

# Review of the Degree in Social Work

Report 14  
June 2019

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## Involving People Who Use Social Work Services in the Degree

### **Perspective on the Degree Review by Joanne Sansome - Member of the Review Team and the Social Care Council Participation Partnership Forum**

I have been involved in social work education for 12 years. I first had the opportunity to contribute to teaching through my involvement with Disability Action and the REAL (Rights, Empowerment. Action & Lobbying) Disability Network. Over the years, I have contributed to the modules, Introduction to Social Work, Law and Preparation for Practice at Queens University Belfast and Belfast Metropolitan College. I am also a member of the Social Care Councils Participation Partnership. Through my work on the Participation Partnership and involvement in social work education, I was interested in the review of the Degree.

It has been great to be part of, and observe, the development of service user and carer involvement over the years. I have seen participation develop from one-off presentations within group seminars to the service user and carer teaching group influencing the questions asked at the admissions stage, the content and structure of modules via modules reviews, briefings and meetings. We also have a statement of expectations embedded in the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work. My involvement in this review of the Degree seemed like a logical next step.

I have been involved in reviews of the Degree before as a consultee, so being part of the project group was a new experience. As part of the review team, I participated in the initial planning and development stage, through to the data collection, analysis and writing of this report. This involvement was an

opportunity for me to hear from all stakeholders about their experiences, opinions, suggestions and future expectations of social work education. I now have a better understanding as to why and how the Degree is currently delivered.

Discussions in focus groups, and with the project team, highlighted and inspired thoughts and concerns as to how the existing structures could be further utilised to develop and deliver a holistic practice centred approach to all aspects of the degree curriculum. From my perspective, it is vital that graduating social workers know that they are not coming into service users or carers' lives to solve every concern. However, to support and encourage people to make their own informed choices, supported by the knowledge, to signpost or advocate appropriately as per the situation, guided by the Social Work Practice Continuum, highlighted in this report. Graduating students and practitioners should also consider the Degree as the foundation of a professional knowledge base, as professionals they should actively commit to encouraging, supporting and practising lifelong learning opportunities.

The use of technology presents both the benefits and challenges to social work. Advancing technologies and the global realities of today's' online' 'offline' society together with changing societal and cultural structures need to be considered within social work education. I think the strategic actions identified at the end of this report reflect both focus group discussions and the shared commitments regarding partnership working, to maintain the quality of social work education and practice while ensuring it remains future ready.

## Section 1 - Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) 5 yearly Review of the Degree in Social Work, (the Degree). Based on annual monitoring and findings from this Review the Social Care Council are satisfied that the provision of the Degree continues to meet the Social Care Council Rules, Standards and Requirements.

This report highlights a number of areas for development as strategic actions that should be taken forward to further develop and improve Degree course provision into the future. The following paragraphs outline the key findings and development areas arising from this report.

### 1.1 Partnership Arrangements

**The Review has demonstrated that there is effective engagement and collaboration across a range of stakeholders with strong and consistent examples of partnership working at operational and strategic levels.** Into the future there is an opportunity to review the purpose and function of all Partnerships and Committees at strategic, regional and operational levels to articulate how they support the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree and for course providers to develop mechanisms to facilitate symbiotic relationships between social work educators that support improvement of the Degree.

### 1.2 Curriculum

**Based on the findings from this review, the Social Care Council is satisfied that the curriculum is forward looking and takes account of developments in social work research, inquiry, policy and practice.**

Building on this strong foundation the Strategic Advisory Group should take lead responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is agile and innovative to meet the needs of employers, service users and communities into the future. In recognition of a rapidly developing digital world Course providers should ensure that social work students develop the knowledge and skills required to safely use digital technology to safeguard and improve the wellbeing of service users, carers and communities

### 1.3 Degree Outcomes

**The Review has confirmed that course provision is designed and delivered in a way that supports the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective social workers with a strong professional social work identity.** Social work is an emotionally demanding profession and there are new understandings of the importance of self-care. It seems timely that self-care should be legitimised, both as an individual and team responsibility that is modelled in academia and practice and incorporated into social work education in a structured way.



## Section 2 - Introduction

**2.1** The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Health (DoH). The Social Care Council was established on 1 October 2001 by the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. The Act requires the Social Care Council to promote high standards for social workers in their conduct, practice and training.

**2.2** As the regulator of social work education and training in Northern Ireland (NI), the Social Care Council is responsible for setting standards of social work education, ensuring these standards are being met by course providers, and that social workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver quality services that meet the needs of users of services and their carers. These standards are set out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (2015).

**2.3** The Social Care Council is responsible for the approval, annual monitoring, review and inspection of the Degree. The Social Care Council Quality Assurance Framework sets out the arrangements for the approval, monitoring, review and inspection of the Degree. Reviews are conducted at least every five years after approval and enable an in-depth consideration of the strengths of the courses, areas for development, and whether requirements continue to be met. This is the third Review of the Degree in Social Work since its introduction in 2004.

**2.4** In undertaking its function of regulating social work education and training, the Social Care Council works to the following principles:

- **Continuous improvement**

The Social Care Council seeks to ensure that continuous improvement underpins both its regulation of provision and the processes by which regulation is undertaken. It will focus on the continuous improvement of social work education and training and the consequent outcomes for services. The Social Care Council will ensure that the delivery of education and training meets its standards.

- **Efficiency and effectiveness**

The Social Care Council will work in partnership with providers and other key stakeholders as appropriate, to implement these arrangements and to avoid duplication of effort where possible. Constructive dialogue between the Social Care Council staff and providers is encouraged so that any on-going or developmental issues can be dealt with as they arise. The Social Care Council will ensure that its standards for education and training are appropriate, comprehensive and reflect up to date professional practice and that its regulatory activity and requirements are proportionate, reasonable and fit for purpose.

- **Consistency**

The Social Care Council will be consistent in its approach to all providers and in the interpretation of the Rules, Standards and Requirements.

- **Transparency**

The Social Care Council will have in place a transparent and proportionate system of quality assurance for education and training providers and processes that are responsive to both internal and external scrutiny. A summary of quality assurance reports will be made available to key stakeholders and the public.

## Section 3 Background to the Degree

**3.1** The social work profession has a lead role in improving and safeguarding the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. Social work practice therefore takes place in a societal context influenced by a wide range of socio-economic and political factors. The duality of the social work role as both enabler and protector means that social workers often occupy a contested space where they are required to balance, what are sometimes, competing rights and needs while empowering those they work with.

**3.2** The policy context for both social work and social work education and the way in which services are delivered has changed since the Degree was first introduced and will continue to change. While Northern Ireland's hiatus in devolved government may have temporarily impacted on legislative and policy change, policy development from a range of government departments including Department of Health (DoH) as sponsor, Education (DE), Justice (DOJ) and Communities (DOC) will have relevance, influence and impact. Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH, October 2016) focuses on the transformation of how health and social care services are conceptualised, structured and delivered into the medium and long term. This agenda provides the opportunity for social workers to work innovatively with related professions in community contexts where the emphasis is on prevention, early intervention and better targeting for specialised and statutory services. It is important for providers of the Degree to take account of plans for the implementation of "Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together" that impact on social work. The transformation of services across the public, community and voluntary sectors requires leadership and effective co-production

with service users and carers, communities and other professionals. Social work training must therefore prepare students to be leaders at all levels and work effectively with service users, carers, communities, and other professions in integrated teams and services. Social work training must also be dynamic in its design in order to maintain core social work foundations as well as being responsive to major policy and evidence based developments that set the context for practice.

**3.3** In Northern Ireland while the DoH holds lead policy responsibility for social work education strong policy connections are required across government Departments to ensure that social work in all sectors is supported and thrives. As the first strategy for social work, Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing – A Strategy for Social Work in Northern Ireland, 2012-2022 (DHSSPS, April 2012) reflects the DoH's commitment to social work as a valued and valuable profession. The strategy sets out a vision for strengthening social work in the context of the current political, economic and social challenges and their implications for social work. A number of strategic priorities and recommendations were made to help the profession of social work and social workers meet the challenges ahead. A Framework for Social Work Practice and a Social Work Practice Continuum to support the delivery of the vision for social work are set out in the strategy. The DoH subsequently published, The Purpose of Social Work; Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing which articulates the purpose of social work, the key characteristics of effective social work practice and the role of social work in improving people's social wellbeing. These publications are applicable for all social work sectors and settings and are therefore of value in the planning and

## Section 3 Background to the Degree

delivery of education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying levels. Outputs and outcomes from the implementation of the strategy will continue to be important considerations for future planning in the Degree.



Figure 1 – Social Work Practice Continuum (DHSSPS, April 2012)

**3.4** The impact of austerity measures will continue to be felt across Northern Ireland with greatest impact in areas of high deprivation. This resulting increase in demands on public services will require focused and innovative responses which the social work workforce of the future must be prepared for. In such an environment the financial support provided by DoH to student social workers remains crucial to ensuring diversity of the profession in the workforce by widening access to social work training.

**3.5** The Review of the Degree also takes place against a backdrop of significant review and scrutiny of social work education across the UK countries. Professor Croisdale-Appleby's (2014)[6] review concluded with detailed recommendations spanning student selection, university-based learning, practice placements and continuing professional development. The report identified a key challenge facing social work education as a lack of clarity around what social work education is for and recommended a re-visioning of social work's identity and outcomes and investment in the integrated and career-long learning methods required to deliver on that. The recommendations from Sir Martin Narey's review in 2014[7] set in motion a number of changes to the delivery of social work education in England. These include the introduction of fast track, specialist training. In Scotland, the Scottish Social Services Council conducted a detailed Review of Social Work Education in Scotland which completed in 2017. Broadly, this Review concluded that social work education in Scotland remains 'fit for purpose' but is facing significant challenges, similar to those facing the profession as a whole. A key headline was that social work education and professional learning needs to be better understood as a shared endeavour, requiring strategic, sustained and joined up contributions from academic, practice and other key stakeholders.

[4] The Purpose of Social Work; Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing (DoH, June 2017)

[5] Degree in Social Work in NI, Student Incentive Scheme, DHSSPS(NI), September 2012

[6] Re-visioning Social Work Education – An Independent Review, David Croisdale Appleby, February 2014

[7] Making the Education of Social Workers Consistently Effective, Martin Narey, (2014)

## Section 3 Background to the Degree

**3.6** The Degree in Social Work is a generic qualification which qualifies social workers to practise across a range of sectors and settings including the statutory health and social care sector, justice sector, education sector and the voluntary sector. The Degree is designed to help students acquire the core knowledge and skills that are transferable across a range of settings and service user groups. Completion of the Degree represents the first stage in a journey of continuous professional development that spans a social worker's career. Successful completion of the Degree is followed by an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE)[8]. The AYE is designed to ensure that Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) have the necessary support to make the transition from student to employee and have demonstrated sustained, continuous and effective competence in the workplace. Employers must confirm to the Social Care Council that a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) is fit to practise as a fully accountable social worker before the AYE condition is removed. Within three years of completing the AYE, social workers are required to achieve two Requirements from the Professional in Practice Framework to maintain their registration as a social worker.

***‘Clearly an initial qualification as a social worker is just that, an initial qualification in a journey in which continuing professional education is expected to take place throughout a professional’s career in practice ‘ Croisdale Appleby 2014***

**3.7** Social work undergraduate education in NI is supported by a strong weave of partnership arrangements that ensure the Degree meets the needs of service users and carers, employers, and communities. The NI Framework Specification for the Degree in

Social Work incorporates a statement of expectations from service users and carers and they are involved in elements of the design, delivery and evaluation of Degree programmes.

### **The Structure of Degree Delivery in Northern Ireland**

**3.8** In Northern Ireland, a policy decision was taken in 2001 to establish the Degree in Social Work as the threshold level for qualification for social work practice. The first Degree courses in NI were validated and commenced in 2004. The NI Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (2015) and associated Social Care Council requirements (FN) and standards specify what should be taught and assessed as part of the Degree to promote consistency across courses and relevance to the needs of service users, carers and employers.

**3.9** The Degree is provided as a three year undergraduate course (UGR) and a two relevant graduate course (RGR). A part time route was available from 2010 but was discontinued in 2016/17. A collaborative approach by course providers and employers is essential to the delivery of social work education in NI.

