training was received *(Please tick or type ‘Y’ in appropriate box or boxes.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview skills</th>
<th>Questionnaire design</th>
<th>Quantitative data analysis</th>
<th>Qualitative data analysis</th>
<th>Other (please specify below)</th>
<th>Other type of training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. Over the past two years, have you delivered any research training? *(Please tick or put ‘Y/N’ in brackets.)*

Yes [   ] No [   ]

If yes, please indicate what type(s) of training you delivered *(Please tick or type ‘Y/N in appropriate box or boxes.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview skills</th>
<th>Questionnaire design</th>
<th>Quantitative data analysis</th>
<th>Qualitative data analysis</th>
<th>Other (please specify below)</th>
<th>Other type of training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please also indicate who received and who funded the training that you delivered. *(Please tick or type ‘Y’ in the appropriate box or boxes.)*
### Recipients of training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation that funded the training</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Dept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate social work students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate social work students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other undergraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other postgraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other academic staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authority personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People using services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other recipients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Which (if any) research resources such as, for example, the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, Social Care Institute for Excellence, Making Research Count, Research into Practice, do you currently use to help with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research activity</th>
<th>Resource used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducting research/research methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing research or datasets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraising research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research funding/current tenders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making research bids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research ethics/governance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing research projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research dissemination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Please indicate which (if any) of the following networks you are a member of and how you have used them? *(Please tick or type ‘Y/N’ in the appropriate box/es to show which network you are a member of and how you have used any of the networks.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>How you have used the organisation/network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Policy Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Social Policy Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services Research Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Children’s Bureau Research Network</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Sociological Association</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Work Research Association</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Society of Gerontology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group for the advancement of psychodynamics and psychotherapy in social work (GAPPS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Association for the Study, Prevention and Care of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCCAN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Association of Social Workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Institute of Learning Disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please specify any other ways you have used these networks........................
8. Do you get professional or personal support to undertake research?  *(Please tick or type ‘Y/N’ in brackets.)*

Yes [ ]    No [ ]

If yes, who provides it? ..............................................................................................................

9. How would you rate the personal and professional support you receive to undertake research activities?  *(Please tick or type ‘Y’ in brackets)*

Very Good [ ]    Good [ ]    OK [ ]    Poor [ ]    Very poor [ ]

10. What three things would help you to be more actively involved in research?

**About you:**

Please will you answer the following questions about your background and other characteristics?

11. What is your gender?  *(Please tick or type ‘Y’ in brackets.)*

Woman [ ]    Man [ ]

12. What is your age in years?.................

13. To which of these ethnic groups do you consider you belong?  *(Please tick or type ‘Y’ in the appropriate box.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>Any other white background (please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
<td>White and Black African</td>
<td>White and Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Mixed background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please tick or type ‘Y’ in brackets for the following questions.

14. Please indicate your highest qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Postgraduate Diploma</th>
<th>SW qualifying MA/MSc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other MA/MSc</td>
<td>MRes</td>
<td>MPhil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctorate of SW</td>
<td>Education Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Do you have a social work qualification?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, are you registered as a social worker with one of the four UK Care Councils (General Social Care Council, Scottish Social Care Council, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, Care Council for Wales)?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

16. Please indicate the source of funding for your currently position:

Full-time, Higher Education Funding/ Council/DELNI funded [ ]
Part-time, Higher Education Council/DELNI funded [ ]
Full-time, other funding [ ]
Part-time, other funding [ ]

Other funding could include ESRC, other research contract, seconded, or practice learning funding.

Please indicate the source of ‘Other funding’ below

........................................................................................................................................

17. How many years have you worked in the academic sector? .........................

18. Finally, we are going to be doing some interviews with a small group of academics, to ask some more in-depth questions. If you are willing to be contacted for a follow up interview, please enter your name and a contact number/e-mail address or postal address below.

Name: ..........................................................................................................

E-mail address: ..............................................................................................
Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please return in envelope provided to FREEPOST SCWRU or email to scwru@kcl.ac.uk
APPENDIX 2

RESEARCH CAPACITY AMONG UK SOCIAL WORK ACADEMICS:
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date of interview:
Interviewer:
Thank participant for returning questionnaire about social work research capacity. Check that he or she is still happy to take part in an interview.

19. Can we start by talking about working in higher education? You mentioned in the questionnaire that you have worked in the academic sector for [number of] years. Please would you tell me a little about why you decided to move into the academic sector?

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Ask those who have undertaken research in past two years:

20. Please would you tell me more about the research that you mentioned in the questionnaire?

Probes:
Process of securing funding
Size of project
Who did you work with (if anyone)?
How did it fit with your other work?
Have you published from this work?

---------------------------------------------------------------
---------------------------------------------------------------
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Ask those who reported receiving training in past two years:

21. You said that you have received training in [type of training]. What sort of training was this? How helpful did you find it? Is there any other training that you would like to receive?

Ask those who have reported receiving no training in past two years:

22. You mentioned that you have not received any training in research methods over the past two years. Are there any kinds of research training that you would like to have received?

Probes:
Reasons for wanting/not wanting training
Barriers to accessing training
How training would help

Ask all who have delivered training:

23. Please would you tell me a little about the training [in topics mentioned] that you have delivered?
Probes:
Confidence/skills in area(s) in which training delivered
Any other support/facilities that would help in providing training
..............................................................................................................
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Ask all who are not member or involved in any research networks:

24. You said that you are not using any research networks, such as the Social Policy Association. Is there a reason for this?
   Probes:
   Relevance for current post?
   Cost of membership?
   Used in past but not now?
..............................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................
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Ask all who are members or involved in any research networks:

25. You said on the questionnaire that you used [name of] network(s). How helpful have you found them in undertaking research?
   Probes:
   Relevance for current post?
   Cost of membership?
..............................................................................................................
Ask all who rated support received for research as ‘good’ or ‘very good’:

26. You rated the support you receive to undertake research activities as ‘very good’ or ‘good [delete as appropriate]. Please describe a little bit about the support you receive.

Probes:
- How does this help?
- What, and who, gives most support?
- Anything else that would support you in undertaking research?

Ask all who rated support received for research as ‘ok’ ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’

27. You rated the support you receive to undertake research activities as ‘ok’, ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ [delete as appropriate]. Can you tell me a bit more about why you chose this option?

Probes:
- Extent to which affects ability to undertake research?
- Types and extent of support that would like to receive?
Ask all who said they did not receive support for research:

28. You said that you did not get any support to undertake research activities.
   *Probes:*
   Extent to which affects ability to undertake research?
   Types and extent of support that would like to receive?

29. You mentioned the things that would help you become more actively involved in research as being [list]. How would they help? Who could provide them?
   *Probes:*
   Extent to which feels already involved or wants more involvement in research?
   Importance given to social work research in place where works?
   Impact of undertaking (or not) research on teaching ability/approaches?

Ask all those who have not done research in the past two years:

30. Are there any things that have prevented you from doing research in the past two years?
   *Probes:*
   Other commitments?
   Funding?
31. What (if any) kinds of research do you want to do?

Ask those who have done research in the past two years:

32. Going back to your research that we talked about at the beginning, what plans have you got for doing more research?
   
   Probes:
   Methodologies/study designs that will be used?
   Opportunities for interdisciplinary research?
   Funding?

33. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank participant for interview.
Part 3: An audit of research teaching in the social work degree

Prof Joan Orme, Glasgow School of Social Work
Dr Gillian MacIntyre, Glasgow School of Social Work
Sally Paul, Glasgow School of Social Work
Prof Jan Fook, University of Southampton
Prof Jackie Powell, University of Southampton
Dr Elaine Sharland, University of Sussex
Aim

The aim of the audit of research teaching is to establish a baseline of information about research teaching in social work qualifying programmes across the UK.

Objectives

In discussions about building capacity in social work research assumptions are made about research teaching at undergraduate level. This audit, in providing baseline information will test out these assumptions. In doing so, its objectives are (from the proposal):

1. To inform the Research Training Board in relation to capacity building of Social Work
2. To inform the implementation of the social work research strategy for HEIs 2006-20.
3. To explore a model for auditing research teaching at qualifying level across the social sciences

Methods

The design of the audit included an initial review of the literature alongside several methods of empirical data collection. These were:

- a broad brush email questionnaire survey of Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] to map current research teaching at qualifying level
- analysis of course outline documents
- follow up telephone interviews with a sub-sample of survey respondents
- questionnaire to representatives of the four care councils of the UK
Summary

1. There were 84 e-mail questionnaires completed from 60 out of a possible 110 institutions (a 54% response rate). The returns comprised responses from 52 undergraduate and 32 postgraduate courses and from all four countries of the UK. There were almost equal returns from pre- and post-92 institutions and from 5 FE colleges delivering the degree under franchise.

2. Interviews were undertaken with representatives from six institutions (covering all 4 countries) and the 4 country care councils were consulted.

3. The literature review identified 64 relevant papers published in the English language between 1987 & 2008. These included 42 from USA and 7 from UK (others were from Australia, Europe etc). While points raised in this audit were reflected in the literature there were few studies that were directly parallel (i.e. evaluations or audits of research teaching on qualifying).

4. Almost all (95.2%) of the questionnaire responses report that specific modules in research are provided on qualifying courses to develop students’ awareness of research and its relationship to professional practice. In addition 33% responses state research permeates all teaching.

5. There is a good deal of variation in what is taught. From the data there is some notion of a continuum of learning both within the qualifying programmes and between qualifying and post qualifying programmes.

6. Teaching methods varied but generally responses indicated a use of conventional, classroom based, approaches. There are some examples of interdisciplinary and inter-professional approaches to teaching and learning. There is very little experiential learning reported.
7. Research on qualifying courses is taught primarily by academics. Limited expertise/experience of social work academics means that teaching is provided by other social science disciplines. Practitioners are rarely involved in teaching research.

8. The dissertation is identified as a key tool in learning about research and its use, and is often the method of assessing students in the area of research. However opportunities for undertaking empirically based dissertations were said to be limited by: time available for students, by the complexities (and time taken) to gain ethical approval, and by limited support from practice agencies.

9. Only 9.5% (8 responses) identified practice learning involved opportunities for developing critical use of research studies. Only two institutions mentioned active engagement with practice around teaching and learning research. This produces a conundrum: if the aim of teaching research is to underpin its relevance to practice there needs to be a continuum of learning from the academic setting to the practice setting. This was not evident.

10. The QAA benchmark statement for undergraduate degrees in social work and the National Occupational Standards for social work and social care were said by all respondents to underpin the requirements for qualifying courses in all four countries. The role of the care councils is to ensure the requirements are met but there is differential attention to research in the requirements of the four countries.

11. The requirements (in all four countries) for practice learning opportunities and related teaching lead to a demanding curriculum and present some tensions. There was enthusiasm and commitment from all respondents to ensure research is embedded in and informs best practice. However if teaching and learning occurs only in the academic curriculum (50% of total curriculum time) there is
limited opportunity for specific attention to research, and it is more difficult to develop links between research and practice.

12. The quality of research teaching on undergraduate courses has implications for the quality of applicants for doctoral research. It is therefore necessary for stakeholders, including the ESRC and the care councils, to debate how opportunities for engaging with and in research are available across the qualifying/post-qualifying continuum in professional disciplines and relate this to understandings of the undergraduate/postgraduate/doctoral continuum.
1. **Context**

In a background paper for the JUC SWEC Research Strategy Orme & Powell (2007) identified a ‘circle of resistance’ to research in social work education and training. This refers to the historical context in which social work qualifying education has been delivered. It is argued that prior to 2003 the level of the professional qualification (the Diploma in Social Work) did not provide incentives to practitioners either to acquaint themselves with research outputs or to acquire skills in undertaking research. This was compounded by the lack of commitment to a research base for practice in agencies. Finally there was an imperative for social work courses to recruit staff with expertise in practice, rather than a ‘traditional’ research career. Social work academics were therefore disadvantaged when beginning a research career in academia, and were not sufficiently equipped to promote research in teaching the next generation of practitioners – hence the circle of resistance.

A long term strategy to bring about change requires, at a minimum, a research aware practice workforce at the point of qualification. Research therefore has to be an integral part of the curriculum of qualifying courses. As part of the modernising agenda for social work, the qualifying level for social work was raised from the level of diploma in higher education to honours degree. The first degree level courses commenced in England in 2003, and in the other three countries in 2004.

It was assumed by many that a degree level qualification could be significant in bringing about change, by locating social work within wider university teaching, either in the social sciences or in other related disciplines. This would provide an opportunity to embed research methods into the curriculum for qualifying social workers. Also, social work students introduced to research through teaching might be encouraged to undertake further research qualifications – including doctoral research, a level at which social work had not figured to any great extent (Orme, 2003). It was anticipated that such developments could influence the culture of practice though the development of the workforce and the contribution
that social work practitioners and academics make to high quality social work research and the evidence based policy and practice agendas. However as the new degree emerged it was apparent that such developments could not be taken for granted for a number of reasons.

First, the four countries of the UK developed their own requirements for the social work degree (see Appendix 9). Because the degree also led to a professional qualification, the requirements for the degree were developed by the care councils established in each of the four countries. Courses had to be approved by these councils. All four countries based their requirements on the QAA Benchmark Statement (2000) and the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. However, as is demonstrated in appendices seven and eight, there are differential levels of reference to research mindedness and/or competence in these documents.

The benchmark statement for Social Policy and Social Work (2000) has as a defining principle that study of social work at honours level involves: ‘the critical application of research knowledge from the social and human sciences (and closely related domains) to inform understanding and to underpin action, reflection and evaluation’ (2.1). It is also clear that this is meant to apply to learning in the academy and in practice (2.3.4). Finally, part of the knowledge required includes: ‘knowledge and critical appraisal of relevant social research and evaluation methodologies’ (3.1.4).

In contrast the National Occupational Standards, which provide the professional requirements for the social work degree, mention research in only one unit (Unit 18) and the descriptors for this unit do not clarify what is meant by research in this context. There is therefore no consistent requirement for students to become research aware, let alone research competent.

Second, the requirements for the social work degree, which include periods of assessed fieldwork practice, mean that the curriculum is overloaded (DoH, forthcoming). The curriculum was also designed in a very short space of time (Burgess, 2004), with little opportunity to respond to all the expectations and priority was given to professional practice. One consequence of this is that there
was dispersal to individual social work programmes of responsibility for developing different aspects of curriculum, and that there was no coherent model of effective curriculum design (Luckcock et al 2006: 62).

Third, even those who are optimistic about the inclusion of research teaching in the social work degree have concerns about the way that research is introduced to students. For example Trevillion (2008) argues that the relationship between standards and service delivery in social work practice has led to the new degree being standards driven. This, he argues, has meant that teaching and learning about research is no longer the preserve of universities. He optimistically suggests that in the new model social work curriculum students may be required to accept that they must apply the latest research to their practice (2008: 447). However he also expresses concern that students may learn about research ‘only’ as evidence – rather than something that can be critiqued, changed and improved. His reference to what he calls the irreconcilable conflict between different interpretations of ‘research minded’ in social work education (2008:449) raises the question of what undergraduate students in social work are required to do – either by the guidelines for ‘graduateness’ or for a degree that is also a professional qualification. Trevillion suggests that the distinction between social work education and other subjects is that social work is influenced by ‘standards-driven’ education where lecturers teach from a canon of approved research rather than from a ‘research driven curriculum’ where research active staff draw on their own research to enrich their teaching. This also begs the question raised earlier of the competence and experience of social work educators in undertaking research.

Finally the need to review arrangements for research teaching at qualifying level is not specific to social work. In 2001 the then teaching and learning network for Sociology and Social Policy (SSP2000) produced Learning to Research: reflections on learning to research, one in a series of publications designed to provide resources to support learning & teaching\(^3\). Based on consultations with

\(^3\) A 2nd volume Learning to Research: Examples of Practice was produced as an accompanying volume
academic colleagues at the end of the 1990s and on an overview of the assessment reports from the HEFC Teaching Quality Assessment exercise, the report identifies changes in social sciences and higher education more generally (including changes in views of teaching, changes in the student body, modularisation, pressure on academics’ workloads and the demands for transferable skills). These had led to changes in curriculum, including decisions about what to teach under the heading ‘research’, and how to teach it. The major shift identified was from teaching specific research methods courses to ‘learning to research’ (Humphrey et al, 2001: 4). The emphasis became wider: addressing values and attitudes and not just ‘techniques’ in research.

In 2007 the Social Policy Association held a workshop to consider issues surrounding the use of social policy research in teaching. The workshop noted the concern of social policy academics that students were being positioned as consumers of knowledge and the need for lecturers not just to equip students to recognise ‘good’ and bad’ research but also to provide them with the tools to carry out research themselves.

These issues set the context for the audit of research which will help to establish to what extent research is addressed in the social work degree. In doing so it will investigate what is taught, who teaches it and what prominence is given to research in the overall curriculum. In doing this no assumptions are made about what is meant by ‘research teaching’.

This audit is designed to provide a broad brush picture, a baseline of how research teaching is addressed in the (new) social work degree. This baseline will provide opportunities to analyse possible models for research teaching and identify what investments and developments are required to increase and enhance research teaching on the social work degree, but the method and findings will be of interest to other professional disciplines and the wider social sciences.
2. Audit design and methodology

2.1 Literature Review methodology

A literature review was undertaken to set the current audit within a broader context of education practice and debate about the teaching of research methods in qualifying social work. Within the time and resource limits of the project, this was not a systematic review. However it was rigorous and targeted to capture as much as possible of the relevant literature worldwide. It included accounts and evaluations of specific education initiatives as well as surveys of research methods education provision and non-empirical discussion papers.

Papers were identified through searching two bibliographic databases: Social Care Online and Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)⁴. Through a process of selection first on the basis of title and abstract, then on reading of full papers, these yielded a total of 59 relevant papers. Five additional papers known to members of the audit team were also included, bringing the total to 64.

All included by definition addressed the teaching of research methods in qualifying level social work education. Publication dates were restricted to 1987 to 2008 as it was thought that a ten year period would provide the most relevant literature relating to a degree which commenced in 2003.

The search was not exhaustive; some other citations came to light through the process of review but time/resources did not allow pursuit. However, coverage has been extensive of relevant UK, USA, Australian and other international journals.

All papers were coded using a proforma (Appendix 5) developed to capture the same core themes as were examined in the audit of current education practice in the UK. Synthesis of their findings and arguments according to these themes was initially undertaken to provide a discrete overview of the research literature.

⁴ Search details as follows:

ASSIA: ((social work) within 6 (educat* or student* or qualif* or program* or curricu* or course)) within 6 (research). 202 ‘hits’; 28 unique relevant papers.

Social Care Online: @k= (“social work education”) and @k= (“research”). 834 ‘hits’; 29 unique relevant papers.
In the light of further discussion with the research team and elaboration of the core themes as they emerged from the audit, the synthesis of research literature was further developed and integrated within discussion of findings from the audit itself, according to the thematic framework discussed in section 3.2 below. No attempt is made in this review to judge the quality of the studies and the evidence they provide, or plausibility of their claims. Their findings and arguments are presented to illustrate the nature of discussion in the field.

