# UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

# FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

# SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

# Overcoming Barriers to Post-Qualifying Social Work Education and Training: The Candidate Speaks

## By

## Kenneth Stephen Bayley

## Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education

## January 2009

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**ABSTRACT**

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**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO POST-QUALIFYING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING: THE CANDIDATE SPEAKS**

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In this practitioner based inquiry I have taken the findings of previous studies and explored in greater depth the reasons why some qualified registered social workers are reluctant to undertake further post-qualifying study. This timely research coincided with the introduction of a new General Social Care Council (GSCC) post-qualifying framework aimed at increasing the number of social workers and their employers engaging in continuing professional development (CPD). Currently the GSCC estimated that between 10-12% of social workers have achieved a post-qualifying award (GSCC, 2006). To assist the readers' understanding of the nature of post-qualifying social work education and training a review of contemporary literature and policy guidance introduces this research study. Using primarily qualitative methodologies I gathered data from three distinct sample groups of registered social workers currently undertaking post-qualifying training or recently completed their PQ awards at a number of south coast Universities. I adopted a three-stage structured approach, using questionnaire, interviews and focus groups as data gathering tools. My analysis and interpretation focussed on giving voice to respondents 'lived' experience and to provide authentic evidence for presentation to representatives of higher education, employers and training bodies involved in the planning, design and delivery of the new PQ framework. A comparison of other social welfare professions was used to 'benchmark' CPD polices and requirements across social work, nursing and teaching. My findings demonstrated correspondence with a previous much larger research study funded by Skills for Care at the Centre for Health and Social Care research, Sheffield Hallam University. This research contributes to the continuing debate on the promotion of post-qualifying social work education and training and makes recommendations on possible tried and tested success factors, human resource strategies and the need for leadership from national bodies.

# Contents

# List of Figures and Tables

# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, **Kenneth Stephen Bayley** declare that the thesis entitled, **'Overcoming Barriers to Post-Qualifying Social Work Education and Training: The Candidate Speaks'** and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.  I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given.  With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all the main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

**Signed:**     *Kenneth Stephen Bayley*

**Date:**     21st July 2008

# Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the assistance and support of colleagues near and far who have been so generous with their time and ideas and to all those who contributed to the research which underpins this study by responding to questionnaires or participating in interviews and group discussions.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Mr Ian Bryant, whose advice, support and understanding throughout the completion of this thesis has been invaluable as have been the staff of the School of Education.

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Finally, to my friend and partner Tim, I give my sincere thanks and appreciation for being there when I needed him most and providing the inspirational 'sea view' from my desk!

# Dedication

I dedicate this Thesis and my related research studies to my mother and father, the late Lucy and Astley Bayley, who would have been so pleased with my professional and academic achievements, and without whom I would not have developed my social conscience and enquiring mind.

# Abbreviations Used

| | |
|---|---|
| AASW | Advanced Award in Social Work |
| ADSS | Association of Directors of Social Services |
| ASW | Approved Social Work (Mental Health) |
| BASW | British Association of Social Workers |
| BERA | British Educational Research Association |
| BME | Black and Minority Ethnic |
| CCETSW | Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work |
| CCW | Care Council for Wales |
| CIPD | Chartered Institute of Personnel Development |
| CPD | Continuous or Continuing Professional Development |
| CRE | Commission for Racial Equality |
| CSCI | Commission for Social Care Inspection |
| CWDC | Children's Workforce Development Council |
| DCSF | Department for Children, Schools and Families |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |
| DH | Department of Health |
| DipSW | Diploma in Social Work |
| EdD | Education Doctorate |
| GCPA | Graduate Certificate in Practice Assessing |
| GSCC | General Social Care Council |
| GTC | General Teaching Council |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| HR | Human Resources |
| LA | Local Authority |
| MHSWA | Mental Health Social Work Award |
| NISCC | Northern Ireland Social Care Council |
| NMC | Nursing and Midwifery Council |
| NOS | National Occupational Standards |
| NQT | Newly Qualified Teacher |
| PTA | Practice Teachers' Award |
| PQ | Post-Qualifying |
| PQ1 | Post-Qualifying (Part 1) Certificate |
| PQCCA | Post-Qualifying Child Care Award |
| PQSW | Post-Qualifying Award in Social Work |
| PQY | Post-Qualifying Year (WSCC PQ1) |
| PREP | Post-Registration Education and Practice |
| PRTL | Post-Qualifying Training and Learning |
| QTS | Qualified Teacher Status |
| SfC | Skills for Care |
| SCIE | Social Care Institute for Excellence |
| SWAP | Social Policy and Social Work |
| TOPSS | Training Organisation for Personal Social Services |
| TPLF | The Teachers' Professional Learning Framework |
| TTA | Teacher Training Agency |
| WSCC | West Sussex County Council |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the early 1990's qualified social workers have been encouraged to continue their professional development by improving their practice competence via a range of post-qualifying training programmes.  At best this was piecemeal and at worst there where few if any training opportunities generally available.  Social Work, as a relatively new profession, has lacked public confidence and in the face of media hostility following a number of high profile care scandals, the Government has been keen to regulate and improve the quality of social workers' practice. The Department of Health undertook to review the post-qualifying training of social workers and improve the opportunities, access and uptake of new PQ awards. Currently the GSCC estimated that between 10-12% of social workers have achieved a post-qualifying award (GSCC, 2006). The introduction of a new post-qualifying framework of training and awards, in parallel with the greater public accountability of social worker registration with the GSCC, provides a timely opportunity to study how access to PQ can be improved.  The main purpose of this practitioner-based inquiry is to provide a critical evaluation of individual candidate (those social workers registered on a PQ programme) experience in relation to their post-qualifying studies in social work and what they saw as the major barriers they had to overcome.  By quoting directly from what candidates had to say I have sought to give 'voice' to an often overlooked but essential stakeholder in the post-qualifying partnership.

If so few social workers undertake post-qualifying training, what is it that prevents them from doing so? What are the barriers to PQ study and how could these be overcome? These were the two primary questions I have asked of two sample groups of existing PQ candidates. My intention was to give 'voice' to those with actual experience of PQ study and gain an insight into what, if anything, would improve opportunities for registered social workers.  I chose to engage with existing registered PQ candidates rather than the majority of social workers with little or no interest in post-qualifying study, but acknowledge that this larger group is worthy of further research.  Similarly, the measurement of

service user and carer satisfaction on whether a post-qualified trained social worker provides a better service falls outside the remit of my study.

The Government's agenda of modernisation of social care services and a desire to improve public confidence in social workers has underpinned the introduction of registration of all social workers in the UK and the degree in Social Work as their initial qualification. Consequently, the need to revise and redesign post-qualifying education and training for social workers was undertaken by the GSCC in 2004. The Care Standards Act 2000 brought the accountability and regulation of social workers to the public's attention and with the GSCC's introduction of the Social Care Register for all qualified social workers, the nature of post-qualifying training became of prime importance. This practice-based inquiry is one of only a few previous studies concerned with the social worker's post-qualifying experience and therefore is important in extending our knowledge from the candidates' perspective. Other studies have focused on strategic development and measuring overall candidate registrations and award completions.  This study bears similarities with Doel et al (2006) and provides further evidence, be it from a different region of the country, to support Doel et al's assertions on how to promote and increase PQ activity.

Where most references are found from bodies such as GSCC, Skills for Care and SWAP, there appears to be little written about actual social work education and training at the post-qualifying level in comparison to initial training and actual social work practice, administration and management. With the expansion of the remit of Skills for Care to include post-qualifying education of social workers the situation is improving slowly, for example, Doel et al's (2006) Skills for Care funded research gave me a useful starting-point for my own local research and influenced the design of my original questionnaires. I adopted a 3-stage approach in gathering data, 1) a larger regional questionnaire of 65 current PQ candidates, followed by 2) the interview of a smaller randomised sample of 12 candidates and finally 3) discussion of initial findings with groups of social work and HEI professionals (see Figure 1: Research Timeline and Milestones). I have

used the term 'candidate' throughout this study to differentiate those undertaking post-qualifying study from the qualifying social work degree students.

In processing my findings I was able to draw together elements from all three stages to present a coherent body of evidence to add weight to existing anecdotal feedback, which did not come as any surprise, as well as significant new factors that govern candidates' motivation. I was impressed by the commitment and stamina of candidates to overcome adversity, and it was clear that, regionally employers, were in the majority supportive of their staff, in particularly by rewarding PQ award achievement with pay progression and potentially promotion opportunities. This study did not set out to solicit the opinions of all registered social workers, nor did it intend to quantify the service user or carer satisfaction with post-qualified social work practitioners. These important areas of inquiry will need further research. However, my findings did align themselves fairly closely with Doel et al (2006), especially when considering individual candidates' motivations and disincentives for post-qualifying study. In 'bench-marking' continuous professional development across nursing and teaching, social work has lessons to learn and good practice to share with other professions.

## 1.1. Practitioner Based Inquiry: Listening To Candidates

The aim of this study was to analyse how a model of practitioner based research can be used to gain a greater understanding of why social workers are reluctant to undertake professional development. The intention was to gain useful factual data from critically reflecting with post-qualifying practitioners on their experiences of what happened in practice. In other words, to focus on what works! Demetrion (2000: p.119) describes the field of practitioner-based inquiry as where the focus of study is not solely defined by an academic theory but rather is a combination of what works in practice and supported by practitioners' own experiences of using theory. Carr and Kemmis (1986: p.50) believed this method of research built on the experiences of practitioners and

their 'common sense' understanding of real situations. They believe it possible to unearth the theoretical preconceptions of practitioners, which as Demetrion (2000: p.122) suggests, 'are not typically academically based, but rather implicit...' In other words practitioners, who are often wary of academic theories, believing them to be impracticable, prefer to use their knowledge of what works in practice, based on professional experience. It provides a real life testing ground for theoretical techniques, which Coleman (2007: p.480) believes is an indication of its growing recognition, especially within educational research.

> 'The focus on enquiry connects strongly with Schön's call for the emergence of reflective practitioners, who possess the capacity to explore their own approaches and develop strategies that can support their responses to constantly changing context in which they operate (Schön, 1983)' (Coleman, 2007: p.481)

In this context, the candidates I surveyed not only have the constantly changing operational social work agenda to contend with, but have also navigated their way through often complex and contradictory post-qualifying guidance and requirements. Coleman (2007: p.484) also contends that 'practitioner enquiry' has an empowering nature, freeing participants to challenge the status quo and established ways of working. Practitioner research is a way of learning from experience, creating space for individuals to learn from their own experience and that of others and the environment in which they learn.  By giving voice to their experience, I believe this study may empower candidates to suggest new ways of working that can transform practice.

In this practitioner based inquiry I have endeavoured to explore how qualitative methodologies have enabled me to not only gather data and generate findings, but alert me to possible pitfalls from a theoretical and political perspective which I will need to acknowledge, address and resolve in order to ensure the validity, credibility and utility of my findings.  From the beginning, the focus of this research was subject to my own professional social work qualification training and continuous professional development choices, and my move from

professional practice into the delivery of education and training, culminating in the teaching of social work practice in higher education. Over the course of my social work career, in which I specialised at an early stage in the education and training of social care and social work staff, I have undertaken a variety of post-qualifying training, including; the Practice Teaching Award and the Advanced Award in Social Work (Education and Training). The achievement of my own PQ awards has given me some insight into the difficulties of completing study whilst employed full-time.  It also has contributed to my belief in the benefits of continuous professional development (CPD) as a means of up-dating and improving practice and promoting personal life-long learning.  This research study has been undertaken as part of my four-year, part-time Education Doctorate at the University of Southampton.  The choice of my research topic is directly linked to my current and developing role as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at a south coast University, where I am responsible for the design, validation and delivery of new PQ programmes in Social Work Practice Education.

As the most likely audience for this research will be teachers and academic programme providers, social work and social care agencies and employers, students and candidates of post-qualifying social work programmes, I have made certain assumptions regarding underpinning knowledge and understanding of contemporary social work. However, to aid the reader, Chapter 2 includes some background on recent changes in the education and post-qualifying training of social workers in the United Kingdom, some of which are inherently political, as the government continues its reforming agenda for public services. 'Understanding the research environment and all its political, social, psychological, economic and cultural dynamics is vital to producing rich, useful, valid findings,' note Anderson and Arsenault (1998: p.134). It is within this contextual background of how social work activity and social workers are defined that we can begin to appreciate how the political and public environment in which social workers operate will influence research methodologies.

| Date: | Activity: |
|---|---|
| June 2006 ⇓ | University Ethical Review approval |
| 23rd June 2006 ⇓ | STAGE 1: Pilot Questionnaire (sample = 5) |
| 17th August 2006 ⇓ | WSCC Research Governance approval |
| 29th August 2006 ⇓ | STAGE 1: Final Questionnaire (sample = 155) |
| Sept-Oct 2006 ⇓ | STAGE 1: Questionnaire respondents = 65 Coding of responses, excel spreadsheet |
| December 2006 ⇓ | STAGE 2: Randomised, stratified sample =12 |
| December 2006 ⇓ | STAGE 2: Prepared 'guided conversation' interview questions and schedule |
| January 2007 ⇓ | STAGE 2: Pilot interviews (2 of 12 sample) |
| Feb-April 2007 ⇓ | STAGE 2: Final 10 Interviews |
| Jan-May 2007 ⇓ | STAGE 2: Interviews transcribed from digital recordings; themes developed for Stage 3 |
| September 2007 ⇓ | STAGE 3: Prepared PowerPoint presentation for professional groups |
| 4th-29th October 2007 ⇓ | STAGE 3: Professional Group presentations (18 employer, HEI and GSCC members in 3 groups) |
| Nov 2007-Feb 2008 ⇓ | University sabbatical to write Thesis 1st Draft |
| 9th July 2008 | JSWEC Cambridge, Present Conference Paper |

**Figure 1: Research Timeline and Milestones (2006-2008)**

The staged approach to data gathering has revealed certain anticipated and expected outcomes, but in processing these findings in this way it has improved my understanding of the enormity of the task for candidates, employers and providers. What were found to be expected factors, (e.g. pay, study leave or workload), were supplemented by unexpected factors such as, employers' lack

of confidence with national bodies and the frustration and lack of strategic drive to promote post-qualifying training.

To aid the reader, Chapter 2 will give an overview of contemporary literature that underpins the rationale for the new post-qualifying framework for social workers.  Chapter 3 describes my chosen methodologies and how I have applied these in practice. The data gathered and initial findings of Chapter 4 are preceded by profiles of candidate samples at Stages 1 and 2. A more in-depth analysis and interpretation of data and findings is explored in Chapter 5, which provides underpinning evidence for possible implications and the recommendations that are made in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 2: Review of Contemporary Literature

It is useful to acknowledge from the beginning that the focus of this thesis and my practitioner-based inquiry are subject to my own professional social work qualification training and continuous professional development choices, and my move from professional practice into the delivery of education and training, culminating in the teaching of social work practice in higher education. As Anderson and Arsenault (1998: p.134) state: 'Qualitative researchers declare any personal bias which may impact on their role as researcher and make known the theoretical and conceptual perspectives on which the study is based.' Although I have endeavoured to carry out my semi-structured interviews and small group discussions mindful of research methodology underpinned by my academic doctoral studies, I also acknowledge that I come to this with an 18 year career as a professional social worker, and little more than 4 years as a university lecturer; hence some of my perceptions have been influenced by my own experiences, both in training, teaching and lecturing and as a qualified social worker. My own personal and political perspective, underpinned by my value base, has in no small part influenced the implementation and interpretation of my research methodology.

As the most likely audience for this research will be colleagues and academics, I have made certain assumptions regarding underpinning knowledge and understanding of contemporary management practices within higher educational institutions. The thesis includes some implicit references to recent changes and pressures within higher education in the United Kingdom, some of which are inherently political, for example, the drive to recruit more students, as the government continues its expanding agenda for higher education. 'Understanding the research environment and all its political, social, psychological, economic and cultural dynamics is vital to producing rich, useful, valid findings' Anderson and Arsenault, (1998: p.134).

As an 'out' gay man entering a social work department of a School of Social Studies, I have a vested personal interest in how my organisation welcomes and supports members who have diverse sexualities, as well as from the professional social work perspective of the General Social Care Council Codes of Conduct (2002) and anti-discriminatory practice. From a psychological, analytical perspective Kolb explores this tension between ones public and private lives:

> 'Jung saw a basic conflict between the specialized psychological orientations required for the development of society and the need for people to develop and express all the psychological functions for their own individual fulfilment.' Kolb (1984: p.79)

## 2.1. The Professionalisation of Social Work: the context of contemporary social work education and training

For a number of years the social work profession has seen a haemorrhage of qualified workers and declining applicants to train, placing increasing pressures on Social Service Departments to maintain service delivery. Initially the Government White Paper 'Modernising Social Services' (Department of Health, 1998) provided the underlying driver for change for social care training activity. Enabling the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to license the Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (TOPSS) to promote a national training strategy for all employees in social care linked to new National Occupational Standards. The TOPSS National Training Strategy (1999) preceded the establishment of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) in October 2001, to regulate all those working in the social care sector and set Codes of Practice for employers and practitioners. The new Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) underpin the activities of the GSCC.

In response to the DfEE targets for improved levels of qualification in the social care sector, the Department of Health (1998) began to address the public image of social work and more clearly define what social workers actually do.

'For years, social work has been dismissed as a vocational rather than a profession.  To many, social workers seemed to lack a clear purpose or vision.  At best they were seen as well-meaning do-gooders and at worst inept meddlers" (Adrian O'Dowd, The Guardian, 15.10.03)

To address this lack of public confidence the government supported these emerging organisations to improve quality, monitoring and accountability of social care practice and training.  The General Social Care Council was established under the Care Standards Act 2000, as the guardian of standards for the social care workforce in England. Its job is to increase the protection of service users, their carers and the general public by regulating the social care workforce and by ensuring that work standards within the social care sector are of the highest quality.  'As well as promoting high standards within the social care sector, our job is also to champion social care and to help give it the recognition it deserves'.  (GSCC, 2002)  To raise the profile of the social work profession, an undergraduate degree was introduced in 2003 as the professional qualifying training for social workers in England and to meet European standards. The degree in social work approved by the GSCC replaced the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) in England and brought social work training in line with teaching, nursing and other graduate professions. As part of the devolution agenda, separate new degrees were introduced in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

"...Through reforms to the social work qualification we have a unique opportunity to make sure that training really does equip the profession fully for its future role and tasks. We want to create a qualification which gives social workers skills in analysis and assessment, confidence to apply knowledge to practice, the ability to create opportunities for users and work collaboratively with other professions."

Jacqui Smith, Minister of State (DH, 2002)

The changes are aimed at better equipping social workers to provide high quality services to the public. They will ensure that the qualification provides a sound basis for the registration of social workers by the GSCC as the professional regulator of social work and social care.  The Department of Health (DH), (http://www.dh.gov.uk) is the main government department for health

and social care policy and guidance for social workers in adult care settings. The sister Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk) oversees children and families practice. Together these departments set targets, provide statutory guidance and interpretation of legislation for the whole social care profession. They monitor, review and publish performance indicators of all social care/social work providers and underwrite major policy and resource developments. The DH website contains numerous 'hotlinks' to related government websites and professional, practice and service user organisations.  The Care Standards Act 2000 introduced 'protection of title' for all qualified social workers from 1st April 2005 and a requirement for registration with the  General Social Care Council (GSCC) http://www.gscc.org.uk  The GSCC is responsible for regulating and supporting social work education and training and also administers bursaries to social work students to support them throughout their studies. GSCC has developed Codes of Practice for both practitioners and employers that define what it is that makes for good social work practice and what the public can expect from professionally qualified social workers.  The GSCC registers all qualified social workers who are expected to uphold the codes.  The Social Care Register is a public access document and can be accessed at the GSCC website.  Since 2003 all students studying for a social work qualification are registered with the GSCC and have to adhere to the Codes of Practice.