**3.10** Two course providers are currently approved to deliver the Degree in NI;

- **Collaborative Partnership at Queens (CPAQ)**
- **Ulster University/Further Education Collaborative Management Board (UU/FECMB)**

[8] Assessed Year in Employment, DHSSPS(NI), Circular HSC (OSS) AYE2/2015

[9] Professional in Practice (PiP) is the CPD framework for Social Work in NI. PiP recognises all learning, formal and informal. It provides an opportunity to accumulate credit by recognising a range of learning and providing Professional Awards certificated by the Social Care Council.

## Section 3 Background to the Degree

The Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP) was established to co-ordinate a consistent regional approach to delivery of the Degree including admissions and practice learning.

**3.11.** 50% of the Degree is delivered through practice learning, therefore a partnership approach between academic and workplace staff is essential to support the integration of theory with practice, to promote the implementation of evidence-based practice and to ensure that there is coherence and progression between the academic and practice components of the course.



## Section 4 Aims and Objectives of Periodic Review

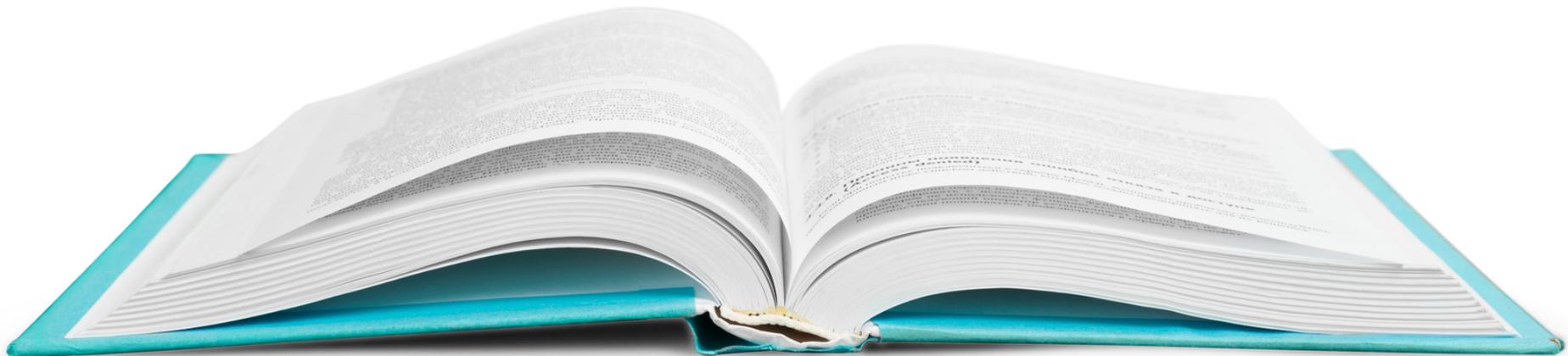
### Aim of the Review

'To test the extent to which the Degree in Social Work is forward looking and agile'

### Objectives of the Review

To ascertain that;

- 1. The Degree in Social Work programmes meet the requirements of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work, January 2012**
- 2. Partnership arrangements are efficient, effective and imbedded in the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree in Social Work**
- 3. The curriculum is innovative and forward looking and takes account of developments in social work research, inquiry, policy and practice.**
- 4. The Degree in Social Work programmes support the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity**



## Section 5 Review Methodology (Further detail in Appendix 2)

**5.1** This is the third Review of the Degree, previous reviews were completed in 2009 and 2014. The action plan arising out of the last review was extensive and took five years to complete. The outworking of that action plan together with the outcomes of annual quality assurance monitoring processes has created the conditions for a more strategic and forward looking approach to the current review of the Degree.

**5.2** The scope of the Review was determined by the Social Care Council in collaboration with the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) for the Degree in Social Work along with DoH, the sponsoring body, and was conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work, January 2012.[10] Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, January 2012 A Review Team was established by the Social Care Council ensuring the work was conducted within the Terms of Reference/Objectives for the Review and in accordance with the Social Care Council Quality Assurance Framework. For the first time the Review Team included a member of the Social Care Council Participation Partnership for Service Users and Carers and a social work academic from outside NI.

**5.3** The key questions guiding the Review are set out in Section 4. In answering these questions, the Review employed a mixed methods approach, involving focus groups, digital surveys and Review planning meetings. A total of 22 focus groups were facilitated with key stakeholders, including:

- **Academic staff**
- **Health and Social Care Trusts**
- **NQSWs (those currently on the Assessed Year in Employment - AYE)**
- **Practice Teachers**
- **Service users, carers and survivors**
- **Social work managers**
- **Social work students**

In addition to the focus groups noted above the Review Team also consulted with representatives from the Department of Health, Health and Social Care Board and the Executive Directors of Social Work group (representing the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland).

**5.4** Four digital surveys were also completed, targeting:

- **Social Work students**
- **Social work managers**
- **NQSWs**
- **Practice Teachers**

(further detail is available in Appendix 2.)

**5.5** The Review also analysed available quality assurance data routinely collected by social work education providers. Recent work completed under the direction of NIDSWP relating to the improvement of service user and carer involvement, Professional Development Day (PDD) Guidance and a review of the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree was also considered.

[10] Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, January 2012

## Section 6 Review Findings

### 6.1 The purpose of the Review of the Degree in Social Work

To examine the quality of provision measured against the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work and the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work.

**6.1.1.** The Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001 Section 10(3) gives the Social Care Council the authority to make Rules on the provision of social work education and training that can include the content of courses. In accordance with Section 18(3) no Rules shall be made without the consent of the Department of Health. The Council will approve a course only when it is satisfied that the course meets the Standards for Approval which cover the following areas:

- 6.1.1 Regional consistency**
- 6.1.2 Collaborative arrangements**
- 6.1.3 Management and organisation**
- 6.1.4 Policy and planning**
- 6.1.5 Resources and staffing**
- 6.1.6 Student participation**
- 6.1.7 Public participation**
- 6.1.8 Selection and registration**
- 6.1.9 Teaching, practice learning and assessment**
- 6.1.10 Governance and continuous improvement**



## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.1.2** Course providers were asked to provide documentation in relation to each of the areas above. The outcome of this Review demonstrates that the Degree continues to meet the requirements of the Social Care Council Rules for Approval.

**6.1.3** During the last 5 year period, the annual monitoring reports and associated documentation submitted to the Social Care Council by course providers, Designated Practice Learning Providers and the NIDSWP have consistently evidenced that the provision of the Degree is meeting Social Care Council Standards. Feedback from students to Further/Higher Education Institutions has evidenced that there is a high level of satisfaction with the course and Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO) provision.

**6.1.4** The Degree curriculum has been developed around the six key roles as set out in the NI Framework for the Degree in Social Work and the Social Care Council Practice Learning Requirements. The curriculum covers all key areas of social work theory and practice and is designed to support a generic training course. As part of this review the module outlines taught on the UGR and RGR routes at both QUB and UU/FE were examined. The Social Care Council is satisfied that the modules address the six key roles of the National Occupational Standards for social work, as outlined in the Framework Specification.

**6.1.5** The Social Care Council delivers a periodic programme to review its standards and arrangements for regulation and quality assurance of education and training to ensure that the model used is fit for purpose and reflects best practice. The outcome of this work will be reflected in future quality assurance arrangements for the Degree.



## Section 6 Review Findings

### 6.2 Partnership

**Partnership arrangements are efficient, effective and imbedded in the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree in Social Work**

**6.2.1** The Learning and Improvement Strategy (DoH, 2018) states that, 'Effective partnerships in the provision of learning and improvement offer the best opportunity for achieving higher standards and securing regional consistency'. The Degree is delivered in partnership between employers and education providers through a range of collaborative arrangements

- **Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)**

the Social Care Council, employers from all sectors, education providers, HSCB, NIDSWP, and DoH, working collaboratively to identify the key policies and strategies which will impact on and inform social work education and training

- **NIDSWP**

a partnership of education institutions and employing agencies (Statutory and voluntary) working collaboratively through NIDSWP to ensure consistency in the delivery of the Degree through the Board and three sub committees (Admissions, Practice Learning and Degree Delivery (PLADD) and Governance)

- **Degree provider partnership arrangements**

the Social Care Council, employers and NIDSWP jointly oversee the delivery of courses.

While the formal arrangements are set out above partnership permeates every aspect of the delivery of social work education, with service users, carers and survivors involved in the delivery of the Degree, between tutors, practice teachers and on site facilitators and the course provider/employer partnerships in the preparation for practice module.



***'I believe the user ethos and voice is critical to the learning and development of social workers'***

**Carer**

## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.2.2** While the formal arrangements are set out above, the Review found that partnership permeates every aspect of the delivery of social work education; with service users, carers and survivors involved in the delivery of the Degree, between tutors, practice teachers and on site facilitators and the course provider/employer partnerships in the Preparation for Practice module.

***‘Do not change the excellent support from staff involved in the Degree course, without that support there would be very little input from those of us involved’***

***Carer and citizen educator***

***‘The Voluntary sector couldn’t make the contribution to practice learning it does without the partnership arrangements’***

***Practice Learning Centre Manager***

***‘Partnership arrangements help with consistency of standards, one handbook for all students is very helpful’ Practice Teacher***

**6.2.3** The NIDSWP coordinates regional delivery of the Degree. There is evidence that these partnership arrangements are effective, particularly in relation to the Regional Admissions System, the PLO allocation system and the regional approaches to curriculum delivery, including the regional Preparation for Practice Learning module. The Review found that stakeholders strongly valued the role of NIDSWP in regional coordination, but that the work of the partnerships was not visible beyond those directly involved. Students and first line managers had little understanding of the work undertaken by the NIDSWP.

**82% of Practice Teachers surveyed thought that the partnerships between their agency and course provider helped to support practice learning.**

**6.2.4** Membership of partnership bodies (NIDSWP, CPAQ, UUFEC/CF) had remained stable for many years, with few changes in personnel. Due to a number of retirements, over the last three years in particular, considerable experience has been lost. The clarity of purpose of partnership which was achieved between the first and second Reviews of the Degree may have lost momentum as a result. While the new membership has brought a range of experience and fresh perspectives it has taken some time to achieve a more consistent understanding as to the purpose and Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Partnership Board and committees. The Partnership Board is in the process of developing a revised governance framework which will help to further clarify roles and responsibilities for partnership members. There is a consensus of opinion that the balance of effort within the PLADD

## Section 6 Review Findings

committee has tipped in favour of practice learning at the expense of degree delivery. The work currently being undertaken to review the TOR for the various committees, including CPAQ and UUFEC/CF is timely therefore and should ensure a consistent purpose and understanding going forward.

**6.2.5** With regard to changing regional policies or procedures, it was reported that the process of agreeing changes can be slow as course providers often need to refer regional proposals to their own internal committees which can prolong the decision making process. The recent work undertaken by the PLADD committee to develop a service user and carer quality improvement plan and review the Preparation for Practice module was taken forward by a sub group who gathered and considered evidence as part of the process and provides a good model for future work.

**6.2.6** The Review found that opportunities for course providers and practice teachers to work together as social work educators arise naturally through student practice learning, delivery of the Preparation for Practice (PfP) module and the NIDSWP's annual Practice Learning Review. While most Practice Teachers reported being informed (76%) about the Degree curriculum in a broad sense they expressed an interest in knowing more about module content relevant to their practice area and having an opportunity to shape social work education for the future. This is reflected in the lower figure of 28% of Practice Teachers, who took part in the survey, indicating that they had an opportunity to provide feedback to tutors on aspects of the Degree that could be improved.

Course provider/Practice Teacher information events held by course providers have lapsed, due to lower attendance following the introduction of employer mileage restrictions. Practice Teachers told the Review Team that they valued this opportunity to develop their knowledge of module content. One employer had requested, and was provided with, information about module content that was reported as helpful in supervising students.

Social work practice, education and research is best served by a reciprocal, symbiotic relationship that was not consistently evident to the review team. Practice Teachers have an important role in social work education and the absence of a structure that gives voice to their experience, knowledge and understanding is a lost opportunity. However, Practice Teachers also need to be active in seeking information and there may be some benefit to consideration of technological solutions to support improved knowledge exchange and communication.

[13] All students must have satisfied the assessment criteria for Preparation for Practice at Level 1 before progressing to a Practice Learning opportunity (NISCC Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work, August 2010)

[14] Regional Practice Learning Opportunities Handbook, NI Degree in Social Work Partnership, Revised December 2018

## Section 6 Review Findings

### Areas for Development

The Review has shown that partnership arrangements are effective in the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree. The Review found less evidence of the efficiency of the partnership arrangements in supporting collaborative decision making. It is understood that partnership arrangements can be complex and demanding and that improvements with the streamlining of committees following previous reviews of the Degree have been welcomed. However, this Review has heard that meetings are lengthy and have not always achieved an appropriate balance between reporting on Degree delivery and the development of the curriculum and content. The review of TOR's currently underway should go some way towards resolving this issue but it may also be helpful to consider how the use of digital technologies could improve efficiency of the partnerships. The development of clear and efficient communication systems at strategic, operational and organisational levels is crucial to improving the efficiency of these arrangements and communicating their value and importance to a wider audience.