2.2 The email questionnaire survey

Institutions offering the new qualifying social work degree were identified via the different UK Care Councils and the UCAS web sites. Contacts at these institutions were subsequently identified via university web pages, the JSWEC data base and through personal contacts. 110 institutions were identified (see Appendix 9); 6 in Northern Ireland, 8 in Scotland, 9 in Wales and 87 in England. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was emailed to all identified contacts in November 2007. The first email was followed up by a reminder in January 2008 where relevant.

The email acknowledged that there may be a 'problem of definition' and stated that no assumptions had been made of a common understanding about what teaching research in social work may entail. ‘Clues’ were given by setting out some of the different ways in which students might be exposed to research. Quite explicitly, specific modules might be provided encouraging awareness and critical use of research, or modules that facilitate understanding and use of research methods. Alternatively research teaching might be implicit, informing all aspects of the curriculum area. Students may be required to undertake a dissertation based on empirical work or may undertake literature reviews or critical evaluations.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit responses to four broad topics or activities within the curriculum of the degree course offered. Thus we endeavoured to make it ‘easy’ for people to engage with the survey and provide a response, however brief. Respondents were also invited to attach any relevant
documentation such as extracts from programme specifications or module outlines, or to indicate where these could be found on websites.

The four topics were:

1. Developing awareness of research and its role in promoting effective practice
2. Learning how to make critical use of research studies (research findings and methods)
3. Gaining knowledge and understanding of research strategies, methods and skills
4. Opportunities (academic or in a practice setting) to undertake a project/dissertation involving the use of research skills

Respondents were also asked to indicate the overall proportion of credits (of the whole course) assigned to the assessment of research/research methods and the level of these credits. Finally they were invited to identify what they considered to be the primary concerns in learning and teaching about research for students on qualifying programmes.

Underpinning the questionnaire was a framework for content analysis of responses as follows:

- what is taught (includes course name, content, topics and textbooks/references used)
- why is it taught (includes course rationale, background, aims, learning outcomes)
- how it is taught (includes teaching/learning styles/presentations/approach; number and length of sessions/credit points; curriculum design (vertical/horizontal integration)) and assessment and nature and length of assignments
- when it is taught (stage and level of course program)
- who teaches it (named teaching staff/background/qualifications)
- what are the primary concerns in learning and teaching about research
2.3 Course outlines and curriculum material

As an addendum to the email questionnaire, participants were asked if they would also provide any relevant curriculum material either as an attachment, or by hard post.

Most of this material was provided in the form of unit/module or course outlines, although there were some excerpts from handbooks. The outlines were usually of units or modules pertaining directly to research and/or dissertations, and were from both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Most outlines included unit content, aims, methods of teaching, assessment and references.

Course outlines were analysed using a broad framework for content analysis that derived from the one underpinning the questionnaire (Appendix 3). Each course outline was analysed using these categories, and then broad patterns which emerged for each category were identified. This material was then used to enhance and further illustrate the major themes/findings identified from the questionnaire material.

2.4 Follow-up telephone Interviews

Taking account of survey respondents’ indications of willingness to respond to further inquiries, a purposive sample of six programmes was followed up to find out more about the experiences of addressing this area of curriculum development.

To ensure appropriate coverage, a range of criteria were considered in the selection of the six programmes. These were:

- Geographical spread (4 countries)
- Pre- and post- 1992 university
- Further education college
- Postgraduate/undergraduate
- Research teaching permeates course/discrete module
- Practice setting/academic setting for research teaching
- Inter-professional/uni-professional teaching
- Placement based/academic research project
The interview schedule (Appendix 2) was designed to ensure that the underpinning thematic questions in the framework outlined above (2.2), would be covered:

- What is taught and why?
- How is it taught and when?
- Who teaches and in which setting?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the specific issues or challenges for social work research in the UK?

Each of the selected respondents was contacted by email, setting out some key questions and requesting a short telephone interview lasting approximately half an hour. Six people contacted agreed to take part in interview and these were held in January and February 2008. Only one person initially asked declined because of ill health, and was replaced. The interviews were recorded and documented by hand written notes incorporating verbatim quotes.

2.6 Questionnaire to representatives of the four country care councils

In the final phase of data collection, key informants from each of the four care councils were contacted with a request to complete a questionnaire designed to elicit their views on their country’s requirements for teaching on research within the social work degree.

As indicated in the introduction social work education is regulated by care councils for the four countries of the UK. A decision was taken that the councils should be asked to provide a perspective on research teaching on the social work degree given their role in approving and reviewing the degree as the professional qualification for the social work workforce. While there are other stakeholders, primarily government departments of the four countries, who have an investment in the quality of social work graduates, the complexities of trying to match the different departments and to ensure that any consultation was comprehensive was too complex for such a small study. Also it is likely that government departments’ perspectives would focus on workforce needs, which
might not necessarily be perceived by them to include awareness of or capacity to undertake research. This complex relationship between the practice workforce and the research workforce is part of the wider strategy discussions to which this report will contribute. Care councils, while independent, liaise with the government departments in their own country and are therefore sensitive to the different and frequently changing areas of interest of those departments. The questionnaire used for the telephone interviews with social work educators was adapted for use with representatives of the care councils (see Appendix 4).

2.7 Analysis
The different questions in the email survey were identified as corresponding to specific themes and were therefore used to analyse the emergent data. In the first instance responses from the online survey were entered into SPSS and the resultant statistical analysis was used as the basis for the description and discussion. Data from the other parts of the audit were analysed and added. A first draft of the findings was prepared under these headings and the analysis of the literature review was then scanned to see where there were points of reference/comparison from other studies. These were then added to the report. Therefore throughout this report references are made to particular texts either where they make distinctive contributions to findings or debate, or as examples of broader points of evidence and argument.

2.8 Presentation of the findings
In order to provide a coherent analysis of the findings from these data collection methods and sources, a decision was made to present the findings in a way that combines all the data under the identified themes.
3. Findings

3.1 Introduction

This section brings together the findings from data collection methods and sources outlined above. Findings have been collated around themes which broadly relate to the following questions:

- Why teach research (survey question 1, 2 & 7; interviews & curriculum material)
- What is taught under the heading ‘research’ (survey questions 1, 2, 3 & 5; interviews and curriculum material)
- How is research taught (survey question 4, 6 & 7, interviews & curriculum material)
- When (in the curriculum) is research taught (interviews and curriculum material)
- Who teaches research (curriculum material & interviews)
- Where is research taught

The section first gives details from the four different data gathering processes. It then goes on to a detailed discussion of the findings.

3.2 Data gathered

i. Profile of papers included in the literature review

A significant majority of the papers reviewed (42) were from the USA; the rest included Canada, Australia, India and Europe. Only 7 were from the UK, just one of these describing existing research methods teaching in a specific qualifying social work programme. Though this raises questions about the direct applicability of much of the literature to UK contexts, many of the pedagogic issues and debates highlighted are common across contexts. Over half (38) of the papers included discuss examples of specific teaching programmes and courses; commonly authors were directly involved in these as educators. Twenty-two of these make claims to have evaluated the teaching of research methods in some way, most of them presenting some empirical evidence in support of their claims.
In addition, 10 papers are surveys either of teaching provision or of student or faculty attitudes. A further 18 papers are discussion papers highlighting a wide range of principles, dilemmas and debates about the teaching of research methods at qualifying social work level, or across all levels of training.

**ii. Number and extent of responses to the email questionnaire**

There were 84 completed questionnaires from 60 out of a possible 110 institutions, representing a 54% response rate. The sample was comprised of 52 undergraduate returns and 32 postgraduate returns, with the total number of returns including some institutions making two separate responses, on the basis the undergraduate and postgraduate routes that they provided. Returns were received from all four countries of the UK, although Northern Ireland was particularly under-represented, with only one institution completing the questionnaire.

**Table 3.1 Analysis of responses to the email questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under/post grad Course</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Undergraduate course only</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Postgraduate course</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-nine of the questionnaires returned were from pre-1992 institutions and 39 from post-1992 institutions. There were five returns from further education (FE) colleges which offered the social work degree usually on a franchise basis from a regional university.

**Table 3.2 Analysis of responses to the email questionnaire: by type of institution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When granted University status</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Pre 1992</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Post 1992</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Further Education College</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Missing Data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
iii. **Curriculum material**

A total of 31 unit/module outlines was received from 23 HEIs (representing approximately 20% of HEIs offering the social work degree). Thirteen of the outlines were from postgraduate, and 16 from undergraduate programs. It was unclear whether the remaining two were undergraduate or postgraduate.

iv. **Telephone interviews**

There were telephone interviews with respondents from six programmes. Coverage included: each of the four countries, both pre- and post- 1992 HEIs, one FE college, and both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Given the small sample size of telephone interviewees and the courses they represent, their identities are protected in this report by referring to them as Interview respondents 1-6.

Where particular characteristics are relevant to specific quotations used (e.g. the country or the level of the qualification) these are indicated.

v. **Key informant care council interviews**

The representatives of the care councils for the four countries were asked whether they would prefer a telephone interview or to complete the questionnaire and return it. Two care council respondents provided individual written responses and one opted for a telephone interview. The fourth took the questionnaire to a team meeting and provided a written composite response.

3.3 **Why teach research?**

Analysis of the stated aims or learning outcomes of research modules/units as set out in course materials reflects great variation in terms of research learning expectations. This said, quite a large number of module outlines do not clearly articulate the aims of the unit/module, to express the rationale. Others, however, are very clear, providing a definitive list of learning outcomes, and still others included more discursive introductions which gave some feel for the background of issues pertaining to social work and research, and reasons for its inclusion in the qualifying curriculum.
The findings suggest that there is great diversity in what is being expected of social work students in relation to research, and much variation in the levels to which this is articulated.

This is not surprising in the light of the requirements for the social work degree. All four country representatives from the care councils make reference to the QAA benchmark statement (Appendix 7) and the National Occupational Standards (NOS) as the basis for their country specific requirements (see Appendix 8 for extracts). England, Northern Ireland and Wales make reference to the specific requirement that students must demonstrate by the point of final assessment, that they have met the NOS and QAA Benchmark Statement for Social Work. Informants identified different levels of emphasis on research requirements between the four countries and these are illustrated in the summary of the different sets of requirements in Appendix (9).

As table 3.3 indicates some of the ‘concerns’ raised in the questionnaire survey in response to question 7 were about the purpose of teaching research (others are dealt with in section 3.9 below)

| Table 3.3 Identified concerns about research teaching – why teach research? |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
|                                              | Responses | % of cases  |
|                                              | N        | Percent     | N        |
| Understanding social work research methodologies | 17       | 2.6%        | 20.2%    |
| Critically appraising research               | 22       | 3.3%        | 26.2%    |
| Developing students research skills          | 19       | 2.9%        | 22.6%    |
| Preparation for further postgraduate study   | 4        | .6%         | 4.8%     |
| Enhancing social work profession             | 13       | 2.0%        | 15.5%    |

Critically appraising research skills was regarded as a primary concern by 26% respondents who answered this question and it could therefore be assumed that this was seen as a prime reason for teaching research methods. This was followed by ‘developing students research skills’ which was listed as an area of concern by 22.6% of respondents to the questionnaire (see Table 3.3 below) and
mentioned too by interview respondents, suggesting that it was identified as an aim to be met, and a reason to teach research on social work courses.

One questionnaire respondent identified three reasons for teaching research, including equipping students to undertake research:

…that they (students) have an understanding of research process and feel equipped to undertake or commission research and to know when and how to seek advice and guidance… (Pe-1992 institution, Scotland, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

Another response, however, confirmed that there is not universal agreement that students should become research competent and be equipped to undertake research. Rather, they needed to become critical consumers of research:

Students should be able to critically read and apply research findings to practice. It is unlikely that they can become competent researchers within the qualifying training but should gain some understanding of research methods, particularly evaluation (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

The following respondent to the questionnaire suggests that such a position means that students wishing to develop research skills should do so via other means, such as specialist postgraduate study:

We also consider that the social work curriculum is already over-crowded, and it is better to leave the acquisition of empirical research skills to post-qualifying level, for those who are specifically interested in this area. For most social workers, the ability to find, evaluate and apply research effectively is what matters, and so we focus on those ‘reading and using’ skills. (Post-1992 institution, England offering postgraduate route)

For the following interview respondent the emphasis of the rationale for research teaching is on preparing students for the social work workforce, and linking research skills to reflective practice:

Trying to push the idea that practitioners need to be aware of research and need to be critical of research…we are generating so much research that it becomes almost meaningless…so they need to be able to
commission research as well as choose not to participate or participate, so we’re thinking about them as practitioners but we are also thinking about equipping them with the basic level skills they would need to undertake research in their own practice settings…and the third thing for me is that it is another skill teaching opportunity…they do a lot of experiential work…actual tools and techniques get practiced…a lot of practice would benefit from data collection techniques and another area of relevance relates to consent procedures…how do you know whether someone understands why you are there…we have to think about how to make links that make this meaningful…we have to recognise that not everyone in the class will undertake research but they need to have the confidence and the skills to know how to access it and use it (Interview 3 respondent).

Such a position would seem to be supported by the representatives from the care councils. The responses from Wales and Northern Ireland indicate that those care councils would expect all degree programmes to highlight the importance of research in influencing decisions on practice interventions. Students should be clear about what works in practice, why particular interventions are more successful, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of particular approaches. The Northern Ireland Framework Specification states that an underpinning skill (B18) requires students to: implement plans using a range of methods of intervention which are knowledge and evidence based.

This approach is reinforced by the response from England:

research teaching should recognise that the social work degree had to prepare students for a workforce that had to undertake ever more complicated tasks and be responsive to change. A beginning practitioner had to have an enquiring mind that would enable them to critically evaluate practice and use knowledge. Using research in such practice was essential, but students also had to be given the knowledge and skills to evaluate research.

Two councils also identify that preparation for the workforce requires students to understand the importance of keeping themselves up to date in relation to current
research and see the links between this and their Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Post Qualification (PQ) and Post Registration Teaching and Learning (PRTL) requirements. Indeed in Northern Ireland the new PQ Framework outlines in PQ Requirement 2 of the N.I. Specific Award in Social Work: Demonstrate systematic and appropriate application of relevant legislation/policy, theories, research, and methods of practice that include a range of skills. However it is clear that the groundwork for this had to begin in the qualifying degree.

An overview of findings from the questionnaires, interviews and care council responses therefore suggests that respondents were operating with some kind of continuum of research teaching and learning in mind, although this is not always explicit.

This line of thinking is well fleshed out within the research literature. Several authors, in both the USA and UK, have put forward models for a continuum of research aims in social work education. For example, Hardcastle and Bisman (2003) propose a developmental progression from educated consumer of research, to practitioner-scientist, to research as a practice methodology. Writing more generally about developing research capacity, Orme and Powell (2007) propose that qualifying students become research aware, advanced practitioners need to be research informed and doctoral research students have to be research competent and research literate. Cameron and Este (2008) suggest that research learning should range from critical appraisal, to application of research to practice, to programme evaluation, increased depth understanding, to original contribution to the knowledge base of the profession/discipline.

Also in the literature there are pleas by some that qualifying programmes be modest in aspiration – to generate informed consumers rather than producers of research (eg. Desai, 1987; Wainstock, 1994; Pierce, 1998; Ello, 2006). However the goal of producing researcher-practitioners does seem to be present, either implicitly or explicitly, in some programmes. Often this is seen as part of the notion of a developmental progression, from acquisition of basic knowledge and skills at qualifying level, with a view to specialist at post qualifying levels (eg.
Fraser et al, 1990, 1993; Orme and Powell, 2007). In the USA literature, unlike the UK, the picture is complicated by the expectation that most masters’ students will have had some research training at undergraduate level. They are therefore considered capable of more advanced level training.

Thus an emerging theme from the findings of this audit is whether the primary concern of social work research teaching should be about equipping students to have a critical awareness of research or whether it should be about developing students’ understanding of research methods. Table 3.3 shows that questionnaire respondents’ views on this are fairly evenly split, with 26.2% citing critical awareness of research as a primary concern and 20.2% highlighting the need to understand social work research methodologies.

That the distinction between the two aims for research teaching and learning is less marked in the literature may be a reflection of the preponderance of the practitioner-scientist model of research teaching and learning in the USA. The aim that students become informed critical consumers of research is mentioned in 20 papers, but usually in conjunction with their acquisition of research skills (eg. Berger, 2002; Finn and Dillon, 2007; Cameron and Este, 2008). Ryan and Sheehan’s (2000) survey of Australian Bachelor of Social Work programmes is noteworthy in that it showed that only eight out of 20 highlighted critical appraisal as an aim, despite Association of Australian Social Work (AASW) guidelines.

The language of evidence based practice is found in some studies (notably Howard et al, 2003; Zlotnick, 2007; Wilson, forthcoming) but is surprisingly less prominent in the literature than might be expected.

In the present audit, somewhat by contrast, the questionnaire responses place significant emphasis on the need to develop students’ critical capacities in an age of ever increasing range of research findings:

* I think it’s important to teach research in a way that enables students to critically evaluate research - particularly given the technical-rational paradigm that informs ideas about evidence-based practice/ research-based practice. I teach students about epistemology/ies in the hope that it allows them to assess research in a more comprehensive way than simply
evaluating methods and/or methodologies. (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

The challenge of teaching research to equip the workforce, alongside the many other competing demands for curriculum space, was highlighted by around one third of respondents. This is summed up well by one questionnaire response:

*The challenge is to fully integrate research into the teaching of the qualifying programmes throughout, whilst at the same time meeting all of the demands that the regulatory frameworks create. We need qualified social workers who can access, interrogate and critique research findings to inform effective reflective practice, and who can conduct practitioner research to inform service and practice development. That is a big ask in a packed curriculum – especially at PG level. And yet it is at PG level that one would expect students to be best prepared for this challenge.* (Pre-1992 institution, Scotland, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

These competing curriculum demands are directly linked to the dual nature of the qualification: that it is both an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and a professional qualification in social work. These two strands are highlighted in responses from the care councils which emphasise the links between research and professional practice.

### 3.4 What is taught?

This section draws on all data sources to discern what is covered on the social work degree that might be identified as ‘research teaching’, setting these in the context of the wider literature. The survey questionnaires focussed attention on possible reasons for teaching research which included:

1. Developing awareness of research and its role in promoting effective practice;
2. Learning how to make critical use of research studies (research findings and methods);
3. Gaining knowledge and understanding of research strategies, methods and skills.

The same themes were relevant to the analysis of the curriculum material. However, the distinct themes were not necessarily dealt with separately in different units/modules; which of them is taught in any one module needs to be discerned from the titles and content of units/modules.