The National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Social Work were introduced in 2002 (TOPSS, 2002) in readiness to underpin the new degree in social work to be delivered by HEI's from September 2003.  The NOS clearly define and describe discrete tasks and competencies that trainee social workers need to demonstrate before achieving qualified social worker status. In addition, service users and carers have endorsed the professional social work values stated within 'Expectations, Ethics and Values' statements.  These two documents combined constitute the statutory professional competencies for social work practice within England.  The other three devolved countries of the UK have combined the work of the English GSCC and TOPSS in unified organisations:

- The Scottish Social Services Council http://www.sssc.uk.com

- The Care Council for Wales http://www.ccwales.org.uk

- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council http://www.niscc.info

SCIE (http://www.scie.org.uk) has been charged with improving social work practice and the establishment of a framework of guidance for social work practitioners and their managers. This particularly applies to the involvement of service users, their supporters and carers and to Human Resource Management (HRM) in social care. SCIE hosts Caredata, a database of evidenced-based practice reports and guidance and regularly commission best practice guidance, e.g. 'Knowledge review 1: Learning and teaching assessment skills in social work education' (2003) and 'Resource guide 2: Involving service users and carers in social work education' (2004). Commission for Social Care Inspection http://www.csci.org.uk The CSCI was established by merging the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) with the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) to form an overarching government body to regulate care services and financial audit of public funded social care. It uses the Performance and Assessment Framework and National Occupational Standards to measure the performance of all social care providers and social services departments. This and preceding websites have 'hotlinks' to partnership statutory and independent organisations across health, education and social care including employer and professional bodies. Local authority social services managers are represented by: the Association of Directors of Social Services http://www.adss.org.uk ; the British Association of Social Workers http://www.basw.co.uk (professional association for qualified social workers); Unison http://www.unison.org.uk (which has the largest trade union membership of social work and social care employees). Social Policy and Social Work http://www.swap.ac.uk is a higher education website that supports the education and training of social workers.

## 2.2. Existing PQ Programmes structure: What we know from other studies

I am grateful to Professor Mark Doel of Sheffield Hallam University, who kindly shared his findings of his 2006 research on the, 'Experiences of Post-Qualifying Study in Social Work', funded by Skills for Care. Doel et al, like me began with a search of the available literature on post-qualifying education in social work. They suggested that, there is likely to be resonance with post-registration education in other professions (Conneeley, 2005) and other countries of the UK (SIESWE, 2006), but the primary focus of his research was social work in England. Doel et al agrees with Brown and Keen's comment (2004: p.77) that 'published research on Post-Qualifying Awards in Social Work is scarce' and given the nature of its often 'grey' literature, it is hard to access. Doel et al (2006, p.8) identified that studies in this field are often local and focused on evaluation of a particular programme or of candidates in a specific agency. For example, Channer and Doel et al's (forthcoming) study of black candidates' experiences of a post-qualifying child care award.  These he suggests offer useful insights and surveys, such as Rowland's (2003; 2006) in the West Midlands, which have much to tell us about the national scene.  '…his findings that more than 80 per cent of award holders saw the process as a way to develop their skills,' resonates with Doel et al's own research. Some differences do occur; for example, Rowland (2003) reported that, 'the most common motives reported for undertaking an award were career progression, recognition and development of skills, and personal ambition', contrasted to Doel et al's own findings.  Doel et al noted, the lack of consistent implementation of PQ, in Cooper and Rixon's (2001) questionnaire survey of post-qualifying candidates in a local authority; 'the PQ framework for qualified social workers has struggled to become consistently established within workplace training and practice organisations across the UK'. This need to embed professional education is also reflected in other research commissioned by Skills for Care/Practice Learning Taskforce (Doel et al, 2005).

In a study based on an analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from 23 PQSW holders, Mitchell (2001: p.433) found that the

post-qualifying awards 'have a positive impact on practice for both individuals and organisations'.  Like Doel et al (2006) the focus of my research on the experience of post-qualifying study does not extend to the measuring the specific impact or improvement of PQ qualified practitioners' social work practice. Mitchell's conclusions about the complexity of the factors associated with success and failure reflect similar current findings. Exploring the stakeholder benefits of an early Northern Ireland post-qualifying programme, Taylor (1998: p.88) saw how awards could provide employers with a link to specific job requirements, establishing a clear performance management, progression and career structure.

In promoting post-qualifying awards the importance of the commitment of the employer's middle managers to provide space for candidates to reflect on their practice cannot be underestimated. (McGrath and Patel, 1998: p.82)  Similarly, Mitchell's (2001: p.433) findings, based on the effects of introducing the PQSW, suggested that undertaking PQ awards had a positive benefit on both individuals and organisations, but he highlighted the partnership between stakeholders, especially employers, as the key to success.  Doel et al (2006, p.9) also cites McCloskey's (2006) evaluation of one particular PQ programme where, 'Managers' support was highlighted as important, but they often lacked information about the programme and its content.'  Ennis and Brodie (1999: p.7) argued that the need for continuing professional development for the social work profession was timely in light of the dual pressures to be accountable for their actions and to, 'perform to specified and agreed standards of professional practice.'  They cite the concept of the 'competency gap' introduced by Watkins et al (1992), whereby 'the value or 'shelf life' of an initial qualification diminishes over time' as a compelling argument for continuing professional development (1999: p.9). They assert that for post-qualifying training to be successful the practitioners' motivation and commitment to continuing professional development needs to be supported by 'good line management and supervision' in the workplace (1999: p.13).  Ennis and Brodie (1999: p.16) introduce a model used in higher education by Harding et al

(1981), 'described as the athletic model', whereby the practitioner becomes proactive in their own development:

> 'It assumes that they themselves, like athletes, realise that their performance can be improved or enhanced and will use an advisor or mentor (athletics coach) to achieve improvement.  Within this model, the larger organisation has the responsibility to provide facilities and support individuals' efforts to improve performance.'
> (Ennis and Brodie, 1999: p.16)

In their article on post-qualifying continuing professional development, Postle and Edwards et al (2002: p.165) cite the candidate experience of a number of newly qualified social workers on their first foray into post-qualifying training (Post-Qualifying Year: PQ1 Certificate), where they identify the tension between academia and workplace:

> 'This tension was expressed throughout PQY where we found that we were taught college-based modules where opportunities for critical reflection and debating the merits of different social work theories  were prioritised.  By comparison, in the workplace, the demands of working within an increasing managerialist culture and with growing resource shortfalls mean that practitioners are effectively making decisions based on employer-directed eligibility criteria.  This is a very different reality.  Further, some candidates experienced a culture of anti-intellectualism (Thompson, 2000) in their teams, with a negative approach toward theoretical learning, and a lack of understanding of the current emerging and rapidly expanding national PQ framework.'
> (Postle and Edwards et al, 2002: p.165)

On a more positive note candidates believed the overall benefit of their programme was in developing skills as reflective practitioners and improving their anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice.  They particularly welcomed the financial rewards that the achievement of their PQ awards brought, mirroring those experienced by other professions:

> 'Fortunately, our agency and its partnership arrangement with the college links successful completion of PQ1 and the PQSW award directly to career and pay progression.  This provides a valued incentive to complete the programme.  Yes, even for vocationally minded social work practitioners, money still talks!'
> (Postle and Edwards et al, 2002: p.166)

Saltiel (2003: p.105) begins to address the difficulties for experienced social workers that have lost their study skills and need, 'to understand the importance of reflecting critically on their practice and to rethink the conventional, academic, relationship between theory, practice and research.' In challenging conventional ideas of the professional's expertise, which he believes, 'is based on the acquisition of a body of technical, theoretical knowledge that can be applied to a real situation', Saltiel (2003: p.106) is keen to move practitioners away from thinking of 'theory' as 'separate and abstract' but rather:

> '...to make theories more accessible by emphasising their provisional nature as explanatory models about the world and emphasising that we all use theories all the time: if we use them reflectively practice can be enriched, if we use them unreflectively we enter the dubious world of 'common sense'...I wanted to help these post qualifying students to demystify theorising and the doing of research, place these activities in their social context and make it easier to integrate them into critical reflections on practice.' (Saltiel, 2003: p.107-8)

In encouraging his students to have 'a clear sense of what constitutes professional expertise', Saltiel (2003: p.110) is hopeful that the benefit to practitioners can be passed on to others and, 'serve to demystify and democratise practice wisdom' within social work agencies.

In her article on providing a PQCCA programme, Kroll (2004: p.654) outlines a potential negative context in which post-qualifying training took place:

> 'The picture presented is of a dedicated, beleaguered work force, struggling in an organisational culture characterised by abuse of goodwill and intellectual starvation in which space to think, analyse and 'know' is filled with paperwork and contributes to stress levels that militate against safe practice. In the heightened state of anxiety that this environment produces, the capacity to take in new knowledge and to use thinking time effectively is seriously undermined.'
> (Kroll, 2004: p.654)

Kroll (2004: p. 655) goes on to describe how many candidates arrived on the programme with little or no workload relief, little support and a sense of 'ill-feeling from colleagues, concerned that their own workloads would increase.'

Kroll (2004: p. 656) believed these and other distractions could be seen as '…a type of spoiling envy on the part of the organisation', citing Halton's (1994) explanation '…which operates like a hidden spanner in the works either by withholding necessary co-operation or by active sabotage.'

Walton et al. (2006) were commissioned to carry out a feasibility study on post-qualifying training for Skills for Care England. They refer to the guidance published by CCETSW (1990) on 'The Requirements for Post Qualifying Education and Training in Personal Social Services: A Framework for Continuing Professional Development'. CCETSW stated that, 'for the first time workers in the personal social services will have the opportunity to obtain recognition for their post qualifying professional development within a new UK-wide framework' (CCETSW, 1992).   By 1998, however, the Department of Health and Welsh Office consultation document on Post Qualifying Education and training commented, 'whilst acknowledging the difficulties of establishing the system and the commitment of those actively involved, the total number of award holders represents a disappointing outcome' (DH and Welsh Office, 1998: p.5).  In December 2002, alongside the development of the qualifying degree in Social Work, the GSCC launched a review of the post-qualifying framework, which I was fortunate to be a part of, as a local authority employer training and development consultant.  Key changes suggested within this review included: the full integration of academic and professional qualifications; that universities would award qualifications while the GSCC maintained its regulatory function; that some modules would be open to members of other professionals; and that users of social care services and carers should be at the heart of the new system (GSCC, 2004).   Figure 2 gives an overview of the current post-qualifying training programmes available nationally.  These 'stand-alone' GSCC nationally credit-rated and awarded qualifications are made of discrete practice competencies (PQ1-6) that alongside integral academic knowledge requirement have to be met by post-qualified practitioners.  Each award has a pre-requisite list of competencies and occupational standards specific to the area of social work practice. Figure 3 gives a snap-shot of locally

provided PQ programmes by a number of south coast Universities who are accredited by one of 19 PQ Consortia as meeting GSCC requirements.

| |
|---|
| **Overview of current post-qualifying training (up to September 2008)** |
| **Post Qualifying Award in Social Work**<br>The current generic post-qualifying awards are the Post-Qualifying Award in Social Work (PQSW) and the Advanced Award In Social Work (AASW).<br><br>The PQSW has 6 requirements: PQ1-6. PQ1 demonstrates consolidation and progression from the point of qualification. All GSCC specialist post-qualifying awards meet some or all of the PQ2-6 requirements of the PQSW. GSCC (2006) |
| **PQ1 Certificate (PQ1)**<br>The consolidation and progression stage of the PQSW which is an entry requirement for other awards e.g. Child Care Award and the Mental Health Social Work Award |
| **Child Care Award (CCA)**<br>Meets PQ2-6. A DOH target award for all qualified social workers employed by Children and Family Services. Delivered by partnerships of HEI's and employers. |
| **Mental Health Social Work Award (MHSWA)**<br>Meets PQ2-5. Incorporates the statutory requirements for Approved Social Worker as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983. Delivered by partnerships of HEI's and employers or in-house. |
| **Practice Teaching Award (PTA)**<br>Meets PQ5-6. Refers to the teaching, supporting and assessment of qualifying social work students. |
| **Regulation of Care Services Award**<br>Meets PQ2-6. An award required by all those involved in the inspection and regulation of care services in England and Wales. |
| **Advanced Award in Social Work**<br>A masters level award for senior social work practitioners and managers |

**Figure 2: Overview of current post-qualifying training**

Sadly, the literature concerning the Post Qualifying Framework is limited in volume and it also tends to be limited in focus. The majority of studies focus on programmes running within one specific Post Qualifying Consortia or Social Services Department, or on one particular Award within the framework. Overall the available literature indicates that the PQ Awards are seen to have a positive impact for both individuals and organisations (Cooper & Rixon, 2001; Mitchell, 2001), although evaluations of the exact impact of learning on practice (and therefore service users) are scarce (Mitchell, 2001). The complexities of delivering and accessing post-qualifying programmes are prone to an 'increasingly complex and fragmented arena' within which the PQ framework exists (Postle et al, 2002). Similarly there are structural difficulties in establishing the PQ Framework within organisations. Cooper and Rixon (2001) commented on how the PQ framework, 'has struggled to become consistently established within workplace training and practice organisations across the UK'. They argued that organisations need to consider how operational demands and professional development demands can be better integrated and balanced.

| Surrey and Sussex PQ Consortium Programmes (2006) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Award** | **University of Brighton** | **University of Chichester** | **University of Kingston** | **University of Sussex** |
| **PQ1** | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| **CCA** | | √ | √ | √ |
| **MHSWA** | √ | | | |
| **PTA** | | √ | √ | √ |
| **PQSW** | | √ | √ | √ |
| **AASW** | | √ | √ | √ |
| The Regulation of Care Services Award is not accredited within the Surrey & Sussex PQ Consortium | | | | |

**Figure 3: Surrey and Sussex PQ Consortium PQ Accredited Programmes (2006)**

For a number of years, Social Services organisations have been criticised for their lack of workforce planning and human resources strategies (LGMB & CCETSW, 1997 and NATOPPS, 1998), a situation which is exacerbated by the fact that, 'there has never been consensus amongst employers and professional and training interests as to what training and qualifications are required by the

different occupational groups' (NATOPPS, 1998: p.18). Ennis and Baldwin (2000: p.229) argue that, 'the development of professional awards has been too much the province of specialist educators and trainers and that line managers need to be brought on board'. Employers and HEI's have been criticised for their failure to offer opportunities to staff in certain areas of practice. Ennis and Brodie (1999) comment on the patchy provision in both in-service courses, and certificated courses offered by HEI's, for staff working in areas outside mental health and child care. In 1998, CCETSW, via post qualifying consortia, had accredited forty-nine different child care awards, compared to only twenty-one identified as having a community care focus. The Department of Health introduced a national PQ award for Children and families social workers in 1999, but no national PQ award specific to social workers working with adults outside mental health services has been developed within the current framework.

- Partnership between employers (organisations), line managers, individuals and programme providers (HEI's and others) is crucial to the success of the Post Qualifying Framework
- Organisations need to continue to strive to achieve a balance between meeting operational demands and the professional development needs of the workforce
- There needs to be improved workforce planning and integration of PQ within HR strategies, including career progression policies
- No one type of provision fits every organisation and individual. Both HEI-based and in-house provisions have advantages and disadvantages.
- There is concern that some groups may be disadvantaged in accessing Award programmes, that is, part-time and locum workers, and workers in the voluntary and independent sector.
- Research regarding PQ remains limited in volume and scope. This includes very little research into the impact of learning on practice, and the benefits of PQ Awards to service users and carers.

**Figure 4: Key Messages from Literature, adapted from Walton et al (2006) Skills for Care England**

## 2.3. The New Post-Qualifying Framework

Having a professional involvement in the GSCC consultation exercise which preceded the document's publication gave me an insider's perspective regarding

the accuracy of data and content, as well as an understanding of stakeholder interests, values and principles.  However, it has been beneficial for me to apply a systematic analysis of this document, particularly as Scott urges researchers to be thorough in their analysis of historical documents and look for inter-connectedness when applying one's schema for interpretation. 'The four criteria of authenticity, credibility, representiveness and meaning should not be regarded as distinct stages in assessing the quality of documentary sources.' (Scott, 1999: p.35) He argues that these are interdependent and that, 'the researcher cannot adequately apply one criterion without simultaneously invoking the conclusions derived from applying the other three.' (Scott, 1999: p.35)  However, we need to remind ourselves of Becker and Bryman's (2004: p. 291) useful advice: 'It is easy to become submerged in the detail…the researcher needs to keep a firm grasp of both the research questions and the larger picture.'  Hence Bell (1999: p.115) suggests researchers need to; 'Ask yourself whether the evidence supplied in the document convincingly supports the authors' arguments, - Was the author a supporter of a particular course of action in which he or she had a stake?'  My interpretation of this document would suggest that in spite of acknowledging stakeholder interests the GSCC has chosen to follow the 'party-line' rather than risk offending its government paymasters.  As Becker and Bryman (2004: pp.291-2) state, 'Any government document must first be located in terms of the debates giving rise to it, inside and outside Parliament and the civil service.'  The White Paper 'Modernising Social Services' (1998) which preceded the Care Standards Act 2000 and established a number of non-governmental bodies (GSCC, SCIE, CSCI, TOPSS) provided the background debate surrounding the governments reforming agenda for social work and social care.  GSCC (2005b: pp. 6-7) has brought together certain principles and values, such as inter-professional and multi-agency working; the integration of academic and professional learning; and a modular approach to achievement, which it sees as essential for the development of the social work profession.  The revised PQ framework will play a significant role in raising the standards of practice and as GSCC (2005b: p.6) expect, '…over time, help improve the quality of social work and social care in

England' which could be seen as a direct result of government reforming policy for the social services and an example of what Becker and Bryman (2004: p. 291) suggest may be intended, 'Printed and published documents may provide a variety of competing explanations for the introduction of a particular policy.' GSCC has published a clarifying and guidance document 'Implementation and transitional arrangements for the new post-qualifying framework for social work' on their website http://www.gscc.org.uk [Accessed 29th March 2005], which could be argued was a necessary action to answer Calvert's question asked in Allan and Skinner (1991: p.122) 'What does the document mean?' and, as he maintains, 'words change meaning and new usages are generated'. As words and professional jargon derive their meaning from their context, the original document written for a specific stakeholder audience, required this additional guidance to clearly explain its meaning to a wider readership of social work practitioners and their managers.

In Walton et al's, (2006: p.14) feasibility study, respondents identified a number of factors that mitigated the conflict between operational demands and workforce development. This included:

- The active involvement of Directors or senior operational managers. Effective workforce planning is the key and this requires the engagement of strategic service managers with a clear view of service developments and their impact on workforce development issues"
- HEI's and other providers being realistic and flexible
- Al those involved in the partnerships being flexible in understanding each others' perspectives and drivers, and to value and make use of the contributions of the individuals involved.
- Planning ahead, from meeting schedules to more strategic issues.