## Section 6 Review Findings

### 6.3 Curriculum

**The curriculum is innovative and forward looking and takes account of developments in social work research, inquiry, policy and practice.**

**6.3:1** For the purposes of this Review, the Social Care Council understand curriculum to include the totality of social work students' experience in University or College and on Practice Learning. The Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work is a joint publication by the DoH and the Social Care Council. It sets out a single comprehensive set of learning outcomes in the form of performance criteria, core skills and knowledge and statements of understanding for the Degree. It includes an expectation that course providers maintain a curriculum that incorporates academic and practice learning and fosters the integration of knowledge, skills and values in teaching, learning and assessment to meet the performance criteria. Practice learning provides the opportunity to contextualise and expand academic learning and to apply it to social work practice.

**6.3.2** Student and AYE social workers, almost 60% of whom were within three months of qualification, were asked a series of questions about their experience of the Degree in Social Work. 94% of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) surveyed thought that Practice Learning was a significant element of preparation for social work practice. A lower satisfaction rating (44%) was attributed to Practice Development Days (PDDs). Connecting qualitative feedback from NQSWs and current students indicates an understanding of the purpose but not always the value of PDDs,

which were considered an additional pressure. Some good examples were provided as to how students have been able to use PDDs to positive effect through involvement in the Ulster University Stand Up for Social Work Society and other volunteer experiences. Students reported that these opportunities also enhanced their understanding of social work as community activism and community development. Course providers and employers have provided opportunities for PDDs such as conferences, Erasmus opportunities and Belfast Metropolitan College link with the Belfast City Council Diverse city project (<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/events/Event-100403.aspx>).

Considerable variation was described in how PDDs are approached by individual students and tutors despite the availability of guidance. It was a recommendation of the last Review of the Degree that NIDSWP and course providers should undertake a review to consider the continuation of PDDs. This Review was completed and reported in 2017, therefore postdating the experience of some of those surveyed. It was concluded that while just 40% of students surveyed thought PDDs should continue there was not a strong rationale for removing the requirement in the absence of a viable alternative to extending PLO days. As a regulated profession, social workers are required to take responsibility for their own professional development. PDDs can help to develop skills and understanding in this area but further development is required to ensure that both students and tutors are applying the guidance and using PDDs to best effect.

[15] Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, June 2017

[16] Guidance on Individual Practice Development Days for the Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, June 2017

## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.3.3** Social work by its nature takes place in a dynamic social context. Social work education therefore must be responsive to changing demographics', demands and emerging issues. Practice in a post conflict society and the arrival of populations new to NI requires cultural competence but also presents an opportunity to involve more racially and ethnically diverse service users in Degree delivery. The involvement of Citizen Educators - WAVE Trauma Centre ([www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk](http://www.wavetraumacentre.org.uk)) provides an opportunity for students to understand the trauma experienced by those directly impacted by 'the troubles'. WAVE Citizen Educators consulted as part of this Review expressed a willingness to contribute more strategically to social work education and agreed with the recommendation of the Service User and Carer quality improvement plan, that a more coordinated approach to service user and carer involvement was required. The Review found that students and NQSW valued the opportunity to hear directly from service users, carers and survivors and that it helped prepare them for practice (Figure 2).

**6.3.4** Practice Teachers and Line Managers surveyed identified elements of the Degree that they felt were working well. The benefit of a Preparation for Practice Module (PfP) where students have the opportunity to begin to develop practice skills was acknowledged. 100% of Practice Teachers and 89% of Line Managers said that students and NQSW's respectively can form effective working relationships with service users. In their qualitative feedback both groups consistently noted evidence of a strong value base, knowledge of legislation and an ability to integrate theory and practice in students and NQSWs.

[17] A Quality Improvement Plan to Widen the Involvement of Service Users and Carers in the NI Degree in Social Work, NIDSWP, 2018

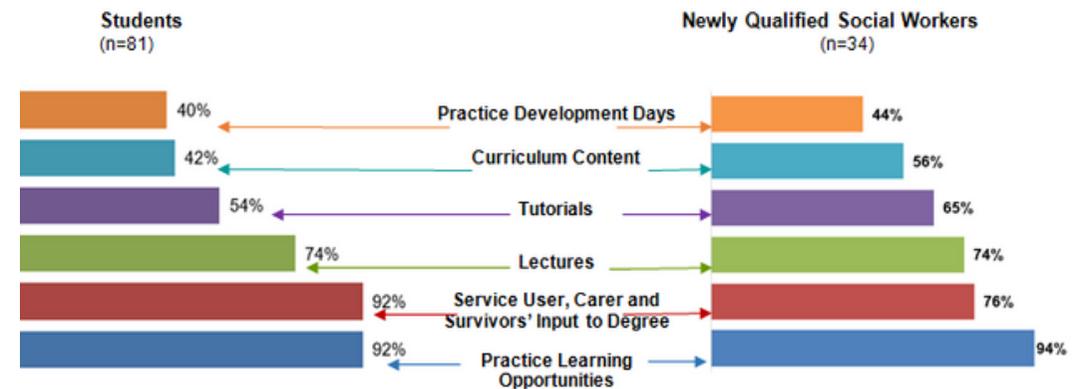


Figure 2: Degree students and newly qualified social workers – Elements of the Degree that helped prepare them for practice (further information is in Appendix 4)

**"I'd like more time on case studies, debating ideas. These are where you begin to find your value base and become self-aware'  
(AYE SW)**

### Students and NQSWs can establish positive working relationships with service users and carers

Practice Teacher's Views (n=50) and Line Manager's Views (n=47)



Figure 3: Practice Teachers and Line Managers Views - Students and NQSWs ability to establish positive working relationships with service users and carers (further information is in Appendix 3)

## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.3.5** While students were generally positive about the level of academic and pastoral support received from staff, course providers acknowledged the tensions, for staff, in reconciling the demands of the academic environment with delivering two separate professional programmes (RGR and UGR).

***'This has been a fantastic degree so far and the support from the university staff is brilliant. Having completed a degree at this university before, there was a stark difference between the supports received. The School of Social Work invests much more time in students'***

***Student***

**6.3.6** Course providers described keeping up to date with developments in policy and practice through research activity commissioned by employers or government departments and student practice learning opportunities. The Review heard that research active staff can relate to specific areas of practice through their research, however staff within the Further Education sector have less opportunity to do so. While course providers were confident that they were aware of policy and practice development a more methodical approach to ensure consistent understanding could be developed through the partnership arrangements at strategic, regional and operational levels. This could be achieved through existing structures such as the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG).

**6.3.7** The Review heard views from employer organisations, first line managers and Practice Teachers, that social work education needed to support students to develop digital literacy and an

understanding of the benefits of technology to social work. This included access to up to date knowledge and research base and to network with other practitioners to share knowledge and good practice. Digital safeguarding balanced with an understanding of the support that can be provided by an online community, across all service user groups was also identified as an area that should be included in social work education but not at the expense of key relational and communication skills as reflected in the Learning and Improvement Strategy for Social Workers (DoH 2019).

***"The challenge moving forward for both academic institutions and practice learning providers will be how a synthesis of the traditional and new skill sets can be achieved"***

***Practice Teacher***



## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.3.8** A number of stakeholders expressed a view that the Degree curriculum can be 'crowded' with a sense that areas of practice compete for space. It is important that that the Degree curriculum achieves the right balance between depth and breadth in terms of core knowledge and skills for entry to a career in social work. The Degree is an important foundation but other factors contribute to the development of competent and confident practitioners such as the supports provided to transition from student to qualified practitioners.

**6.3.9** Report writing and recording skills were noted by line managers as requiring attention. Social work students are required to have GCSE English and their work is academically marked at undergraduate level. However report writing skills for social workers are predicated on an understanding of context, purpose, assessment and analysis that may relate to developing confidence in a practice context. Students will have some opportunity to develop skills in writing for different contexts within their University or College but by their nature these will have some limitations. Recording and report writing skills that include formal decision making processes should be further refined through practice learning and, as a social worker, progressed in their practice experience according to agency guidance for their work setting.

**6.3.10** Areas that Practice Teachers and line managers identified as requiring further attention included a broader understanding of Social Work practice in different contexts that is relationship based and uses creative methods to engage with service users, carers and communities.

### Areas for Development

The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social work sets out a single comprehensive set of learning outcomes in the form of performance criteria, core skills and knowledge and understanding statements for the Honours Degree in Social Work. It also specifies the value base as an integral part of the knowledge and practice requirements. As it is beyond the scope of the review to examine all of the learning outcomes of the Degree in detail the Strategic Advisory Group agreed a focus on the areas set out above and reflected in the TOR for this Review.

Broadly speaking programmes were found to meet the requirements as set out in the Framework Specification. Evidence from a number of stakeholders supports the view that social workers in NI graduate with an appropriate value base, an understanding of the legislative and theoretical framework and are competent in their practice. A number of areas identified for further development can be considered within existing structures for managing Degree delivery such as further work to embed the PDDs Guidance and development of service user, carer and survivor involvement.

It was the view of the Review Team that the Strategic Advisory Group should develop and consolidate its role in providing strategic direction in relation to the Degree curriculum. The Review found that the Degree supports the education and training of social workers who can form effective working relationships with service users and carers, reflecting an understanding of relationship based practice. Social workers must also understand and engage with the digital world and the Review heard a consistent message from a range of stakeholders about the need for social work education to equip graduates with digital knowledge and skills to improve outcomes for service users, carers and survivors.

## Section 6 Review Findings

### 6.4 Outcome of the Degree

**The Degree in Social Work programmes support the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity**

**6.4.1** Through a series of surveys and focus groups, students, NQSW's and employers were asked to what extent they thought the Degree helped to support the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity.

**6.4.2** Students and NQSWs were asked about professional social work identity and factors contributing to their understanding as to what it means to be a social worker. The results from the student survey demonstrate a strong sense of professional identity. The NQSW survey had similar results although slightly reduced in the first two questions. While students and NQSWs judged the visibility of professional social work identity in the workplace at a lower rating than among academics. Qualitative responses reflected a strong value attached to their identity as social workers. Understanding and developing a strong sense of professional identity was reported to be more challenging for first PLO students who did not have a social worker on site and for some NQSWs working in multi-professional teams with fewer modelling opportunities.

*"Working within a multi-disciplinary team both on placement and within my current role has provided the opportunity to work alongside other health professionals (Nurses, OT's, Physiotherapists, Speech & Language Therapists). The roles are clear and unambiguous supporting the development of professional identity"*

**NQSW**

*"Practice teachers, tutors and colleagues have helped to shape my professional development through formal and informal supervision. The provision of constructive feedback has allowed my professional development to continue to improve." NQSW*

*"Understanding the social work role is key to professional identity"*

**Student**

*"Codes of conduct, teaching staff with passion and experience, practice teachers, SU involvement in teaching, SW on PLO, understanding professional accountability, supervision, team meetings have all contributed to my professional identity"*

**Student**

# Section 6 Review Findings

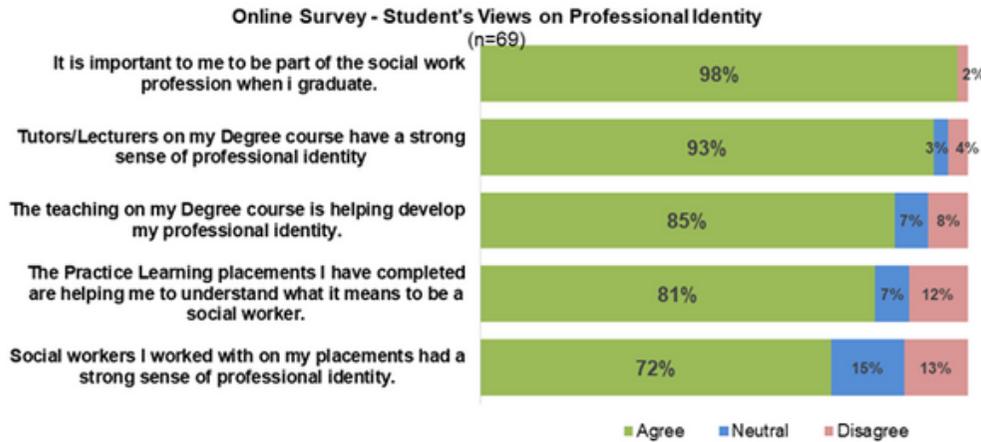


Figure 4: Students Views – What helps develop Professional Identity (further information is in Appendix 4)

**6.4.3** The findings from the surveys reveal some variation between the views of Practice Teachers and first Line Managers of NQSW's in relation to their assessment of student and NQSW confidence in their decision making. A greater percentage of Managers (39%) indicate a neutral view. This variance could result from increased expectations of Line Managers, as well as the increased caseload and greater decision making responsibilities of NQSWs compared to students. A review of the qualitative responses from Managers suggests that this is a reflection of their experience of some NQSW's who had confidence in their decision making and those who did not.