From the curriculum material it appears that programmes offer either one or two specific units/modules with research content: 17 HEI’s offered one unit/module, and six 6 offered two. Where only one unit is offered, this tends to focus on developing students’ research awareness and critical appraisal skills. Where more than one module is offered there tends to be a progression towards an understanding of, and ability to use, research methods-skills in order to conduct research. However there is one example from an English HEI postgraduate program of one unit/module offered which encompasses all three themes.

These observations resonate with the discussion in section 3.3 about the continuum of purpose envisaged for research teaching in social work education identified in the literature. However, while many papers distinguish between the purposes of research teaching (with the emphasis more on educating students to become researching practitioners not to appraise and utilise research critically), it is often not easy to distinguish in the content of teaching and learning between the three priorities of developing research awareness, critical appraisal and knowledge/use of research strategies and skills. Though most papers emphasise the importance of raising research awareness, almost half (30) also identify improvement of students’ knowledge of research strategies and skills as the key focus of both aims and content. Several discussion papers, notably Fraser and Lewis, (1993), Fraser et al (1993), Hull and Mokau (1993) argue that these should be progressively staged.

In the light of the above, discussion now turns in detail to the evidence for the content of research teaching, under each of the key themes identified: research awareness, critical appraisal of research, and knowledge of research strategies and skills.
Theme 1: Developing awareness of research and its role in promoting effective practice

Much of the literature presents the intimate relationship of research and practice as the raison d’etre for research teaching in social work. Among the most passionate advocates for synergy between the two are Charles (1997), Lyons (2000), Hardcastle and Bisman (2003), Lorenz (2003), Kiik, (2005), Labonte-Roset (2005) and Cameron and Este (2008). Karvinen-Niinikoski highlights the contribution of research education to the development of reflexive practitioners ‘creating communities of practice, where practice and research meet in a creative dialogue of developing social work’ (2005, p267). It is interesting to look at current research teaching on qualifying social work degrees in the UK in this light.

From the questionnaire responses it would appear that there are resonances with the literature. Table 3.4 shows that almost all (95.2%) of the questionnaire responses report that they offer specific modules in order to develop students' awareness of research and its relationship to professional practice.

Table 3.4 Answers to Q.1. Give details of relevant modules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Modules</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>31.7% 95.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeates all modules</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.1% 33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.3% 25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Scale research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2% 3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-professional Learning</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.8% 14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8% 8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>40.1% 120.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>100% 300%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Table 3.4 incorporates multiple responses in that some respondents will have given details of more than programme within their institution.)

A quotation from the questionnaires illustrates how these discrete modules may be configured:
We do a module titled Social Research Perspectives which aims to provide students with an awareness of different approaches to research but also its relationship with practice. The assessed piece comprises a critique of two research articles using an appropriate evaluative framework (Post-1992 institution, England, offering postgraduate route)

However 33.3% of institutions also state that the function of promoting research awareness for practice permeates all modules. This is elaborated in questionnaire responses such as:

Students look at the role of theory and research in their first module on the qualifying programmes. This thread then runs through all modules and is highlighted by staff. They undertake direct teaching on research methods over three semesters (Pre-1992 institution, Scotland, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

There is evidence to suggest that combination of discrete modules and embedded focus on research awareness can be configured different ways. The institution responding below, for example, offers firstly general awareness-raising of the relationship between research and practice, followed by a specific module dedicated to this:

These issues tend to be developed implicitly through engagement in critical analysis through the early part of the MA programme. They are then developed through the ‘Social Work Research’ Module and the dissertation where students are expected to develop an understanding of how their own research helps them to develop their own practice. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

For those institutions indicating that research content does not currently permeate the entire course, responses suggest that is the direction in which future developments would lead:

We are moving towards integrating research into the course holistically through all three years - it is primarily taught at the moment in
Appraisal of Evidence and the project course (Further education college, England, offering undergraduate route)

It is worthy of note that pre-1992 institutions are more likely to identify developing research awareness as permeating the course (see table 3.5 below). This may reflect the priority given to research at traditional universities and/or the likelihood that there are more staff involved in teaching at pre-1992 HEIs who are also directly involved in research.

### Table 3.5 Answers to Q.1. by types of institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Specific Modules</th>
<th>Permeates all modules</th>
<th>Dissertation</th>
<th>Small-scale research</th>
<th>Inter-professional Learning</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 1992</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This does not suggest lack of commitment to research at post-1992 universities, but may be indicative of fewer resources available for research at these institutions. The following questionnaire extract is illustrative:

*The academic teaching team at [this institution] are all research active, therefore teaching is research led. All modules require students to identify, critically appraise and collate research studies. Lecturers role model these methods in their own teaching. Lecturers use empirical data and their own research papers in their teaching. Whilst the module ‘Reflexive Practitioner’, taught at graduate and undergraduate level, specifically focuses on the relationship between research and practice, research teaching is integrated across the programmes. At both undergraduate and postgraduate level, students are required to produce a dissertation and this is the product of a piece of independent, either library/documentary or other field research. Across the programmes, students engage in activities that enable them to develop an understanding of the relationship between research and effective practice- e.g. case study work - students must undertake background research to inform their care planning and bring*
Analysis of course outlines in the curriculum material shows very little explicit content pertaining to research awareness and its relationship to practice, in terms of either named topics or the amount of class time devoted specifically to addressing this. However it is possible to discern a range of ways in which raising research awareness is addressed, from the explicit to the more implicit:

First, in a small minority of cases, there are units/modules specifically devoted to the topic (e.g. *Research for ethical and effective practice*). Only three units/modules were actually titled in ways which articulated the connection between research and professional practice and decision-making (e.g. *Evaluation Research for Professional Practice*). When the focus is on topics addressing this connection, topics covered include evidence-based practice, research-minded practice, and research for practice evaluation. These may also include methods and approaches which might be seen as more appropriate to practice (e.g. action research, explanatory research).

There are examples of similar modules in the literature, where the relationship between research and practice is underscored either by integration of practice relevant material, professional ethics and values in the teaching of research, or vice versa, by use of research skills to inform learning in or about practice. Illustrating the first approach, for example, are the teaching of participatory research to highlight oppression and empower the disenfranchised (Pastorello and Schooler, 1988; Larson and Brown, 1997), or evaluating child care practices through exploring child welfare datasets (Whipple, 2001). Examples of the latter include students taking an evidence based practice approach to considering interventions in their practice placements (Howard et al, 2003), or, quite commonly in the USA, students engaging in action research in their communities better to understand needs and resources (e.g. McNicholl, 1999; Anderson, 2002; Reese. 2004)

A second approach evidenced in the curriculum material, is the provision of units/modules which cover research awareness and its relationship to practice by
way of introduction to the whole idea of research in social work. Such units/modules tend to include one or two named topics which address this issue, at the beginning of the unit/module e.g. *Types and relevance of research to social work; Research in social work and practitioner research; Why research is important; Philosophical, social and policy contexts for social work research; Social research methods as applied in social work research.* However few if any papers describe modules devoted to the relationship of research and practice alone. Rather, they argue that their interdependency be conveyed through modules or projects integrating research learning with learning in or about practice.

Lastly, and representing by far the majority of curriculum outlines surveyed, there are units/modules which are primarily about research or research methods. These do not, however, address as a named topic the issue of research awareness and its relationship to practice. Instead they tend to move straight into talking about the nature of research or giving overviews of methodologies. Such units/modules tend to reflect a broader social science orientation to research. Perhaps because of their focus, they may also be open to students other than those on social work courses, or may be taught inter-professionally.

In the literature there is considerable evidence of similar courses, either at introductory or more advanced levels. These courses may focus on quantitative research methods and statistics (e.g. Fast, 2000; Pettrachi and Patchner, 2001; Bolen, 2006), as likely as qualitative (e.g. Julia and Kondrat, 2000; Holley et al, 2007). More often than not, they appear to involve a mixture of the two (e.g. Riessman, 1993; Sar et al, 2003; Finn and Dillon, 2007). More commonly, than appears to be the case in the UK audit, social science research methods courses such as these tend to provide the baseline foundation underpinning students’ subsequent or concurrent work on social work specific research projects (e.g Cnaan, 1987; Anderson, 2002; Reese 2004).

Interestingly, analysis of course outlines demonstrates that the types of literature students are referred to underscores an inter-disciplinary or inter-professional orientation even more strongly. There is a marked lack of social work research
literature used or cited, even in course outlines which purport to be explicitly about social work research. In some cases more generic social science research texts are used as main texts, with social work texts as supplementary material. In other cases, there is a marked lack of social work literature cited even on broad reading lists.

Theme 2: Learning how to make critical use of research studies (research findings and methods)

Institutions included in the audit highlight a number of ways in which students learn how to make critical use of research studies. As Table 4.6 shows, 89.3% of institutions state that specific modules are the main route used to enable students to learn how to make critical use of research studies.

Table 3.6: Answers to Q.2: Learning how to make critical use of research studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific modules</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeates all modules</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small scales research projects</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Learning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interprofessional Learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is illustrated by the following questionnaire response:

In the research module we use the [www.rip.org.uk/researchresources/evaluating.asp](http://www.rip.org.uk/researchresources/evaluating.asp) model. This is to actively encourage a research approach that is social work grounded as opposed to medical/health. Within this module we have current social care researchers in to talk about their work and to be questioned by the
students about their research methodology (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

In addition, however, 34.5% of responses indicate that this function of learning to make critical use of research permeates all modules. Here too, both explicit input on research criticism as well as permeation of this focus throughout all teaching may be present in the same programme, usually with the former reflected in teaching input, and the latter in assessed learning outcomes:

*Our assessment routines require students to demonstrate their understanding of relevant research in every piece of coursework and in relation to their recording of practice learning (for assessment purposes). Moreover, all staff are research active and teach with a strong emphasis on their own and related research* (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

Some questionnaire responses highlight a distinction made between research methods modules that teach students about research *skills* and that the teaching of critical appreciation of research studies which may permeate the course:

*Critical use in terms of critical appraisal of research findings and methods used is only superficially covered in the RM (research methods) unit as this focuses more on methods of data collection and analysis. Within the RM unit it is included within the framework of undertaking a literature-based dissertation.* (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

While the role of dissertations in the teaching of research will be discussed in more detail under the heading “how research is taught” it is noteworthy that 23.8% of the questionnaire respondents indicate that undertaking a dissertation is regarded as a route to facilitate students in making critical use of research studies, findings and methods.

A small number of institutions (8) suggest that students are expected to critically appraise available and relevant research evidence whilst on placement. The approach indicated here is that the use of research is not something that should
be restricted only to the academic setting, but that an evidence based approach should be taken to practice:

In addition students are expected to look at research relating to area of practice whilst on placement. The portfolio of practice asks them to write specific pieces e.g. case analysis that requires reading from a range of sources including research. (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

This position is supported by the respondents from the care councils who identify two inter-related areas in which the links between research and practice can be made explicit. The first is the college environment:

- ensuring that teaching is practice focused, and is continually making reference to evidence based practice.
- constantly linking research to the roles and tasks of the workforce.
- greater involvement of practitioners in teaching at Universities and creation of innovative joint teaching/practice posts.

The second area is in practice learning where encouragement is needed to ensure that students and practitioners address evidence based practice. Suggestions include:

- investing in the development of practice teachers to enable them to assist students to see relevance/importance of basing their practice interventions on sound research findings.
- forming strong partnerships between universities and agencies which generate joint research projects involving practitioners and building up research awareness in practice.
- requiring students to identify in practice portfolios evidence of research which has influenced their choice of practice interventions.

Interestingly, the explicitly evidence based practice approach is surprisingly little evident in the wider literature. Among the few advocates are Howard et al (2003) who describe a masters programme in the USA where:

instructors of all practice methods courses teach students about the interventions that have best survived rigorous empirical testing in their
respective practice areas…... Students [are] routinely informed as to the amount, type, and quality of the evidence supporting major theories, policies, and interventions in specific fields of practice (p 236)

In the UK audit, pre-1992 institutions are more likely to claim that learning how to make critical use of research (as with learning about the relevance of research for practice) permeates all modules. Again this may reflect the higher level of research activity of staff in these institutions, but such assumptions have to be tested in the light of the data in Part Two of this report giving the results of the audit on staff.

Table 3.7: Answers to Q.2: Learning how to make critical use of research studies by type of institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Specific modules</th>
<th>Permeates all modules</th>
<th>Small scale research projects</th>
<th>Dissertation</th>
<th>Practice learning</th>
<th>Inter-professional</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre1992</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post1992</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Making critical use of research studies is identifiable in both the content and aims of a minority of course outlines. It appears among topics listed with a variety of titles: critical evaluation of evidence; critical appraisal of research; critiquing research; and critical evaluation of published research. However, as in the wider literature, more often than critical use of research appears as an aim, rather than as a topic explicitly covered in a class session. In some cases critical research appraisal also forms the basis for a piece of assessed work. Examples of such practice are rare in the literature, with Sar et al (2003) among the few describing an assessment task whereby students are required to appraise the quality of one quantitative and one qualitative journal article informing practice.

Theme 3: Gaining knowledge and understanding of research strategies, methods and skills

Despite the debates outlined in section 3.3 above questioning the relevance of teaching research skills on qualifying social work courses, 89.2% of respondents
to the questionnaire indicate that students gain knowledge and understanding of research methods by undertaking specific modules focussed on research methods.

**Table 3.8: Response to Q.3: Gaining knowledge of understanding research strategies, methods and skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific modules</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permeates all modules</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small scales research projects</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation supervision</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here respondents are specifically emphasising research training via research methods modules, rather than teaching and learning general appreciation or critical appraisal of research; they are discussing students’ development of practical research skills and understanding of specific research strategies:

*Research strategies, methods and skills are developed through ‘Research Theory and Methods’ module where students are introduced to a range of social work methods and skills in social work and more generally, social sciences (pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)*

*The opportunity to acquire basic skills in both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis provides the basis for the development of critical appraisal skills and as preparation for undertaking a 10,000 word dissertation. This can be either a critical review of research studies in a particular area or a small-scale empirical study. The role of research in practice and issues of ethics and politics within the research process are also explored. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)*
Again, interestingly, the experience of undertaking supervised dissertations is regarded as a significant route towards students gaining greater knowledge and understanding of research. This was mentioned by 41% of respondents (see Table 3.8) and expanded in some answers:

…Little training in primary research methods. General overview given to masters students. More in depth supervision to those undertaking empirical projects for their dissertations. (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

The teaching of research methods and skills forms the basis of the majority of course outlines. Outline contents tend to follow a similar pattern including: an overview of research and research designs and approaches (often though not always including both quantitative and qualitative approaches); some coverage of what are seen as key methods (e.g. interviewing, questionnaire design); and proposal writing. Less often covered are specific methods such as work with computers and statistical packages (SPSS), research on sensitive topics, partnerships, small scale research, documentary research, participatory and emancipatory research; many of these topics could be seen as having direct applicability to research for social work practice.

The same emphasis on teaching of research methods and skills with a view to practising, rather than just appraising research, is evident in the wider literature. Where papers describe specific examples of research methods courses or modules within qualifying social work programmes, some (8) focus on quantitative methods some (8) on qualitative, but the largest proportion (14) on a mixture of both. For each approach there is evidence of formal, classroom based learning, to acquire relevant knowledge and develop skills, but also considerable opportunities for experiential learning, either through structured exercises or, more often, through students conducting empirical research projects.

Among the range of qualitative methods taught are ethnographic research (Sells et al, 1997), in-depth interviews for needs assessment (Tajnsek, 2005), detailed single case study a family encountered in placement (Berger, 2002), qualitative analysis techniques (Uehara et al, 1997) and exploration of the relationships
between evidence, interpretation, theory, researcher and researched (O’Conner and O’Neill, 2004), Quantitative methods taught include classroom based study of sampling, variable definition, measurement, analysis and bivariate statistics (e.g. Fast, 2000; Kolleck, 1993; Pettrachi and Patchner, 2001; Bolen, 2006) as well as experiential project based collection and/or analysis of quantitative data associated with practice problems (e.g. Cnaan, 1987; Hopkins and Brooks, 1987; Wells, 2006). As for mixed methods, the same mixture of classroom and experiential project based teaching and learning is in evidence. Several papers describe for example introductory courses on qualitative and quantitative paradigms and methods (eg. Riessman, 1993; Sar et al, 2003; Hisle-Gorman and Zuravin, 2006) or students encouraged to apply mixed method research mindedness to a problem observed in practice. Eight papers describe students undertaking individual, group or apprenticeship based projects, using mixed methods in fieldwork to explore community or practice issues directly relevant to social work. Recent examples are Anderson (2002), Appleby and Botsford (2006) Ello (2006), Wilson (forthcoming). Typically these focus on defining research questions, literature reviewing, negotiating agendas and access with agencies, designing mixed methods case studies or evaluations, developing interview and questionnaire research instruments, sampling, conducting field work, analyzing and synthesizing data.

Interestingly, only a minority of papers describe or discuss teaching and learning the skills of bibliographic or other literature and document based research methods. Exceptions are Finn and Dillon (2007) who focus on content analysis of records, speeches or transcripts, and Folaron and Stanley (1998) who attend to developing students’ knowledge and skills for bibliographic searching and web based enquiry.

Relatively little attention appears to be paid either to research ethics, as the topic of teaching and learning, or to politics and power as the focus of research content and process. McNicoll (1999), Julia and Kondrat (2000) and Holley et al (2007) are among the few concentrating on participatory research. O’Conner and O’Neill describe an emphasis on teaching and learning about feminist research,
power and social justice, and Whipple (2001) on research with minority and
disempowered ethnic groups. Comparing the teaching of research methods
between the UK, Israel, South Africa and Australia, Powell (2008) suggests
rather greater focus on these issues in the latter, rather than the former, two
countries. It is worth noting too that little if any reference is made to ethical
barriers preventing students from undertaking empirical research, often with
vulnerable people in practice or community settings. Poulin (1989) is among the
few identifying research ethics as a general topic for student learning, but does
not consider the viability of their own empirical research in this light.
The responses of the care council representatives to the question about
coverage of any specific requirements tend to refer to the lack of specific
requirements with respect to research in the degree. The respondent for England
for example reiterates that there are no such requirements from the Department
of Health. The responses from other councils reference the specific requirements
for the inclusion of attention to research rather than specific requirements for
teaching modules.
The response from Wales, for example, illustrates how research is included in
the NOS within the knowledge base of each unit at point 4 as well as being
referenced within unit 18: ‘Research, analyse, evaluate and use current
knowledge of best social work practice.’ It goes on to explain that within the ‘All
Wales Framework for Assessment’ at Level 2 and Level 3, students are expected
to demonstrate skills to: Assess the merits of contrasting theories, explanations,
research, policies, procedures and methods of intervention, and have knowledge
of relevant social research and evaluation methodologies.
The Northern Ireland response emphasises that research is included in the
underpinning knowledge of the N.I. Framework Specification at (C21). It
elaborates that to achieve the honours degree, social work students need to
have knowledge and critical understanding of: Theoretical perspectives and
evidence from international research on the design and implementation of
effective social work intervention with a wide range of service users, carers and
others. Following on from this (C22) further states, social work students need to
have knowledge and critical understanding of: *Researched based concepts and critical explanations from social work theory and other disciplines including their distinctive epistemological status and application to practice.*

Finally the response from Scotland points out that the *Rules for Social Work Training* (2003) outline what is required, specifically Rule 6.1(d) which requires that:

> there has been an HEI validation/approval process in respect of the course, which includes confirmation that the proposed course provision

(i) is designed and will be monitored and reviewed in accordance with the SiSWE;

(ii) will enable students completing an approved course to meet the SiSWE: and

(iii) will meet the terms of the Rules.