The survey undertaken by Walton et al (2006) gave limited detail on PQ candidates' needs; an area they believed needed further exploration. However, what did appear to be represented was a candidate confidence in gaining equal access to PQ programmes, be that their employer's support, and throughout

the application and selection process.  Three main areas of disadvantage identified by Walton et al (2006) were; part-time workers and staff from small organisations faced potential difficulties in accessing programmes because they may not be able to secure release from work on the days required by the programme; the introduction of targets in only limited service areas was seen to operate to the detriment of workers in other areas; candidates in Adult Services (with the exception of mental health) were seen as being disadvantaged by targets and priorities being set by Children and Families Services. In reality the PQ framework has not been flexible enough to accommodate individual carer paths, and what candidates really want is an increased flexibility around programme options (Walton et al, 2006).

Where employer and HEI organisations are actively involved in planning and managing a shared PQ process and (importantly) listen to each other, things work well (Walton et al, 2006).  The fact that understanding has grown up over time between employers and HEI's via the local PQ Consortia is also noted as being important.  Good management information, communication systems, trust, willingness to commit resources, engagement of strategic managers and flexibility in understanding everyone's perspective and drivers is seen as most important in facilitating productive networks.  Walton et al (2006) mention the gap between those 'who promote PQ programmes (HEI's and other providers) and those who deliver operational services (local employers)', as a major concern and is rarely central to to senior managers strategic planning. Employers usually send a representative from their training departments to any PQ networks, which generally do not have the power or influence to affect strategic planning.  The link between PQ Awards and employee CPD and career progression is at best ad hoc and at worst non-existent (Walton et al, 2006). Tompsett's article (2006) 'The new post qualifying framework in England' in SWAP News: University of Southampton (www.swap.ac.uk) quotes Stephen Ladyman, former Community Care Minister, February 2005, 'With the introduction of the social work degree, registration of social workers, and protection of title, the new PQ framework will play an important part in raising

standards in social work practice' (GSCC 2005b).  For Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, recipients of services and carers, improvements in standards of social work practice also require improvements in standards of social work education, renewed confidence and expertise in social work professionals, the development of places of employment as learning organisations and some evidence that service users/carers notice a difference. The development and implementation of the new post-qualifying framework, which started early in 2004, resulted in most Universities starting their new programmes in September 2007. The three new levels of award, shared across the UK, are: Specialist, Higher Specialist and Advanced. Take up of awards is likely to be strongest at Specialist level (see Figure 5).

The Joint University Council's Social Work Education Committee (JUC-SWEC) produced a set of recommendations for the new PQ Framework to advise HEI's offering post-qualifying programmes. Swap News, Issue No.11 (Summer, 2006)



| Advanced | | | | | |
| Higher Specialist | C&F | Adults | MH | PE | L&M |
| Specialist | | | | | |
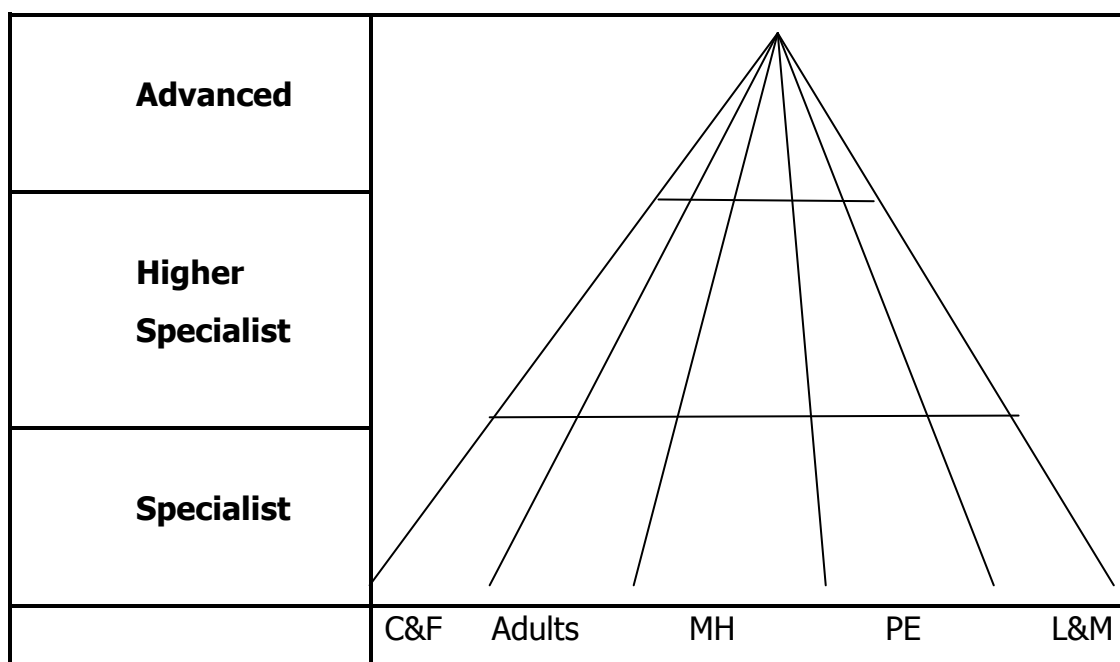
**Legend:**
C&F   Children & Families
MH   Mental Health
PE   Practice Education (not available at Specialist level as separate award)
L&M   Learning & Management (not available at Specialist level except for residential managers)

**Figure 5: Plan of the PQ framework structure and expected take-up in England.  Adapted from Swap News, Issue No.10 (Spring 2006)**

The GSCC in its Part I of the 'Approval of post-qualifying course rules' (2005b) defines a Post Qualifying Course as, '...a course relating to relevant social work persons, who are registered as social workers with the Council, for which approval by the Council has been given or is being sought, under Section 63 of the Care Standards Act 2000.' Section 5, Part II goes on to define course content;

> 'Courses must enable social workers, through course content and a validation process , to attain the standards set out in paragraphs 37 to 52 of the *Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training* and in the following documents:
>
> (a) The *National Occupational Standards for Social Work* published by The Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (now known as Skills for Care) in May 2002.
> (b) *The Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers and Employers* published by the Council in September 2002
> (c) *The Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace* published by The Training Organisation for Personal Social Services (now known as Skills for Care) and the Council in November 2002.'

GSCC (2006a) stated that, 'The introduction of the new post-qualifying framework will be completed by September 2007 with some programmes approved for an early start in September 2006.' This includes a proviso that any PQ awards gained through the 'old' system will be transferable and recognised under the new system, but wherever possible, '...individuals, employers and existing consortia should therefore work together to maximise achievement of the PQSW by the end of September 2008.' (GSCC, 2006)

The introduction to the 'Post-qualifying framework: for social work education and training' GSCC (2006a) highlights the revised aims for the new PQ framework to be:

- 'Relevant;
- Efficient and effective (representing good value for money);
- Meaningful and easily understood by practitioners;
- Accessible;
- Modular;
- Linked to national occupational standards;

- Linked to the university credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) in a straightforward way;
- Focused on the assessment of competence in practice; and
- Likely to enhance the maintenance of national standards.'
  GSCC (2006a: p.4)

| The Revised PQ Framework (GSCC 2005) | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Degree in Social Work**<br>(CQSW, CSS, DipSW. Or international qualification)<br>GSCC registration as "Social Worker"<br>• Generic qualification | | | |
| **Post Qualifying Award in Specialist Social Work**<br>(Minimum honours degree level) Pathways | | | |
| Child Care | Adults | Mental Health (MH) | Leadership & Management* |
| • Consolidating and extending initial competence<br>• Developing competence in depth in a specific area of practice<br>• Enabling learning, mentoring and practice education<br><div align="right">(* for Residential Care Managers only)</div> | | | |
| **Post Qualifying Award in Higher Specialist Social Work**<br>(Post graduate diploma level) Pathways | | | |
| Professional Practice (Child Care/Adults/MH) | Leadership & Management | Professional Practice Education | Applied Professional Research** |
| • For complex decision making and high levels of responsibility | | | |
| **Post Qualifying Award in Advanced Social Work**<br>(MA degree level) Pathways | | | |
| Professional Practice (Child Care/Adults/MH) | Leadership & Management | Professional Practice Education | Applied Professional Research** |
| • Taking a leading role in promoting good practice and applied professional research<br><div align="right">(**No awards yet in Research pathways)</div> | | | |

**Figure 6: Revised PQ framework (GSCC, 2005). Adapted from Swap News, Issue No.10 (Spring 2006)**

GSCC's intention is for the revised PQ framework to promote the integration of professional development and the development of the workforce, establishing a clear link between education and training and the development of career pathways, and in doing so will develop to meet the evolving needs of the workforce.  'It will support workforce planning and development by ensuring that all programmes of education and training approved by the GSCC are relevant to the needs of employers and employees.' GSCC (2006a: p.5)  At the post-qualifying stage, social work practice becomes increasingly diverse and therefore it is hoped that the new PQ framework will link practice supervision, appraisal and performance management to key stages of ongoing professional development. In its emphasis on specialist knowledge and skills, the revised PQ framework recognises that over time the major focus of activity for some workers may shift towards enabling or managing others and so will require additional skills and knowledge in leadership and management (GSCC, 2006a: p.5).  The GSCC in their 'Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying social work education and training: Leadership and management' (2005a) discuss the specialist nature of the context in which contemporary social work practice takes place. They state:

> 'The social work subject benchmark statement makes clear all social workers need to have contextual as well as analytic, explanatory and practical understandings of their work (Quality Assurance Agency, 2000: p.12).  In the UK, the professional context of social work practice is increasingly specialist.  This means that the context for the ongoing development and assessment of all aspects competence is also specialist.  From an education and training perspective professional leadership and management is a specialism in its own right, even though all leaders and managers operate in a specific service context that may require them to possess specific knowledge  and skills.' GSCC (2005a: p.3)

> 'The development of a leadership and management specialism as part of the PQ framework creates an education and training pathway for social workers who either have moved or intend to move into leadership and management roles, and which is nationally recognised, incorporates social work values and addresses the risks and dilemmas which face leaders and managers.'
> GSCC (2005a: p.3)

The GSCC are keen to advocate that for all Registered Social Workers (RSWs), the PQ framework will offer a number of different ways to adhere to point six of the GSCC codes of practice. 'As a social care worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for the maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills' (GSCC, 2006b: p.5). Also because all forms of PQ will count towards a RSW's post registration training and learning (PRTL) requirements, the GSCC hopes this will act as an incentive for practitioners. This may be particularly true for newly qualified social workers who will have a series of structured opportunities to develop as specialist social workers, '... while progressing through the increasing demanding and complex levels of practice' (GSCC, 2006b: p.7). For experienced social workers, the new PQ framework offers opportunities to obtain recognition and credit for what they have already achieved. It also provides ways of moving on to new types of education and training, perhaps linked to new career challenges and opportunities. The emphasis on inter-professional and multi-agency collaboration will enable social workers and other professionals to study alongside one another and ensure that all social workers, '...have a strong grounding in inter-professional and inter-agency working while simultaneously developing their social work professionalism.' GSCC (2006b: p.6)

Now that we have considered the background and context of social work post-qualifying education and training and the underpinning arguments and intentions to improve social work practice, I will now describe the design and methodological techniques used in Chapter 3.

# Chapter 3: Research Methodologies Used

Qualitative research is the study of individuals in their own 'natural' environment using a variety of methods to begin to understand and interpret social meanings of everyday activities (Brewer, 2000: p.10). It derives from ethnography and the study of humans in their natural settings and as Becker and Bryman (2004: p. 276) state: Ethnography is a style of research rather than a single method'. It has at its core the belief that qualitative research can reveal fundamental and powerful insights of how people interact individually and socially: 'through conversation and observation in natural settings rather than through experimental manipulation under artificial conditions.' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p.119)

> 'Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, observational, historical, interact ional and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.' Denzin and Lincoln (1994: p. 2)

Denzin and Lincoln believe it is the qualitative researcher who thinks they can get closest to their subjects' perspective through detailed interviewing and observation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: p.10). Holloway (2005: p.272) suggests that in particular, qualitative researchers need to take account of a number of important factors when first considering their design and methodologies to be used as this will impact on how their written report or thesis will be presented, including:

1. 'The development of coherent and persuasive arguments.
2. The readership to whom they address the report or thesis.
3. The context of the research: context sensitivity.
4. Their own stance and location as researches: reflexivity.
5. The validity and credibility of the research: quality.
6. The form in which they present the study: language and style.'
   (Holloway, 2005: p.272)

In exploring the possible theoretical and political implications on my chosen research methodology and potential research questions, I focused primarily on questionnaires and interviews with self-selected post-qualifying candidates, supplemented by discussion of findings with small groups of interested social work professionals, I am aware that the use of case studies may also have been appropriate in generating relevant data and in fact may share similar characteristics around engagement, participation, confidentiality and ethics.  It is argued that by using different methods the researcher can alleviate any tendency to bias in their findings and introduces the concept of 'triangulation'. 'Triangulation is often thought of as a way of guarding against researcher bias and checking out accounts from different informants…' (Taylor and Bogdan: 1984: p.68)  To facilitate this I adopted a 3-stage approach, beginning with the distribution of questionnaires to current and recent PQ candidates.

## 3.1. Research Ethics and Governance

Prior to data collection I applied and received ethical review permission from both the University of Southampton and my own HEI employer. As the majority of my potential respondents were to be social workers employed by West Sussex County Council (WSCC), I also applied for and received confirmation of Research Governance from the West Sussex Social and Caring Services Research Unit (see Appendix A). A significant and important influence on my research is my own personal and professional perspective, including my personal value base, career aspirations, professional credibility and self-esteem within the local and regional social work community. A long career in social work education and training and a recent beneficial change in role to that of Practice Learning Co-ordinator for a social work degree programme, based in a University, have influenced my engagement with the area of study and specific research questions.  My personal experiences of higher education and expectations of post-qualifying social work education within a specific social and political context, time and place has influenced my mind set and commitment to continuous personal and professional development, as has my gender, age, social class, and sexuality. Anderson and Arsenault (1998: p.127) advise

caution when sharing one's own personal history 'The degree to which you reveal personal aspects of your life, to build rapport, must be weighed carefully against what may be gained or lost by this disclosure.'  Having previously, rather naively, shared my sexuality or political activism with others and found myself on the receiving end of some bigoted comments, I need to constantly remind myself that regardless of professional codes of ethical practice, a significant minority of people have yet to embrace anti-discrimination and multi-culturalism.  Happily the nature of my research with candidates was a mutually respectful and productive activity, sharing personal experience in an open and honest manner.

Clearly both the implementation of an ethical methodology and the quality and validity of research findings are dependent on the researcher's thoroughness and continual commitment to refining and revising their research tools. The importance of piloting questionnaires, interview and focus group questions should not be underestimated. 'It is important, particularly in the early stages of the interviewing period, to reflect upon the questions that you are asking and to amend them if necessary.' (Jones in Allan and Skinner, 1991: p204)  Jones goes on to remind us that 'the relationship which is established between the interviewer and those being interviewed is important in determining the quality of the data.' (Allan and Skinner, 1991: p.207)  However, I am aware that as Anderson and Arsenault (1998: p.127) reveal 'Asking people to share personal stories may result in an unexpected and overwhelming emotional response from the participant', and if such a situation were to arise, I need to have thought out beforehand how to respond appropriately. I found the West Sussex Social and Caring Services Research Governance Application Pack, gave some helpful advice on meeting the needs of research participants, whilst providing myself also with a degree of protection:

> 'The dignity, rights and safety and well being of participants must be the primary consideration at all times.
> The safety of participants and of researcher and other staff must be given priority and at all times health and safety regulations must be strictly observed.

> Every effort should be made to ensure the design of research does not discriminate against participants on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation or disability.  This may mean that special arrangements need to be made to ensure participation e.g. Braille, audio cassettes, plain English, translations in minority languages, payment of travelling expenses etc.'
>
> Risk or harm is defined as including physical, emotional or psychological.  At all times the welfare of subjects should be kept in mind.'
>
> West Sussex Social and Caring Services (2003: p.7)) 'Research Governance Application Pack' West Sussex Social and Caring Services Research Unit, Chichester

Personally, I endeavoured to meet all these requirements, as they appeared to me as appropriate and logical. If one is to adopt an ethical approach to research in social work, especially when as a professionally trained and registered social worker, one is continually seeking to improve the life chances of service users and carers, whilst promoting public confidence in the social work profession.  However, I am mindful of Cavan's comments when considering his definition of ethical practice;

> '…principled sensitivity to the rights of others.  Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth.  Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect for human dignity leaves one ignorant of human nature.'
>
> Cavan (1977) cited in Cohen and Manion (1994: p.359)

I find this sentiment illuminating, as it reminds all researchers in the social science arena to avoid being complacent when considering the validity of their ethical methodology, and not to be seduced by the potential generalisations and assertions one might seek to highlight in our research findings, at the expense of denying an individuals' dignity and self respect.  Anderson and Arsenault (1998: p.134) describe, how the keeping of detailed and accurate records of all sources of information used, for example transcripts and field notes, provides an audit trail, which maintains a clear chain-of-evidence and offers internal integrity for the methodology used.  It is only when we openly and honestly discuss the imperfections and implications of our research methodologies, that we can gain the reader's respect for our integrity and professional credibility, for the usefulness of our findings. With this in mind I

carefully protected all data gathered by using the secure computer database of the University, which is backed-up each evening, and is password protected. Additionally I made CD copies that were kept in researcher's own home. Any data generated, paper documents, were kept separately at researcher's own home, prior to numerical coding. Digital recordings of interviews were kept electronically separate, with transcribed respondent comments anonymised using interviewee self-selected pseudonyms and numbers. If, during our conversation, interviewees focused on individual and personal experiences that could potentially identify others, e.g. lack of team or line manager support, I would record this as 'general discussion', and avoid using any actual role titles. This all helped to avoid possible collusion with people I may have met, or worked with, previously, or currently consider a practitioner colleague.

### 3.2. Stage 1: The Use of Questionnaires

Prior to the formulation of questions I gave due attention to how to begin to engage with participants and offer them certain terms, conditions and rights of their involvement. Initially I had intended to enlist the assistance of our local PQ Consortium in the disseminating of my questionnaire, however, this proved difficult as the consortium were reluctant to assist with access to names and contact details of registered PQ candidates. Having discussed my difficulties in reaching post-qualifying candidates with senior University personnel, I received permission from a south coast University to use the contact details of current and former PQ candidates registered with that University. Although I was disappointed that I would be unable to reach a wider representative constituency of post-qualified social workers, I was optimistic that I would reach a range of social workers across a geographical area and therefore achieve my research objectives. I designed a letter of introduction and explanation (see Appendix B1) which addressed 'good practice' guidance ensuring the following; informed consent, which is freely given; explicit reference on how to withdraw, culturally sensitivity of the individual's needs, confidentiality and how the information will be recorded and shared. The principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and

self-determination… ensuring participants freely choose to take part (or not) in the research' (Cohen et al, 2000: p.51). The British Educational Research Association (1992) provides an ethical statement on researchers' responsibilities to the public:

> 13. Informants and participants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected when no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. Researchers are responsible for taking appropriate precautions to protect the confidentiality of both participants and data. However, participants should also be made aware that in certain situations anonymity cannot be achieved.
>
> www.bera.ac.uk/guidelines.html [Accessed 20th January 2005]

My letter seeking consent (see Appendix B1) addresses what Bell (1997: p.42) states should be covered, for example: What the study is about; introduction of the researcher; What does the participant need to do; What happens to information and data collected; and, most importantly, the reason for doing the research. 'The purpose of the covering letter/sheet is to indicate the aim of research, to convey to respondents its importance, to ensure them of confidentiality, and to encourage replies' (Cohen et al 2000, p.259). I also invited respondents to indicate whether they would consent to a) a further individual personal interview or b) join a small group discussion.