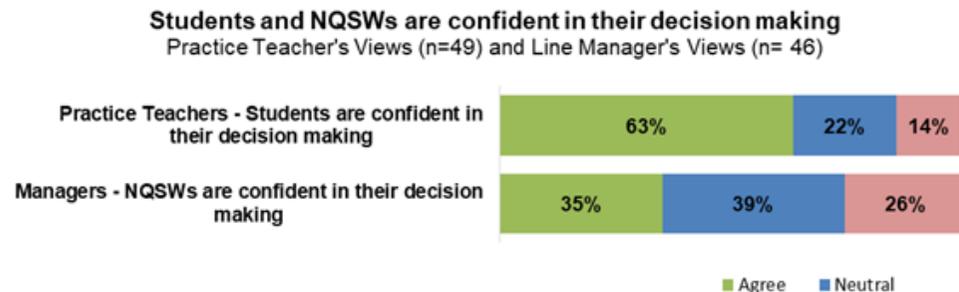


Figure 5: Practice Teachers and Line Managers Views - Students and NQSWs confidence in their decision making (further information is in Appendix 3)

On the basis of consultation with a range of stakeholders the Review Team formed the view that the profession has not yet achieved a shared understanding about what can be expected of a social worker at qualifying level and then built upon within a framework for continuous professional development.

**6.4.4** The majority of Practice Teachers and Line Managers thought that students and NQSWs can work autonomously with only 6-7% (N=2-3) strongly disagreeing with this statement.

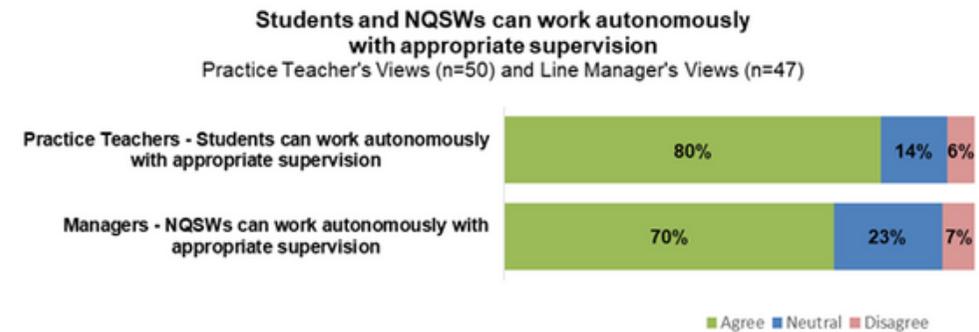


Figure 6: Practice Teachers and Line Managers Views - Students and NQSWs ability to work autonomously (further information is in Appendix 3)

***"The degree prepares them with a good structure for beginning AYE practice year. They understand key issues such as confidentiality, accountability and have good legislative knowledge."***

***Line Manger***

## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.4.5** The Review Team found evidence of a consistent commitment to developing and using evidence based practice. Through surveys and focus groups, students and NQSWs expressed a value on evidence based practice that was visible to Line Managers and to a lesser degree Practice Teachers. 80% of Line Managers surveyed agreed that NQSWs practice is evidence based, Practice Teachers judged this at a lower level of 60% for students. This may reflect a different developmental stage. It was reassuring that 71% of NQSWs reported that they regularly (at least once per month) refer to research to develop their practice.

***"I am encouraged to use research and publications to develop my knowledge"***

***NQSW***

***"It is important my learning is informed by research evidence"***

***Student***



Figure 7: NQSWs Views – Supporting their social work learning/development (further information is in Appendix 4)

The Review found that most students and NQSW's (88%) thought that the Degree provided opportunities to develop skills in critical reflection. NQSW's felt more confident in using critical reflection to improve their practice (91%) than assessed by either Practice Teachers or Managers. Students and NQSW's identified a range of models they had applied, and understood to varying degrees, to support reflective practice and understood that reflection could take place in a number of ways, through supervision and in discussion with colleagues.

***'Houston's model needs clearer teaching and guidance regarding application'***

***NQSW***

***'My practice teacher really helped me to understand and develop skill in critical reflection'*** NQSW

## Section 6 Review Findings

***"Tutors, practice teachers and onsite supervisor have all made reflection a live topic"***

***Student***

**6.4.6** Practice Teacher responses in relation to student resilience are almost equally distributed across the 'agree, neutral, disagree' continuum, with a stronger positive response from Managers. In the focus groups sessions, both groups acknowledged the range of demands on NQSWs and contextual issues that influence their developing resilience such as staffing levels and available support. It was of interest in qualitative survey responses that some social workers managers framed the issue in terms of developing personal resilience, while NQSWs spoke of managing demanding caseloads mediated by the level of professional support available in their feedback and focus groups.

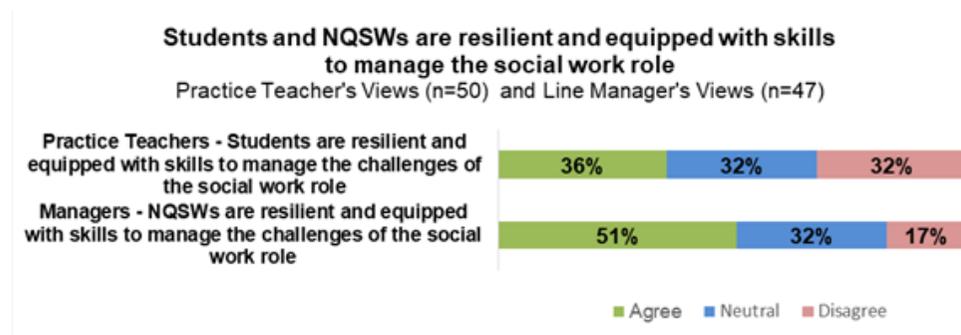


Figure 8: Practice Teachers and Line Managers Views - Students and NQSWs resilience and skills (further information is in Appendix 3)

***"Self-care is 'name checked' but little has been done to date on the course to educate us in how to constructively do this/ deal with burn out. It seems like a big gap to me given the high workloads and limited budgets in social work at the moment"***

***Student***

***"Resilience has been the outcome of my training and learning."***

***NQSW***

***"There is a significant gap between the size of a caseload of a student on placement and the size of a caseload in real life, I think they need more preparation about how to manage that"***

***Line Manager***

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**Not perfectionists**  
They understand that 'perfection is impossible'

**Empathetic**  
They understand people & can relate to them

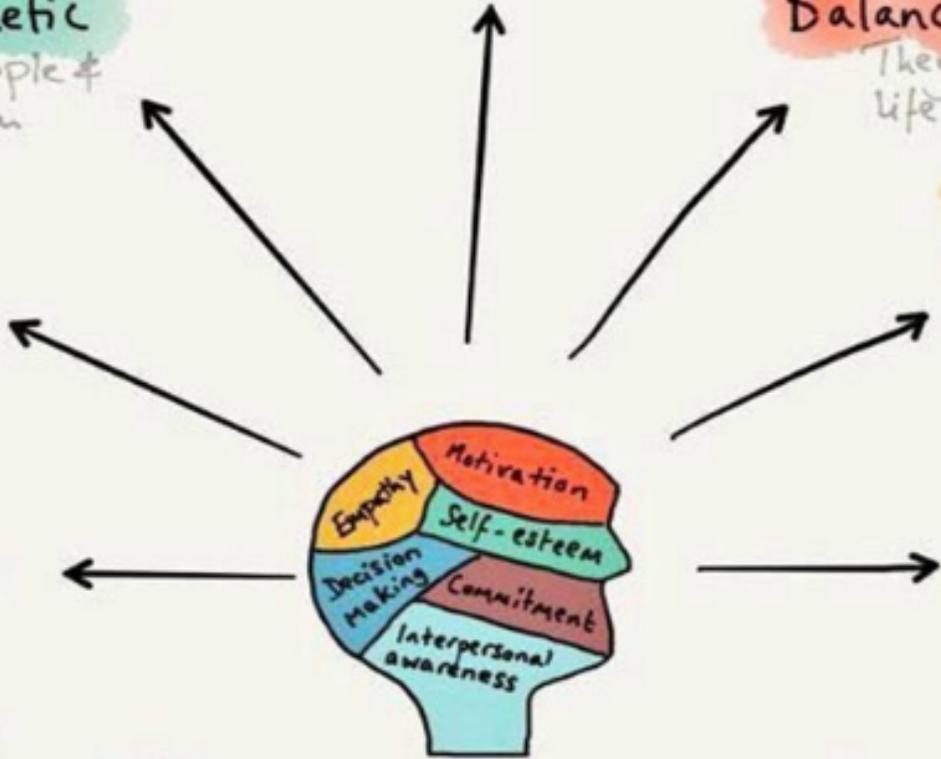
**Balanced**  
They maintain a good work-life balance & recognise its importance

**Self aware**  
They know what they're good at & what they still have to learn

**Curious**  
They ask questions & are keen to explore possibilities, they don't judge

**Area't afraid of change**  
They understand change is a necessary part of life.

**Gracious**  
They feel good about their own lives and give thanks easily



How to recognise  
**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**  
7 attributes

Inspired by Rhett Power

Contact us [enquiries@impact.wales](mailto:enquiries@impact.wales)  
for bespoke support & resources

## Section 6 Review Findings

**6.4.7** Students identified a number of issues that they felt impacted on their resilience including financial pressures due to debt from a first Degree, supporting their family and being unable to maintain paid employment during practice learning in particular. University and College staff also expressed concern about the impact of financial hardship on student mental health and capacity to engage with learning. A bursary is currently paid by DoH to social work students domiciled and studying in Northern Ireland that can go some way to alleviating these pressures if made available in a timely way.

### Areas for Development

The evidence gathered within this Review supports the view that social work education in NI delivered through the Degree does support the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective practitioners with a strong professional social work identity.

One of the developmental areas that elicited most comment from Practice Teachers and Managers was that of supporting students to develop the resilience required for effective and sustained social work practice. Some of the contextual issues raised such as staffing levels are beyond the scope of this review but may warrant attention elsewhere.

Opportunities for critical reflection on practice with peers and supervisors can help to build resilience but an understanding of the role of self-care is also crucial.

It is the view of the Review Team that self-care for social work needs to be legitimised as both an individual and team responsibility that is modelled in academia and practice and incorporated into social work education in a structured way. A number of models and tools to support self-care specifically for social workers are now available such as SPARK and the recently published 50 Acts of Professional Self-Care for Social Workers, Kerwin, Mclean Associates.

<https://ideachildrights.ucc.ie/resources/tools/SPARK-Tool-Final-UCC.pdf>

The outcomes of Practice Teacher/Manager surveys and focus groups evidence some significant differences in expectations of early career social workers. Through analysis of the data gathered, it was not clear to the Review Team that the profession has achieved a shared understanding about what can be expected of a social worker at qualifying level, and then built upon within a framework for continuous professional development. It was agreed that social work graduates should have an understanding of core social work knowledge and be able to apply skills to build relationships; engage in assessment processes and intervene to improve and safeguard social wellbeing.

Given the variety of contexts in which social workers practise, a range of models and methods will be applied, not all of which can be addressed within a generic Degree curriculum. It would therefore be helpful for stakeholders to work together to achieve a shared understanding through clearly articulated and agreed requirements that can then be built upon within the Assessed Year in Employment and Professional in Practice Framework.

## Section 7 Summary of Actions and Outcomes

The Review Team have reviewed the wide range of data gathered as part of this Review process and prioritised the following actions and outcomes to ensure that the Degree in Social Work is forward looking and agile. Each priority has a number of strategic actions to support delivery of the outcome. It is envisaged that an implementation plan will be developed with stakeholders within the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership, with strategic oversight provided by the Strategic Advisory Board for social work education in NI.