The lack of specific requirements for research teaching means that institutions offering the social work degree cover the subject in a variety of ways. The main difference in what is taught is related to the question of why research is taught on social work degree programmes. On the basis of responses to the audit, it is apparent that research is addressed in some way on social work degree programmes but that there is a wide range of approaches taken. Though individual programmes do not necessarily feature an explicit continuum of research teaching and learning, the range of approaches evident overall span a continuum from making students research aware and utilising methods of intervention which are knowledge and evidenced based, to developing their capacity for critical research appraisal, onward to providing them with knowledge and skills to enable them to practise research.
3.5 How research is taught

3.5.1 Models of integration

This section considers the different ways in which research teaching is configured in the curriculum of the social work degree, contextualising these first within the themes of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal integration’ that emerge from the literature. These themes are defined as follows:

- **vertical integration**: denotes where and when research methods teaching is positioned in programme structure and progression; and
- **horizontal integration**: denotes how far research methods focus is integrated with other curriculum areas, especially practice.

Together, they provide a useful framework against which to consider the data from the audit of current practice in UK social work education. They concern both what is taught and how it is taught, providing a link between the previous section and the current one.

i) Vertical Integration

Many papers describing specific research methods modules do not indicate where these sit within overall programme curricula – whether they are one among other research methods modules in qualifying programmes or whether they stand alone. Some are described as introductory or foundation courses, others final year and more advanced. Ryan and Sheehan (2000) surveying Australian practice, and Lorenz (2003) reflecting on European, all suggest that research methods teaching is commonly left (too) late in curricula – ‘icing on the cake, not bread and butter’. Some of these discrete courses take place over a matter of days or hours, others appear much more substantial; one (Sells et al, 1997) involves seven very substantial looking distinct components.

However, four discussion papers (two of them UK) do explore the question of sequencing, all proposing incremental models for research teaching, with introductory and foundation modules succeeded by more specialized and/or advanced work, in some cases including application of knowledge and skills in practice based research projects. For Fraser et al (1993) this progression is
envisaged from undergraduate (introductory/basic) to masters (advanced/specialized); for Powell (2008, and Orme and Powell (2007) it is from qualifying to postqualifying levels; for Desai (1987) and Hardcastle and Bisman (2003) the progression is envisaged within programmes at each level. Nine papers do describe undergraduate or masters qualifying programmes demonstrating vertical, sequential integration of research methods teaching. To some extent this mirrors the progression ladders discussed above, from research awareness, knowledge and comprehension to competence and application. Commonly it involves either movement from introductory to more advanced level (say statistics or evaluation) research methods teaching (eg. Whipple, 2001; Berger, 2002; Adam et al, 2004;), and/or movement from classroom based research methods instruction to application in a class or practice based project (eg. Howard et al, 2003; Ello, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007).

ii) **Horizontal integration**

In the literature review nine papers describe taught modules that suggest no particular integration of research methods with teaching and learning either about or in social work practice. Five of these (eg. Fast, 2000; Hisle-Gorman and Zuravin, 2006) involve use of web or e-technologies for delivery and support of teaching. They involve mainly the teaching of quantitative rather than qualitative research methods, such as survey techniques, statistics or experimental design (eg. Stocks and Freddolino, 1998; Bolen, 2006; Stark and Cohen, 2007). In their survey of USA graduate schools of social work, Fraser et al (1990) and Fraser and Lewis (1993) identified that most did not integrate teaching about research methods with teaching about social work practice. However, in line with the preoccupation identified above with the relationship between research practice and social work practice, and in particular with the concern to make research teaching and learning relevant and real, a significant proportion of papers (25) describe particular examples of integrative approaches to teaching research and social work practice. A further 8 discussion papers argue for such integration on grounds of practice relevance and student
motivation. Fraser and Lewis (1990), though their survey uncovered little of it, argued:

> While the integrated approach represents one of the most creative – and perhaps rigorous – approaches to teaching practice research, it is not clear that it is producing different outcomes. What is clear, however, is that the integrated approach provides students with an array of classroom and practicum learning experiences that are richer – with regard to learning potential – than those that can be offered under the traditional structure of separate research, practice and practicum courses’ (Fraser and Lewis, 1990, p 98)

Among either the literature describing particular programmes, or survey and discussion papers, a range of different models is presented for horizontal integration of research teaching and learning about social work practice. The models can be categorised as:

a). Infusion throughout curriculum

Several discussion papers, especially Hull and Mokuau (1994), Lorenz (2003) and most recently Cameron and Este (2008) advocated for this, on lines indicated above. Just one example appeared to demonstrate this in practice; Spicuzza (2007) describes in detail an undergraduate programme involving dedicated introductory research methods coursework, with all other modules utilising and critically appraising research evidence, as well as embedding teaching and learning of research and critical thinking skills throughout the academic curriculum and practice learning (field experience).

b). Integration of research practice with practice placement

Seven papers describe the practitioner/researcher approach where typically, students undertake research projects in their own practice learning/practicum. This comprises some form of assessment of service user needs (eg. Wodarski et al, 1995’ Berger, 2002), evaluation of their own or others’ practice (eg. Hopkins and Brooks, 1987; Sells et al, 1999), or taking and evidence based practice approach to research particular problems presented in their placement setting.
Howard et al, 2003). This is commonly supported by classroom teaching/discussion either prior to the placement or concurrent with it.

c). Research enquiry in or about other community/practice settings

Ten papers describe this approach which involves collaborations between HEI/students and agencies or community groups, in what are usually described as ‘service learning’ initiatives (as distinct from practice placements). Examples include Karvnen-Niinikoski (2005), O’Conner and O’Neill (2004), Appleby and Botsford (2006). Students explore particular agendas commonly agreed with community and agency partners, such as housing needs assessment (Knee, 2002), or the prevalence of domestic and community violence (Waintstock, 1994; McNicholl, 1999). The approach may involve participatory or action research (eg. Reese, 2004; McNicholl, 1999) and students may become involved in all aspects of research, or just certain parts of it. Again this is commonly supported by classroom teaching/discussion either previous or concurrent.

d). Integration of practice relevant material and social work values/goals into research methods teaching

Five studies suggest an approach which not only imports but infuses research methods teaching with social work content and principles. Examples include teaching participatory research to highlight oppression and empower those who are disenfranchised (Pastorello and Schooler, 1988), addressing ethnicity and anti-racist approaches to research design (Larson and Brown, 1997), and exploring child welfare datasets (Whipple, 2001).

e) Development and use of research skills in other parts of the taught curriculum

Three papers describe teaching initiatives that aim to develop students’ research skills to support their work on other course modules. Folaron and Stanley focus on development of students’ e-learning skills, including on-line bibliographic searching, to explore research practice topics. Holley et al (2007) describe students’ developing qualitative interviewing skills to explore both ethnicity, and the supportive significance in human lives of their relationships with animals.
McNicholl (1999) discusses student use of their learning about participatory research to consider both community development and group work.

3.5.2 Methods, assessment and accreditation of research teaching and learning
To examine how research teaching takes place on the social work degree, data from the questionnaires, interviews and curriculum material are examined under three categories:

1. Teaching methods/approaches
2. Assessment and assignments
3. Credits assigned to the assessment of research/research methods

Within these categories, much of the detail of the data presented illustrates the how the themes of horizontal and vertical integration, derived from the literature, take shape in the UK context, albeit rarely described in exactly these terms by respondents. (The same is true of discussion of ‘When research is taught’ in section 4.7 below).

The analysis of the UK audit data should also be read in the context of the differing levels of attention given to research teaching in the degree requirements of the four countries. The respondents from the care councils, when asked to give a personal and/or organisational view of teaching methods (e.g. whether there should there be discrete or generic modules for social work students; whether students should be requited to do a research based dissertation), reiterated that programmes can choose to take different approaches in how they incorporate research in the degree and achieve the required outcomes in a variety of ways.

The role of care councils is summed up by the response from Wales:

At approval and review, we will be looking for evidence that the approach chosen is likely to or has achieved the outcome of enabling students, by the time they graduate, to meet the requirements in relation to research requirements identified within the NOS, All Wales Assessment Framework and QAA benchmark statement.
The response from Scotland indicates there is an expectation that examples of research teaching would be found across the social work degree in Scotland but that these would relate to the specific learning outcomes of the SiSWE (also known as the Framework).

Only the response from England gives a more specific perspective, indicating that while there would be different approaches it would be within the philosophy of the degree that teaching on research will be integrated with teaching and learning about practice. This would include not only academic modules presenting research on practice, which would make it more interesting to students, but also link the research teaching to practice placements, echoing in some ways the concept of horizontal integration discussed above.

The care council responses illustrate that the context of the social work degree, or more specifically, the lack of specific research requirements, constantly raise inter-related questions of how, when and where research is taught. This observation is not to suggest that more specificity is required, but to highlight the ongoing tensions for social work educators of having to fulfil professional requirements and academic standards. This tension is evidenced by the discussion in the following sections.

1. Teaching methods/approaches

Respondents both to the questionnaire and interviews refer to the use of a range of teaching methods including lectures (sometimes followed up with smaller group workshops or tutorials), experiential group learning and individual dissertation supervision.

Decisions about how teaching is to take place are sometimes influenced by practicalities rather than principle. Pressure of space in the qualifying social work curriculum can in itself place constraints on the teaching methods used:

*It would be beneficial if there was more workshop time. There is so much to cover in social work teaching, that the opportunity to think and reflect is squeezed.* (Pre-1992 institution, Scotland offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)
Resources such as teaching space available can also dictate the methods used. For example, the inter-professional module taught in year one at a pre-1992 university (England) involves mainly large group teaching (didactic lectures), because doing small group work and exercises is difficult in a large lecture theatre. Other examples of large group teaching also include those designed for more than one professional or disciplinary group, which might suggest a level of integration not addressed in the literature, but one which is linked to degree requirements for inter-professional learning.

It is noteworthy, in the light of the requirements for inter-professional learning from the regulators, that 14.3% respondents identify this as a way of teaching research (Table 3.4 above). However the fact that students are learning in inter-professional groups may have implications for how research is taught. One example of an inter-professional module at a pre-1992 university in England, involves mainly didactic teaching with self-guided study in which students have to undertake critical appraisal of a piece of research.

Inter-professional learning is reported as having implications for student engagement. One respondent (from an FE College in England) commented on differences of approach between the social work and nursing students undertaking this undergraduate module:

*Social work students are so used to working in groups and finding out for themselves but the nurses don’t seem to like it at all…the nurses are used to being lectured to.*

A further observation suggests that inter-professional learning is not so popular with social work students, but this seems to relate more to the content or the dominant paradigm of teaching, rather than the mode:

*Part of an inter-professional learning module in Year 1 in which students learn very basic aspects to enable searching and description of journal articles and other relevant material. Grounded in an EBP (evidence based practice) approach. Half of the 20 credits for the Foundations of Inter-professional Practice module come from the research element. NB students from social work tend to find that this module is dominated by a*
health paradigm. We have worked intensively with colleagues to try to alter this with limited success. We are now building up a database of statistical material from a current research study for social work students to be able to use, probably in 2009 onwards. (Post 1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

An example of inter-disciplinary (as distinct from inter-professional) teaching is a discrete postgraduate module on research design, taught in a pre-1992 university in Wales. The module is taught firstly as a lecture series together with other disciplines; this is followed by seminars taught within single discipline groups, with the aim of making the research teaching more specific to social work. The course uses a social science text but the emphasis is on applying this more specifically to social work in the context of the seminars and associated assignment.

A different approach is used in a second module offered by the pre-1992 university in England referred to above. Lecturers discuss a range of qualitative methods using case studies from their own research to exemplify the points they are making. Each session focuses on a particular methodological approach. It is not clear whether this is linked to discussions about practice.

All of the approaches described thus far constitute non-experiential approaches to learning and teaching, and it would appear that they do not attempt horizontal integration with social work specific teaching.

Within the literature a number of non-experiential learning methods were also identified. It is clear, for example, both from the surveys of education practice and from passing references made in many other papers that a significant amount of research methods teaching is done didactically, through lectures or related means. There is also plenty of reference to the use of seminars and other forums which engage students in exchange about research, rather than doing it as such (e.g. Sar et al, 2003; Finn and Dillon, 2007; Holley et al, 2007; Spicuzza, 2007). Whiteman and Nielsen (1990) even describe the use of drama to teach survey research methods. However, with just one exception, papers do not discuss these non-experiential approaches in and of themselves. The exception (Fast,
discusses a particular technique for 'making concrete' basic statistical concepts in class. More commonly, non-experiential methods are described as precursors for, or adjuncts to, experiential learning about research through the process of doing it.

A further non-experiential approach taken to qualifying level research teaching is technology assisted learning. In this context the response from the care council respondent from England is pertinent. It was suggested that the requirement for students to complete the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) or equivalent as part of their degree could be made interesting and relevant to teaching research by introducing students to databases and giving them the skills to search them.

Seven papers focus on use of e-technologies, including websites, email and electronic discussion groups (eg. Stocks and Freddolino, 1998; Royse, 2000; Schoech and Helton, 2002; Hisle-Gorman and Zuravin, 2006; Stark and Cohen, 2007). Two additional linked papers look at course delivery via video conferencing (Patchner et al, 1998; Pettrachi and Patchner, 2001). The rationale for these is either that they may supplement classroom teaching, or, for distant students, replace it. It is interesting to note that six of the seven technology assisted projects described have been the subject of some evaluation. There is mixed evidence about the effectiveness of use of IT and technology assisted methods in place of face to face delivery of teaching; Stocks and Freddolino (1998) and Pettrachi and Patchner (2001), for example, are in favour, while Hisle-Gorman and Zuravin (2006) are against The evidence is clearer about the effectiveness of additional of web based methods accompanying teaching traditional methods, with for example Folaron and Stanley (1998) and Fast (2000) reporting enhanced student learning and experience as a result.

Turning to experiential learning, a range of examples of such approaches to student learning about research were provided by respondents in the UK audit. One module, offered by an English HEI (for which two other non-experiential modules have already been described above) focuses on examining what counts as evidence and is designed to 'highlight the importance of understanding the
need to have different criteria for different types of method'. Students are expected to do their own literature search and undertake their own critical analysis of the literature in relation to a particular topic. Although methods of assessment are dealt with in detail below it is useful to see how the assignment for this module links to the process of teaching and involved:

four to five students working in small groups. They have all to read at least four or five things each including papers and policy documents...they have to look for the key themes and then each person covers one theme...they have to do an individual essay but they need to look at the general context that they covered as a group...this is a fairly difficult assignment, we are battling with their tendency to take a minimalist approach alongside a specific antipathy towards research methods...we ask them to bring in research methods literature in order to critique the literature they are discussing...but we might be asking too much. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes).

Another programme (at a pre-1992 institution in Scotland offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes) makes specific reference to the use of workshops as preparation for undertaking a piece of empirical research. Classes are designed to enable students to think about what they are learning and how they might apply this to their own project. Students have time in small groups to reflect on this and are encouraged:

to navigate through the teaching and immediately be able to apply the ideas...I do think the experiential bit is really important...it is a live experience...they need to go out and get data.

Other interesting or innovative ways that research teaching has been developed using experiential methods include small scale research projects identified by 3.6% respondents (Table 4.4 above):

We are developing a research partnership with [local] Borough Council to identify mutually beneficial areas of research for students to undertake in partnership with the local authority. Students are expected to undertake a
small scale piece of research in their third year and to apply the research skills they have been taught in the second year. (FE College, England, offering undergraduate route)

This UK evidence is interesting to consider in the context of the wider literature, where very strong support for and emphasis upon students’ experiential research learning is in evidence. While commonly supported by some didactic input and other forms of exchange to discuss the experience, the pedagogic case for experiential learning is usually made in terms of making research ‘real’ and demystifying it. An impressive range of models for learning about research through the experience of doing it are presented:

i. Conducting research projects

Sixteen papers describe programmes in which students experience undertaking research projects of their own. These were mainly done as single researchers (eg. Appleby and Botsford, 2002; Knee, 2002; Ello, 2006; Wells, 2006), but occasionally group based (McNicholl, 1999; Reese, 2004; Tajnsek, 2005). They included the practice based projects discussed, for example assessing community needs, engaging in participatory research initiatives, evaluating practice. Occasionally they include classroom or private study based projects – for example analysing existing datasets (eg. Bolen, 2006)

ii. Research apprenticeship

Four papers (Cnaan, 1987; Quinn et al, 1992; Whipple, 2001; Ehler, 2005) describe, and a fifth (Cameron and Este, 2008) advocates for students working as apprentices either on existing or newly developed research projects being conducted by faculty members, perhaps in partnership with agencies. Students may be involved in all or part of the research activities and stages involved and they may do so singly or in groups.

iii. Other experiential learning

A few papers highlight examples of students’ experiential learning through a variety of exercises (which do not amount to ‘projects’). These include critical appraisal exercises whereby students examine a series of research papers and reflect critically on them (Pastorello and Schooler, 1988; Sar et al, 2003). They
may also involve students conducting small research tasks such as observational exercise, content analysis of short texts, and reflecting on them (eg. Riessman, 1993; Finn and Dillon, 2007).

It is important to note too that among the strongest messages emerging from the 23 studies claiming to have evaluated research methods teaching and learning in some way is that students especially value such experiential learning. The hands-on experience of researching practice based or practice relevant issues ‘brings research alive’ and underscores its relevance (e.g. Anderson, 2002; Knee, 2002; Ello, 2006). Sar et al (2003) argue strongly that the effect of using experiential methods is that student anxiety and resistance can be reduced, recognition of the relevance and utility of research for practice can be enhanced, along with student understanding of the need to integrate research with practice. Students can better understand practice issues when they learn to take a research minded approach to problems and questions.

While there is strong support in the literature for experiential learning, several papers (eg. Garrett, 1998; Cameron and Este, 2008) echo the argument substantiated most strongly by Secret et al (2003) in a survey of student attitudes towards research learning that a mix of different methods and strategies is needed to cater for diverse student learning styles, prior knowledge and motivations.

In this light it is also important to note that several authors (eg. Quinn et al, 1992; Lyons, 2000; Wells, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007) also highlight that student research projects are resource intensive, time consuming for educator and students; they require flexibility and, importantly, the quality of work can depend on nature of research learning opportunities (Quinn et al, 1992; O’Conner and O’Neill, 2004). The same issues are relevant to UK respondents in this audit, and their concerns are discussed more fully in section 3.9 below.