I took care with the language I used when writing and phrasing my questionnaire questions to avoid any sexist, racist or value-laden assumptions (see Appendix B2), because a generally more politicised social work audience may have found this particularly off-putting and therefore would be disinclined to complete the questionnaire. As Orme and Forbes in Allan and Skinner (1991: pp. 156-157) state, 'The use of language which avoids the traditional stereotypes of sex, race and class is, at the very least, best professional research practice.' I gave a clear commitment to an Equal Opportunities agenda, to both increase interest and responses from the social work profession, as it demonstrates the researchers understanding of contemporary

British society in which they practice and offer some reassurance that participants will not be harmed by taking part:

> 'Equal opportunity practice and philosophy is ethically significant in research….feminist researchers and writers in particular…recognize that oppression is a general phenomenon in society, affecting especially black people and those from lower socio-economic groups…it is important to ensure that disadvantage in society is not exacerbated by research activity.' (Orme and Forbes in Allan and Skinner, 1991: pp.156-157)

Having previously contacted Professor Mark Doel at Sheffield Hallam University, to discuss my research, he kindly shared with me his own research undertaken on behalf of Skills for Care (2006). This proved immensely helpful for the choice of questions and phraseology and designing the initial questionnaire to be used for my pilot study.  Cohen et al (2000, p. 261) explain the benefits of trialling a pilot questionnaire in qualitative research, and I was able to test-out the effectiveness of my design, on a similar sample group to the one intended to be used for my main study. 'The purpose of a pilot exercise is to get the bugs out of the instrument so that subjects in your main study will experience no difficulties in completing it…' (Bell, 1999: p.128)  For example, my original questionnaire included a Likert Scale (see Appendix B2), developed in the 1930's as a tool for gauging the relative impact of particular questions on respondents, (Cohen et al, 2000: p.254). Having piloted my questionnaire with a small group (six) of respondents I decided to remove the Likert Scale and change some of my 'open' questions to 'closed' ones in order to focus respondent's choices, and gain more quantitative data.  I also simplified some questions based on respondent feedback (see Appendix B4).

My covering letter and introduction to the questionnaire (see Appendix B3) clearly stated the purpose and reason for my study, with an opportunity for respondents to raise any queries or concerns with me or my supervisor, plus an assurance that if they so wished, they could exit from the study at any time.  I was aware of any possible bias that might be implied by the content and style of my questions and pre-set choices on offer, so I took care to always offer a space for individual comments on each topic.  These free-text comments are

recorded verbatim in Chapter 4, Data and Findings and analysed further in Chapter 5, Analysis and Interpretation.  Although I sought advice from my University colleagues on the possible use of SPSS, an on-line electronic data analysis tool, I decided to use a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet (see Appendix B5) to code respondent's answers. I calculated the response rate of 40% based on 65 questionnaires returned (including the original six questionnaires of the pilot study) of 140 circulated.  Two-thirds (66%) of respondents who had indicated their consent to a further individual interview, were used to obtain a randomly stratified self-selected sample of 12 candidates to interview (18% of original sample of 65).

## 3.3. Stage 2: Interviewing of Self-selected Candidates

The benefit of using interviews in qualitative research is demonstrated by the wealth of rich data that can be gathered, thus enabling detailed analysis and interpretation. Arksey, in Becker and Bryman (2004: p.268), defines their use in accessing data, 'Social science researchers employ semi – and unstuctured interviews when eliciting people's views, opinions, attitudes and experiences', whilst Bell (1999: p.135) suggests the researcher can increase the depth of their understanding, through their use, 'A major advantage of the interview is its adaptability.  A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which questionnaire can never do'.  Similarly, Silverman (2004: p.355) believes that 'taped' interviews and transcripts provide a valuable public record, which can be '...available to the scientific community, in a way that field notes are not'.  However, any research interviewer seeking to put 'flesh on the bones' of data garnered from questionnaires will, as Allan and Skinner (1991: p. 184) identify, need to be politically sensitive in creating a good impression 'ethnographic fieldwork requires that the researcher be politically aware and sensitive to the impression she or he is making on others.' This was particularly evident when interviewees described their personal barriers to post-qualifying training, which often revolved around their personal relationships with line manager and/or social work team.  As well as engaging with participants on a practical level, describing the nature, design of research,

the interview sample size, confidentiality and how one intends to disseminate findings, the researcher needs to promote goodwill and co-operation to build trust and ensure success '…qualitative research seeks to understand the world through the eyes of the participant, the people with whom you interact must feel comfortable enough to speak with you.  Sharing the details of one's life, or talking to a stranger, does not come easily to all people…' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p.126)  To reassure each interviewee, I took a little time before recording each session to explain the purpose of my research and to share my own personal experience of PQ from the perspective of both a candidate and tutor and assessor. This was intended to put the interviewee at ease and indicate my personal preferences and bias.  Anderson and Arsenault (1998) go on to describe how the researchers personal characteristics, opinions and attitudes may influence their own interpretation of what is being said by participants and therefore they must acknowledge this bias, if not directly with the interviewee, at least within their methodology, and endeavour to record data from the participants perspective '…qualitative researchers must look beyond the obvious, hear what is not actually stated, interpret behaviours within their natural context, and try to understand what people tell us from their perspective, through their lens.' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p.134) The 'Google Map' demonstrates (see Appendix C2) the geographical spread across the south coast region of the twelve interviewees and reflects the randomly stratified sample, based on the criteria described in Chapter 4, which I carried out between January (initial pilot of two) and April 2007 (see Interview Sample Profile, Appendix C1).

Responding to the relatively politicised environment social work practitioners operate within, I was flexible in the manner and way I asked questions and was prepared for what Bell (1999: pp. 136-8) believes, a structured focused interview should guarantee, 'Freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her'; using colloquial and shared jargon-free language to establish; 'an easy relationship with the interviewee.' That is not to say this technique is without draw backs as Becker and Bryman

(2004: p.271), remind us, that 'Reflecting the relative lack of control on the interviewer's part, there is more scope for these interviews to take off at a tangent and not cover the key areas for research questions', hence the need for ethical codes of practice, which '…help to protect both the researcher and the researched.' (Becker and Bryman, 2004: p.334). I decided to take a guided conversation approach, using a list of semi-structured questions as a basis for our discussion (see Appendix C3). Throughout the interviews I endeavoured to work within the framework of the National Occupation Standards for Social Work:

> 'Expectations, Values and Ethics section on Communication skills and information sharing, they state, 'Social workers must explain their:
> 1. role and the purpose of contact, e.g. assessment
> 2. their powers, including legal powers
> 3. in a way that can be understood by all involved
> 4. Be open and honest about what they can and cannot do
> 5. Build honest relationships based on clear communication
> 6. Respect confidentiality'. (TOPSS, 2002)

As well as appreciating the GSCC Codes of Practice (2002) I was also aware that, these professional social work ethical codes, mirrors those of BERA (1992) and, therefore, hopefully went some way to ensuring participant confidence in my commitment to communicating and interacting in an ethical and non-judgemental manner. Cohen et al reminds of us of a key ethical consideration, that 'participants must not leave a situation in an insecure or emotional state…' (Cohen et al, 2000: pp.58-59), therefore, it is the researchers' responsibility to have prepared contingency plans, for anyone disturbed or distressed by issues raised. Fortunately the risk of any disruption or distress was minimised, as I had given my interviewees a significant degree of choice, regarding their participation, and offered them reassurances at the beginning of each interview, explaining how I would treat their responses and ensure anonymity.

I anticipated those taking part in the interviews were concerned about accountability and ethical responsibility. Banks (2006) suggests one of four essential elements of accountability and responsibility is 'ethical accountability', that is, the commonly held and accepted values about right and wrong,

personal, institutional or professional values that society would acknowledge. Here levels of risk may be influenced by a social workers strong personal value of client self-determination.  Just as social workers use reflective practice when engaging in the process of supervision with their line manager, enabling the sharing of mistakes and uncertainties, I was able to build a similar trusting relationship, be it very short-term, with each interviewee, creating a safe place for open and honest dialogue.  Once I had obtained consent to record the interview, I used a small discrete digital voice recorder. I personally transcribed what was said, between each interviewee and myself.  Then used a 2-stage process of first listening and writing a longhand account, followed by word-processing the text on the computer. Although this was very time consuming, it did enable me to try to establish the meaning and emotional content of the spoken words and phrases.  'Occasionally, participants will share with you information of a personal or confidential nature which may influence the way you think or feel about the situation' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p.127). Obviously, in the process of interviewing, I sought clarification and summarised content and meaning, to accurately and honestly record, not only, factual but inferred data.  My own understanding of the current local policy and political environment, kept misunderstandings on an interpersonal level to a minimum, and facilitated my rapport with all the interviewees. In fact, the activity of meeting and interviewing a variety of practitioners, turned out to be a most enjoyable experience. The respondents gave freely of their time and shared openly and honestly, often at times humorously, how they had coped with their post-qualifying studies.  I acknowledged that each member's professional role would have significant impact on how they approached and interpreted my questions:

> 'People's identities or social locations (that is, the patterns of social relationships in which they are enmeshed) can have two kinds of effect on the nature of the accounts or actions they produce.
> (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: p.226)

> 'The other way in which identities affect actions and accounts is through the particular perspectives that people in various social locations tend to generate and that will filter their understanding and knowledge of the world, and shape their actions in it.  In particular, the

interpretation of information available to a person is likely to be selected and slanted in line with his or her prevailing interests and concerns. There may even be a strong element of wish-fulfilment involved.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: p.226)

In other words, how members interpret the usefulness of post-qualifying training, will be dependent on their own perception of the intrinsic worth, and usefulness of these initiatives to themselves and others. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: p.91) suggest that when; '…deciding how much self-disclosure is appropriate or fruitful', one has to strike a balance on how ones own self-disclosure will help or hinder the interviewee. 'It is hard to except 'honesty' and 'frankness' on the part of participants and informants, while never being frank and honest about oneself' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: p.91). I decided to share my own previous personal, organisational experience, and sexuality to place members at ease with this question. It also indicates what Kolb (1984: p.212) believes, is a need to seek out new learning experiences, otherwise; 'In the absence of new and fresh challenges, creativity gives way to merely coping and going through the motions.' (Kolb, 1984: p.212) Although social work as a profession, has developed its own code of ethics and values that are integral to knowledge, skills and practice (Statement of Ethics and Values, National Occupational Standards, TOPSS, 2002), clearly one needs to constantly return to the philosophical debates and moral arguments that underpin these established ethical assumptions. Carr in Hammersley (1993: p.169) suggests that; '…it is the continuing presence of contesting philosophical viewpoints that provides the oppositional tension essential for critical thinking to perform its transforming role.' In other words, social workers and especially those in training, their educators and assessors, need to acknowledge, interpret, and understand the philosophical origins of the professional social work codes, values and ethics they practice within, and how these are subject to challenge and change over time, not least by political influence and social policy legislation. (GSCC Codes of Practice, 2002)

It is not surprising, given the public image of social work and especially the tabloid press coverage that social workers, educators, and researchers are well

used to responding to criticism of the profession, no matter how ill-informed. Whether considering practice or research, looking at this issue from a philosophical perspective, Pring (2000: p.135) argues that, to '...eliminate bias or subjective interpretations of the evidence', researchers should seek '...wide and continuous criticism of the conclusions provisionally reached.' Therefore, for good research to take place '...an atmosphere in which criticism is welcomed, rather than avoided, and a forum in which others are in a position to examine conclusions in light of evidence' (Pring, 2000: p.135). The fact that social work activity is continuously in the public and political spotlight, may actually encourage researchers to consistently monitor and improve the way we educate our social work professionals. Again, philosophical issues are raised when considering research, in what is essentially a human activity, both in the sense of social work as practised and the educating of practitioners, and therefore depend heavily on interpersonal communication, language and interpretation. The underlying 'value-laden activity' of educational research, described by Carr and Kemmis (1986: p.99) '...must be able to confront questions about practical educational values and goals', and constantly remind researchers in their methodologies, to fully explore, interpret and understand respondents data from a philosophical perspective, by appreciating the ethical principles and values that underpin social work practice:

> 'Post qualifying teaching involving short intense periods with part time students who have demanding jobs creates a particular dynamic and this has implications for the presentation and integration of both process and product knowledge. In addition it raises issues about the so-called levels of partnership between agencies and institutions and the space, both mental and actual, that needs to be created if we are to embrace the opportunities provided by post qualifying training, value the work that social workers do, and support them to practise safely.' (Kroll, 2004: p.664)

Rutter (2006: p.279) acknowledges, that for a significant minority of post-qualifying candidates, access to sources of information and research, and the skills on how to find and use these sources was evidence of 'the depth of information illiteracy prevalent within the profession.' She suggests PQ

programmes need to provide information and skills training and support, to enable candidates to understand and make use of academic research.

When opening their practice to scrutiny and assessment, PQ candidates are likely to experience feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence, similar to those at qualifying training. Lefevre (2005: p.579) believes there are two ways to reduce the stress of the learner role and the requirement for practice assessment:

> 'Firstly, an open, collaborative partnership approach which is explicitly anti-oppressive allows for power to be shared, increasing the student's sense of agency and empowerment.  Secondly, a supportive and nurturing approach enables the development of trust and safety. This promotes the development of the student's confidence and encourages them to expose their practice to scrutiny; reflective learning and assessment are thus facilitates.'  (Lefevre, 2005: p.579)

## 3.4. Emerging Themes from Interviews

My assumptions and understanding of what it felt like for social workers to study at post-qualifying level had already been informed by the data and findings generated by the responses from the Stage 1 questionnaires, however, I tried to take a step back and 'word-storm' what the emerging themes from my interviewees were. For this I used the 'mine-mapping' technique as described below in Chapter 5 and focussing on the candidates' voice, by directly quoting from data generated from questionnaires and interviews.  As I prepared each interview transcript, I collated the number of times an interviewee referred to a specific issue or experience.  This enabled me to quantify the strength of feeling emerging around a particular theme, i.e. the number of interviewee quotes given for each theme (n=x), relate directly to number of respondents who raised a specific or related issue.  For example, for theme C: seven out of twelve respondents cited pay and career progression as an important issue. These themes, alongside more quantitative data from the questionnaires, were used to inform the next Stage 3 discussions with social work professionals. It was at this stage that I also circulated my initial findings to the twelve respondents who had taken part in individual interviews, demonstrating my

wish to share data and findings and acknowledge those who had made significant contribution of time and experiences.

### 3.5. Stage 3: Social Work Professionals Group Discussion

My supervisor and I had discussed the possibility of using focus groups to further my data gathering. Anderson and Arsenault (1998: pp. 200-1) describe focus groups as having distinct advantages for the qualitative researcher, over other methods 'the focus group goes one step further', than questionnaires and interviews '...resulting in a deeper, more insightful discussion', which in turn can '...uncover complex motivations or behaviours'.  Using their definition, 'A focus group is a carefully planned and moderated informal discussion where one person's ideas bounce off another's creating a chain reaction of information dialogue.' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: pp. 200-1) The focus group, because of its unique access to qualitative information and understanding about people's reaction to a specific topic or concept, is increasingly being used for evaluation and analysis of educational programmes, providing a litmus test on the quality of delivery and outcomes. Relatively inexpensive to arrange, the focus group can '...address a specific topic in depth, in a comfortable environment to illicit a wide range of opinions, attitudes, feelings or perceptions from a group of individuals who share some experience relative to the dimension under study' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p 201).  Although, I had asked the original Stage 1 questionnaire respondents, whether they would like to take part in a small group discussion, intending these participants to form a number of focus groups, I had to change my research design. In order to use my research findings to influence the design and planning of our new PQ programmes, I needed to present my data sooner than I had expected. Therefore, I chose to present my Stage 1 and 2 findings to two groups of social work professionals, drawn from local and regional stakeholder partnerships, involved with the design and commissioning of new programmes, and meeting with the national GSCC PQ Lead Inspector.  This provided me with a small, but significant social work education and employer perspective, on what post-qualifying candidates where saying.  To facilitate this Stage 3, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation

based on my data and findings entitled; 'The Candidate Speaks', borrowing the epithet from a famous social work text of the 1970's, which explored the social services client personal perspective; 'The Client Speaks', by Mayer and Timms (1976) (see PowerPoint Presentation Appendix D1). I negotiated with each professional group a convenient time and date to attend their meetings and, with their consent, added my item for discussion to their agendas.  Each group was representative of major social work employers and educators across the Surrey and Sussex Skills for Care sub-region:

- Skills for Care, Practice Learning Co-ordinator Network
- Meeting with GSCC Social Work PQ Lead Inspector
- South Coast University Research Group

The transcripts of these group discussions are included at Appendices D2-4.


Once each group was established, I needed to systematically process the information generated through discussion. I began to record their own ideas, about how themes link together, especially when participants took the conversation in different and contradictory directions (Allan and Skinner, 1991). As Dobson in Becker and Bryman (2004: p.286), states: 'There needs to a balance between the researcher's agenda and that of participants so that those attending the group are able to enjoy the discussion and explain and contextualise their replies'.  I used two methods to record comment and debate, 1) brief had-written notes, and 2) a digital recording of our group discussion, with the consent of group members (see Interview Transcripts, Appendix C5). As Taylor and Bogdan (1984: p.53) suggest; '...you should strive to write up the most complete and comprehensive field notes possible…. Even "small talk" can lend insight into people's perspectives when viewed in context later'. They go on to describe the usefulness of accurate recording and what to include; '...field notes should include descriptions of people, events, and conversations as well as the observers' actions, feelings, and hunches or working hypotheses'.  A good rule to remember is, that '...if it is not written down, it never happened.' (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984: p.53). Once I had collated this comprehensive record, I was able to identify key words, or

regularly used phases, which stood out, and began to aid my interpretation, and provide evidence of new themes or insights.

## 3.6. Other methodological considerations

It would appear that unless the researcher is vigilant in their application of their chosen methods, techniques and tools, there is potential risk of bias in their findings.  Whether political in a personal and group dynamic sense, or in a wider experience of local and national social policy and political agendas, for those social work practitioners taking part in the research.  Similarly, without due care and attention to the operationalisation of chosen research methods, the findings and interpretation may be open to criticism as invalid or not credible and in the worst-case scenario un-publishable.  'The quality of research is dependent on the skills of the individual researcher and his or her ability to understand, record, gain insight and interpret the…data collected' (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998: p.134).  Phillips and Pugh (2000: p.21), describe a prerequisite activity of the professional researcher; '…must have a command of what is happening in your subject so that you can evaluate the worth of what others are doing'. Again this illustrates the importance of knowing what is currently on the minds and agendas of those social work practitioners, and service users, who one seeks to provide answers to the research questions posed.  The active interview is described by Holstein and Gubrium (2004) as:

> 'Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter. Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge – treasuries of information awaiting excavation – as they are constructors of knowledge in association with the interviewers.'
> Holstein and Gubrium (2004) in Silverman (2004: p. 141)

I certainly appreciated what Holstein and Gubrium (2004) were referring to, as throughout my research, there are examples where both interviewer and interviewee spent time exploring and teasing-out what the future of PQ means, and what the new PQ framework would look like in reality.

(See responses to Question 9; Interviewee Transcripts, Appendix C5)

Wilkinson (2004) in Silverman (2004: p. 177) believes that; 'Focus group methodology is, at first sight, deceptively simple.' As a means of collecting qualitative data, it involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues. At Stage 3, I decided to use small group discussion with a number of social work and HEI professionals, in order to 'check-out' my initial findings, from my candidate data, and ascertain how true this was for employers and education providers. To facilitate group discussion, I prepared a few questions which promoted what Wilkinson (2004) in Silverman (2004: p.181) describe, as '...the relatively free flow discussion and debate between members.' I was then able to record, both in note form, and by digitally recording what was said, to be transcribed and analysed later. Peräkylä (2004) in Silverman (2004: p.285) asserts, that '...checking the reliability is closely related to assuring the quality of field notes and guaranteeing the public access to the process of their production.' To this effect, I circulated by e-mail, my transcribed notes of our group discussion, to all those involved, for their comment and amendment. I also made a second request for permission to use this material within my thesis.