### Partnership Arrangements

#### Actions

- The purpose and function of all Partnerships and Committees at strategic, regional and operational levels will be reviewed to articulate how they support the development, delivery and improvement of the degree.
- Course providers will have mechanisms in place to facilitate reciprocal, symbiotic relationships between social work educators that support improvement of the degree.

#### Outcome

**Partnership arrangements are efficient, effective and imbedded in the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree in Social Work**

## Section 7 Summary of Actions and Outcomes

### Curriculum

#### Actions

- The Strategic Advisory Group will take lead responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is agile and innovative to meet the needs of employers, service users and communities into the future.
- Course providers will ensure that social work students have the knowledge and skills required to safely use digital technology to safeguard and improve the wellbeing of service users, carers and communities.

#### Outcome

**The curriculum is innovative, forward looking and takes account of developments in social work research, inquiry, policy and practice.**

### Outcome of the Degree

#### Actions

- Self-care will be incorporated into social work education in a structured way.
- Stakeholders will work together to affirm a shared understanding of the expectations placed upon newly qualified social workers, which are measured through agreed requirements linked to the AYE and continuing professional development

#### Outcome

**Degree in Social Work programmes support the development of autonomous, evidence based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity.**

# Review of the Degree in Social Work

## Appendices

Report 14  
June 2019

## Appendix 1 - The Review Team

### Introduction to the project team for the Review

**Review Team Purpose:** to ensure the Review objectives are met through the following activities:

- Agree the schedule and facilitate stakeholder consultation
- Refine the areas to be considered in each of the consultations
- Review and analyse research evidence, policy and strategy relevant to social work education in Northern Ireland
- Prepare the final report

### Review Team Membership

Name	Role
Frances Cannon	Senior Professional Officer - NIPEC
Roslyn Dougherty	Council Member – Social Care Council
Barbara Gillen	Professional Social Work Advisor - Sessional
Gerry Heery	Professional Social Work Advisor - Sessional
Jan Houston	Professional Social Work Advisor - Social Care Council
Joanne Lytle	Professional Officer – NIDSWP
Dr Trish McCullough	Senior Lecturer in Social Work – University of Dundee
Catherine Maguire	Professional Social Work Advisor - The Social Care Council
Kerry Malone	Professional Social Work Advisor - Sessional
Joanne Sansome	Member – Social Care Council Participation Partnership for Service Users and Carers

## **Appendix 2 - The Review Process**

**Overview of the approach taken to complete the Review, the people we engaged and the feedback that was gathered.**

### **2.1 Planning Meetings**

- Department of Health NI - Office of Social Services
- Social Care Council Board Members
- Social Care Council Participation Partnership for Service Users and Carers
- NI Degree in Social Work Partnership
- Degree Providers

### **2.2 Stakeholder Engagement – 22 Focus Groups facilitated with 200 people who represented:**

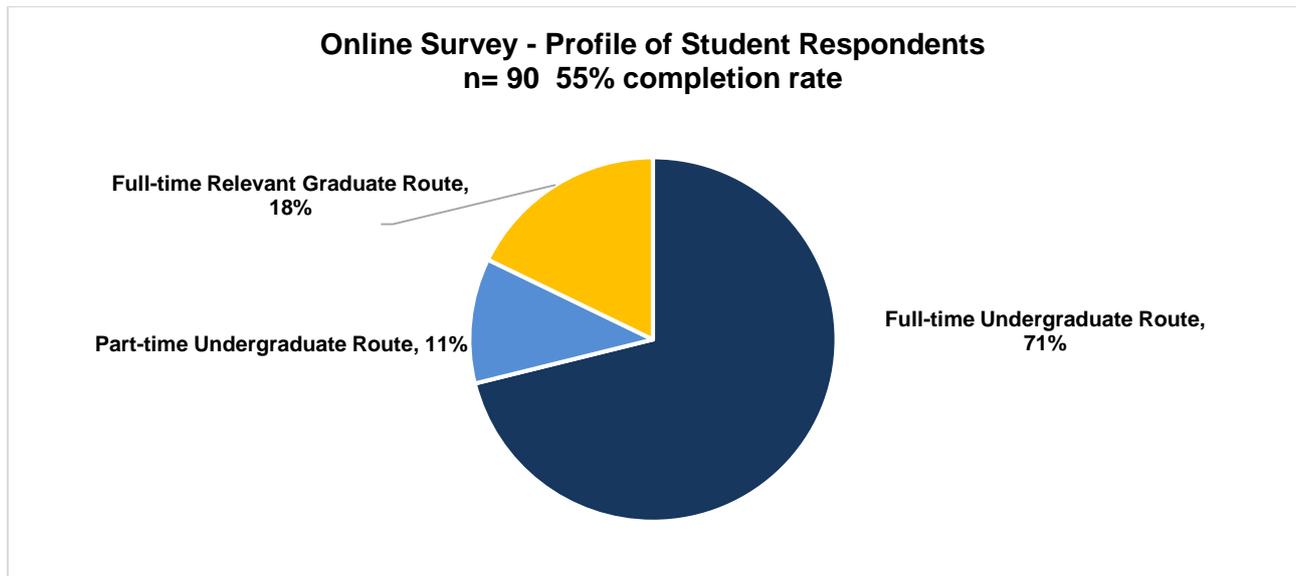
- Academic staff (Course Directors and Tutors) – Queens University, Ulster University, Belfast Met and South West College
- Health and Social Care Trusts - Assistant Directors for Governance
- Newly Qualified Social Workers (AYEs) - those in the first year of professional practice
- Practice Teachers – Social workers who supervise and assess Degree students on practice placements across NI
- Service users, carers and survivors – People with social work experience who are involved in Degree teaching/presentations
- Social Work Managers - Those with management responsibility for newly qualified social workers in HSC Trusts, Education Authority, Probation, Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Social Work Students – Those currently studying on Year 2 and Year 3 of the Degree at Queens University, Ulster University, Belfast Met and South West College (includes students on Undergraduate and Relevant Graduate courses)

### **2.3 Digital Surveys - 242 people across 4 online surveys and 1 Mentimeter polling session:**

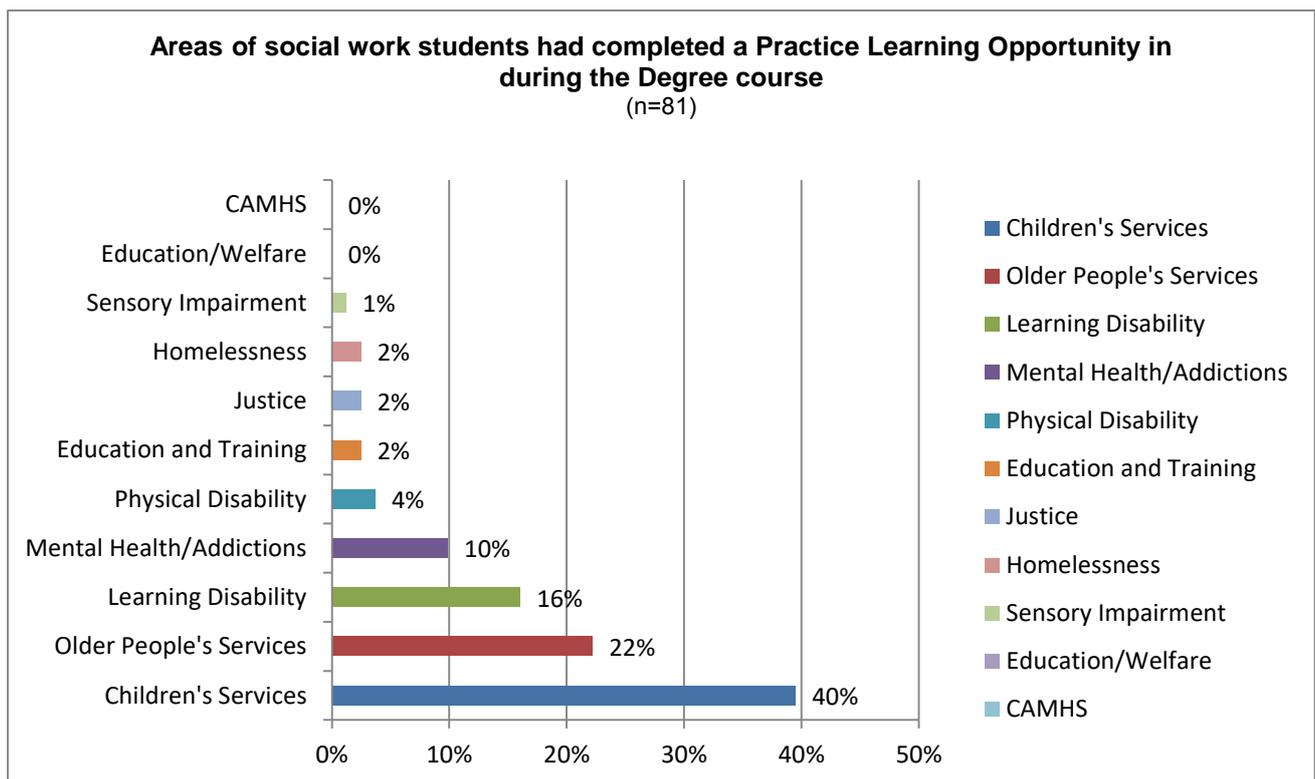
- 90 Social Work Students (55% completion rate)
- 47 Social Work Managers (77% completion rate)
- 42 Newly Qualified Social Workers (AYE) (81% completion rate)
- 13 Practice Teachers through online survey (100% completion rate)
- 50 Practice Teachers through Mentimeter Poll (95% completion rate)