Finally, there is much less attention paid to teaching methods and approaches in the course outline material than there is to content. Actual teaching approaches are not often mentioned in course outlines and where they are mentioned, it is mainly to emphasise the fact that students are expected to participate in learning:
an “active” or “interactive” approach is taken. There is mention of specific forms of delivery, such as lectures, seminars, workshops and group learning exercises. Computer laboratories are mentioned very little. Only one unit mentioned the use of e-learning.

2. Assessment and assignments

It has already been indicated that the assignments set for students to demonstrate research learning outcomes, and the methods used to assess them, might also give indications of how research is taught. Dissertations are identified as a method of teaching research, but when they are undertaken they are a significant means of assessing whether students are research aware and research competent. Responses to the survey question about whether students had the opportunity to undertake a project/dissertation, and the nature of the dissertation, are therefore relevant.

Table 3.9: Responses to Q.4: Opportunities to undertake a project/dissertation involving the use of research skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent study</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation - empirical</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module assignments</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice portfolio</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation - literature based</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.9 shows that 81 questionnaire respondents state that there were opportunities to undertake a dissertation, either literature based or an empirical study.

There is no requirement from any of the care councils for students to undertake a dissertation. Only the response from the care council representative from Wales addresses the issue of the dissertation stating that at Masters level, the Care
Council for Wales would expect students to receive specific teaching on research methodology to prepare them for their dissertation. They acknowledge that some undergraduate programmes also require students to undertake a dissertation in the final year of the degree, and would expect to see evidence of appropriate teaching input on research incorporated into the curriculum in such circumstances.

A key issue in terms of what is taught and how it is taught, is whether the project or dissertation involved empirical research. 53% of survey respondents indicated that it is possible for students to carry out an empirical piece of work. However, more detailed questionnaire responses suggest that in some cases students are advised against this:

*Most students follow the advice strongly given to undertake literature based research. Those wishing nonetheless to include small scale empirical research must consult their supervisor/facilitator fully, to ensure that the work envisaged: fits their research questions, is practicable, and meets the ethical criteria for approval by the XX Institute (HEI). If appropriate, procedures for gaining other agency research governance approval are also addressed.* (Pre-192 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

Table 3.10 indicates that there is no significant difference in approach adopted by pre or post 1992 institutions or FE colleges.

**Table 3.10 Responses to Q.4: Opportunities to undertake a project/dissertation involving the use of research skills: by institution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent Study</th>
<th>Dissertation - empirical</th>
<th>Module assignments</th>
<th>Practice portfolio</th>
<th>Dissertation - literature based</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre 1992</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post 1992</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FE</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Undertaking a dissertation was regarded by 23.8% of respondents as a tool to demonstrate the use of research skills. This approach was more clearly articulated in the course outlines. In fact, a large proportion of course outlines (seven) were actually outlines for undertaking a dissertation rather than the description of a teaching course/module.

Although many programmes require a dissertation as a major demonstration of a student’s ability to undertake research of some form, there was great variation in the assessment requirements for these dissertations. There is also variation in the types of research which were seen as acceptable for the dissertation. Very little specific guidance is given in course outlines for doing different types of dissertation research, other than small scale empirical studies or literature reviews. Only one HEI makes explicit in the course outline the choices available covering examples such as: scoping studies, mapping literature, analysis of ethical issues, key informant interviews, mock research proposals, and feasibility assessments. It is possible, of course, that such guidelines may have be provided for students in supplementary course material, not included in course outlines.

Analysis of questionnaire responses shows that a major variation between courses is whether students were asked to undertake empirical research or not, with ethical and practical constraints the main obstacles.

**Final year independent study - 12,000 word extended essay on topic of their choice related to social work. Students are encouraged not to do empirical study because of difficulties with ethics approval and time frame of launch of study and final practice placement. Usually literature or theoretical based study. Learning outcomes require evaluation of appropriate literature and research in connection with topic and critical appraisal of the research process and its connection to social work practice. (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)**
All third year students are required to undertake a dissertation on an area of social work. This can be either theoretical or practice focussed. All dissertations are literature based due to difficulties of time scale and ethical requirements. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

3rd year undergraduates used to complete a small piece of practical research. We moved from this to a hypothetical research proposal for several reasons, but the main one was concern about the ethics of letting people of unproven research competence do this. The current format does seem to work well (Post-1992 institution, England, undergraduate route)

Here there was a contrast with much of the practice described in the literature, where, as has been noted above, practical and resource demands received some critical attention, but ethical and governance concerns very little. The range of assessments other than dissertation identified from the data includes:

- Variety of formative/summative assessments including exams, group presentations, statistics tests
- Critical reviews of research studies (1.5-3K words)
- Research proposal or design (sometimes designed as proposal for dissertation research) (0.5K – 4K words)
- Literature review (2.5K – 3.5K words)
- Project presentation and group evaluation
- Journal article to be submitted (6K)

There is little information on the detailed requirements of these assessments methods either from the curriculum material or the survey responses. The literature search revealed references to assessing different elements of research learning. Some studies highlight the need to assess the different elements of students' research methods knowledge and abilities. Cnaan (1987) for example,
focuses on assessing both the design and conduct/analysis of research projects while Sar et al (2003) propose an assessment model to address a range of different research methods, knowledges and skills, including critical analysis and empirical research conduct. In terms of timing, as opposed to method of assessment, Desai (1987) argues that students should be progressively assessed on different stages of their research methods learning, with the expectation that levels of understanding and competence level will increase as they progress. Three papers (Wodarski et al, 1995; Ello, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007) highlight the potential for requiring students to make individual or group presentations of their work as a significant motivator and source of confidence and esteem.

Again there is little or no information from the survey or the curriculum material of what the different types and/or level of assignment are intended to assess.

Researching practice

The linking of research related assignments with practice placement is perhaps a more innovative form of assessment than essay based assignments. One care council respondent suggests that a way of embedding research into the curriculum would be to require all assessed material, from both academic learning and practise, to reference research. This would require a level of horizontal integration not evident from the curriculum material or the survey responses.

However a small number of institutions (n=8) suggest that students are expected to critically appraise the available research evidence whilst on placement. This suggests that use of research is not something that should be restricted only to the academic setting:

*In addition students are expected to look at research relating to area of practice whilst on placement. The portfolio of practice asks them to write specific pieces e.g. a case analysis that requires reading from a range of sources including research.* (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)
Our assessment routines require students to demonstrate their understanding of relevant research in every piece of coursework and in relation to their recording of practice learning (for assessment purposes). (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

The assessment of research teaching and learning is touched upon by only a small proportion of papers and is not a significant focus. Nineteen references related to specific programmes, six mentioned assessment in discussion only. Just a few papers mention the assessment of student project work and/or dissertations (e.g. Sar et al, 2003; Holley et al, 2007) but these are not discussed in any detail. Some problems with the assessment of experiential projects, however, are highlighted: the quality of the student learning experience may vary with the particular projects undertaken and with the relationships with available research supervisors available (Quinn et al, 1992). Where students learn to do research as apprentices to staff researchers, it is not always easy to disentangle for assessment purposes what is student's own achievement, and what is the product of their supervisor's work (McNicholl, 1999). Some attention, interestingly, is paid in the literature to the practice of requiring students to make presentations, either individual or in groups on their research work. Several papers highlight how this can provide motivational incentive and focus to learning about research and recognise its relevance for practice (Wodarski et al, 1995; Ello, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007). Finally, there is some discussion of formative and summative assessment for research, with the majority focussing on the latter. However Larson and Brown (1997) and Garrett (1998) advocate for formative assessment as a valuable part of the learning process.

3. Credits assigned to the assessment of research/research methods
The amount of time devoted to the teaching of research might be seen as an indicator of its relative importance in the curriculum and provide some baseline from which to measure its increasing importance over time. An attempt was made to gain some measure of this by asking the number of credit points
assigned to research units/modules, and the proportion of credit points this represented for the whole course. Unfortunately these figures were difficult to ascertain meaningfully as only a very small proportion of respondents gave information in response to the second part of the question. The figures here remain somewhat provisional. However it can be seen from Table 3.11 that there is great diversity in the number of credit points accorded to the teaching of research.

Table 3.11: Credits - level and proportion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 credits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 credits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 credits</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 credits</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 credits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 credits</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 credits</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 credits</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 credits</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 credits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 credits</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 credits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no credits - non modularised</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can not quantify as permeates course</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of credits assigned to the assessment of research/research methods varies considerably, from 10 credits to 75 credits. It would appear that the most common proportion of credits awarded was 20 or 60. Three institutions state that the programme was not modularised and six say that it is not possible to quantify the number of credits awarded for research given that research teaching permeates the course.
This diversity is reflected in course materials. Actual class time varied from 15 hours to 8 full day sessions. However there are different ways of presenting time commitments: some course outlines mention specific extra hours of study time required by students, and specific hours of time expected to be spent with supervisors.

### 3.6 Who teaches research?

Issues about the capacity of social work educators to teach research can be explored by identifying who teaches research on the social work degree. Course outlines did not always include the name or position of the unit/module co-ordinator or teaching staff. Therefore it is difficult to provide meaningful data in response to this question. When included, it is often names only, without detail of position, qualification or background. This part of the audit might therefore be further clarified by data from the audit of staff discussed in Part Two above where staff did describe themselves as providing research training.

Having said that one noticeable trend is that a generic research unit might be coordinated by someone of non-social work background, but involve tutors or supervisors who have a social work background in related seminars. This is exemplified by Interview respondents who identify a range of arrangements regarding who was involved in the teaching of research methods.

At Interview site one each of the three taught modules has input from different people. The inter-professional module in year one is taught mainly by staff from the nursing department. The second module is taught by members of staff from the social work teaching team and the third module is taught by the social work academic with responsibility overall for research methods teaching on the programme.

At Interview site two the limited research expertise amongst staff is acknowledged and research methods teaching (an inter-professional module in year two) takes place within the local university that had validated the programme. Staff from the college are only involved in moderation of assignments.
We are a further education college validated by the local university so we do not have many research tutors...the local university has a wealth of research knowledge and a wealth of research professors who can do the work for us...so the thinking is two-fold...one to take the students into the university and give them a university experience and two to be tutored by someone else...because we are a very small team...to broaden out their knowledge.

The respondent from Interview site three holds overall responsibility for coordinating the research methods teaching and undertook most of the teaching. She is a researcher and also a practitioner and is able to talk about relevant areas: *It's good to be able to give live examples.*

At Interview site four all lecturing staff are contracted to be research active and bring research into their teaching. Currently, a new module is being developed by two staff with particular interest in the area. Both are senior members of staff with considerable research knowledge and expertise.

It is interesting to note that where research methods are taught within an interdisciplinary framework the lead discipline or profession is not social work. The interdisciplinary research module at Interview site five is taught by sociologists although the associated seminars are taught by social work academics. Across the social work course, all teaching staff members are social work trained. Some staff members have research as part of their contract. Others (with the exception of one), not contractually required to undertake research are, by choice, doing doctorates.

Within the specific *Research Methods* module taught at Interview site six lectures are given by a qualified social worker and active researcher, currently completing a PhD. She provides follow-up seminars along with another staff member who is social work trained and holds a doctorate.

Little if any of the wider literature touches upon who provides research methods teaching. Where the subject arises at all, it is in discussion of the challenges of providing either formal input or supervision (especially in practice settings) due to
the variable levels of training, competence and motivation of staff involved (eg. Lyons, 2000; O’Conner and O’Neill, 2004; Labonte-Roset, 2005).

3.7 When is research taught?

The timing of research teaching within programmes might be an indication of how the subject is perceived - how central it is to social work education. The question of when research is taught is also very closely linked to that of its vertical integration, within the rest of the curriculum. As earlier discussion has identified, though many papers describing qualifying courses give no indication of their timing, there are arguments made for sequential progression from introductory to more advanced research teaching over the course of qualifying programmes (eg. Fraser et al, 1993; Hardcastle and Bisman, 2003). There is also some (USA) evidence of such sequential progression of research modules (eg. Sells et al, 1997; Berger, 2002; Adam et al, 2004; Ello, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007). However, the complaint has also been made that research methods teaching and learning comes all too often too late, and therefore too marginalised (Ryan and Sheehan, 2000; Lorenz, 2003).

Within the current UK survey, data about the timing of research teaching are not always included in course outlines (nine did not include it), and if it is, it is not always meaningful as it was not clear from the outlines how many stages are included in the whole course.

While ten course outlines did not state at what level the research unit/module is offered, the majority of outlines locate the research units/modules towards the middle or end of courses A small number (3) did include a module in year one. All of these appeared to be in the second semester. This suggests that social work students are introduced to research teaching later, rather than earlier, in the curriculum.

Within the literature reviewed, a majority of papers focused on the teaching of research methods through various discrete courses, modules or projects. However, several discussion papers, and one account of an actual example of
education practice, advocate for thoroughgoing infusion of research content and methods in all aspects of the qualifying social work curriculum, underlining the centrality of research to practice. Both Hull and Mokuau (1994) and Cameron and Este (2008), for example, propose a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methodological content to be integrated throughout teaching and learning about practice. Zlotnik (2007) advocates for the teaching of evidence based practice throughout while Spicuzza (2007) describes in detail an undergraduate programme in the USA with dedicated introductory research methods coursework, and with all other modules incorporating critical appraisal an utilisation of research evidence to support practice effectiveness.

In addition to responses which focus on either research teaching taking place in particular modules or research permeating the course, one quarter of respondents identify the dissertation as a mechanism for developing awareness of research.

Dissertation oriented units/modules tend to occur in the last year or semester of the programme. Only one HEI appeared to spread the class time in support of dissertation writing over a whole academic year. More usually dissertation class preparation was given in semester one, on the understanding that work would be ongoing over a longer period with support from supervisors.

The interview respondents illustrate a range of approaches in relation to the introduction of research methods teaching, although the timing generally took account of the need for dissertation planning. This is evident in Interview site six where a research module and dissertation are completed in year two of the Masters programme.

At Interview site three there is an emphasis on the allocation of dissertation supervisors as early as possible to encourage students to begin thinking about what they might do. In practice, few students do much work on their dissertations in the early stages as they are undertaking their practice learning placements during this period.

The Research Design module at Interview site five is introduced in the first term after which students are required to choose their subject area and begin research.
design and ethical approval. Data collection and writing-up is to be done in year two. This programme’s respondent also noted that research is introduced early and permeates all modules across both years of the Masters course. Permeation is also emphasised by the respondent at Interview site four, alongside a specific focus on research teaching in year three. The use of permeation here might equate to the horizontal integration discussed in the literature.

An alternative approach is evident in one programme (Pre-1992 institution, England offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes) where specific research methods teaching takes place in each of the three years. The inter-professional module takes place in first year in semester two:

*The first year is not the best place to do this…but it is difficult to change because this would involve making changes to two courses…I am thinking it might be worth moving away from the inter-professional model towards a social work only module.*

Locating this module in year one appears to be problematic because students have not yet had the opportunity to develop their own professional identity: *it might possibly be better to have this module in year two when students might be more open to hearing about others roles.*

The second module takes place in year two, semester one while in year three students undertake a dissertation.

Research methods teaching at Interview site two (an FE college) takes place in years two and three. The respondent also raises the issue of managing both academic and practice components within a programme where there are three practice placements: *so the academic input is squeezed quite a bit.* However, she went on to suggest that the research input within the degree has increased when compared with the two-year DipSW programme when it had been taught as part of a sociology module.

*I would say the research teaching we have now is a direct consequence of the new degree…we are giving more time to research…the degree echoes the importance of it that was maybe lost on the DipSW…*
This would appear to be an illustration of how moving from a DipHE to a degree level qualification has enhanced research teaching in social work education.

3.8 Where is research taught?

The discussions above about integration of research teaching in the curriculum raises particular issues for social work, where students have to undertake a significant amount of their learning outside of the academy, engaging with a variety of practice experiences. This question is linked to earlier discussion about horizontal integration of research methods teaching, with a notable emphasis in the (mainly American) literature on use and development of research skills in practice and/or community settings. It is therefore particularly relevant to interviewees in this audit to elaborate on where research teaching took place.

Despite the fact that responses to questions about the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of research teaching indicate that research teaching was seen to be relevant to practice as well as academic learning, all six interview respondents indicated that research teaching and its assessment takes place mainly within the academic setting.

One respondent at Interview site one indicates that at present there is limited opportunity to emphasise the research dimension within the practice setting:

\[
\text{there is no requirement for students to be research oriented when they are out on placement...this is not part of the competencies...I feel that this is a structural omission which creates the illusion of a divide between practice and research.}
\]

Another respondent (from Interview site two) indicates that students are encouraged to draw on relevant research as part of their assignments involving analysis of practice, although as a third respondent (from Interview site five) pointed out: \text{research methods are not taught specifically as part of the practice learning module.}
However, at Interview site four students are required to undertake an *Evidence Based Case Study* that involves an examination of how the evidence base in social work informs their intervention as part of their assessed practice.

By being encouraged to undertake empirical work as part of their dissertation, students at Interview site three have to liaise with outside organisations in relation to negotiating access and gaining consent. The respondent from this site went on to indicate that there have been some occasions where the university has been approached by organisations who have asked for students to undertake particular pieces of work for their dissertation. This is something the respondent feels could be increased: ‘particularly for our Masters students…that’s quite a high level of research…15,000 words is a substantial report.’ However, as indicated in the discussion of dissertation issues (section 4.5) this is not a unanimous view.

The literature search also identified discussions of different settings for teaching and learning about research methods. These corresponded to the range of approaches to delivery and integration of research methods teaching. Eight papers describe cases where research methods are classroom taught only, although some incorporate practice issues and data. Nineteen papers describe cases where students learn about research methods and deploy them both in the classroom and in practice or community settings. An additional group of seven papers focus on use of e-technologies, and 1 on video-conferencing which are intended for student use away from classroom settings.

### 3.9 Concerns raised

The final question in the survey questionnaire asked respondents to articulate their concerns pertaining to research teaching. This was deliberately left open in order not to influence the nature of the responses. The bar chart below shows all responses and indicates that both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have similar concerns in relation to research teaching.
In terms of differences between types of institution, it is interesting to note that only postgraduate programmes have concerns around students’ perceived lack of interest. Time constraints in terms of students undertaking research is mentioned only by undergraduate programmes responding to the questionnaires, although interviewees from postgraduate programmes did raise this.

Further analysis suggested that responses to this question could be divided between three categories. The first category of responses relate to ‘why teach research’ and these have been discussed in section 3.3 (see also Table 3.3).

Pragmatics

The second category of responses to this question has been identified as the pragmatics of teaching research on qualifying social work programmes.
Table 3.12: Identified concerns about research teaching - pragmatics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>% of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints - fitting research teaching into the curriculum</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints - undertaking research (students)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of research expertise amongst staff</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses highlight some of the constraints felt by respondents when attempting to teach research. The most commonly mentioned are time constraints.