## Chapter 4: Data and Findings

As part of my EdD thesis, undertaken whilst working full-time as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Practice Learning Co-ordinator, in a Social Work Department of a south coast University, I carried out my research between July 2006 and September 2007, to fit in with the seasonal nature of my practice learning co-ordination task, and the placement finding activity. I took care to co-ordinate my interviews with the candidate's most convenient availability. Recorded within this Chapter are the results of my findings, which I have presented as a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, with a particular emphasis on what candidates actually said, to give voice to their personal experience. I will proceed to offer an analysis and interpretation of my findings in Chapter 5, and finally draw some implications for practice and suggested recommendations, for future research and development in Chapter 6.

My research followed a three-stage process. Stage 1: circulation of initial personal questionnaires to 160 current and previous candidates registered with a regional PQ Consortium. The majority of the 65 respondents, were candidates registered with the Surrey and Sussex PQ Consortium, the majority of whom had undertaken, in the last five years, or about to begin a recognised PQ programme with a local or regional University. Stage 2: a semi-structured interview schedule, where questions were distilled from the questionnaire responses. Related piloted questions were used for a guided conversation, with a random stratified sample of 12 respondents, from those who had returned questionnaires, and had indicated their consent to a follow-up interview. Stage 3: involved a presentation of the research findings to three groups of social work professionals from employers, HEI's and the national registration body, GSCC. The open group discussions were recorded and transcribed (see Appendices D2-4). The data and findings from all three stages are recorded here, whilst the analysis and interpretation of findings follows in Chapter 5.

### 4.1. Stage 1: Data and Findings from the Questionnaires

A total of 160 questionnaires were either circulated, via university colleagues, or mailed directly, with self-addressed envelopes, to named current and previous candidates.  An initial small group of seven candidates formed the pilot study and their responses were used to refine and redesign the subsequent questionnaire used.  Appreciating the localised nature of the distribution, this could not be seen as a purely representative sample, in terms of the overall number of candidates across the South East region, or in fact the sub-region of Surrey and Sussex. It does, however, provide a useful specific geographical 'snap shot' of candidates' experiences and feelings regarding their PQ studies, and in that sense offers some insights into the current realities of PQ education and training.

Apart from the MHA (Mental Health Award), both the questionnaire and interview samples covered the range of PQ programmes, including; PQ1, PQSW, PQCCA, PTA and, therefore, were representative of current post-qualifying training. 65 questionnaires were returned (including those from the pilot study). This equated to a response rate of 40%, which compares favourably with that of Doel et al's (2006) at 22% and Rowland's (2003) of 29%, although, it is acknowledged that the catchment area of this study was of a much smaller geographical, and localised area.  Each questionnaire respondent was requested to provide a personal profile regarding their gender; age; disability and ethnicity, plus the type of social work agency they worked for; details of their original social work qualification, and which PQ award they held, or were currently or intending to study.  In addition, each respondent was asked whether they wished to take part, or not, in a future individual interview or small group discussion. A statement on confidentiality, consent and withdrawal was included at this stage.

Of **65 (100%)** respondents: **43 (66%)** Agreed to an individual interview

**34 (52%)** Agreed to a small group discussion

This response rate, demonstrates the candidate's willingness to share their experiences.  Completion rates for each question were high (see n=X for each question asked).

## 4.2. Profile of those responding to the questionnaire

The Tables below, indicates the personal profile, qualification and post-qualifying record of the respondents. Actual respondent numbers are given in brackets. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and therefore do not always equate to 100%.

### Table 1: Profile of the Candidates

*(n=65 or less; not all candidates completed each category, e.g. ethnicity or disability)*

| Gender | Female:<br>(59) **82%** | Male:<br>(12) **18%** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age profile (i) | 21-26:<br>(4)  **6%** | 27-32:<br>(9) **14%** | 33-38:<br>(5)  **8%** | 39+:<br>(47) **72%** |
| Ethnicity (ii) | White:<br>(35) **54%** | BME:<br>(3)  **5%** | Not Answered<br>(27) **41%** | |
| Disability | No:<br>(59) **90%** | Yes:<br>(3)  **5%** | Not Answered<br>(3)  **5%** | |
| Agency | Statutory:<br>(59) **90%** | Voluntary:<br>(1) **1.5%** | Independent:<br>(3)  **5%** | Private:<br>(2)  **3%** |
| Social Work Qualification | New Degree: | (2)  **3%** | | |
| | DipSW: | (45) **69%** | | |
| | CSS: | (4)  **6%** | | |
| | CQSW: | (12) **18%** | | |
| | HO Letter: | (0) | | |
| | Other: | (2)  **3%** | | |

Notes: (i) 21 is the earliest age a person could attain a social work qualification (new social work degree) subsequent age ranges are five years apart

(ii) Respondents were asked to self-define their ethnicity: 1=White British; 2=White European; 3=Dual Heritage Black African/White British; 4=Black Caribbean; 5=African Asian. The collective terms White and Black and Minority Ethnicity (BME) have been used in the table above. A significant number of respondents did not answer this category.

The high percentage of candidates who did not answer the question on ethnicity, may in part be due to the design of the questionnaire category, by not offering the usual CRE list, preferring rather to ask candidates to self-define. It could also be an indication of the lack of importance candidates place on defining their ethnicity, assuming this question is not for them as they are obviously 'White'. It may also provide evidence of the predominately white, often affluent, middle-class assumptions of this particular area of the south coast (see Appendices E2-3). If the assumption is made, that black and minority ethnic candidates **would** definitely have answered this question, then it is logical to assume that, the actual differential between white and BME respondents would be **95** and **5** percent respectively. Similarly, a much smaller group of candidates, did not answer the question on disability. Again, one might draw the conclusion, that this was an oversight on their part, and that by aggregating the 'NO' and 'not answered' scores, the differential between 'no disability' and 'disability' would be **95** and **5** percent respectively.

**Table 2: Post-qualifying record of the Candidates** (n=64)

| Award | Hold Award | Currently Studying | Intend to Study | Total for Award |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PQ1 Certificate (i) | (46) 72% | (1) 1.6% | (1) 1.6% | (48) **75%** |
| Practice Teaching (ii) | (21) 33% | (6) 9% | (9) 14% | (36) **56%** |
| Mental Health (iii) | (1) 1.6% | (0) | (2) 3% | (3) **5%** |
| Child Care | (6) 9% | (22) 34% | (8) 13% | (36) **56%** |
| PQSW (Adults) (iv) | (8) 13% | (11) 17% | (6) 9% | (25) **39%** |
| AASW | (3) 4.5% | (0) | (3) 4.5% | (6) **9%** |
| Other | (1) 1.6% | (1) 1.6% | (6) 9% | (8) **13%** |
| Total | **(86)*** | (41) **63%*** | (35) **54%*** | |

Notes:  (i) PQ1 Certificate includes PQ Year, PQ1 fast-track and PQ1 portfolio programmes

(ii) Includes Graduate Certificate in Practice Assessing (available from 2004)

(iii) Mental Health Award only offered at two sub-regional universities, neither od which took part in study.

(iv) Locally offered PQSW programme has Adult Services focus

* A total of 86 awards are held by the 64 respondents (some holding more than two e.g. PQ1 is an entry requirement for both the Child Care and Mental Health awards).

63% of all respondents were currently registered for some form of post- qualifying study and 54% of all respondents are intending to study a further PQ Award in the near future.

The typical PQ candidate was female, white, able bodied, in her late thirties or forties, Diploma in Social Work qualified and working in a statutory agency. A similar profile to the candidates in the study identified by Doel et al (2006), indicating possible commonalities across regions.

## 4.3. Responses to Questions

The responses from the 65 candidates were analysed, coded and gathered into themes which emerged as representative of the collective candidate response. (The number of responses for each question is recorded as n=X, with the subsequent number for each sub-category. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore do not always equate to 100%). Candidate's additional personal comments in answered to questions in category, e/f 'other', are recorded separately under each question and have been used for illustration; clarification and evidence to support themes (see Appendix B4 for format of questions).

**Funding post-qualifying study** *[Question 8; n= 63/65; (97%)]*
Of those respondents who answered the question, (60) **95%** stated that, their employer funded their PQ studies, with only 5% of candidates using a PQ bursary, self-funding or using other means.

**Expectations of Employer**
*[Questions 10; n=61/65; (94%) and 11; n=59/65; (91%)]*
**98%** of candidates (60) were encouraged by their employer to undertake PQ training. Of those respondents who answered Q11, (27) **46%** stated that, their employers required them to undertake a specific PQ award. Where candidates stated, the ratio of rewards required by employers was; PQ1 Certificate 30%; Child Care Award 18% and Practice Teachers' Award 4%.

**What are the barriers to post-qualifying training?** *(Question 12)*

    a) Lack of information on PQ: *(n=57)*

                Agree: (20) **35%**   Disagree: (37) **65%**

    b) Lack of time, length of course: *(n=60)*

                Agree: (35) **58%**   Disagree: (25) **42%**

    **c)** Access to local PQ award course: *(n=54)*

                Agree: (16) **30%**   Disagree: (38) **70%**

    d) Cost of training: *(n=53)*

                Agree: (8) **15%**     Disagree: (45) **85%**

    e) I found the following were (could) be barriers to PQ training:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=15/65; 23%)* |
|---|---|
| 6 | My 'barrier' was working in the voluntary sector for 8 years – this is a 'hidden' group who doesn't have access to PQ |
| 19 | Being part-time |
| 20 | *I was originally employed by Hants, for whom PQ training did not appear to be a priority at the time I was working for them. PTA and ASW were relatively easy to access, but this primarily appeared to be the result of employer demands for specific roles, rather than a wider commitment to PQ( and CPD generally).* |
| 22 | Not spreading assignments out well enough |
| 24 | Structured training at Chichester University is difficult to fit in with child care.  Travel to Chichester is difficult and time consuming from the north of the county. |
| 26 | Partly lack of time because of caseload commitment and I was also completing final year of a degree. |
| 28 | Time from the workplace could be an issue, particularly if more than one student wished to study. |
| 30 | This questionnaire is further evidence of confusing, inconsistent info. Given on PQ training.  I was told I had to register with the consortium, phoned who I was asked to contact who told me I didn't need to do. According to this questionnaire I am registered. |
| 35 | Employers not wanting to release the candidate for the university days or reduce caseload. |
| 37 | The fast-track is better for worker and team. |
| 39 | Already working unsocial and long hours, family commitments, job commitments, confusing information, lack of places, criteria for placement (by employer) current case load and inroads into private life. |
| 40 | Caseload |
| 47 | Taking on another commitment in an already busy life, home, 2 children, work etc. |
| 48 | Undertaking further study, meeting required standards as a mature student having not studied for many years. |
| 65 | Lack of study time given for each module. Only had 1 day per module. Have had to take annual leave days to complete coursework. |

**Motivations for undertaking post-qualifying training** *(Question 13)*

a) GSCC re-registration requirements: *(n=59)*

Agree: (49) **83%**    Disagree: (10) **17%**

*b)* Opportunity to increase knowledge base: *(n=60)*

Agree: (57) **95%**    Disagree: (3) **5%**

c) Opportunity to improve practice skills: *(n=61)*

Agree: (57) **93%**    Disagree: (4) **7%**

d) Enjoy life long learning/personal achievement: *(n=57)*

Agree: (49) **86%**    Disagree: (8) **14%**

e) I found the following were (could) be motivators to PQ training:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=17/65; 26%)* |
|---|---|
| 4 | Motivation limited because of the limited focus at PQ and AA on generic social work skills |
| 6 | Links to pay and progression. Job Descriptions might include PQ as an essential requirement |
| 8 | To move on to 'higher grade' social work |
| 19 | Money! |
| 20 | *The opportunity to "do something different" (PTA)was a factor : my care management role was becoming increasingly routine-ised and crisis driven- I was aware of the potential to be de-skilled unless I took further action* |
| 21 | Promotion with PQCCA |
| 22 | To help fulfil my ambitions of 'climbing the ladder'. -financial implications i.e. pay rise and going up grades |
| 23 | Opportunity to progress in job if PQ2-5 gained. Increase in salary. |
| 24 | Career progression. |
| 35 | Require PQCCA to be eligible to progress to be higher grade social worker. |
| 39 | Recognition by higher grade. I was hoping for better pay (movement to higher grade social worker – but this pay structure has now been abolished). Better job prospects. Recognition of achievement by employer. |
| 40 | I need to attain the PQCCA before I can move on to Mental Health. |
| 43 | Promotion and pay increase. |
| 44 | Linked to pay |
| 47 | Opportunity to revisit social work training, having qualified in 1982. |
| 56 | Money |
| 65 | Changes in the social work training to degree level |

**Factors which helped sustain post-qualifying training** *(Question 14)*

    a) Clear guidance on expectations and assessment requirements: *(n=58)*

        Agree: (40) **69%**    Disagree: (18) **31%**

    b) Teaching content: *(n=59)*

        Agree: (33) **56%**    Disagree: (26) **44%**

    c) Regular meetings with assessor/mentor: *(n=56)*

        Agree: (25) **45%**    Disagree: (31) **55%**

    d) Line manager or team support: *(n=61)*

        Agree: (51) **84%**    Disagree: (10) **16%**

    e) Regular study-time/study days: *(n=56)*

        Agree: (39) **70%**    Disagree: (17) **30%**

    f) Once registered for a PQ Award the following factors sustained my study:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=8/65; 12%)* |
|---|---|
| 4 | My motivation has been limited because of these negative factors |
| 20 | *The above relates to my initial PQ study in Hants. The cliché about having to brush up on my knowledge because I had a student appeared to be relevant.* |
| 23 | My own commitment to completing PQSW |
| 35 | Self motivation and enthusiasm to gain award and progress through career. |
| 39 | My own dedication and commitment despite lack of time. So far I have found 'taught' elements are time consuming and boring with little 'new' content. |
| 47 | I am someone who sees through commitments I've started so will finish. To date successful completion of course requirements. |
| 48 | My own motivation and I wanted to 'lead by example' i.e. to encourage colleagues in undertaking further training and be able to inform and show service users how the centre is committed to improving, keeping up to date with current training. |
| 65 | My personal health problems |

**Factors which hindered post-qualifying training** *(Question 15)*

a)  Workload/job pressure: *(n=61)*

        Agree: (52) **85%**   Disagree: (9) **15%**

b)  Lack of line manager/team support : *(n=56)*

        Agree: (9) **16%**     Disagree: (47) **84%**

c)  Academic or assessment load: *(n=54)*

        Agree: (23) **43%**   Disagree; (31) **57%**

d)  Practice assessment requirements: *(n=52)*

        Agree: (15) **29%**   Disagree: (37) **71%**

e) Once registered for a PQ Award the following factors hindered my study:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=7/65; 11%)* |
|---|---|
| 20 | In Hants there appeared to be a lack of information about the PQ framework as a whole: it was difficult to conceive of, and map, a personal CPD pathway that incorporated PQ. The culture appeared to be one of applying for courses that you liked the look of, rather than seeing these opportunities within a sequential CPD framework. In addition, the received wisdom in the organisation was that it was very difficult to get on courses: I believe that this discouraged colleagues from applying in the first place, or provided an excuse not to undergo further training. The corollary of this was that , when people got on a course, they were usually motivated : my experience of WSSX is that some/many candidates take the opportunities available to them for granted, or complain that they are "sent". |
| 22 | Very difficult working full-time as well as part-time study.  More college days would have been welcomed. |
| 23 | Pressure of work – this never seems to be taken into account by those who set assignment dates. |
| 24 | Fitting around home commitments especially children.  Also no financial reward. I am already on my top increment and will get no reward for completing PQSW. I am also a practice teacher which I do mainly in my own time for no financial reward at all. Unheard of in any other career! |
| 35 | Inability to take study days due to workload. |
| 39 | Would be far better for it to be module based with say every social worker doing one module per year over 5 years with say half-day study per week for each module – could ease case management of teams as well. |
| 47 | General pressure of all the above plus home/family commitments, feels a lot to do. |

**Advice for those considering post-qualifying training** *(Question 16)*

a) Preparation and planning with manager and team: *(n=61)*

Agree: (60) **98%**   Disagree: (1) **2%**

b) establish support networks early: *(n=60)*

Agree: (57) **95%**   Disagree: (3) **5%**

c) being creative and realistic: *(n=59)*

Agree: (55) **93%**   Disagree: (4) **7%**

d) enjoy new learning and practice skills: *(n=57)*

Agree: (55) **96%**   Disagree: (2) **4%**

e) what advice would you offer a new PQ candidate:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=11/65; 17%)* |
|---|---|
| 2 | Forthcoming changes to the PQCCA **could** cause or encourage cynicism or lack of trust due to constant changes within qualification |
| 20 | I am not sure you could really disagree with any of the above. My advice would be to be an active, rather than a passive, participant. The students who struggle/ are bored/ de-motivated are often those who don't take responsibility for their own learning: they expect to be spoon fed and guided by tutors and training officers. More controversially perhaps, I also feel that some students approach training with a degree of passive aggression: they import cynicism and dissatisfaction from practice (a "been there; seen it; bought the T shirt "attitude). Interestingly, these students are not usually the most able/ experienced. Successful students (by my definition) take the material and opportunities and adapt them to their own needs and professional realities. They perhaps recognise that going on a course will not make them a better social worker by a process of osmosis, but it will provide them with a space to reflect and to research things that are useful to them. |
| 22 | Be prepared to sacrifice your own personal time (110% needed).  Look after yourself, have regular supervision, be prepared to delegate your workload to colleagues. |
| 26 | Get family on your side and stay healthy. |
| 30 | Some clear consistent information that does not require travelling to Chichester for. |
| 35 | Recognise extra pressure it puts on you. |
| 39 | Keep to plans and schedule, be selfish, put your own needs first. |
| 40 | …all of the above idealistic in such a pressurised workplace. |
| 47 | Take the course chunk by chunk, try and keep on top of things, don't leave things to the last minute, get on and organise child observations, otherwise the next requirement is on top of you. |
| 58 | Be aware of caseload and realistic expectation to study as well. |
| 65 | Don't under-estimate the workload. |

**What might have prevented a lapse in post-qualifying training or failure to achieve your Award?** (Question 17)

| Respondent ID No. | Comment |
|---|---|
| 1 | More time to complete the missing bits from my portfolio –work too busy/not enough study time |
| 4 | Clarity as to whether employers, need, desire, value PQ |
| 7 | I failed the final piece of work, competence schedule; at the time of carrying this out an amalgamation of offices involved moving to a new office did hinder my ability to complete my work. |
| 10 | I'm not sure yet if I have passed my PQ1 but I was under a lot of pressure both professionally and personally at that time. I felt I had to 'jump hoops' which didn't make for effective learning. On a personal note, I felt that much of the PQ1 course was covering old ground, which actually felt more stressful. I had only graduated from the Masters in Social Work Course at Sussex University months before and felt as though I had to take time from a busy case load to rehash old ideas. |
| 11 | Clearer expectations of academic level required to achieving Award for students returning to study |
| 13 | I was previously unable to complete a degree course due to family problems. Whilst I officially deferred for a year, I think personal contact from the college, may have brought me back to the 'fold' rather than feeling demoralised. |
| 16 | I am applying to do my ASW Training, however if I am not successful in gaining a place on the course it will be too late to apply for PQ 2-5, therefore more flexibility and synchronising the application dates would be beneficial. |
| 22 | On PQCCA at present. Long term sick leave has set me back. However, catching-up now. I am determined to not let this hinder my study! |
| 23 | Pressure of work, not enough study days. Ill health, family commitments |
| 24 | No time at home to study. No time at work to study. Difficulty accessing university from north of county. |
| 26 | I have been fairly consistent in my PQ studies but feel I need space before considering the AASW. |
| 32 | Having to undertake work for job at home, therefore impacting on time and capacity for study and completing assignments. |
| 40 | Not working full time in such a demanding job. Being able to build up to the full PQCCA by passing modules at learners pace. |
| 41 | Only just started course in October 2006. |
| 43 | More time off to study. |
| 53 | Family commitments |
| 65 | Ill health, lack of support from manager on PQ1 Fast-track, juggling full-time employment and study. I am currently trying to complete PQSW. |

## Future post-qualifying plans or other kinds of training (Question 18)

The post-qualifying candidates, were asked about their future training plans.