## 2.4 Social Work Student Respondents

### Degree Course

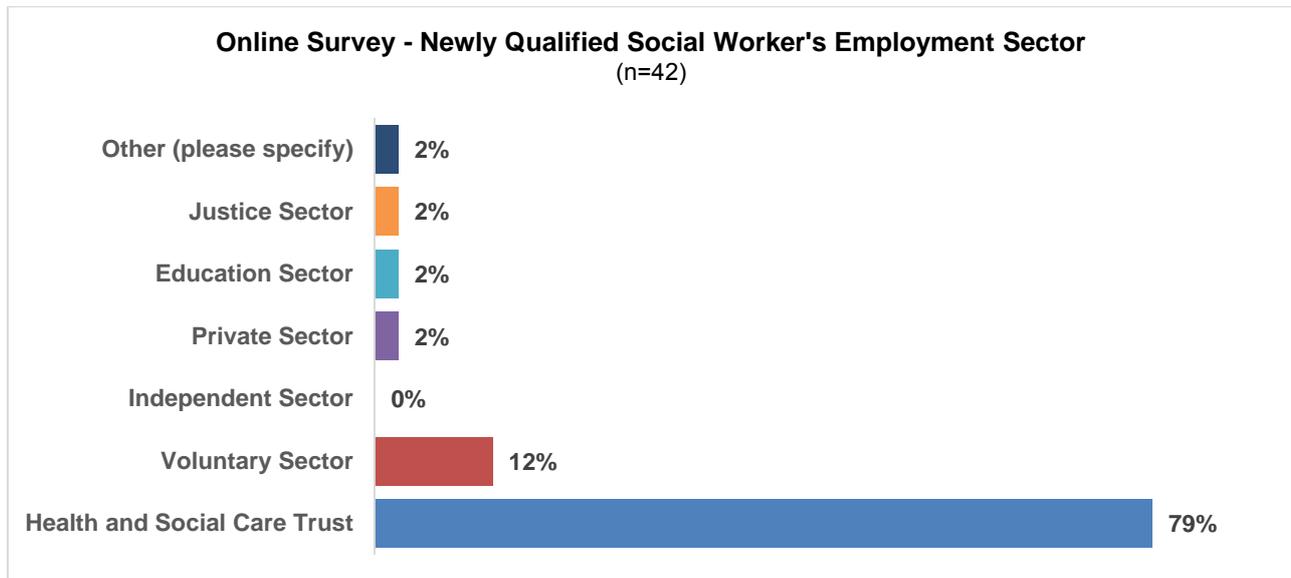


### Practice Learning Settings Experienced

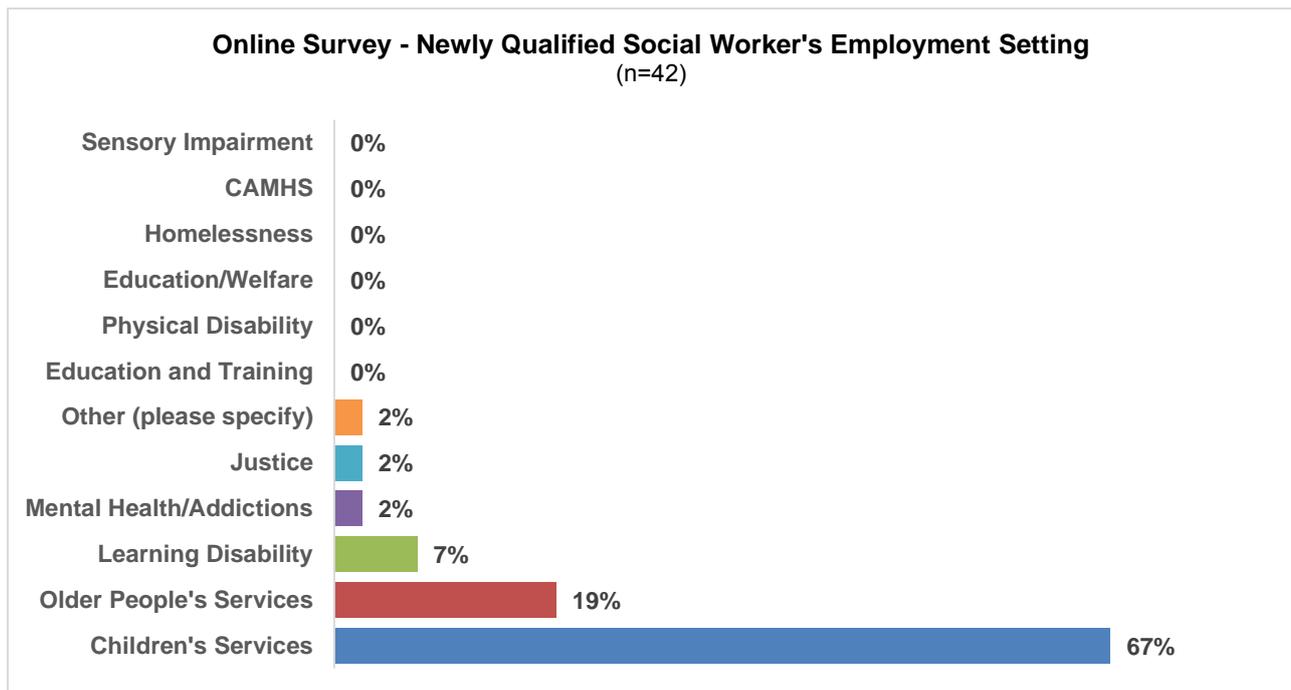


## 2.5 Newly Qualified Social Worker Respondents

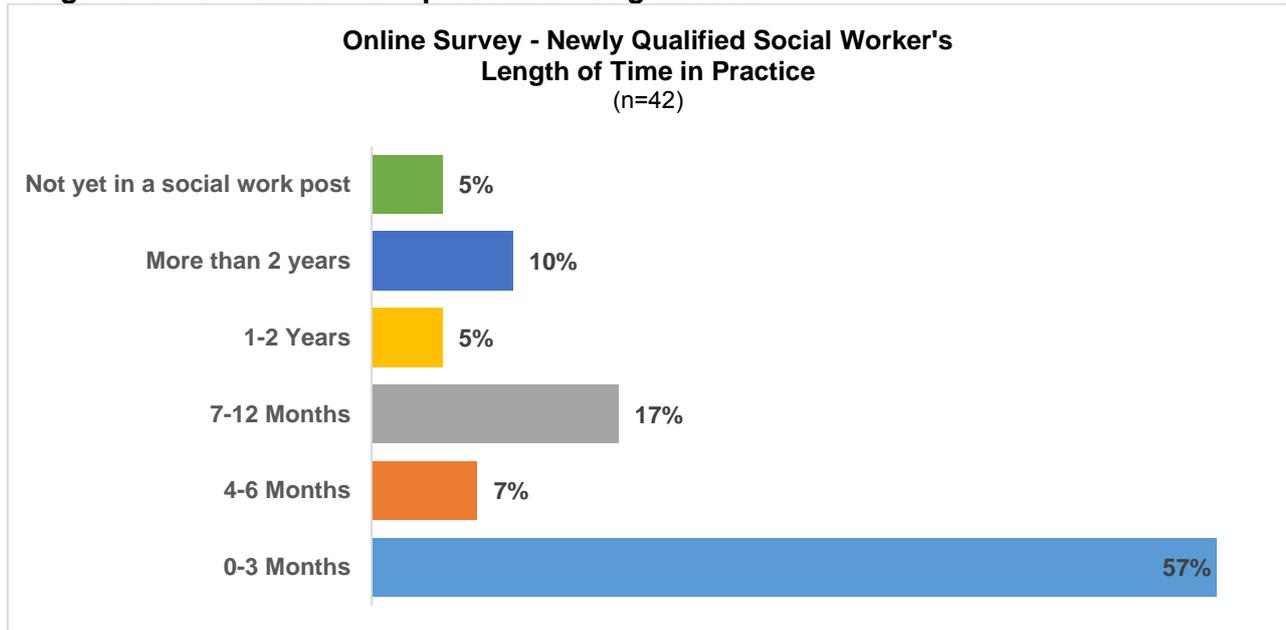
### Employment sector



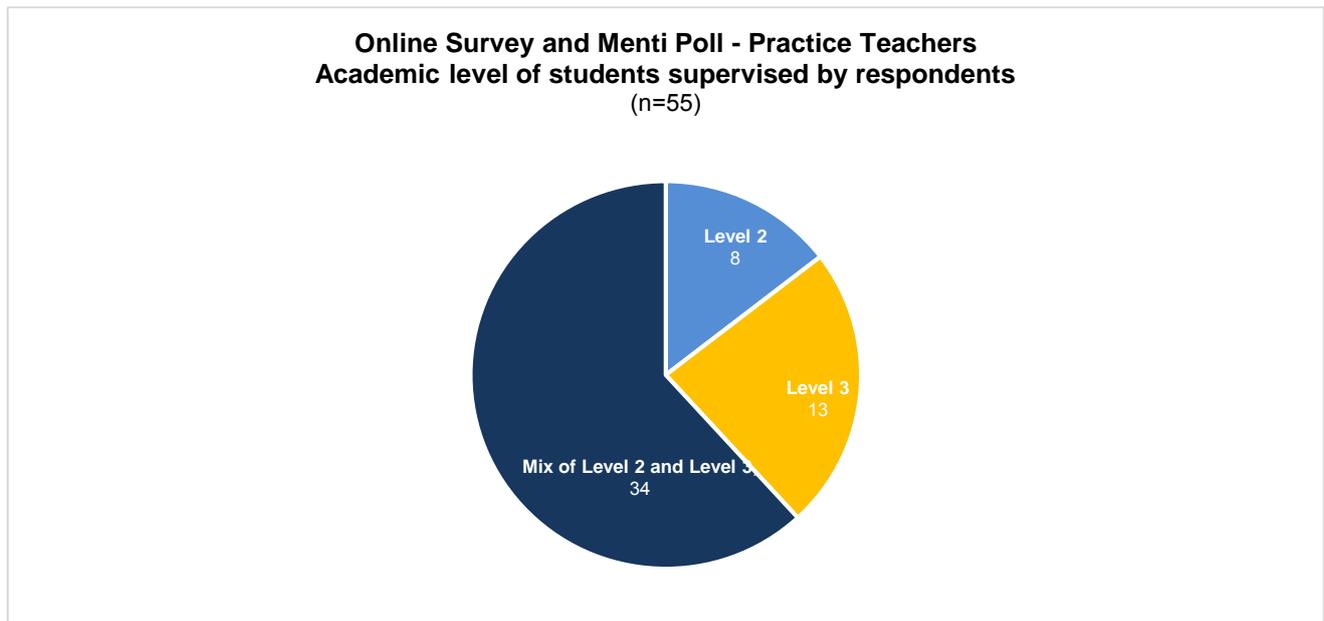
### Employment setting



### Length of time in social work practice since graduation



### 2.6 Practice Teacher Respondents Academic level of students supervised by Practice Teachers

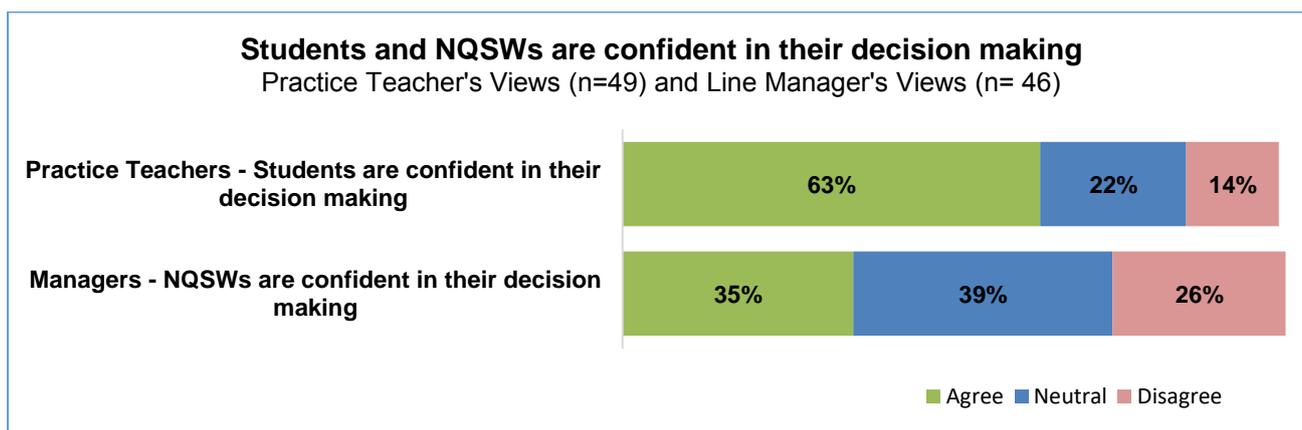


## Appendix 3 - Feedback from Practice Teachers and Line Managers

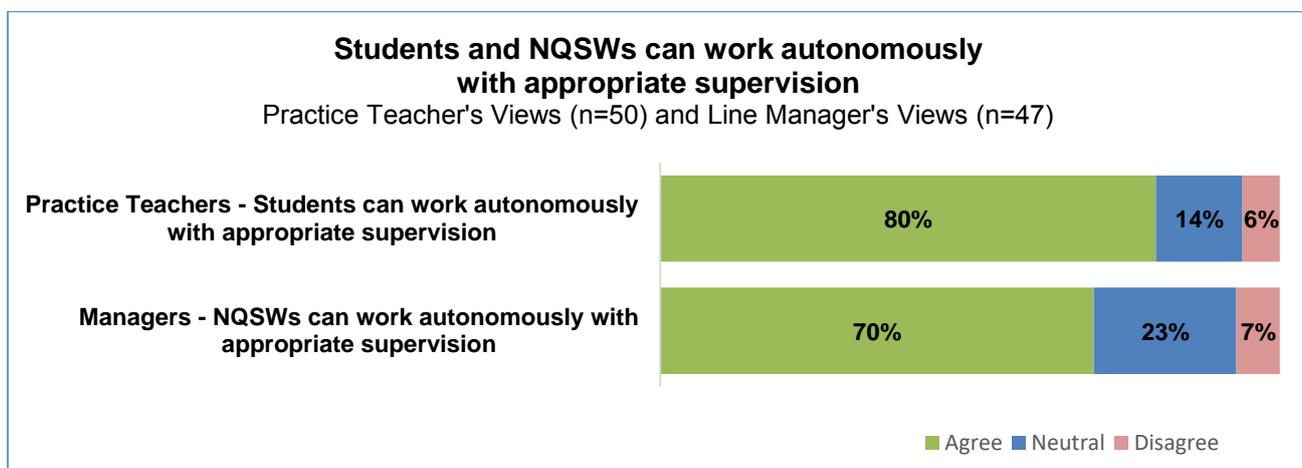
Surveys and focus groups with Practice Teachers and Line Managers sought their views on whether the Degree in Social Work programmes support the development of autonomous, evidence-based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity. The following information below provides additional information to support the references quoted in the Review report.