**Time constraints**

Throughout the preceding sections there have been references to practical issues that affect the teaching of research. In particular time constraints both in terms of fitting research teaching into the curriculum and the lack of time for students to undertake research were cause for concern, being mentioned 32.1% and 7.1% respectively of respondents to the questionnaire. As one interview respondent highlights, even when time is found in the curriculum for teaching, it is the demands of getting hands-on experience that proves the greater challenge:

> we have made lots of space in the timetable to teach research methods (three course units) so for us there is not a timetabling issue…there is an issue around time and that is about students being unable to undertake practice based research which I think they would enjoy…there is simply not enough time to do this. (Interview 1 respondent)

The following quotation highlights dilemmas relating to level of study. It is an expectation that masters’ level students undertake a dissertation. However time constraints are greater because courses have to ensure the same number of days in assessed practice as undergraduate programmes, but have to deliver the total programme in only two years. However it is constraints other than length of the curriculum that are seen to confound research teaching:

> Even on the Masters programme, students are asked to do a literature based dissertation…as well as time constraints we feel that social service
Departments won't want a lot of students coming in to do research with their service users...it's just not possible (Interview 6 respondent)

The tension of research methods courses vying for curriculum space is apparent in the literature. There is emphasis on the challenges of integrating research methods in the curriculum, both vertically (in programme structures and progression) and horizontally (integrating research with learning about and in practice). In particular, research project-based experiential learning in placement or community contexts were seen to be resource intensive (Quinn et al, 1992; Wells, 2006; Spicuzza, 2007) It was also seen to be logistically demanding to dovetail schedules in order to incorporate research teaching and to balance this with other student, staff and practitioner commitments (Fraser et al, 1990; McNicholl, 1999; Adam et al, 2004, Wells, 2006).

A final time constraint identified by interview respondents is demands on staff time:

Because students do an individual piece of work they have to have individual supervision and that means carving out staff time' (Interview 3 respondent).

Staff expertise

Another concern relating to staff identified in the survey is lack of staff expertise. It is mentioned by 13.1% of respondents to the questionnaire and by respondents to the telephone interviews.

I would love students to learn about research while doing some...to make it more real...it would make more sense...I don't know how we would do it in the current climate with the number of people we've got on the teaching team (Interview 2 respondent)

The concern is common to both undergraduate and postgraduate routes to qualification, but the latter refers to specific methodological expertise:

In terms of expertise, we do not have huge amounts of quantitative expertise within the department...we have to call on staff from the nursing department who are more familiar with survey and experimental design. (Interview 1 respondent)
Similarly, some of the papers included in the literature review highlighted that social work educators and practice assessors often lack either the commitment to research training, or the research knowledge and skills to provide the training required (Hopkins and Brooks, 1987; Quinn et al, 1992; Lyons, 2000; Labonte-Roset, 2005).

Interestingly, as indicated in section 3.6, demands for expertise in supervision can lead to an interdisciplinary approach: ‘Work load constraints for social work staff to provide individual dissertation supervision. Some times staff from other social science disciplines will supervise students’ (Interview 5 respondent).

**Ethics**

Other practical issues such as the need to gain ethical approval (13.1%) and the need to involve service users and carers (6.0%) are mentioned as being time consuming, or affecting the time taken to undertake research. Interestingly, while some studies in the literature pay specific attention to research ethics and user participation as part of the content of research methods teaching and learning, the question of ethical barriers to students undertaking empirical research in practice settings receives less attention in the (predominantly American) literature; only three mention it (McNicoll, 1999; Anderson, 2002; Wells, 2006).

In this study, respondents to the questionnaire highlighted ‘ethics’ in its various manifestations as a concern:

*Right or wrong: students are often disappointed and frustrated by having to avoid primary research as they don’t feel confident of meeting new ethical procedures required of social care research. Timescales and perceived hurdles result in students focusing on ‘safer’ research where ethics are likely to be less of a barrier to success or completion. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)*

*As always, there is not enough time to really develop students’ knowledge and skills in this area and we have nothing very much to build on in terms of students’ prior knowledge. This is true for students who reach us via the*
school or non-traditional routes. We are also hampered by the degree to which agencies have the capacity to reinforce our commitment to knowledge based approaches. In this part of the world, as everywhere, ‘process’ is dominant. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate route)

A respondent at an interview site said that students do not undertake empirical research because they do not have the time. This is partly because of the time demands of undertaking rigorous, ethical research in a programme dominated by the need to undertake assessed practice:

they don't have the time to do good questionnaires and get through ethics committees…they have three placements and there isn’t time practically for them to do it…a couple of students were dying to do some empirical research…but afterwards they said if they’d realised they wouldn’t have

(Interview 2 respondent)

For this respondent gaining ethical approval is a huge issue to the extent that opportunities to undertake empirical research are denied: ‘we actually say to them now sorry but no’.

‘Problematics’

The final category of responses to this question relates to what we have called the ‘problematics’ of teaching research and are shown in Table 3.13 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>% of cases</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance to practice</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ anxiety around research</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service user and carer involvement in research</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student lack of interest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research within practice learning opportunities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student anxieties

The most common concern across all programmes is to ensure that students are aware of the relevance of research to practice and allay anxieties. This is stated
as a concern by 51.2% of respondents to this question, and elaborated in the comments:

*Making ‘research’ relevant to qualifying students is always a challenge. Many are put off by fear of statistics, for example. This is why we are trying to introduce more teaching in that area. However, we aim to show students that they are capable of getting involved in ‘research’ (including audit, evaluation, or other forms of enquiry) and that this should be an important part of their future practice; not everyone will become a researcher, but all should be ‘research-minded’ in order to improve outcomes for those with whom they work.* (Pre-1992 institution, England, undergraduate & postgraduate routes)

This response echoes two themes within the interview data. Firstly, respondents refer to students’ primary focus on becoming qualified practitioners where research was often regarded as irrelevant. Secondly, there is frequent reference to students’ fear of statistics or their preconception that research is difficult. The main challenge appears to encourage students to see the relevance:

*Students see social work as being about doing and being with people…research methods are seen as difficult and students can’t see the relevance*. (Interview 1 respondent)

*Students say we’re not researcher’s we’re social workers. We just want to help people. What’s research got to do with us…we need to try and sell them the idea of research really.* (Interview 2 respondent)

Student ‘research reluctance’ is a common concern flagged in the literature mentioned in relation to both to undergraduate and masters levels. Under this general heading are highlighted firstly anxiety, fear and lack of confidence – exacerbated by lack of knowledge and skills in relation especially to statistics but also analytic writing and computing skills. Secondly students’ lack of motivation and indifference is noted. This is primarily associated with an inability to recognise the relevance of research or research methods to practice.
For example Green et al’s (2001) study of student attitudes found that social work students at masters’ level were more anxious and less research oriented than those from cognate disciplines at this level. However both Secret et al (2003) and Stark and Cohen (2003) provide empirical evidence challenging the stereotype – the latter suggesting that it reflects faculty expectations rather than reality. Interestingly, Wilson (forthcoming) found that prior to research training social work students were less resistant and more willing than expected (by academic staff) to recognise research relevance to practice, though remained sceptical of the aspiration become practitioner scientists.

Despite their anxieties students’ perceived lack of interest in research is mentioned only by a very small minority of questionnaire respondents (2.4%) to the questionnaire, but was elaborated further in the responses:

Many students (with Bachelor degrees) come on the course with little knowledge of research and are not research minded. They have first degrees but have limited critical thinking skills and don’t appear enthusiastic about being an independent learner and adopting an enquiry based approach. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering postgraduate route)

This does not seem to relate to levels of the qualifying route as this interview response from an FE college offering an undergraduate degree illustrates:

For those students who are really interested and can see the relevance of research to their practice they embrace it with open arms…for other students, you really have to persuade them that this is a valuable topic and they really need to know about this…because you get the comments, you know, once I am in practice, once I am qualified I wont be reading research…and you sort of say to them…well actually it has to be part of your professional life from now on in…and it takes them a while to grasp that…it takes a while for some of them to embrace it and go with it…it does take a bit of nurturing (Interview 2 respondent)

Among the challenges to research methods teaching and learning discussed in the literature, are those presented by the characteristics of both the students and
staff involved. Student groups at qualifying level are often very diverse, at very
different starting points in terms of attitudes towards research, research
knowledge and experience (eg. Berger, 2002; O’Conner and O’Neill, 2004; Ello,
2006; Cameron and Este, 2008). They have different learning styles requiring
flexible and varied teaching approaches (eg. Hopkins and Brooks, 1987; Fraser
et al, 1990; Bolen, 2006).

Practice resistance

Trying to encourage students to see the relevance of research to practice can be
influenced by their practice experiences. Lack of commitment by practice
organisations to the research process (i.e. organisations are said not to have an
understanding of the relevance of research) is mentioned by 51.2% and 11.9%
mention research in practice learning as a concern. Attitudes to research in
practice settings are also perceived to be a barrier by questionnaire respondents:

In my experience research, particularly what one might call traditional
research skills, have not been accorded the same importance as other
elements of the curriculum. In an environment where our practice partners
(as well as some colleagues) do not feel research skills are important for
social workers, and in the context of a full curriculum, it is difficult to argue
for increased emphasis in the area. (Pre-1992 institution, England,
offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

The difficulty in ensuring that agencies where students undertake practice
learning have a sufficiently high regard for evidence informed practice and
actively contemplate the possibility of taking a critical view of the
outcomes of their practice. By this I do not mean a narrow outcomes
focussed approach but a 'person-as-scientist' approach to investigating
the effectiveness of their practice in terms of what they can say about it
(and what they can not say!). We have incorporated an element in the
assessment of practice learning where all students are required to give a
brief presentation to colleagues about an aspect of EIP (Evidence
Informed Practice). We also hope that the preparation of practice
assessors to support students undertaking their Integrative Study (see 4 above) will gradually spread the message about the use of research/evidence/knowledge in practice. (Post-1992 institution, England, offering undergraduate and postgraduate routes)

My main concern is the old one of the split between what the students do in the university and in their practice placement agencies, where research informed thinking is not very evident. Unfortunately basing the students’ assessment on a portfolio demonstrating the National Occupational Standards is not helpful in this respect. (Pre-1992 institution, England, offering postgraduate route)

Similar concerns are expressed in the literature, with references made to a deep-rooted climate of research resistance or ambivalence within the social work community, and tensions between practice and the academy about control of the discipline (eg. Lyons, 2000; Lorenz, 2003; Labonte-Roset, 2005; Orme and Powell, 2007; Cameron and Este; 2008. In particular, it is argued that there is a lack of integration in the profession between research and practice, with practitioners making little use of research, being poorly research informed or skilled and not convinced of the relevance of research to practice (eg. Wodarski et al, 1995; Kiik, 2005; Appleby and Botsford, 2006). This can be exacerbated by particular reservations in the professional community about evidence based practice orthodoxy, and the tendency to equate research with managerialist approaches to practice (Howard et al, 2003; Spicuzzza, 2007).

Overall the concerns raised by the survey respondents support the themes that have been raised in the JUC SWEC Research Strategy as requiring a research infrastructure. In particular the need to have research recognised both within the academic curriculum and the practice curriculum in ways that will ensure appropriate attention and levels of resource.
4. **Emerging themes**

A number of themes have been signposted throughout the report and these are expanded upon in this concluding section.

1. **The purpose of research teaching on a qualifying social work course**

   Respondents were evenly split on the question of whether the key aim of teaching research on a social work degree is to support students to develop the skills to become researchers or the skills to critically appreciate existing research. There are some indications that the key function is to teach students the importance of using the best available evidence to inform their practice. This highlights a recurring theme around the continuum between academic teaching and learning and practice on qualifying courses.

   In order to use the best evidence, students must have the necessary skills to evaluate and then accept or reject existing research. It was felt by some that further post-qualifying study would be required in order to more fully develop the skills required to undertake research, thus highlighting a second continuum in professional education: qualifying – post qualifying.

   Debates about the purpose of social work research education – to generate critical consumers of research or scientist practitioners – occur in the literature. Though much of the (mainly American) literature assumes that the latter is the goal, several key discussion papers propose that both purposes are relevant and appropriate for social work, with a continuum of learning required in order to achieve them (e.g. Fraser et al., 1993; Hardcastle and Bisman, 2003; Orme and Powell, 2007; Cameron and Este, 2008)

2. **The focus of research teaching on qualifying social work courses**

   Some tension was identified in terms of the amount of social work research that was available. This issue is felt particularly keenly in modules that offered on an inter-professional basis. There is a general consensus that in these cases a health or social science paradigm tended to dominate. The tensions include issues of who teaches research (e.g. social work educators, or others) and how much and whether social work specific research literature is used. Debates about
whether social work is (and should be taught as) a distinctive research discipline, with primarily practice relevant epistemology and methodology, or is transdisciplinary, borrowing from other disciplines - with potential gains in 'respectability' but risk of loss of disciplinary autonomy and practice relevance – are evident in several of the discussion papers in the literature (eg.Lyons, 2000; Lorenz, 2003; Labonte-Roset, 2005). They are less prominent, however, in many of the accounts of specific programmes and research methods courses. Where, for example, didactic input on quantitative methods is discussed, the distinctiveness of social work from other social science research tends to go unremarked. It is in discussion of students undertaking hands-on experiential research projects that specificity of social work research, and its basis in practice, is more highlighted.

3. **Content of research teaching on social work qualifying courses**

The audit suggests that a relatively narrow range of research designs and methods are taught on qualifying courses in the UK. Also, the focus in modules on methods suggests a lack of coherence in articulating a curriculum for research teaching at qualifying level.

A wider range of research methods, especially quantitative, taught to qualifying social work students is apparent in the literature, although surveys of provision have indicated significant diversity and disparity both in content and level (Fraser and Lewis, 1993; Ryan and Sheehan, 2000) with pleas for greater coherence and standardisation (Lorenz, 2003; Labonte-Roset, 2005). However, there remain with some notable exceptions, relatively few references to focus on ethnographic methods, document based research and content analysis, participatory and action research models, or politics and ethics in research. Still less is there emphasis on the relationship between theory, research and practice. Such debates suggest that there is a need to at least begin to standardise the expectations, or at least find some common language in which to further develop some common elements of research teaching in social work.
4. Opportunities for students to undertake a research project
Arguments for and against students undertaking empirical research became apparent during the course of the audit. A dissertation is generally regarded as the most desirable way for students to learn about the research process, but a number of caveats are identified. These relate mainly to practical issues such as the short timescales available and the difficulties in obtaining ethical approval, pressures on the curriculum and pressures on staff (in terms of time and expertise). However other concerns relate to whether students at qualifying level had the skills to undertake empirical research. In addition, it is felt by some that the time restrictions on actually undertaking research are such that any empirical research would be so small in size as to become meaningless.

In the literature, the desirability for students to undertake hands-on empirical research, often in placement or community settings, either individually, in groups, or apprenticed to established researchers, is strongly emphasised by advocates of experiential learning. However in this audit opportunities within practice settings to undertake practice related research were very little mentioned with only two respondents (in Northern Ireland and Scotland making specific reference to such opportunities).

Some caveats are also expressed in the literature on grounds of practicality and staff capability, but these rarely pinpoint ethical concerns, and never lead to the conclusion that empirical research for qualifying students should be precluded.

5. The significance of research in relation to practice
There was an aspiration amongst respondents that research should not be regarded as a purely academic activity but as something that is increasingly relevant to practice. It is acknowledged that research should be a core element of practice learning and should be used during the placement and demonstrated in the assessment of practice, via the portfolio. However some academics feel that there is a resistance to the use of research amongst some organisations and this is regarded as a significant barrier.
Concerns with the relationship between research practice and social work practice are evident in the literature, with arguments strongly made both for research to inform practice and for practice to serve as basis for research. Hardcastle and Bisman, 2003, go as far as to propose the model of ‘research as a practice methodology’ – arguing that students be educated to recognise the shared goals, skills and processes involved in both social work practice and research practice. Most recently, Cameron and Este (2008) have put forward a persuasive argument for the practice relevance of research, and for social work education to underline through a wide range of pedagogic approaches how research is integral to practice.

This is an area that has implications for future work by both academic and organisation staff in social work.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the audit of research teaching suggest that there is great diversity in what is being expected of social work students in relation to research, and much variation in the levels to which this is articulated. This is reflected in what is taught, when, where, and how and in terms of ‘embebedness’ or discrete elements within the professionally qualifying programme.

It has emerged that institutions feel some tension between enabling students to become research minded while at the same time meeting the requirements set by professional bodies. This tension could be seen as the direct consequence of the raising of the qualifying level to, at a minimum, an undergraduate degree and is related to ongoing debates about social work as both a profession and an academic discipline (see Lovelock, Lyons & Powell, 2005).

The role of the care councils is clearly articulated by the respondents to the survey. After initial approval all degree courses are subject to regular review by the care councils. As was pointed out by the English and Scottish Councils’ responses the initial approval processes would have assessed the submissions against the country specific requirements, and in particular how they met the
requirements of the NOS and the benchmark statement. They will be revisited in upcoming reviews of qualifying courses.

While it is acknowledged by all care council respondents that the NOS and QAA Benchmark statement provide broad frameworks within which courses have freedom to design their curriculum one respondent points out that while the title of the unit in the NOS under Key Role 6 (Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice) includes unit 18 *Research, analyse, evaluate, and use current knowledge of best social work practice*, the descriptors in the unit give limited attention to research (see Appendix 8)

The Benchmark statement has been strengthened (QAA, 2008). It was also intimated that the NOS are due for review. However for any revisions to be meaningful the links between research and practice have to be better understood and articulated more clearly. This requires consultation with stakeholders.

Two care councils indicated that they will be reviewing their Rules and Requirements for the Social Work Degree in 2009. As part of this exercise, stakeholders could be asked to consider whether changes are need in relation to the expectations regarding research teaching. If it is identified that the profile needs to be improved, this could be taken forward through revision and/or additions which could then inform processes for approval and monitoring. However a respondent from one care councils warns that a review would not necessarily mean an increase in specific topics in the curriculum, but would focus on the outcomes of professional education – what kind of social worker is required.

The time is therefore right to engage in discussions about research teaching on qualifying social work courses and the relationship between research, practice and professional standards. The link between education, research and practice coupled with agreement about what level of research awareness or competence is required on completion of a qualifying degree is crucial.

These debates are not confined to the social work profession/discipline. As indicated at the outset to the audit report as a whole, the ESRC has engaged in discussion with other professional disciplines, many of whom will share the same
challenges. Also, as indicated in the introduction to this particular part of the audit (on research teaching), other disciplines have been exercised by the content, quality and place of research teaching on undergraduate degrees. The quality of such teaching will influence the quality of applicants for ESRC postgraduate research studentships and has implications for training requirements in doctoral programmes. There is therefore a role for the ESRC Training & Development Board to work with professional bodies and QAA to explore research teaching and learning at undergraduate level and beyond.