This question also had a good completion rate, with 43 out of a possible 65

completions (66%). This is what they planned, or hoped for their post-qualifying study:

| Respondent ID No. | Comment *(n=43/65; 66%)* |
| --- | --- |
| 1 | Very interested in new PQ Framework and how this will develop vis-à-vis Higher Awards |
| 2 | Fostering specialism at new specialist award level |
| 4 | More emphasis on broadening and diversifying the skills and knowledge for basic social workers |
| 7 | Yes, more fields of study. Personally I have an interest in adolescents. |
| 9 | No |
| 12 | No |
| 13 | As a social worker, I do have the opportunity to undertake practice based updates through in house training. |
| 15 | Yes, courses that acknowledge that professionals from other fields now employed as Care Managers may have different learning needs to qualified social workers, and should be offered other options, especially as we cannot register with the consortium and therefore do not gain any academic *(sic)* credits. |
| 16 | I was disappointed with aspects of the PQ1 year, particularly the organisation. I would have appreciated more information on the changes in legislation and up to date social issues. |
| 18 | Therapeutic training |
| 21 | I believe in continuous learning and consolidation of learning. I would like there to be support to people taking post qualifying courses which are more specialist, such as MA's – attachment and therapeutic interventions. |
| 23 | One day workshops. Evening courses. |
| 24 | Other locations than Chichester. More flexibility. Didn't really want to follow portfolio route but is only possible way as I have 2 children under 5, one at school, live in Horsham, work part-time and find paying for any child care on top of what I already have to arrange to go to work is not possible. Whole course structure works against part-time workers and those with caring responsibilities. |
| 26 | I would like to see recognition of the work by the department in the form of an increment on pay during the year that people are on the GCPA course as well as having a student. This would encourage more people to do it and make student placements easier to find. |
| 29 | Yes – as a manager I am at a loss as to what is available for me, hence commencing the Practice Teaching Award. Also there was rumour about other qualifications e.g. PCEP (Youth Justice Board) being linked to and counting as PQ Awards. This does not seem to happen, but in an area of specialism like mine it would be a great incentive. |
| 30 | Opportunity to research particular areas of interest. |
| 31 | One day revision type training |
| 32 | I consider PQ courses that I completed were/are valuable to my work and in this respect appropriate. I am not aware of any others kinds? Of study that could support my practice. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 34 | Long distance learning more observed practice instead of spending days at college i.e. portfolio instead. |
| 35 | I would like to be given the opportunity and support to undertake my own research alongside my job in an area of interest. |
| 36 | No, as already studied several years for social work degree and PQCCA! |
| 37 | Evidence on direct work with children. A chance to work in other fields of child care, e.g. CAMHS, YOT, LAC Teams, a chance to swap jobs for a set period. Difficult in CP work, but it could beneficial to understanding team culture and understanding of roles. |
| 38 | Post qualifying work into psychology, as I feel that this is at the basis of all human interaction and practitioners do not learn it. |
| 39 | Once qualified, each social worker to continue their study for 5 years on a modular basis. One module per year so that 'time served' and increased skills/knowledge are rewarded at the end of 5 year period. What about 12 compulsory days (supported by employers) of study each year for social workers leading to PQ qualification! |
| 40 | Shorter courses that require less commitment on time, possibly modular that could build on as and when time/cost/workload/health allowed. You could then dip in and out to build up to full qualification. As it is this is a daunting task to commit to 18 months of study as there is a need to know that you will be in employment for that length of time. |
| 43 | The courses to be for one full block, and full time with pay. This would enable you to concentrate on study. |
| 44 | Something more specialised as the PQCCA was very repetitive of DipSW |
| 45 | A more flexible modular system, academic expectation very high, what is achieved in terms of qualification - low |
| 46 | As a FPSW, at times the PQCCA has felt hard to relate to my work, a more specialist PQ award would be helpful, or at least a modular approach to opt into more relevant modules. |
| 48 | Yes – specifically re working with children and families where there are substance misuse concerns. |
| 50 | Short term training 2-3 week comparing with 10 weeks or more, seminars, in-house training. I found that doing my PQ1 training and PQ2 training is much greater than 1 day training. |
| 53 | On-line, distance study may help |
| 54 | I had an assessor from the LA rather than a line manager. I feel this has made a huge difference to my achievements and would recommend others to do the same if possible. |
| 55 | Yes, seminars, lecture days more provided by LA's to teams to support own professional training. Quality of teaching on PQ courses needa to be considered. Feedback does not always seem to be taken on and the concerns of students seem to repeat themselves. |
| 56 | Specialist areas of study. |
| 58 | May be more aimed at specialism social workers, though I appreciate some specialisms are very small. May be for those who work more therapeutically compared to case management. |
| 59 | The new PQ framework will be/should be flexible enough to accommodate a broader range of awards, with some prospect of being able to design a course around own needs/interests. |
| 60 | Relevant to specialised teams, e.g. Meeting requirements of PQCCA is |

| | sometimes difficult as opportunities not always present in leaving care work and I am not prepared to take on work with another agency as would feel contrived and further reduce the time I have available for my own caseload. |
|---|---|
| 61 | The opportunity to study in a wider context to further develop practice and knowledge base. |
| 62 | I think there is quite a lot of overlap with some courses and the time spent on PQ studies is too much. The course could be streamlined but this may be happening with the revised PQ awards. |
| 63 | Maybe specific skills |
| 64 | I feel those who already have a degree should not have to do PQ2 unless the post-qualifying study was of a higher status:- Masters. For those who have completed a degree it feels like we have repeated the 3 year of the degree. This seems unfair. |
| 65 | Something which could be easily incorporated with Personal Development Plans and GSCC requirements, evidencing to be less work/repetitive. |

## 4.4. Stage 2: Data and Findings from Interviewee Sample

Appreciating the scale and range of my research sample so far, from the questionnaire returns, and those respondents (44 or 66%) who had agreed to take part in a personal interview, I decided on a random stratified interview sample of 12 (18% of original sample of 65). To avoid over-long journeys and time spent on each interview, I decided to adopt a maximum travelling range of 40 miles from Chichester. The respondent sample was chosen randomly with regard to; age (at least 2 respondents from each age group, NB only one 21-26 consented to be interviewed); gender (female 80% / male 20%); disability (5%); ethnicity (5%); employment sector (statutory 90% / voluntary 2% / independent 5% / private 3%). Some respondents were substituted to meet the convenient geographical sample, of no more than 40 miles travelling distance from Chichester (see Interview Sample Profile, December 2006; Appendix C1). To facilitate the interviews, I offered either suitable accommodation at the University, or to travel to respondent's own venue, which invariable was their place of work, where confidential interview suites were available. In one instance, I met the respondent in their own home, at their suggestion, at a time and date convenient to them. I asked permission to digitally record each interview, to assist with recording and transcribing our 'guided' conversation. I also asked respondents to choose a fictions name, in

order to anonymise their recorded responses, and protect their identities. The interviews took place from January to April 2007.  A small sample (two), were used as a pilot, to test the questions, which were discussed and refined with my supervisor, before continuing with my schedule of interviews (see Interview Questions, Appendix C3). I included a couple of open questions, to elicit each respondents view, on why it was good to undertake post-qualifying training and what advice, based on their personal experience, they would pass on to new PQ candidates.

## 4.5. Profile of Interview Sample respondents

For comparison purposes with my original questionnaire sample, tables 3 and 4 below, indicate the personal profile, qualification and post-qualifying record, of the respondents who volunteered for an individual interview. Actual respondent numbers are given in brackets. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore do not always equate to 100%.

**Table 3: Candidate Profiles of Interview Sample** (n=12)

| Gender (i) | Female: (9) **75%** | Male: (3) **25%** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age profile | 21-26: (1) **8%** | 27-32: (3) **25%** | 33-38: (2) **17%** | 39+: (6) **50%** |
| Ethnicity (ii) | White: (11) **92%** | BME: (1) **8%** | | |
| Disability (iii) | No: (10) **83%** | Yes: (2) **17%** | | |
| Agency (iv) | Statutory: (9) **75%** | Voluntary: (1) **8%** | Independent: (1) **8%** | Private: (1) **8%** |
| Social Work Qualification | New Degree: (2) **17%** | | | |
| | DipSW: (8) **67%** | | | |
| | CSS: (2) **17%** | | | |

Notes:   (i) only interviewing two male candidates at 17% would have been nearer the ratio of 18% of the larger sample group. Coincidently one male candidate was also the only BME male respondent.

(ii) due to the small size of sample one BME candidate equated to 8%, 3% higher than the larger sample ratio of 5%

(iii) although over-represented compared to larger group sample, both candidates were female

(iv) for balance at least one candidate from the voluntary, independent and private employers were included

**Table 4: Post-qualifying experience of the Candidates** (n=12)

| Award | Number of Candidates |
|---|---|
| PQ1 Certificate (i) | (10) 84% |
| Practice Teaching (ii) | (6) 50% |
| Child Care | (8) 66% |
| PQSW (Adults) (iii) | (3) 25% |
| AASW | (1) 8% |
| Total | **28\*** |

Notes:  (i) PQ1 Certificate includes PQ Year, PQ1 fast-track and PQ1 portfolio programmes

(ii) Includes Graduate Certificate in Practice Assessing (available from 2004)

(iii) Locally offered PQSW programme has Adult Services focus

\* A total of 28 awards are held by the 12 interview candidates (some holding more than two e.g. PQ1 is an entry requirement for both the Child Care and Mental Health awards).

## 4.6. Emerging themes highlighted by interviewees

Once all the interviews were transcribed (see Interviews Transcripts, Appendix C5) I was able to identify common themes that emerged from the sample regarding respondents PQ experiences, be they positive or negative, i.e. where more than one respondent identified a topic or issue.  Where a topic or theme was highlighted by a number of respondents, this would be reflected in the number of direct quotes used, e.g. seven respondents stated pay and career progression was a positive issue, therefore, these seven quotes were used. Where only one respondent discussed their feeling regarding the marginality of voluntary sector, only that one quote was used.  However, I was selective, and did edit some quotes, where respondents mentioned a specific topic more than once, i.e. I only used one of each respondents quote per issue/theme. I have noted the number of respondents referring to a similar issue under each theme
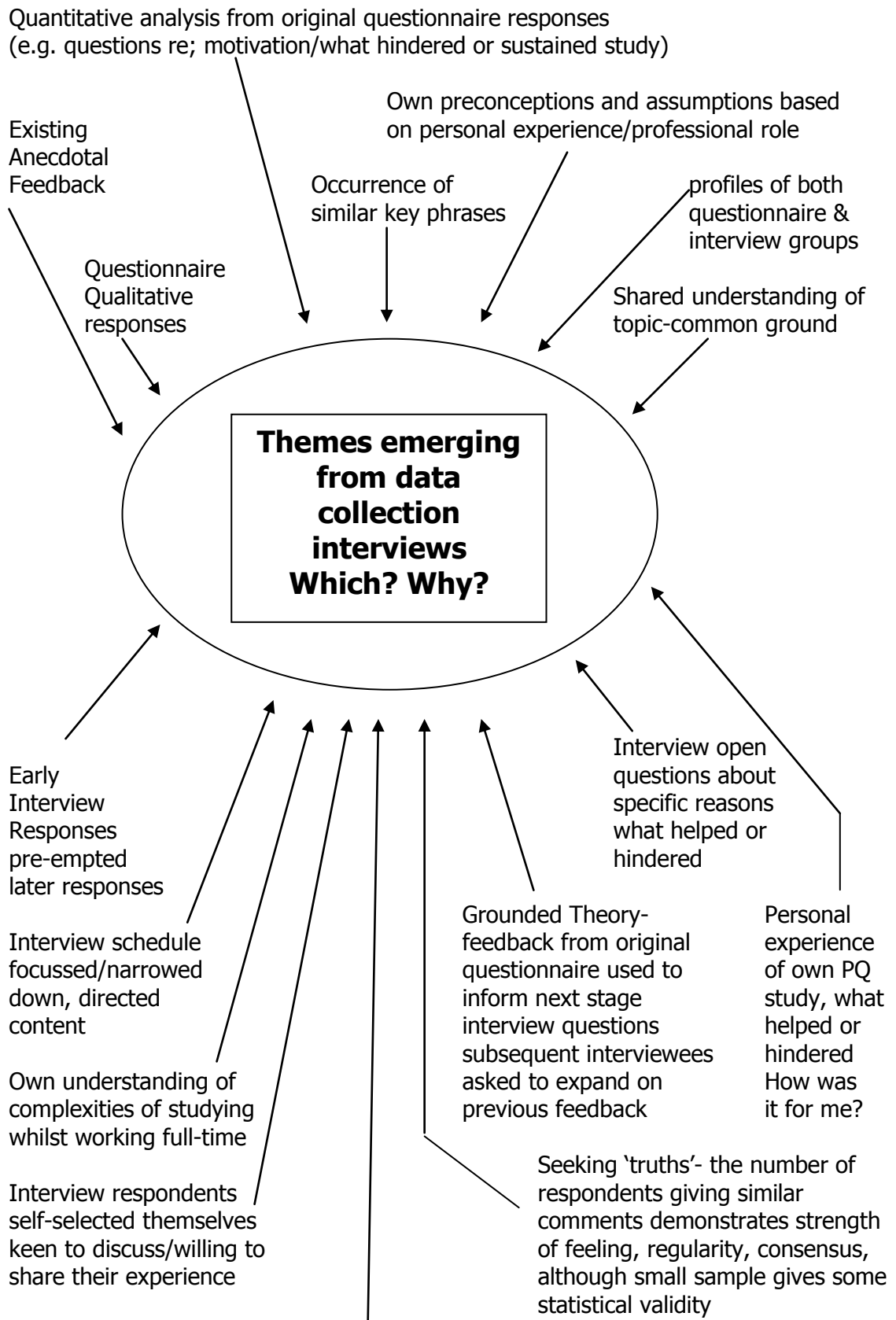
below e.g. (n=x).  To assist in this task I used a mine-mapping exercise (see Figure 7) to facilitate what Craswell (2005: p.75) suggests 'is a useful way to begin to gain textual control' and '...to mine the extensive knowledge you have on emerging from reading or other information-gathering.'  In trying to appreciate and understand each respondent's actual personal experience of post-qualifying training, I had to suspend my own preconceptions and assumptions and as Cohen et al (2000, p.23) remind us:

> 'Theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations: it should be 'grounded' on data generated by the research act (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).  Theory should not precede research but follow it.' (Cohen et al, 2000: p. 23)

Similarly, Cohen et al (2000, p.150) state 'theory derives from the data – it is grounded in the data and emerges from it'. Citing Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p.205) work, that identified; 'by going through the previous sections, particularly the search for confirming, negative and discrepant cases, the researcher is able to keep a 'running total' of these cases for a particular theory.'  This constant comparison of respondent's comments and the regularity of occurrence of specific issues not only provide a degree of statistical validity but also offers methodological triangulation (Cohen et al: 2000: p.113):

> 'Glaser (1978) indicates that constant comparison can proceed from the moment of starting to collect data, to seeking key issues and categories, to discovering recurrent events or activities in the data that become categories of focus, to expanding the range of categories.' (Cohen et al: 2000: p.151)

I grouped a number of interviewee's 'themed' responses under headings (related terms), which I believe best illustrates the issue highlighted, whether that is a 'positive', motivating factor, or considered a 'negative' factor or barrier. I then numbered these themes A to S, (with A having the overall greatest response [n=8] and R [n=1] having approximately the least response). Themes coded AA represent the comments on reasons why it is good to undertake post-qualifying training and BB lists the advice respondents would give to those about to begin their PQ studies. The number next to name in (brackets) is the respondents' research sample code number. The analysis and interpretation of data and findings from both the questionnaire and interview stages are discussed in Chapter 5.

Quantitative analysis from original questionnaire responses
(e.g. questions re; motivation/what hindered or sustained study)

Own preconceptions and assumptions based
on personal experience/professional role

Existing
Anecdotal
Feedback

Occurrence of
similar key phrases

profiles of both
questionnaire &
interview groups

Questionnaire
Qualitative
responses

Shared understanding of
topic-common ground

**Themes emerging
from data
collection
interviews
Which? Why?**

Early
Interview
Responses
pre-empted
later responses

Interview open
questions about
specific reasons
what helped or
hindered

Interview schedule
focussed/narrowed
down, directed
content

Grounded Theory-
feedback from original
questionnaire used to
inform next stage
interview questions
subsequent interviewees
asked to expand on
previous feedback

Personal
experience
of own PQ
study, what
helped or
hindered
How was
it for me?

Own understanding of
complexities of studying
whilst working full-time

Interview respondents
self-selected themselves
keen to discuss/willing to
share their experience

Seeking 'truths'- the number of
respondents giving similar
comments demonstrates strength
of feeling, regularity, consensus,
although small sample gives some
statistical validity

GT-gathering information, analysing, reference to theory,
drawing out key themes to be explored in future interviews.

**Figure 7: Mine-mapping of emergent themes from Interviews**

| **Theme A:**<br>**Interviewee** | **Workload relief** (n=8) |
|---|---|
| Marie (1) | 'I think towards the end, trying to get all the assignments finished and trying to hold a full caseload at work' |
| Mandy (3) | 'I think it's hard because people have heavy caseloads and it's just seen as an additional burden.' |
| Yvonne (4) | 'I think having the time is a big problem, because particularly the team I'm in at the moment, the volume of work is so much, so that people in my team are dropping out of college courses because they don't feel that they've got the time.' |
| Anne (5) | '...I think what puts a lot of people off is the workload...' |
| Georgina (6) | '...because they are meant to have a protected case load if you're doing the Child Care Award and I don't think a lot of people got that.' |
| Meredith (8) | 'Because it's impossible to do the learning if you're worried about who's going to visit that family, who's going to finish off that report. You can't possibly take on that learning if your head's full of that.' |
| Evie (10) | 'I don't think it can be workload relief because it's not true, it doesn't happen.  It may be agreed to but it doesn't happen, so something's got to change, because you can all say it...the managers aren't being awful it's just the workloads exactly the same, they just haven't got anyone to give it to.' |
| Isaac (11) | '...although managers would recognise that you were doing these courses, it didn't really relate in terms of case reduction or an expectation that you'd have extra time to do it.  So really I felt I had to do a lot of it in my own time... I think people need to be given time to be able to do it as well.  I think people are concerned that it's just another add-on to their workload that they have.' |
| **Theme B:**<br>**Interviewee** | **Updating knowledge, skills and research findings** (n=8) |
| Marie (1) | 'It was a good opportunity to stop and take some time to, err...really look into your subject area and have a really good understanding of your own knowledge.' |
| Johnny (2) | 'I think really it's about responsibility for your professional practice and keeping that up-dated...and that you've got to |

realise you do work in a very, very changeable environment, and you need to keep abreast of that.'