### 3.1 Practice Teachers' and Line Managers' views on whether students and NQSWs are confident in their decision and can work autonomously (see figures 5 and 6 in Section 6 - of the report)

- Practice Teachers reporting much stronger student confidence in their decision making, compared to the decision making skills of NQSWs observed by Line Managers. (This variance could result from increased expectations of Line Managers as well as the greater decision making responsibilities of NQSWs compared to students.
- Positive feedback from Practice Teachers and Line Managers that students and NQSWs can work autonomously with appropriate supervision



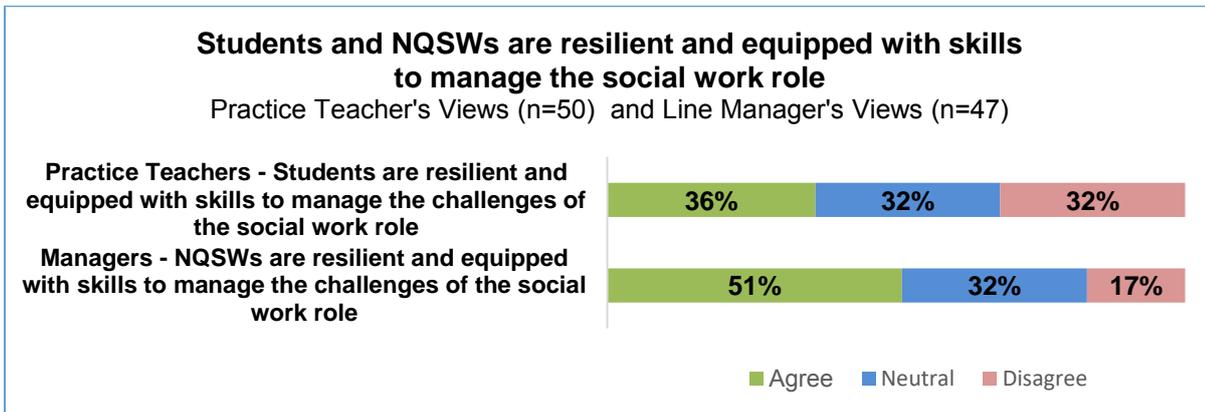
(see page 19, Figure 5)



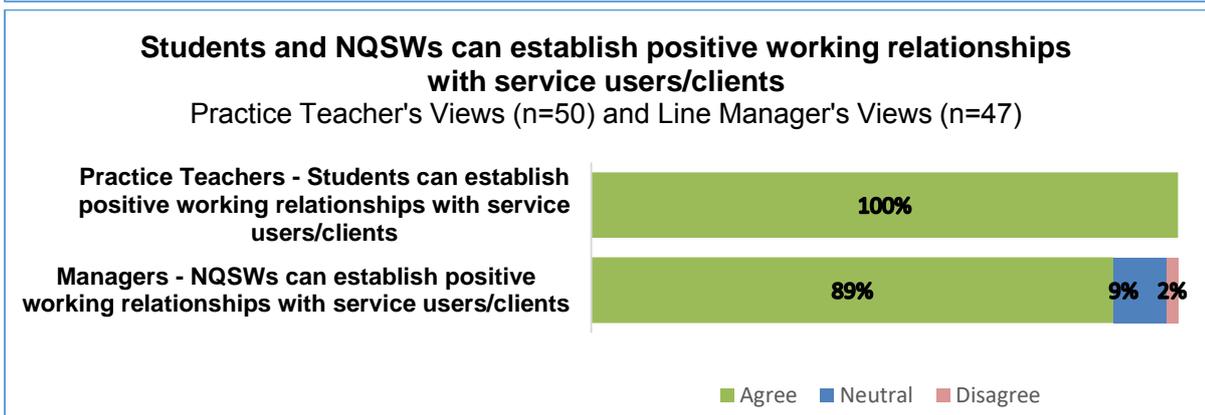
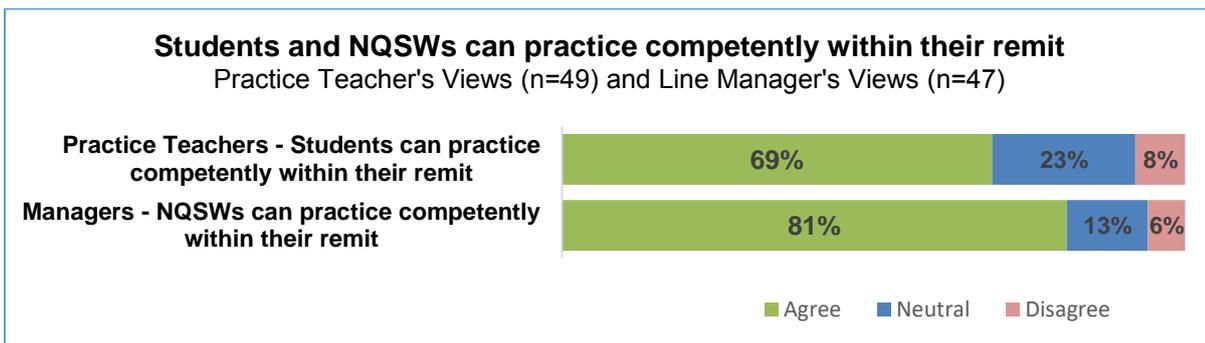
(see page 20, Figure 6)

**3.2 Practice Teachers' and Line Managers' views on whether students and NQSWs are resilient and equipped with the skills required for social work** (see figures 3 and 8 in Section 6 - of the report)

- There is a notable variation between responses to the questions about competence compared to resilience/skills to manage the challenges of the role.
- Managers and Practice Teachers are strongly positive about competence and ability to establish relationships with service users, yet less than are 50% positive overall about resilience and capability to cope with the role.



(see page 22, Figure 8)



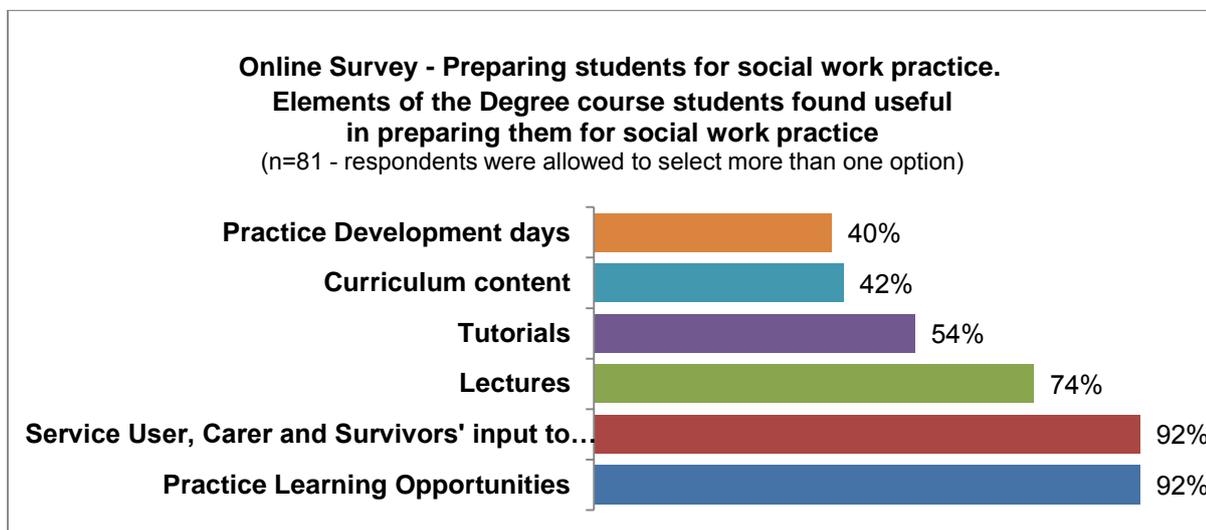
(see page 16, Figure 3)

## Appendix 4 – Feedback from Degree Students and Newly Qualified Social Workers

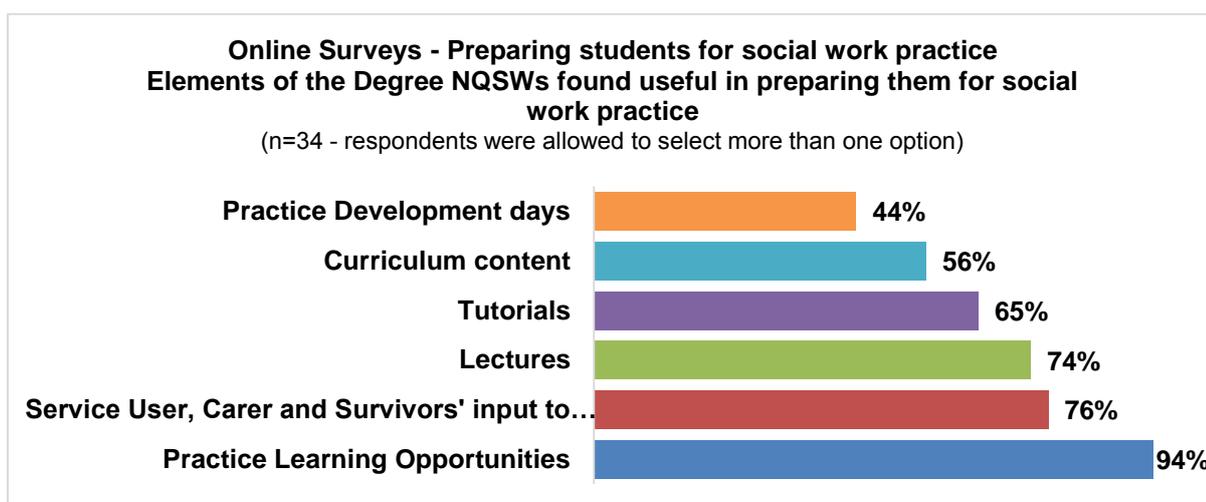
Surveys and focus groups with Students and Newly Qualified Social Workers sought their views on whether the Degree in Social Work programmes support the development of autonomous, evidence-based, critically reflective and resilient practitioners with a strong professional social work identity. The following information below provides additional information to support the references quoted in the Review report.

### 4.1 Social Work Students and Newly Qualified Social Workers views on preparation for social work practice (across both the taught curriculum and practice learning). (See figure 2 in Section 6 of the report)

- Students and NQSWs reported similar ranking for the usefulness of the elements Degree
- Curriculum was ranked considerably lower than Lectures which may be an indicator of the positive views about the delivery of the lectures and materials provided.