At the same time as a profession social work has to address the place of research in the continuum of academic and practice settings. This is of concern to those who practice social work as a managers, practitioners, educators and/or researchers. Importantly it is necessary to ensure that social work students can experience and engage in research activity in both an academic and practice settings in ways that will enhance practice and ensure quality services to those who require them.

It is also necessary for stakeholders, including the ESRC and the care councils, to engage in debate about how opportunities for engaging with and in research are available across the qualifying/post-qualifying continuum with attention to how this relates to the teaching and learning at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels.
APPENDIX 1: Email questionnaire

Audit of research teaching on the new Social Work Degree in the UK

The ESRC is funding an audit of the way in which teaching of research is undertaken on the new qualifying Social Work Degree (at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels) in all 4 countries of the UK. This audit is being undertaken by a team which includes Joan Orme, Gillian MacIntyre & Sally Paul (Glasgow School of Social Work, a joint School of Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities); Jan Fook & Jackie Powell (University of Southampton); Elaine Sharland (University of Sussex).

We are asking for your cooperation in providing some details of the way in which your programme engages with research teaching at qualifying level. The study findings will be shared with all participants and will make a contribution to the debates and activities around the implementation of the JUC SWEC Research Strategy (which can be found at www.swap.ac.uk/research/strategy.asp).

This email has been sent to you because you have been identified, either from the Care Council’s website for your country or through your membership of SWEC, as your HEI’s contact for a social work programme accredited to offer the qualifying award. If you consider that a colleague would be in a better position to respond to our inquiry, please either forward this email to them or reply to us giving us their contact details.

The prescribed curriculum for the qualifying degree is different in each of the 4 countries but all draw on the QAA Benchmark statement (2000) and the National Occupational Standards. Debates have taken place over time with both the ESRC and the regulating bodies about the place of research teaching in social work qualifications. Some of these debates are highlighted in the Research Strategy and a more extended discussion of them can be found in papers prepared for the Strategy which will be available through advanced access in the British Journal of Social Work.

These debates suggest that there has been a lack of attention to research in the social work curriculum to date and this appears to be supported by the limited literature on the topic in the UK. The indications are that there is on behalf of both staff and students resistance to, or reluctance to, engage with research at the qualifying level for a number of reasons associated with: the relationship between research and practice; the nature of social work research; competing priorities on the social work curriculum and issues of capacity - who is available to teach research. This audit is designed to inform these debates by collecting information about the ways in which research is addressed in the degree curriculum. This will give SWEC a stronger base to argue for change, if change is necessary, and will give those involved in delivering the curriculum an opportunity to engage with the debates.

We acknowledge that there may be a ‘problem of definition’ and make no assumptions of a common understanding about what teaching research in social work may entail. We
anticipate students might be exposed to research in a variety of ways: perhaps quite
explicitly via specific modules encouraging awareness and critical use of research, or
modules that facilitate understanding and use of research methods. Alternatively research
teaching might be implicit, informing all aspects of the curriculum area. Students may be
required to undertake a dissertation based on empirical work or may undertake literature
reviews or critical evaluations. We hope that this study will enable you to tell us about your
approaches and engage in the debates.

Please note this is an audit of research teaching and will not involve an evaluation of
any particular individual, course or institution

To take part
We recognise that you have many demands on your time and aim to make it as simple as
possible for you to assist with our inquiry. Our questions are included in the body of the
email message below so that you need only click to reply to the email and add your
answers.

Firstly,
by typing a simple YES or NO answer each time please indicate if the topics or activities
listed below are featured in the curriculum of the qualifying degree course(s) that you
offer.

Secondly,
please provide further details as requested. You can type your answer below the question
and, if you prefer, attach any relevant documentation such as extracts from programme
specifications or module outlines, or alert us to where these can be found on your website.

Please note: If you offer both an undergraduate and postgraduate award, please answer on
separate forms for each.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate/postgraduate</td>
<td>Institution:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Developing awareness of research and its role in promoting effective practice

YES/NO Please give details of relevant module[s]

2. Learning how to make critical use of research studies (research findings and methods)

YES/NO Please give details of relevant module[s], and/or other learning opportunities

3. Gaining knowledge and understanding of research strategies, methods and skills

YES/NO Please give details of relevant module[s], and/or other learning opportunities

4. Opportunities (academic or in a practice setting) to undertake a project/dissertation involving the use of research skills

YES/NO Please give details

5. If you consider that the course[s] you offer address research in ways that cannot be encompassed in options 1-4 above please give us details below.
6. Overall, approximately what proportion of credits (of the whole course) and what level credits are assigned to the assessment of research/research methods in your programme?

7. Finally, what do you consider are the primary concerns in learning and teaching about research for students on qualifying programme?

We anticipate following up a small number of programmes to find out a little more about the experiences of addressing this area of curriculum development and examining your views on factors promoting and/or hindering such activity.

May we contact you again if we wish to discuss these matters further?

If you would be willing to have some further discussion please give a telephone number or confirm email address for future contact.

I would be happy to be contacted

Tel no. email address:

Many thanks for your cooperation and support with this study. Feedback on the study findings will be available via the JUC SWEC mail base; the SWAP website and various conference presentations.

Please return the questionnaire by pressing reply button or send to:
Sally Paul
email: sally.paul@strath.ac.uk
Tel: 0141950 3397

Please send curriculum material as an attachment to the email by post to:
Sally Paul
Glasgow School of Social Work
Sir Henry Wood Building
Jordanhill Campus
Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP
APPENDIX 2: Interview schedule for course staff (telephone)

Institution: 
Course: 
Name: 
Role: 
Date: 
Interviewer: 

Introductions. Permission to record. Confidentiality

1. Can you describe the range of research skills and methods that you teach throughout your programme?

2. Why do you teach these particular skills and methods
   (Prompts: to raise critical awareness, research skills, research appreciation)?

3. At what point in the course does your research teaching take place?

4. How are these research methods and skills taught?
   (Prompt: models of learning)

5. Who is responsible for teaching research methods and skills?
   (Prompt: Background/qualifications?)

6. In which setting do you teach?
   (Prompt: academic, interprofessionally, practice based)

7. Issues to follow up re questionnaire

8. What are the challenges you face in teaching research skills and methods?
   Prompts:
   Structural: Timetable i.e. in relation to meeting National Occupational Standards
   Practical: Environment
   Staff expertise
   Time
   Cultural: Culture bound and relevance
   Conceptual: How research relates to the purpose of social work e.g. Social work as an empowering practice
   Social work research versus social science research
   Research relevant to practice

9. How would you like research teaching to be different at your institution?
   What do you think should be changed?

10. Do you think there are specific challenges to social work research in the UK?

11. How does research teaching relate to the social work mission?

Please can you send us any curriculum material?
Appendix 3: Format for analysing the curriculum material

Analysis of all curriculum material was undertaken by reading the material using the following pro-forma:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Source of information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>What</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course content/topics;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course rationale, background, aims, learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>How</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course teaching styles/ presentations/ approach; Assignments; Number/length of sessions; Credit points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What stage of the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Named teaching staff/background/qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Schedule for Care Council representatives

Care Council:
Name:
Role:
Date:

1. Do the requirements for the Social Work Degree in your country require specific teaching on research?

2. If so, what do they cover? E.g. Teaching of specific research methods; incorporation of research into other teaching.

3. In undertaking reviews of courses have you made specific request for information on research teaching?

4. How, in your opinion, should research be incorporated into a social work degree? E.g. should there be discrete modules for social work students; are generic teaching modules appropriate; should students do a research based dissertation?

5. Are there any specific aspects of research teaching that you feel should be required of social work courses?

6. How do you see the links between research and practice being made explicit?

7. Do you consider that the NOS and the Benchmark statements give sufficient guidelines for social work courses on research teaching?

8. Does anything more need to be done to improve the profile of research teaching on the social work degree?
   If so - what?
   If so – who should be responsible?

9. Any thing else not covered in the above?
### Appendix 5: Literature Review

#### 1. Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level**
- UG
- PG
- Other
- Not specific

**Approach to Research Teaching**
- Varies provision (survey/discussion papers)
- Discrete module
- Partial integration with practice/other parts of curriculum
- Embedded/integrated

**Primary Focus**
- Developing student awareness of research relevance/engagement with research
- Critical appraisal/making critical use of research studies
- Knowledge of research strategies, methods, skills
- Conducting research project/dissertation

**If Taught Module:**
- Methods taught.
- Content: e.g. ethics/politics
- Opportunity to undertake research project
- Methods of assessment
- Credits associated

**Concerns and Challenges:**
- Student related
- Faculty related
- Structural
- Other

**Other**

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203
2. Journals screened in literature search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Journal of Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers in Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Journal of Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Journal of Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues in Social Work Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Community Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Gerontological Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Social Service Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Social Work Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Teaching in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Technology in Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Women and Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Technology in the Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research on Social Work Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Service Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Bibliography for the Literature Review


Wilson, G (forthcoming) ‘Research training and professional social work education: developing research minded practice’ *Social Work Education*


## Appendix 6: Courses offering the social work degree (November 2007)

### Northern Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course(s) Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Queen's University of Belfast (QUB)</td>
<td>Bachelor in Social Work (BSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Ulster at Magee Campus (UUM)</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast Institute of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Tyrone College of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Down &amp; Ards Institute of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West Institute of Further &amp; Higher Education</td>
<td>BSc (Hons) in Social Work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Scotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course(s) Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Dundee</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSc Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>BSc (Social Work)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masters of social work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSc in Advanced Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glasgow Caledonian University</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Social Work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MSc in Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glasgow School of Social Work</td>
<td>MA (Hons) Social Work</td>
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<td>PGDip/Masters in Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BA (Hons) Social Work (distance learning/ employment based route)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BA (Hons) Social Work (Residential Child Care - distance learning)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgrad Diploma/MSc SW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MSc in Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open University</td>
<td>BA (Hons) in Social Work (employment based route)</td>
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### Wales

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<th>Institution</th>
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<tr>
<td>South Wales Partnership (UWIC and Brigend)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Masters degree</td>
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<td>Open University</td>
<td>BA (Hons) in Social Work (employment based route)</td>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Wales, Glamorgan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEWI</td>
<td>Honours degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Wales, Swansea</td>
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**England**

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<tbody>
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APPENDIX 7: QAA requirements


Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;

ii an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;

iii conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and
- to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;

iv an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge;

v the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (eg refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;

b critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;

c communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;

and will have:
qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

QAA Benchmark statement for social work 2000

Academic standards - Social Work

Preface

This benchmark statement fully acknowledges contemporary and forthcoming changes within the context of social work and its regulation across the United Kingdom that may lead to modification of its content over time. These changes include:

- establishment of General Councils as regulatory bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland;
- articulation of new rules and requirements governing professional and vocational education following the planned disbandment of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in 2001;
- formal registration of social workers and certain social care staff;
- development of occupational standards for social work and social care by the Training Organisation for Social Care (TOPSS) in the countries of the U.K;
- mapping of social work and social care posts to levels of qualification; and
- development of care standards, codes of conduct and codes of practice.

1 Nature and extent of the subject

1.1 The statement covers social work as an applied academic subject at honours degree level. It sets out expectations concerning:

- the subject knowledge, understanding and skills of an honours graduate in social work;
- the teaching, learning and assessment methods employed in their education; and
- the standards expected of them at the point of graduation.

1.2 Impending legislation to establish regulatory bodies in social work and to introduce statutory registration of social workers, may result in the terms 'social work' and/or
'social worker' becoming protected titles. In this case, honours degrees with titles such as BA (Hons) Social Work are likely to converge with programmes of professional education to comprise integrated academic and professional awards with nomenclature restricted to these circumstances.

1.3 Professional social work qualifications in the U.K. are not, however, currently linked to a specific level of academic achievement. The status of qualified social worker can be achieved through study leading to sub-degree and post-graduate, as well as degree awards. At present, curriculum design and assessment of practice within integrated awards enables students to meet the Rules and Requirements governing the Diploma in Social Work as determined by CCETSW.

1.4 Despite the strong link between academic and professional awards, this statement does not attempt to define professional competence at qualifying or registration level. It is believed that this process should only be undertaken in partnership with other stakeholders including regulatory bodies, employers, professional bodies, providers of practice learning, service users and those who work within social work and social care.

1.5 The statement also covers honours degrees in the field of social work studies that do not converge with professional awards. These degrees reflect historic and international traditions of social work and social welfare. They are known by a variety of titles such as applied social studies, community studies, human services, social care and social welfare.

1.6 Excluded from the statement by these definitions is a further range of honours degrees that include counselling, youth and community work and careers guidance.

1.7 Honours degree programmes in social work may be studied in full-time, part-time, open and distance learning, workplace-based and post-experience modes. Irrespective of learning mode, however, all honours degree programmes covered by this statement should include structured opportunities for supervised or directed practice in social welfare settings.

1.8 The statement applies to the United Kingdom but acknowledges and values distinctive country-specific legal, organisational, practice and educational contexts. For example, in Scotland an honours degree normally represents four years of full time study, and in Wales the special provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993 permeate all aspects of social work.

1.9 In addressing the content and standards of honours degrees, the statement takes account of European and international contexts of social work and the desirability of the mutual recognition of social work qualifications within the European sector of the International Federation of Social Workers.

1.10 Contemporary social work commonly takes place in an inter-agency context, and social workers habitually work collaboratively with others towards inter-disciplinary and cross-professional objectives. Honours degree programmes should, therefore, be designed to help equip students with accurate knowledge about the respective
responsibilities of social welfare agencies and acquire skills in effective collaborative
development between these.

1.11 To facilitate broad access to honours degree programmes in social work, holders of
sub-degree and vocational qualifications (normally in social care) may be offered entry
with advanced standing by means of approved procedures for the accreditation of prior
(experiential) learning. Honours degree programmes should, however, ensure that all
such arrangements enable students to achieve fully the standards set out in this
benchmark statement.

1.12 The term ‘service user’ is used in this statement to cover the wide and diverse set
of individuals, groups and organisations who are involved in, or who benefit from, the
contribution of social work to the well-being of society. This group will include some that
are involuntary or unwilling recipients of social work services. In providing services,
social workers should engage with service users in ways that are characterised by
openness, reciprocity, mutual accountability and explicit recognition of the powers of the
social worker and the legal context of intervention.

2 Defining principles

2.1 As an applied academic subject, social work is characterised by a distinctive focus on
practice in complex social situations to promote and protect individual and collective
well-being. At honours degree level the study of social work involves the integrated
study of subject-specific knowledge, skills and values and the critical application of
research knowledge from the social and human sciences (and closely related domains)
to inform understanding and to underpin action, reflection and evaluation. Honours
degree programmes should be designed to help foster this integration of contextual,
analytic, explanatory and practical understanding. The specific areas of knowledge and
understanding and the relevant subject and other skills to be acquired are defined in
sections 3.1 and 3.2 of this statement.

2.2 Contemporary definitions of social work as a degree subject reflect its origins in a
range of different academic and practice traditions. The precise nature and scope of the
subject is itself a matter for legitimate study and critical debate. Three main issues are
relevant to this:

2.2.1 Social work is located within different social welfare contexts. Within the U.K. there
are different traditions of social welfare (influenced by legislation, historical development
and social attitudes) and these have shaped both social work education and practice in
community-based settings including group-care. In an international context, distinctive
national approaches to social welfare policy, provision and practice have greatly
influenced the focus and content of social work degree programmes.

2.2.2 There are competing views in society at large on the nature of social work and on
its place and purpose. Social work practice and education inevitably reflect these
differing perspectives on the role of social work in relation to social justice, social care and social order.

2.2.3 Social work, both as occupational practice and as an academic subject, evolves, adapts and changes in response to the social, political and economic challenges and demands of contemporary social welfare policy, practice and legislation.

2.2.4 It follows that, through their education, honours graduates in social work should be:

- equipped both to understand, and to work within, this context of contested debate about nature, scope and purpose;
- enabled to analyse, adapt to, manage and eventually to lead the processes of change.

2.3 The applied nature of social work as an academic subject means that practice is an essential and core element of learning. The following paragraphs clarify the use of the term 'practice' in the statement.

2.3.1 In honours degree programmes covered by this statement, practice as an activity refers to experiential, action based learning. In this sense, practice provides opportunities for students to improve and demonstrate their understanding through the application and testing of knowledge and skills.

2.3.2 Practice activity is also a source of transferable learning in its own right. Such learning can transfer both from a practice setting to the 'classroom' and vice versa. Thus practice can be as much a source of intellectual and cognitive learning as other modes of study. For this reason, learning through practice should attract full academic credit.

2.3.3 The term 'practice' in this statement is used to encompass learning that not only takes place in professional practice placements but also in a variety of other experiential learning situations. All learning opportunities that bear academic credit must be subject to methods of assessment appropriate to their academic level and be assessed by competent assessors. Where they form part of the curriculum leading to integrated academic and professional awards, practice learning opportunities will also be subject to regulations that further define learning requirements, standards and modes of assessment.

2.3.4 Learning in practice can include activities such as observation, analysis and research as well as intervention within social work and related organisations. Practice learning on honours degrees covered by this statement, however, will normally include not only observation and research, but will involve active engagement with service users and others in practice settings outside the university. Such engagement is a compulsory component of honours degrees integrated with professional awards in social work.

2.4 Social work is a moral activity that requires practitioners to make and implement difficult decisions about human situations that involve the potential for benefit or harm.
Social work honours degree programmes, therefore, involve the study, application of and reflection upon ethical principles. Although social work values have been expressed at different times in a variety of ways, at their core they involve showing respect for persons, honouring the diverse and distinctive organisations and communities that make up contemporary society and combating processes that lead to discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion. This means that honours undergraduates must learn to:

- recognise and work with the powerful links between intra-personal and inter-personal factors and the wider social, legal, economic, political and cultural context of people's lives;
- understand the impact of injustice, social inequalities and oppressive social relations;
- challenge constructively individual, institutional and structural discrimination;
- practise in ways that maximise safety and effectiveness in situations of uncertainty and incomplete information;
- help people to gain, regain or maintain control of their own affairs, insofar as this is compatible with their own or others' safety, well-being and rights.

2.5 The expectation that social workers will be able to act effectively in such complex circumstances requires that honours degree programmes in social work should be designed to help students learn to become accountable, reflective and self-critical. This involves learning to:

- think critically about the complex social, economic, political and cultural contexts in which social work practice is located;
- work in a transparent and responsible way, balancing autonomy with complex, multiple and sometimes contradictory accountabilities (for example, to different service users, employing agencies, professional bodies and the wider society);
- exercise authority within complex frameworks of accountability and ethical and legal boundaries; and
- acquire and apply the habits of critical reflection, self-evaluation and consultation, and 2.3.4 Learning in practice can include activities such as observation, analysis and research as well as intervention.