Georgina (6)   '...it gives you a lot more time to reflect on cases...so it kind of related practice and theory together. I do think the benefits are definitely having that one day off a week to reflect on your caseload, that's really good.'

Frank (7)   '...definitely helping me keep abreast of kind of current... child care topics which is really relevant for me at the moment. The big bit for me I think is just getting out of the office and actually looking back on things that we do, that we never, ever do on a day-to-day basis really.'

Meredith (8)   'I think the job is very, very difficult. I think it's a job that needs considerable levels of skill and knowledge and I think because of that you certainly need to undertake the course (PQCCA). It's the whole thing about what it means to be a practitioner now working in the twenty-first century...'

Hannah (9)   'Professionally you shouldn't expect to become qualified and that's it! It's continuous learning. Continuous development...to learn, not stagnate...and the world is changing so, so quickly and social work is changing...so you've got to, you've got to up-date your knowledge.'

Isaac (11)   'I think for me it was just learning something or adding to my knowledge really. As a qualified social worker I think it was actually learning something new or developing what I already know. So I liked that aspect of it. I think people understanding actually it can help their practice'

Kate (12)   'The most I've liked is taking some time out to think about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it and to learn about what backs that up...'

**Theme C:**   **Pay grading – career progression – promotion** (n=7)
**Interviewee**

Marie (1)   'Yeah, it's definitely an incentive. I think I see it in the long term as an incentive. I think it will always be an incentive as we don't get paid enough.'

Johnny (2)   'I think it's been kind of done in a way with the grading...that certainly in West Sussex I know that you can become a Senior Social Worker if you have PQ1 and the Practice Teachers Award or the Child Care Award. So that obviously gives you a) money and b) status, so that makes it attractive.'

| | |
|---|---|
| Mandy (3) | 'This is an honest interview? The pay rise. Complete honesty... To get senior-ship, career progression. To achieve PQSW and get senior social worker pay grading.' |
| Georgina (6) | 'May be a salary increase might be an incentive?' |
| Meredith (8) | 'I've had not one penny for doing this extra work...not one penny...which I think is diabolical!' |
| Evie (10) | 'You don't really get much for passing. A couple of grand bonus would be nice!' |
| Kate (12) | 'If you're along-standing worker you could do all this work and you won't get anything financial from it, so why do it?' |

**Theme D: Beneficial to service users, carers and families – promotes greater competence and confidence** (n=7)

**Interviewee**

| | |
|---|---|
| Johnny (2) | '...generally because it means I've been a more informed practitioner. Whether or not people take that on board is an entirely different story. At least I'm starting from an evidence-based standpoint really.' |
| Mandy (3) | 'I think it does because it's linked to registration and I think it's safer for the public to have social workers who are registered. I think the more status we have, the more confidence it would instil in them.' |
| Frank (7) | '...more indirectly because I went on then to supervise a number of students who I certainly hope...well I know some of them still think they're probably doing pretty good practice so I'd like to think I'd played a little part in that.' |
| Meredith (8) | 'It means because we have a student we can work with more families. That means they may not have to wait so long to receive a service.' |
| Hannah (9) | 'PQ should help with retention. Because people moving on is a big problem for the public. An organisation with a good PQ programme should hold on to its workers.' |
| Evie (10) | 'So I think the service users do get a lot of benefit from it. But it all depends on the individual how you take your learning.' |
| Isaac (11) | 'I think for me it's because it has enhanced my practice and I'm a better practitioner for it.' |

**Theme E:**  **Networking and sharing practical experience with others – learning from others** (n=5)

**Interviewee**

Johnny (2)   'I suppose the networking has increased, with the people you can call on...something about your knowledge being broader.'

Mandy (3)   '...it's about comparing stories with other people and getting practical ideas and really about real practice cases, and complex cases and things...and being able to discuss issues that arise...'

Anne (5)   '...well I enjoyed the whole experience if you like, but I think what I enjoyed most that it was the opportunity to get together, not so much with other students, but other qualified social workers...'

Georgina (6)   'I think what's really good, is that you do meet with other social workers, because obviously in West Sussex but from all different areas and at different levels...'

Evie (10)   '...meeting colleagues from different settings...err...having fun with them, but also learning from them as well'

**Theme F:**  **Difficult to balance conflicting demands of work, family and study** (n=5)

**Interviewee**

Yvonne (4)   'I think balancing work and study...I think for me I have found that the hardest part of the course that I'm on at the moment.'

Meredith (8)   '...when you're talking about study; it's not just support from work it's also at home, because it has a huge impact on your home life.'

Hannah (9)   '...but I think I also just struggled to sit down and get it done (finding the time) because of the children... children family and work.'

Evie (10)   '...not particularly about the programme but about being a part-time worker.  That was a huge thing for me because it took a day out and I only work three days and also my daughter's three years old but she was very little when I joined the course. So I felt I was juggling a lot, because doing that and the essays and everything else.'

Isaac (11)   'Sometimes difficult to do as well as you think you probably

could have done, while you're still working.  I had quite a lot of work commitments at the time I was doing it.  So it was quite difficult fitting it in...'

| **Theme G:** **Interviewee** | **Anxiety coping with academic requirements** (n=4) |
|---|---|
| Marie (1) | '...the recognition of bringing up my old feelings about my ability, in terms of my English and written work, you know. That hasn't improved greatly.' |
| Mandy (3) | '...some people are not academic minded, they'll be fantastic at their job but try to put an essay together and they fall to pieces.' |
| Frank (7) | '...it's quite intimidating to go back to university and do stuff like that.  Could be an anxiety issue, could be a kind of pre-registration type meeting for those people who'd like to find out about those kind of issues.' |
| Meredith (8) | '...although when I first went to college I was a bit daunted because everyone on the course seemed so young.  It was quite strange going back as a mature student.  Because I hadn't been to college for years...sort of anxieties that doing assignments and having to pass and not wanting to fail.  I found it very stressful from that point of view.' |

| **Theme H:** **Interviewee** | **Lack of adequate study leave** (n=4) |
|---|---|
| Marie (1) | '...when you're working with a heavy caseload.  It's just really horrendous and you feel you're letting yourself down because you're not giving it the time...I think we got three study days, I think that should have been a little bit more.' |
| Meredith (8) | '...definitely that, because I think people are so overwhelmed almost by what work needs to be done, that's it difficult for them to have the time to think outside their little area they're working with really.' |
| Isaac (11) | '...and you also felt that, in terms of, the team you kind of felt a bit responsible for other members of the team as well, because you was aware that if you had to take some time out, then the team would have to carry perhaps what you could have done. So I think that was...I think if they'd have been a better work load relief really...from the department...actually it's a course that you have to have time to do.' |

| Kate (12) | '...if it was acknowledged in some way, the amount of work that you put into something, because the majority of that is hours and hours of work at home on top of...' |
|---|---|

**Theme I: Interviewee** **Compulsion – mandatory PQCCA for child care workers** (n=4)

| Marie (1) | '...when we went to out first couple of induction days at the university, I never heard so much complaining about having to do this, and I was like...I was looking forward to do this.' |
|---|---|
| Johnny (2) | 'From the way I've seen how the new framework (PQ) is going to work is that everybody is going to be expected to do it. Like this is your on-going professional development...' |
| Meredith (8) | 'Another thing about PQ I didn't like, lots of people doing the course had to do it! And that was very much around that you had to do it...also a pressure. Because it was part of the PQ...you had to do within so many years (PQCCA) and there was this fear that you've got to do it. I've got all this work to do yet I'm here on the course. So that spoilt the learning of it.' |
| Evie (10) | 'I have to say, and I know there are people who hated it, we had a group and we enjoyed it. We enjoyed the time together and we made time for it, whilst some people really hated being there.' |

**Theme J: Interviewee** **Helps with GSCC PRTL** (n=4)

| Yvonne (4) | 'Keeping up to date with current policies, procedures, research...keeping your mind refreshed...this in turn benefits the people you're working with.' |
|---|---|
| Anne (5) | 'You know its evolving all the time and I think if you continue training then obviously it benefits the public...' |
| Frank (7) | 'Another possible way of selling it is the fact you do have to do a certain amount of hours post-qualifying and certainly when you're on the PQ you don't have to do anything extra to that, which has been a bonus for me.' |
| Isaac (11) | 'It gives you more than enough hours for re-registration, that's the benefit. But I also think it's a benefit because it makes you think that actually there are other learning opportunities out there that you need to continue to do really to improve your practice.' |

| **Theme K:** **Travel distance to college too far/wish to stay local** | |
|---|---|
| **Interviewee** | (n=4) |

| Mandy (3) | '...getting there and back is an absolute nightmare. (Chichester) For someone who doesn't drive.' |
|---|---|
| Georgina (6) | 'Travelling...definitely, because I live in Brighton and was at Uni in Chichester and I couldn't understand why, when you've got the Consortium saying that they work with Sussex Uni as well as Chichester, why couldn't I have gone to Sussex?' |
| Hannah (9) | 'When I did the master modules (at Southampton)… there were two of them, they were taught at Southampton so I stayed away… and they were weeks, a bulk week (block study) so that was travel. Anything for me at Southampton is a long way (160 mile round trip) When you've got children, my children were younger then.' |
| Evie (10) | 'I think the biggest things have been negatively how difficult it was being part-time and travelling to Chichester...it would have been nice to have had somewhere more local to have done the studying really.' |

| **Theme L:** **Little or no direct impact on general public at this stage** | |
|---|---|
| **Interviewee** | (n=4) |

| Georgina (6) | 'I think the general public would expect them to be continuing to train, just like I would, as the general public, I would expect an ambulance person, or a fireman, or a police officer to carry on training. I'm all for it, and I think the general public would probably. But to be honest the general public don't like social workers full stop, so doesn't really matter… especially in child care.' |
|---|---|
| Frank (7) | 'I guess it would be a good thing bringing us in line with people who the public certainly the media and all the rest seem to portray in a slightly better light than social workers...people like nurses, people like that, because they're all qualified and trained 'proper professionals', also I don't see it any harm if we become 'proper professionals'. |
| Evie (10) | 'I may be wrong but I don't think the public have a clue what we do?' |
| Isaac (11) | 'I'm not certain that people really appreciate what social workers do, some people do but there's a lot of public misconception of social work. I'm not sure. We're always getting 'slagged off' as social workers.' |

| **Theme M:** **Management and team support needed** (n=4) | |
|---|---|
| **Interviewee** | |
| Mandy (3) | 'Discuss it with your supervisor and if you're struggling you've got to let them know because you can't juggle everything and if some things got to give and if it ends up being your work that gives, then it's the service user that suffers…' |
| Anne (5) | '…you need a manager on your side. I'm fortunate in that respect, as I have got a manager on my side and she's quite committed to training of any sort.' |
| Georgina (6) | 'I was lucky, I've got a fantastic manager and I did have a protected case load and if at any time I said, I can't cope with this… but it didn't happen because she was always on the ball. I know at the beginning of the Child Care Award managers were invited along, and mine came along, but I know there were a lot of managers that didn't come along, with their social worker.' |
| Kate (12) | 'I guess in terms of an incentive, it would be nice if team managers are really recognising that in order to develop and to keep on top of research, to really applying academic learning to your practice that you really need to do some kind of regular study.' |
| **Theme N:** **Not enough professional supervision** (n=2) | |
| **Interviewee** | |
| Johnny (2) | 'The one other thing I didn't like about PQ1, was that there was too many people who were clearly not getting good enough supervision, that they used the lecturers.' |
| Georgina (6) | 'I think, a lot again social workers were saying they were… you know, the Child Care Award wasn't discussed, or the PQ1 wasn't discussed. Well I'd say to them, make sure it is then! Put it on the agenda. When you go in and your manager asks; what do you want to discuss, it's not just your cases…' |
| **Theme O:** **Need for more discrete time and space for reflection, application and evaluation of PQ learning** (n=2) | |
| **Interviewee** | |
| Evie (10) | 'It's time and space to reflect on your practice, which you don't get the opportunity to do as much in your working life…I just really appreciated that time and also the fact that I could do reading and research and all of that really.' |

| Kate (12) | 'You don't have much space at work to apply this. That's where I get frustrated because I think actually I want to take what I've learnt and put it into practice. But the reality is...is that, that's quite difficult.' |
|---|---|

**Theme P: Interviewee**  **Promotes evidence-based practice** (n=2)

| Frank (7) | '...actually we've just done one of the best bits...the child observation, we've just finished doing, which was really, really good. That was just fascinating to watch.' |
|---|---|
| Isaac (11) | '...we did a section on risk assessments, which again I think was really useful...looking at different risk assessments...different risk assessment tools. I found that really, really useful in terms of my own practice...applying it to my own practice.' |

**Theme Q: Interviewee**  **Anti-discriminatory practice and lecturers experience** (n=2)

| Johnny (2) | 'I thought that the (module) co-ordinators were very defensive about equal opportunities, particularly with regard to race.' |
|---|---|
| Evie (10) | '...some of the lecturers...they've been out of the game too long and their lack of understanding of what's actually out there in the real world was quite evident.' |

**Theme R: Interviewee**  **Voluntary sector feel marginalised and separate** (n=1)

| Meredith (8) | **'(33:40; Working with West Sussex on the PQCCA, has that helped bring you closer?)** No difference! No different relationship at all! **(33:53; ...so you feel slightly separate?)** Yeah, Yeah, definitely and that's how it's always going to be viewed. **(34:02-34:50; shared the reality of marginality for the voluntary sector).'** |
|---|---|

In response to the prompt question (5a) 'Why should you undertake PQ training?' interviewees shared their own reasons for post-qualifying study and what factors might be attractive to potential candidates. They also shared useful advice on how to prepare and manage the PQ experience, a selection of comments are recorded below. The analysis and interpretation of interview comments are discussed in the following Chapter 5.

| **Theme AA:** **Interviewee** | **Why it's Good to do PQ!** (n=12) |
|---|---|
| Marie (1) | 'Oh, I think it's great.  I'm all in favour of PQ training.  I'm a lucky one, because I've come into social work at a time when everything's just 'kicking-off', in a good sense.  We're becoming more recognised, more professional, more training.' |
| Frank (7) | 'I think, like I say, public perceptions aside, I think it is a good thing for us to be doing something.  I think, you know, it can't be healthy to go and train and then fifteen-twenty years on all you've got to show for it is fairly generic in-house courses...' |
| Meredith (8) | 'I've been doing it for twenty odd years...but it's nice to have that opportunity to, you know, catch up to date...learn new things, re-evaluate what you are doing.' |
| Isaac (11) | 'I think you need to do it to up-date your practice, to reflect on your practice, develop it and particularly in terms of what's changing and new.' |
| Kate (12) | 'To really recognise that if you're going to get anything out of it you have to put a lot in.  You need to do it at a time in your life when you have got the time to...the head space to think about it.' |

| **Theme BB:** **Interviewee** | **Advice for would be candidates** (n=12) |
|---|---|
| Marie (1) | 'OK, read, read, read everything that is given to you, in the sense of, the course structure and make sure you've got a good understanding of what is expected of you, in terms of, assignments.' |
| Johnny (2) | 'I would establish a work-based contract about what you were going to be expected to do and in terms of study-time etc. and all of that to be clarified beforehand, to ensure your manager protected that.' |
| Mandy (3) | 'I think one of the biggest benefits would be if you had one central contact person who you could liaise with about the best pathway to take, what implications it has for your job role, you know who would know everything.' |
| Anne (5) | 'I think the best piece of advice, because obviously you have to manage the PQ workload with your own workload, is firstly to |

make sure you take your study days, because you'll need them, to prepare well, things like assignments, presentations and such like.'

Georgina (6)      '...stress to management if you feel your case load is too much and you can't be doing it, you just cannot cope with all the cases.'

Evie (10)        'I suppose just take it for what it is, enjoy the time and space and not get caught up in, 'it has to be done'.  Don't worry about it, there's always enough people...you can read enough portfolio's, essays, that kind of stuff to give you any help.'

Isaac (11)       'You need to be really organised.  You need to be really committed to it, and they need to be organised...and their time management needs to be good.'


## 4.7. Stage 3: Professional Group discussion

A third and final stage of my qualitative research, was to share my data with a range of professional groupings of employers, educators and social work regulators, a total of 18 professionals.  This was to ascertain the validity and credibility of my research findings, and explore the extent to which generalisations could be made.  In doing so I adapted my data to produce a shortened version in a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix D1), which I followed-up with the following questions;

**a) What helps promote success in post-qualifying study?**

**b) What hinders success in post-qualifying study?**

**c) What would improve post-qualifying study?**

The professional groups were representative of major social work employers and educators across the Surrey and Sussex Skills for Care sub-region and supplemented by a meeting with the PQ Lead Inspector at the GSCC national headquarters in London.

1) Skills for Care, Practice Learning Co-ordinator Network (4th October 2007)

2) Meeting with GSCC Social Work PQ Lead Inspector (26th October 2007)

3) University School of Social Studies Research Group (29th October 2007)

The transcripts of these group discussions are included at Appendices D2-4.

Using my three questions as headings I have referred to the comments and feedback from these professional groups, selecting what appeared to me as, significant relevant points, which I then interpret and analyse further in the next Chapter 5.

## 4.8. What helps promote success in post-qualifying study?

**Professional Group discussion 04.10.07**

**CC1:** 'Once they're into education and training, as this paper shows, it clearly motivates some social workers, it energises them, it excites them, it makes them feel valued, it enhances their knowledge and practice, and they enjoy the networking.  Sadly for some those benefits are unseen.'

**Professional Group discussion 29.10.07**

**DP:** 'Whether this means that **(slide 5)** 95% and 93% of people feel they are not adequately skilled or knowledgeable to do their jobs already.  That's the interesting one isn't it?  It's great from an educator's point of view to say that isn't it lovely that people want to increase their knowledge and improve their practice, but you could say –I'm only begging the question- does this say something about how the self-worth and identity of social workers and the profession feels about its self?'
'Would you need to analyse this as to length of time in practice...because you could imagine this would be high for those who have only been in the profession for a year or two...but for people who are doing PQ after twenty years practice...all I'm saying is that it would be interesting to analyse the differences between age groups.'

**SW:** 'I don't really understand the question?  Why would we be saying at our age...why wouldn't we be interested in increasing our knowledge and skill?'

**DP:** 'I'm not saying that...I'm just suggesting that the age differential may need further analysis, just in case there are significant factors.  Because I think it hinges around that question...what do they want the knowledge and skills for?  Is it because they don't feel adequately skilled to do their job at the moment – therefore they need these additional learning opportunities.  Or is it, they do feel skilled, but realise that it's an ongoing process.  That's all I'm asking. Whether that's the underlying question to ask?'

**SB:** 'I think there's something also about the status of the teaching, whether it's true or not, but people might prefer to come to University, in preference to doing a workshop...it devalues it.  Psychologically it devalues the teaching and social workers are already devalued enough.  It's giving it that academic kudos of being at the University.'

**CS:** 'Some of the students have valued how coming to University helps separate out work and study.'

### 4.9. What hinders success in post-qualifying study?

**Professional Group discussion 04.10.07**

**CC2:** 'It is a huge expectation we have of people…who when they finish their degree may then have potentially another seven or eight years ahead of them…and you don't really know where it is going to take you? That wouldn't happen for example in medicine.'