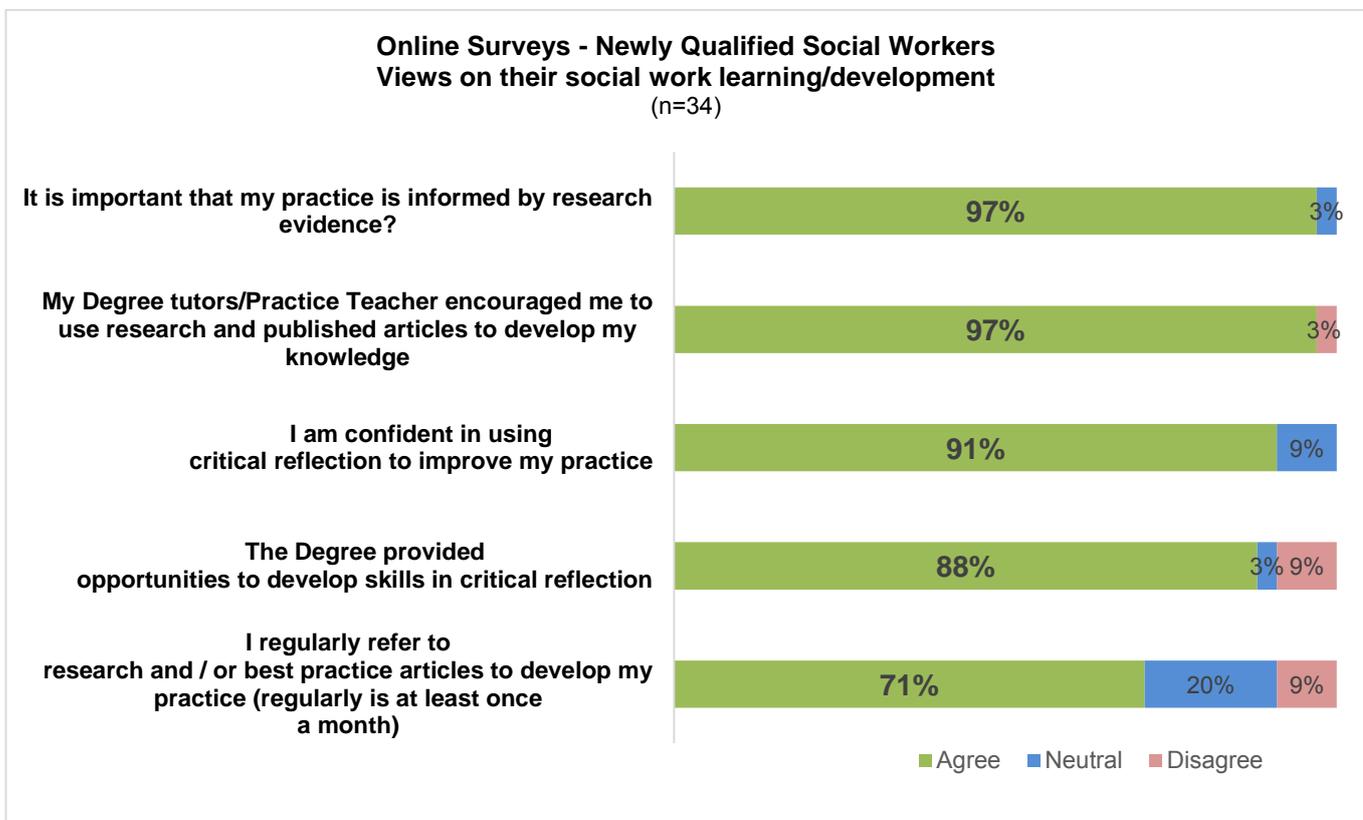
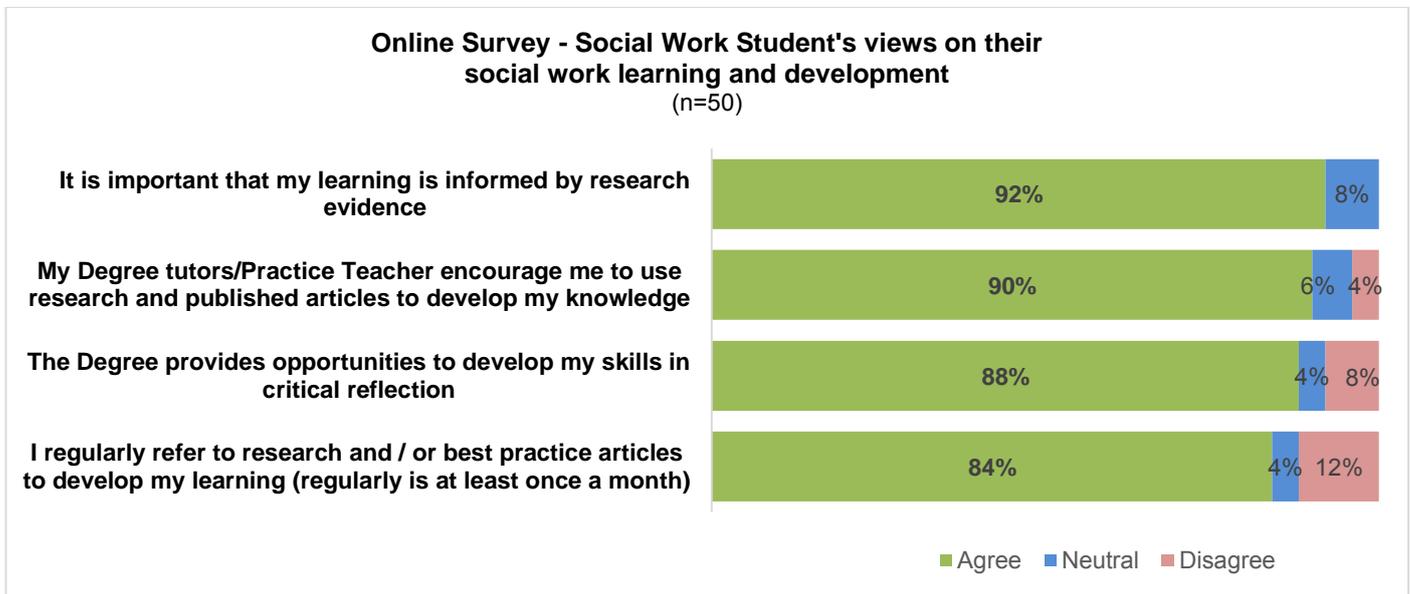
(see page 15, Figure 2)



(see page 15, Figure 2)

**4.2 Social Work Students and Newly Qualified Social Workers – Views on what elements support their social work learning/development.** (See figure 7 in Section 6 of the report)

- Students and NQSWs reported similar views on elements to support learning and development
- Students were more positive about referring regularly to research and best practice at 84% whereas this dropped to 71% for NQSWs



(see page 21, Figure 7)

## **Appendix 5 – Digital Survey Questions**

**242 people responded to 4 online surveys and 1 Mentimeter polling session. Copies of the survey questions are provided below:**

### **5.1 Practice Teachers - Mentimeter Poll and Online Survey Questions**

- 50 Practice Teachers engaged in the Mentimeter Poll (95% completion rate)
- 13 Practice Teachers responded to the follow up online survey (100% completion rate)

#### **Mentimeter Poll**

- 1. Which level of social work student you supervise most of the time as a Practice Teacher?**
- 2. To what extent do students come to the placement with knowledge that is relevant to the level of their course?**
- 3. To what extent do you agree with, if at all, the following statements about how well the Degree is preparing the students that you are supervising?**
  - They understand their role as a social worker
  - They can practice competently within their remit
  - They are confident in their decision making
  - They can work autonomously with appropriate supervision
  - They can establish positive working relationships with service users/clients
  - They are resilient and equipped with skills to manage the challenges of the social work role
  - Their practice is evidence-based
  - They are critically reflective
  - They take responsibility for their own learning and development
  - They show a strong sense of their professional identity as a social worker
- 4. To what extent do you agree with, if at all, the following statements about the current partnership model to support Practice Learning for the Degree?**
  - I am fully informed about the aspects of the Degree curriculum relevant to the students I supervise
  - I receive updates about developments to the Degree to ensure my knowledge is current
  - Partnerships between my agency and the university support Practice Learning
  - I have the opportunity to give feedback to tutors on aspects of the Degree that could improve

#### **Online Survey**

- 1. To help give context to your feedback, please indicate which level of social work student you supervise most of the time as a Practice Teacher.**
- 2. Based on your experience as a Practice Teacher please list the three factors that you consider are the major strengths of the Degree in terms of preparing students for practice. If appropriate, please also list 3 gaps or aspects of the student development on the Degree that could be improved.**
- 3. Based on your experience as a Practice Teacher manager, please list the three factors that you consider are the major strengths of the Degree in terms of preparing students for practice. If appropriate, please also list 3 gaps or aspects of NQSWs development that could be improved.**

- 3. Based on your experience as a Practice Teacher manager, please list the three factors that you consider are the major strengths of the Degree in terms of preparing students for practice. If appropriate, please also list 3 gaps or aspects of NQSWs development that could be improved.**

## **5.2 Social Work Managers - Online Survey Questions**

47 Social Work Managers responded (77% completion rate)

- 1. To what extent do you agree with, if at all, the following statements about how well the Degree has prepared the newly qualified social workers you have managed or worked with? (If possible, Please use the section below if you would like to add any further comments about how well the Degree prepares new social workers for practice.)**
  - They understand their role as a social worker
  - They can practice competently within their remit
  - They are confident in their decision making
  - They can work autonomously with appropriate supervision
  - They can establish positive working relationships with service users/clients
  - They are resilient and equipped with skills to manage the challenges of the social work role
  - Their practice is evidence-based
  - They are critically reflective
  - They take responsibility for their own learning and development
  - They show a strong sense of their professional identity as a social worker
- 2. Based on your experience as a first-line manager, please list the three factors that you consider are the major strengths of the Degree in terms of preparing NQSWs for practice. If appropriate, please also list 3 gaps or aspects of NQSWs development that could be improved.**
- 3. Looking Forward – Shaping the Degree to help ‘future-proof’ the workforce. A review of social work education by the Scottish Social Services Council defined ‘future skills’ for social work with reference to thinking on digital literacies, new media literacy and social media skills. They also focussed on innovation, Creativity and entrepreneurship. How relevant do you think these skills are to the future of social work education and practice in NI? In what way?**
- 4. What other areas do you think should be included in the Degree in Social Work to help ‘future-proof’ the workforce?**

### **5.3 Social Work Students - Online Survey Questions**

90 Social Work Students responded (55% completion rate)

- 1. Which Degree course are you studying?**
- 2. Which areas of social work have you completed a Practice Learning Opportunity in during your Degree Course**
- 3. Your identity as a social worker and views on being part of a recognised profession. Please indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the statements below.**
  - Tutors/Lecturers on my Degree course have a strong sense of professional identity
  - The teaching on my Degree course is helping develop my professional identity.
  - The Practice Learning placements I have completed are helping me to understand what it means to be a social worker.
  - Social workers I worked with on my placements had a strong sense of professional identity.
  - It is important to me to be part of the social work profession when I graduate.
- 4. The Degree in Social Work – Preparing you for social work practice. Please indicate which elements of your Degree course (across both the taught curriculum and practice learning) are useful in preparing you for social work practice.) If possible, please provide details of any other elements you feel should be improved upon or added to the Degree to help prepare students for practice.**
- 5. NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers. (Please indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the statements below.)**
  - I have viewed/accessed a copy of the NISCC Standards for Social Work Students
  - As a student I refer to the NISCC Standards regularly (regularly means at least once a month)
  - The NISCC Standards are useful in guiding me in my learning
- 6. Reflective practice for social work. Please, indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the following statements about your social work learning/development. If possible, please give some more detail on who, how and what has supported you in developing critical reflection and what the challenges have been. (It would be helpful if you could describe which models/research you have used.)**
  - The Degree provides opportunities to develop my skills in critical reflection
  - I am developing confidence in using critical reflection to improve my understanding
  - My Degree tutors/Practice Teacher encourage me to use research and published articles to develop my knowledge
  - I regularly refer to research and / or best practice articles to develop my learning (regularly is at least once a month)
  - It is important that my learning is informed by research evidence?

## 5.4 Newly Qualified Social Workers - Online Survey Questions

42 Newly Qualified Social Worker respondents (AYE) (81% completion rate)

1. Which sector do you work in?
2. What is your main social work setting?
3. How long have you practised in a social work role since graduating from the Degree in Social Work course?
4. Your experience of social work practice as a newly qualified social worker. Please indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the statements below. (If possible, please also provide a few words to describe what it means to you to be a social worker and /or what it has been like joining the workforce as newly qualified social worker.)
  - My social work practice is helping individuals and families to achieve better outcomes.
  - Through my social work role, I am making a positive contribution towards the community I work in.
  - My social work role provides me with positive job satisfaction.
5. Your identity as a social worker and views on being part of a recognised profession. Please indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the statements below. (If possible, please also give some examples of what supported you to develop your professional identity – in university, practice placements and on joining the workforce.)
  - It is important to me to be part of the social work profession.
  - Social workers in my workplace have a strong sense of professional identity.
  - The teaching on my Degree course helped develop my professional identity.
  - The Practice Learning placements I completed during my Degree helped me to understand what it means to be a social worker.
6. The Degree in Social Work – Preparing you for social work practice. Please indicate which elements of your Degree course (across both the taught curriculum and practice learning) helped prepare you for social work practice). If possible, please also provide details of any other elements you feel should be improved upon or added to the Degree to help prepare students for practice.
7. NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers. (Please indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the statements below.) Please use this section if you would like to add more detail on how you are using the NISCC Standards in your social work practice.
  - I have a copy of the NISCC Standards for Social Workers
  - I refer to the NISCC Standards regularly in my social work role (regularly means at least once a month)
  - The NISCC Standards are useful in guiding me in my practice
8. Reflective practice for social workers. Please, indicate how strongly you agree with, if at all, the following statements about your social work development. (If possible, please also give some examples of how, where and when you reflect on your social work practice e.g. supervision, group discussions, with colleagues, self-directed review (please also indicate what models or sources of evidence you use).
  - The Degree provided opportunities to develop skills in critical reflection
  - I am confident in using critical reflection to improve my practice
  - My Degree tutors/Practice Teacher encouraged me to use research and published articles to develop my knowledge
  - I regularly refer to research and / or best practice articles to develop my practice (regularly is at least once a month)
  - It is important that my practice is informed by research evidence?

## Appendix 6 - References

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