3 Knowledge, understanding and skills

3.1 Subject knowledge and understanding
During their degree studies in social work, honours graduates should acquire, critically evaluate, apply and integrate knowledge and understanding in the following five core areas of study:

3.1.1 Social work services and service users

- The social processes (associated with, for example, poverty, unemployment, poor health, disablement, lack of education and other sources of disadvantage) that lead to marginalisation, isolation and exclusion and their impact on the demand for social work services.
- Explanations of the links between definitional processes contributing to social differences (for example, social class, gender and ethnic differences) to the problems of inequality and differential need faced by service users.
- The nature of social work services in a diverse society (with particular reference to concepts such as prejudice, inter-personal, institutional and structural discrimination, empowerment and anti-discriminatory practices).
- The nature and validity of different definitions of, and explanations for, the characteristics and circumstances of service users and the services required by them.
- The relationship between agency policies, legal requirements and professional boundaries in shaping the nature of services provided in inter-disciplinary contexts and the issues associated with working across professional boundaries and within different disciplinary groups.

3.1.2 The service delivery context

- The location of contemporary social work within both historical and comparative perspectives, including European and international contexts.
- The complex relationships between public, social and political philosophies, policies and priorities and the organisation and practice of social work, including the contested nature of these.
- The issues and trends in modern public and social policy and their relationship to contemporary practice and service delivery in social work.
- The significance of legislative and legal frameworks and service delivery standards (including the nature of legal authority, the application of legislation in practice, statutory accountability and tensions between statute, policy and practice).
- The current range and appropriateness of statutory, voluntary and private agencies providing community-based, day-care, residential and other services and the organisational systems inherent within these.
- The significance of interrelationships with other social services, especially education, housing, health, income maintenance and criminal justice.
- The contribution of different approaches to management, leadership and quality in public and independent human services.
• The implications of modern communication and information technology for service delivery.

3.1.3 Values and ethics

• The nature, historical evolution and application of social work values.
• The moral concepts of rights, responsibility, freedom, authority and power inherent in the practice of social workers as moral and statutory agents.
• The complex relationships between justice, care and control in social welfare and the practical and ethical implications of these, including roles as statutory agents and in upholding the law in respect of discrimination.
• Aspects of philosophical ethics relevant to the understanding and resolution of value dilemmas and conflicts in both inter-personal and professional contexts.
• The conceptual links between codes defining ethical practice, the regulation of professional conduct and the management of potential conflicts generated by the codes held by different professional groups.

3.1.4 Social work theory

• Research-based concepts and critical explanations from social work theory and other disciplines that contribute to the knowledge base of social work, including their distinctive epistemological status and application to practice.
• The relevance of sociological perspectives to understanding societal and structural influences on human behaviour at individual, group and community levels.
• The relevance of psychological and physiological perspectives to understanding individual and social development and functioning.
• Social science theories explaining group and organisational behaviour, adaptation and change.
• Models and methods of assessment, including factors underpinning the selection and testing of relevant information, the nature of professional judgement and the processes of risk assessment.

Approaches and methods of intervention in a range of community-based settings including group-care at individual, group and community levels, including factors guiding the choice and evaluation of these.

• Knowledge and critical appraisal of relevant social research and evaluation methodologies.

3.1.5 The nature of social work practice
• The characteristics of practice in a range of community-based and organisational settings including group-care, within statutory, voluntary and private sectors, and the factors influencing changes in practice within these contexts.
• The nature and characteristics of skills associated with effective practice, both direct and indirect, with a range of service users and in a variety of settings including group-care.
• The factors and processes that facilitate effective inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and inter-agency collaboration and partnership.
• The place of theoretical perspectives and evidence from international research in assessment and decision-making processes in social work practice.
• The integration of theoretical perspectives and evidence from international research into the design and implementation of effective social work intervention with a wide range of service users, carers and others.
• The processes of reflection and evaluation, including familiarity with the range of approaches for evaluating welfare outcomes, and their significance for the development of practice and the practitioner.

3.2 Subject skills and other skills

As an applied subject at honours degree level, social work necessarily involves the development of skills that may be of value in many situations (e.g. analytical thinking, building relationships, working as a member of an organisation, intervention, evaluation and reflection). Some of these skills are specific to social work but many are also widely transferable. What helps to define the specific nature of these skills in a social work context are:

• the context in which they are applied and assessed (e.g. communication skills in practice with people with sensory impairments or assessment skills in an inter-professional setting);
• the relative weighting given to such skills within social work practice (e.g. the central importance of problem solving skills within complex human situations);
• the specific purpose of skill development (e.g. the acquisition of research skills in order to build a repertoire of research-based practice); and
• a requirement to integrate a range of skills (i.e. not simply to demonstrate these in an isolated and incremental manner).

All social work honours graduates should have shown the ability to reflect on, and learn from the exercise of their skills. They should understand the significance of the concepts of continuing professional development and lifelong learning and accept responsibility for their own continuing development.

Social work honours graduates should acquire and integrate skills in five core areas:
3.2.1 Communication and Information Technology (C & IT) and Numerical Skills

Honours graduates in social work should be able to:

- use C& IT methods and techniques for a variety of purposes including professional communications, data storage and retrieval and information searching;
- understand and manipulate numbers and show familiarity with statistical techniques.

3.2.2 Problem solving skills

These are sub-divided into four areas:

3.2.2.1 Managing problem-solving activities

Honours graduates in social work should be able to plan problem-solving activities, i.e. to:

- think logically and systematically;
- apply ethical principles and practices critically in planning problem-solving activities;
- plan a sequence of actions to achieve specified objectives;
- manage the processes of change.

3.2.2.2 Gathering information

Honours graduates in social work should be able to:

- gather information from a wide range of sources and by a variety of methods, for a range of purposes. These methods should include electronic searches using the Internet, reviews of relevant written materials, face-to-face, written and telephone contact with individuals and groups;
- take into account differences of viewpoint in gathering information and assess the reliability and relevance of the information gathered.

3.2.2.3 Analysis and synthesis

Honours graduates in social work should be able to analyse and synthesise information gathered for problem solving purposes, i.e. to:

- assess human situations, taking into account a variety of factors (including the views of participants, theoretical concepts, research evidence, legislation and organisational policies and procedures);
- analyse information gathered, weighing competing evidence and modifying their viewpoint in light of new information, then relate this information to a particular task, situation or problem;
- consider specific factors relevant to social work practice (such as risk, rights, cultural differences and linguistic sensitivities, responsibilities to protect vulnerable individuals and legal obligations);
- assess the merits of contrasting theories, explanations, research, policies and procedures;
- synthesise information and lines of reasoning and sustain detailed argument at length and over time;
- employ understanding of human agency at the macro (societal), mezzo (organisational and community) and micro (inter- and intra-personal) levels; and
- analyse and take account of the impact of inequality and discrimination in work with people in particular contexts and problem situations.

3.2.2.4 Intervention and Evaluation

Honours graduates in social work should be able to use their knowledge of a range of interventions and evaluation processes selectively to:

- build and sustain purposeful relationships with people and organisations in community-based, and inter-professional contexts including group-care;
- make decisions, set goals and construct specific plans to achieve these, taking into account relevant factors including ethical guidelines;
- negotiate goals and plans with others, analysing and addressing in a creative manner human, organisational and structural impediments to change;
- implement plans through a variety of systematic processes including contracting with others;
- undertake practice in a manner that promotes the well-being and protects the safety of all parties;
- manage the complex dynamics of dependency and, in some settings, provide direct care and personal support in every day living situations;
- meet deadlines of time and comply with external definitions of task;
- monitor situations, review processes and evaluate outcomes;
- bring work to an effective conclusion, taking into account the implications for all involved.

3.2.3 Communication Skills

Honours graduates in social work should be able to communicate clearly, accurately and precisely (both orally and in writing) with individuals and groups in a range of formal and informal situations, i.e. to:
• make effective contact with individuals and organisations for a range of objectives, by verbal, paper-based and electronic means;
• clarify and negotiate the purpose of such contacts and the boundaries of their involvement;
• listen actively to others, engage appropriately with the life experiences of service users, understand accurately their viewpoint and overcome personal prejudices to respond appropriately to a range of complex personal and interpersonal situations;
• use both verbal and non-verbal cues to guide interpretation;
• identify and use opportunities for purposeful and supportive communication with service users within their everyday living situations;
• follow and develop an argument and evaluate the viewpoints of, and evidence presented by, others;
• write accurately and clearly in styles adapted to the audience, purpose and context of the communication;
• present conclusions verbally and on paper, in a structured form, appropriate to the audience for which these have been prepared;
• make effective preparation for, and lead meetings in a productive way; and
• communicate effectively across potential barriers resulting from differences (for example, in culture, language and age).

3.2.4 Skills in Working with Others

Honours graduates in social work should be able to work effectively with others, i.e. to:

• involve users of social work services in ways that increase their resources, capacity and power to influence factors affecting their lives;
• consult actively with others, including service users, who hold relevant information or expertise;
• act co-operatively with others, liaising and negotiating across differences such as organisational and professional boundaries and differences of identity or language;
• develop effective helping relationships and partnerships with other individuals, groups and organisations that facilitate change;
• act with others to increase social justice by identifying and responding to prejudice, institutional discrimination and structural inequality;
• act within a framework of multiple accountability (for example, to agencies, the public, service users and others); and
• challenge others when necessary, in ways that are most likely to produce positive outcomes.

3.2.5 Skills in Personal and Professional Development

Honours graduates in social work should be able to:
• advance their own learning and understanding with a degree of independence;
• reflect on and modify their behaviour in the light of experience;
• identify and keep under review their own personal and professional boundaries;
• manage uncertainty, change and stress in work situations;
• handle inter-personal and intra-personal conflict constructively;
• understand and manage changing situations and respond in a flexible manner;
• challenge unacceptable practices in a responsible manner;
• take responsibility for their own further and continuing acquisition of knowledge and skills.

4 Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

4.1 At honours degree level, social work programmes explicitly recognise and maximise the use of students' prior learning and experience. Acquisition and development of the required knowledge and skills, capable of transfer to new situations and of further enhancement, mark important staging posts in the process of lifelong learning. Social work models of learning are characteristically developmental and additive (i.e. students are expected to assume increasing responsibility for identifying their own learning needs and making use of available resources for learning). The overall aims and expected final outcomes of the honours degree, together with the specific requirements of particular topics, modules or practice experiences, should inform the choice of both learning and teaching strategies and assessment methods.

4.2 The learning processes in social work at honours degree level can be expressed in terms of four inter-related themes:

• awareness raising and knowledge acquisition - a process in which a student becomes more aware of aspects of knowledge and expertise, engages with and acquires new areas of knowledge, recognises their potential and becomes motivated to engage in new ways of thinking and acting;
• conceptual understanding - a process in which a student acquires, examines critically and deepens understanding (measured and tested against existing knowledge and adjustments made in attitudes and goals);
• practice experience - processes in which a student applies theoretical models together with new understanding and skills to relevant activities and receives feedback on performance enhancing openness to critical self-evaluation;
• reflection on performance - a process in which a student reflects on past experience, recent performance, and feedback, and applies this information to the process of integrating awareness (including awareness
of the impact of self on others) and new understanding, leading to improved performance.

4.3 Honours degree programmes in social work acknowledge that adults learn at different rates and in diverse ways. Thus, students engage with a variety of learning and teaching strategies. Learning methods may include:

- student-focused approaches that encourage active participation and staged, progressive learning throughout the degree;
- the establishment of initial learning needs and the formulation of learning plans;
- the development of resource networks, enabling students to learn from each other;
- lectures, role plays, case presentations, individual and group practice experience, simulations, investigative group projects, skills learning assisted by CCTV and video-recording, seminars, presentation of practice studies;
- the use of communication and information technology systems for accessing data, literature, resources, and contacts.

4.4 Assessment strategies should be chosen to enhance students' ability to conceptualise, compare and analyse issues from a range of data sources including practice and their capability to practise. Academic assessment is designed to develop and test cognitive skills, drawing on the contexts of practice and reflecting the learning and teaching methods employed. Methods normally include case study presentations and analyses, practice-focused assignments, essays, project reports and examinations. The requirements of honours degree programmes in social work frequently include an extended piece of written work, which may be practice-based, and is typically undertaken in the final year. This may involve independent study for either a dissertation or a project, based on systematic enquiry and investigation.

4.5 Honours degree programmes in social work assess practice not as a series of discrete practical tasks, but as an integration of skills and knowledge with relevant conceptual understanding. This assessment should, therefore, contain elements that test students' reflective analysis. Where the honours degree is an integrated academic and professional award, the failure of any core element including assessed practice will mean failure of the course.

5 Standards

Standards associated with three distinct levels of attainment are identified below. Given the essentially applied nature of social work, standards are specified in relation to both academic and practice capabilities. At each level, the requirements relate to subject specific knowledge, understanding and skills (including key skills inherent in the concept of 'graduateness'). Students will be expected to meet each of these requirements.
Where there is an integration of honours degree and professional requirements, meeting these standards should enable students broadly to meet the requirements of the regulatory bodies.

5.1 Modal level

This level represents that of the typical student graduating with an honours degree in social work. At modal level, students will be able to demonstrate the following:

5.1.1 Knowledge and understanding

- Sound understanding of the five core areas of knowledge and understanding relevant to social work as detailed in section 3.1, including their application to practice and service delivery;
- ability to use this knowledge and understanding in an integrated way in specific practice contexts;
- appraisal of previous learning and experience and ability to incorporate this into their future learning and practice;
- acknowledgement and understanding of the potential and limitations of social work as a practice based discipline;
- ability to use research and enquiry techniques with reflective awareness to collect, analyse and interpret relevant information; and
- developed capacity for the critical evaluation of knowledge and evidence from a range of sources.

5.1.2 Subject skills and other skills

A developed capacity to:

- apply creatively a repertoire of core skills as detailed in section 3.2;
- integrate clear understanding of ethical issues and codes of values and practice with their interventions in specific situations;
- consistently exercise an appropriate level of autonomy and initiative in individual decision making within the context of supervisory, collaborative, ethical and organisational requirements; and
- demonstrate habits of critical reflection on their performance and take responsibility for modifying action in light of this.

5.2 Threshold level

All students graduating with an honours degree in social work will have achieved this minimum standard. At threshold level, students will be able to demonstrate the following:

5.2.1 Knowledge and understanding
- Familiarity with the five key areas of knowledge and understanding relevant to social work as detailed in section 3.1, including the application of these to practice and service delivery;
- ability to use this knowledge and understanding in work within specific practice contexts;
- capacity to review previous learning and experience and ability to incorporate aspects of this into their future learning;
- recognition of the potential and limitations of social work as a practice based discipline;
- ability to use research and enquiry techniques to collect, analyse and interpret relevant information; and
- capacity for critical evaluation of knowledge and evidence from a range of sources.

5.2.2 Subject skills and other skills

A basic capacity to:

- apply a range of core skills as detailed in section 3.2;
- integrate understanding of ethical issues and codes of values and practice with their interventions in specific situations;
- exercise an adequate level of autonomy in individual decision making within the context of supervisory, collaborative, ethical and organisational requirements;
- review their performance critically and take appropriate responsibility for future action in light of this.

5.3 Exemplary level

This level of excellence will normally be achieved only by the top range of students graduating with an honours degree in social work. At exemplary level, students will be able to demonstrate:

5.3.1 Knowledge and understanding

- Critical understanding and analysis of the five key areas of knowledge and understanding relevant to social work as detailed in section 3.1, including their application to practice and service delivery;
- consistent use of this knowledge and understanding in an integrated way within specific practice contexts;
- critical reflection on, and analysis of, their previous learning and experience and integration of this with their understanding of social work and their practice;
- clear articulation of a critical understanding of the potential and limitations of social work as a practice based discipline;
• ability to use research and enquiry skills confidently and consistently to collect, analyse and interpret relevant information; and
• well-developed capacity for the consistent and critical evaluation of knowledge and evidence from a range of sources.

5.3.2 Subject skills and other skills

A well-developed capacity and sustained ability to:

• apply creatively an extensive repertoire of core skills as detailed in section 3.2;
• integrate a sophisticated understanding of ethical issues and codes of values and practice with their interventions in specific situations;
• exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in individual decision making within the context of supervisory, collaborative, ethical and organisational requirements; and
• reflect critically and in depth on their overall performance and take responsibility for varying action in light of this, showing elements of innovation in doing this.

Key Role 6: Demonstrate professional competence in social work practice

• Research, analyse, evaluate, and use current knowledge of best social work practice
• Work within agreed standards of social work practice and ensure own professional development
• Manage complex ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts
• Contribute to the promotion of best social work practice

This is elaborated in:

Unit 18: Research, analyse, evaluate, and use current knowledge of best social work practice

18.1 Review and update your own knowledge of legal, policy and procedural frameworks
18.2 Use professional and organisational supervision and support to research, critically analyse, and review knowledge based practice
18.3 Implement knowledge based social work models and methods to develop and improve your own practice
Appendix 9: Requirements for the social work degree in the four countries of the UK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Title of the requirements</th>
<th>Issuing body/date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References to research in the requirements from the 4 countries

Each of the documents listed above has different emphases on research. What follows is a brief comparison based on the text of the documents.

**England**
The only explicit reference to research in the English requirements for social work training is to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) Key Role 6: Unit 18 (see Appendix 8 above)

**Northern Ireland**
The Framework Specification for Northern Ireland maps the NOS and the QAA benchmark statement. For example in identifying how to plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice the Framework it quotes the relevant section from the benchmark statement:
*Theoretical perspectives and evidence from international research on the design and implementation of effective social work intervention with a wide range of service users, carers and others; and*
Research based concepts and critical explanations from social work theory and other disciplines including their distinctive epistemological status and application to practice

Scotland
Research is embedded in The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland. There is a clear statement that on successfully completing the honours degree, newly qualified social workers must demonstrate competence to (among other things):
Locate, understand and critically evaluate research findings and literature that is relevant to social work practice.

Other sections that include reference to either knowledge and/or skills in research include:
Assessment: students are expected to develop skills to assess situations taking into account all aspects of the situation – and research.

Plan & carry out review: students are expected to be able to understand evidence from international research.

Achieve change: students are expected to understand research based concepts

Tackling risk: students are expected to use relevant research

Professional competence is described as: Evaluating and using up-to-date knowledge of, and research into, social work practice. To achieve this students are expected to have the skills to assess the relative strength, applicability and implications of contrasting theories, explanations, research, policies, procedures and methods of intervention.

Wales
The Introduction to the Qualification Framework is explicit that practice learning must be strengthened and students must be better enabled to integrate theory and research findings into their practice. It later asserts that the focus of practice learning involves: using, analysing and evaluating research

In outlining the required standards the Qualification Framework is clear that a person completing the degree programme must demonstrate would be able to integrate legislation (including the Human Rights Act 1998), best practice, theories and research-based evidence, related to social work, into his or her practice as a social worker;
APPENDIX 10: References


Department of Health (forthcoming) Evaluation of the new Social Work degree in England


QAA framework for qualifications http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI/default.asp#annex1 accessed 23/05/2008

TOPSSS National Occupational Standards http://www.topssengland.net/files/cd/ accessed 23/05/08