**CC2:** 'Enhanced practice is not valued. The actual experience of the service user is not valued by senior managers…if your senior manager doesn't actually value the social worker's increased knowledge; it's a big disincentive for people…and not forgetting that in the main the most senior managers are unlikely to have engaged with this PQ framework at all. The focus is on meeting targets rather than promoting good practice. Social work is a much smaller partner in the new organisations.'

**S4C:** 'The old PQ consortia actually had access to bursaries and locally they were able to provide these bursaries, particularly to the voluntary and independent agencies that supported people through their awards. Those bursaries have disappeared, because GSCC isn't providing them and the new area PQ planning networks that replace PQ consortia, are now responsible for collaboration between employers and HEI's.'

**CC2:** 'Reflected in your research, the new PQ framework doesn't provide the flexibility of the old PQ framework, because if you remember, you could develop a personalised portfolio route and manage your own learning, which was very successful in some local authorities. The new framework doesn't enable people to take control of their own learning, which I think is a really big issue as far as PQ is concerned, especially around portfolio development which is not in the new system. I think that is a big, big mistake.'

**Meeting with professional organisation (GSCC) 26.10.07.**
Regarding barriers to PQ training CW referred me back to the Aims in Section One of the GSCC (March 2006, p.4) *'Post-qualifying framework: for social work education and training'* which requires awards to be 'accessible' and 'modular' as well as being, 'meaningful and easily understood by practitioners'.

**Professional Group discussion 29.10.07**

**SW:** 'If you get some of this into perspective, you're talking about child care social workers having six cases, that's not a huge workload. (But not for newly qualified workers) I'm talking about those qualified for a lot longer than that. It's the sort of balances that social workers have to make; it isn't something we can do.'

**DG:** 'But surely that's the trade off with pay and progression because they can move up the career grade as they achieve PQ awards. It's an interesting thought in relation to those people who choose to undertake study as part of their life and those who are doing it for promotion. The big question raised here is about the nature of PQ work vis-à-vis the profession. What's the expectation nationally of the profession, as it

might be for doctors or teachers, in sustaining your professional development, in the context of a reasonable working week?  Because let's not forget Open University students have to do this.'

**CS:** 'With PQ you're got a degree of ambiguity about its value and if there is any value to it, from the point of view of the employer organisation, it's not an immediate fix.  You're not necessarily seeing all the value of improved practice as an immediate pay-back, so what you've got is a fairly long-term benefit which is difficult to implement within organisations that are , by and large, short-term in their objectives, i.e. dealing with today's workload.  Employers may not be able to afford the aspirational needs of social worker's CPD, therefore creating a tension between aspiration and reality.  There is something that we never really acknowledge in social work education, is the fact that when you're doing PQ education you need to engage in your own time, especially when you may be feeling beleaguered...stress is not particularly acknowledged...it's not surprising then that people don't necessarily want – or don't have a huge enthusiasm – for doing more training.  It seems to me, that often social workers at PQ level almost feel betrayed.  They come into a profession and no body likes them and here I am being made to do this.  This is where national bodies don't actually recognise what happens in practice.  Whether we can make any generalisations from this small research project that reflects a wider national perspective needs further exploration.  If you start having gradations of skills – the implication is that you are 'good enough' at a certain level, whereas the logic in an organisation would be – you have a job role which has a job description and that's good enough.  In other words, it's okay to be a good social worker at a basic level, without getting promotion...that's what you want to do...that's how it should work, but if it blurs into this idea that you're not 'good enough' unless you progress, we have a problem there.'


### 4.10. What would improve post-qualifying study?

**Professional Group discussion 04.10.07**
**CC2:** 'For me its something about organisations, particularly local authorities, as the biggest employers of social workers, is to look at career pathways and mechanisms to keep excellent practitioners at the front line, supporting the people to do and also supporting those as practitioner learners, teachers.'
**Group:** 'Hear! Hear!'


**Meeting with professional organisation (GSCC) 26.10.07.**
'It would be useful to contextualise where employers pay and progression polices are used to motivate practitioners to undertake PQ study.'

'The high level of response to motivating factors could be used both to design and market awards whilst also raising the status of the social work post-qualifying training in comparison to other social welfare professions.'

**Professional Group discussion 29.10.07**

**DG:** 'From my experience of some the older staff I've worked with, which seems to be the significant number of your research respondents, were threatened in a different way by PQ, as they felt that all their previous knowledge was not valued. Did you find that in your own research?'

**DG:** 'But don't you think this comes down to the attitude of the candidate's manager. I know some managers are very pro-learning and would use their discretion to support learners in their team.'

**TC:** 'It's not just down to the individuals but also the culture of the organisation, where by as part of an individual's professional development the expectation is to undertake certain learning. The organisation itself needs to be considered as a learning organisation and promote their workers development.'

**DG:** 'Where there any examples cited on flexible learning e.g. on-line training packages, a county meeting or team Away-days?'

**R:** 'Some respondents suggested a monthly input, not constrained by the academic year.'

**R:** 'What did come out was that some learning went over familiar ground, but in a different way that moved it on, in such a way that the 'penny dropped' and the 'jig-saw' started to fit together. That is people internalised their knowledge and skills, gaining confidence in the process and supported by their networking with other practitioners.'

# Chapter 5: Analysis and Interpretation of Data and Findings

The analysis of my data and findings follows a similar format to the previous chapter, beginning with Stage 1: Questionnaires, using the questions asked as discrete headings.  Similarly, at Stage 2, I have examined the emerging themes from interviews, highlighted in Chapter 4. In the spirit of self-determination and 'service user involvement', I have quoted directly from respondents, to give a 'voice' to their expertise and resourcefulness.  I have offered an interpretation of each section, referring to documentation within the appendix, and pick-up selected issues to be further explored in Chapter 6, Implications and Recommendations.

## 5.1. Stage 1: Findings from Questionnaires

**Funding post-qualifying study** (Question 8)

It would appear, that almost all candidates, who chose to undertake post-qualifying training, had their course fees and expenses met by their employers and therefore indicates, that finding the funding for study was not a disincentive to start PQ training.  The majority of this funding would have been supported by various government training grants, administered formally by TOPSS, and now the responsibility of Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council. For example, from 2000 the PQ1 Certificate and the Child Care Award has been supported by a ring-fenced grant, to cover course fees and 'back-fill' course replacement cost, via the Training Support Grant from the Department of Health.

**Expectations of Employer** (Questions 10 and 11)

A strong commitment (98%), on the employer's part, to encourage PQ training may also be in response to government targets and guidance, regarding the improvement of social work practice for children and adults, e.g. targets were set for child care social workers to achieve PQCCA by 2010 (DH, 2000).  As the achievement of the PQ1 Certificate was a required entry qualification for many further PQ awards, this became the most popular and commonly studied award, attractive to both employers and candidates alike. Some employers, such as

WSCC, have offered similar opportunities for Adult Services social workers to progress to the PQSW, in the spirit of fairness and equality.

**What are the barriers to post-qualifying training?** (Question 12)

Neither the cost, access to a local PQ award or the lack of information about such training, proved a significant barrier to would be candidates. Between 65%-85% of respondents, found these factors, of little or no hindrance to the up-take of post-qualifying study. This may be partly due to a well established PQ Consortium directory of awards, regularly circulated across the Surrey and Sussex sub-region, to both employers and potential candidates. The data provides evidence of well established partnership arrangements, collaboration and training agreements between employers and PQ programme providers. However, the length of the post-qualifying course and the time available to complete, were much more of an issue for candidates. Over a half (58%) of candidates, found some difficulty in these two areas. From their responses, being part-time employees was a recurring theme, for those workers who felt that, despite working reduced hours, they were expected to complete their studies at the same pace and within the same timeframe as their full-time colleagues. Those full-time colleagues may view this slightly differently, arguing that they had more workplace and workload pressures to contend with, over the same period of study. As the following comments from respondents indicate, for some candidates, caring for children and travelling distances were problematic areas to be overcome;

> **Comment 24:** 'Structured training at Chichester University is difficult to fit in with child care. Travel to Chichester is difficult and time consuming from the north of the county'.
> **Comment 39:** 'Already working unsocial and long hours, family commitments, job commitments, confusing information, lack of places, criteria for placement (by employer) current case load and inroads into private life'.

Collectively these factors constituted significant barriers for candidates returning to study, whist working either full or part-time. The data reveals that there is a possibility that gender, and more likely age may be influencing factors. 82% of respondents were female, roughly the actual percentage of female employees

across the whole qualified social work workforce, and coupled with part-time working is an indication of their primary care responsibility for family and children. As 72% of respondents, identified themselves as aged over 39, this might indicate, that balancing work, study and family commitments was a difficult activity for a significant minority of candidates, over two thirds of respondents appear to be in the age range where child rearing might not be so time-consuming or problematic.  Of course, this does not exclude the possibility of caring for older or disabled family members.  Time away from the workplace for formal teaching or private study, appears to be a significant issue for candidates across the board, with many candidates citing the lack of adequate study leave, provided by their employers, as problematic, evidenced by the comments from respondents; 26, 28, 35, 39 and 65 (see Chapter 4), for example;

> **Comment 28:** 'Time from the workplace could be an issue, particularly if more than one student wished to study.'
> **Comment 35:** 'Employers not wanting to release the candidate for the university days or reduce caseload.

**Motivations for undertaking post-qualifying training** (Question 13)

Post-qualifying study is demanding, especially in the context of a busy working week.  It is important, therefore, to know what motivates people to undertake it.  The data reveals, from their scoring, that the respondents are highly motivated to undertake post-qualifying study, citing, opportunities to increase their knowledge base (95%); opportunities to improve their practice skills (93%); an appetite for life long learning and personal achievement (86%), and GSCC re-registration requirements (83%).  Although, one might conclude, that as these candidates have already demonstrated their motivation, by the fact they chose to respond to the questionnaire in the first instance, and therefore, may not be the most representative sample of the wider PQ candidate community.  Of those who commented further on personal motivating factors, a significant majority highlighted career progression, promotion opportunities and improved salary grading as key motivators for post-qualifying training, (see

comments made by respondent numbers; 6, 8, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 35, 39, 43, 44 and 56).  Some respondents were more explicit at to what motivated their study;

> **Comments 19 and 56:** 'Money!'
> **Comment 35:** 'Require PQCCA to be eligible to progress to be higher grade social worker.'

This is not surprising as the majority of respondents were employed by agencies in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors, that operate career and pay grade progression polices, linked to the achievement of nationally recognised awards.  In retrospect, it may have been beneficial to have asked a direct question, about the importance of pay and career progression, rather than rely on my assumptions regarding candidates employers' progression polices. However, feedback from the interview sample respondents, identified pay and career progression as a significant motivation in over 90% of cases. The range of motivating factors, is similar to those findings of Doel et al (2006: p.14), who identified differences between factors which we might call 'push' motivations; 'such as requirements to pursue post-qualifying education and 'pull' motivations, such as the opportunity for personal development. Career development and financial incentive might be best explained as a combination of push and pull.'

**Factors which helped sustain post-qualifying training** (Question 14)
The greatest factor in sustaining candidate's post-qualifying training, was seen as support from their line manager and team members (84%), followed closely by the availability of regular discrete study-time or study leave (70%). This highlights the importance of the workplace and team support networks, in sustaining candidate's motivation and morale whilst studying.  This echoes the research study carried out by Doel et al's (2006: p.15) PQ research findings who cite a study by Turner (2000), which underlines the benefit of a candidates' line manager establishing a supportive relationship early, with a focus 'on the developmental and supportive aspects of supervision that may have been eroded over recent years in favour of a narrower, more managerial

approach'.  While most candidates felt fairly confident, regarding their progress meetings with their practice assessor or mentor, over two thirds (69%) did feel it was important to have clear guidance on academic expectations and assessment requirements. Similarly over half (56%) felt that the teaching content helped sustain their studies.   A small minority of respondents (numbers; 23, 35, 39, 47 and 48), demonstrated their keen commitment and enthusiasm for post-qualifying learning and achievement, for example;

> **Comment 35:** 'Self motivation and enthusiasm to gain award and progress through career.'
> **Comment 48:** 'My own motivation and I wanted to 'lead by example' i.e. to encourage colleagues in undertaking further training and be able to inform and show service users how the centre is committed to improving, keeping up to date with current training.

This 'elite' group of practitioners, may share their enthusiasm and encourage others, or serve as negative disincentive, for those less able candidates.  Clearly candidate support, in its various forms, is a significant sustaining factor for post-qualifying study and getting these practicalities right from the start, would appear crucial to continued candidate progress and ultimate success.


**Factors which hindered post-qualifying training** (Question 15)

Candidates definitely identified workload pressures in their jobs as the factor which most hindered their post-qualification training (85%).  Coupled with 16% of respondents who saw the lack of line manager and/or team support as a negative factor, clearly the workplace situation constituted the greatest pressure on candidate's ability to manage their studies. Other factors, such as, academic or assessment load at 43%, and practice assessment requirements at 29%, were still significant problems for almost a third of candidates.  One might argue, that for some respondents, these factors would be exacerbated further, by the lack of team support of workload pressures.  For a minority of those candidates, who highlighted negative factors affecting their study, the strongest was the stress of managing the 'work-home-study-life' balance, and for some the lack of time, to even take advantage of allocated study leave, as commented on by respondent number 35: 'Inability to take study days due to

workload.'  Interestingly, the complexities of what sustains, and what hinders post-qualifying study, throw up some contradictory responses, which bear similarities with Doel et al's (2006: pp.15-16) research. They too found, that the most important factor, in helping sustain post-qualifying study, was line manager and team support (84%), whilst conversely fewer respondents, (16%) identified this as a hindrance to study. In Doel et al's 2006 study this was 71% and 24% respectively.  Doel et al (2006: p.16) ponder, that 'Perhaps we are seeing reflected in these figures the sense that, by and large, support and recognition are available on a personal basis (e.g. the commitment of a mentor) but not at an organisational level (e.g. the relative lack of workload relief).'

**Advice for those considering post-qualifying training** (Question 16)

When considering advice for future PQ candidates, respondents almost unanimously advocated the following activities as good practice:

a) Preparation and planning with manager and team **(98%)**

b) enjoy new learning and practice skills **(96%)**

c) establish support networks early **(95%)**

**d)** being creative and realistic **(93%)**

Others, did however highlight, the importance of personal space, staying healthy and gaining support from friends and family (see comments from respondents numbers; 22, 26 and 39), for example;

> **Comment 22:** 'Be prepared to sacrifice your own personal time (110% needed).  Look after yourself, have regular supervision, be prepared to delegate your workload to colleagues.'

Whilst others thought that; being pro-active, involved and realistic in your expectations were good habits to develop (see comments from respondents numbers; 20, 35, 47, 58 and 65). Not surprisingly, as all respondents had completed at least one if not more post-qualifying award, they emphasised the importance of negotiating clear line manager and team support.  Doel et al (2006: p.18), found that this was certainly the priority for experienced candidates. 'Current candidates were more concerned to stress the support of the supervisor or line manager (19%), compared with past candidates (3%).'

Close behind at 95%, respondents were keen to encourage, would-be candidates, to seek out and develop useful supportive networks at a very early stage, be they professional, personal or domestic.  As respondent no. 20, stated; 'My advice would be to be an active, rather than a passive, participant. The students who struggle; are bored; de-motivated are often those who don't take responsibility for their own learning: they expect to be spoon-fed and guided by tutors and training officers.'  The importance of pre-planning extended to family, friends, and personal well-being, where, respondent no. 26 encourages candidates to, 'Get family on your side and stay healthy.' Respondent  no. 47, sounded a note of realism, 'Take the course chunk by chunk, try and keep on top of things, don't leave things to the last minute, get on and organise child observations, otherwise the next requirement is on top of you.'

These factors and activities, identified by respondents, as good practice preparation for post-qualifying study, reflect strongly similar ideas raised by Doel et al's (2006) respondents;

> 'In particular, time management emerged as the strongest area for advice, with 37% citing it, usually with reference to the need to organise and plan time and not to leave things until the last minute.  As well as time management, would-be candidates were exhorted to make sure they take all their study time (mentioned by 21%) and to be prepared to study in their own time (6%).  The most important personal qualities were the ability to focus (9%), especially when the going got tough, and to be assertive (6%), particularly in terms of deciding whether this is the right time to undertake study.' (Doel et al, 2006)

Respondents were very positive about recommending post-qualifying study to colleagues, and at 96% echoed Rowland's (2003) regional survey, where he found, that 96% of the respondents would recommend the awards to others, though Doel et al (2006: p.19), saw this drop to 82%, in his own survey, although his respondents were a mixed group of social workers, not all of whom had completed a PQ award.

## What might have prevented a lapse in post-qualifying training?

(Question 17)

For those candidates who had experienced a lapse in their post-qualifying training, this was usually due to either ill health or related job pressures. For a small number, the expectations of achieving a certain academic level, or the assessment requirements had proved problematic (see comments from respondent numbers; 1, 7, 10 and 11). But for the majority of candidates, it still appears to be comments like; 'pressure of work, not enough study days', which are representative of this group. Keville (2002), in her study of candidates dropping out, conducted prior to the new social work degree, identified the two main factors were; lack of confidence in study skills and, with a small number of social workers (and possibly undiagnosed), learning needs such as dyslexia. She noted that 'staff must feel safe enough to discuss their individual learning needs, not just in an academic environment or with mentors, but with their line managers too:

> 'Programme organisers were increasingly aware that a significant minority were dropping out of the [PQ1] course. In [one] social services, 37 per cent of candidates were not completing the course and, in group supervision, agency mentors started to make links between this and an unexpected range of learning needs they had noticed with students. While these needs did not prevent workers performing effectively in practice, they affected their ability for written work,' (Keville, 2002).

Although, none of the respondents made specific mention of learning needs, there were pleas for clearer written guidance on academic and assessment expectations. Respondent No. 11 stated that, they needed '...clearer expectations of the academic level required to achieve an award, for students returning to study.' Bearing in mind, the age profile of respondents, this may indicate the need for input on study skills, especially for the more mature, often female returnee to higher education, who was also juggling the demands of work, home and child-care responsibilities. Similarly, Brown et al (2003) in their research suggested that many students found academic study daunting. 'Many had limited knowledge of, or limited access to, sources of either print or electronic information. Many students lacked basic searching and information

skills or said they lacked time to undertake literature research.' (Brown et al, 2003)

**Future post-qualifying plans or other kinds of training** (Question 18)

Respondents, were on the whole, very positive about their future post-qualifying training plans with two-thirds (66%), commenting on their proposed ideas and plans, and the possibility of more flexible modes of delivery.  Travel and available time for study, were still factors for those considering further study (see comments from respondents numbers; 23, 24, 30, 31, 34, 35, 40, 43, 45, 50 and 53). Areas for further study, focussed on; fostering; attachment; therapeutic interventions; adolescents; psychology; multi-professional working; and research in general.  Some examples of respondent comments were;

> **Comment 24:** 'Other locations than Chichester. More flexibility.  Didn't really want to follow portfolio route but is only possible way as I have 2 children under 5, one at school, live in Horsham, work part-time and find paying for any child care on top of what I already have to arrange to go to work is <u>not possible</u>. Whole course structure works against part-time workers and those with caring responsibilities.'
> **Comment 30:** 'Opportunity to research particular areas of interest.'
> **Comment 35:** 'I would like to be given the opportunity and support to undertake my own research alongside my job in an area of interest.'
> **Comment 40:** 'Shorter courses that require less commitment on time, possibly modular that could build on as and when time/cost/workload/health allowed. You could then dip in and out to build up to full qualification. As it is this is a daunting task to commit to 18 months of study as there is a need to know that you will be in employment for that length of time.'

The post-qualifying candidates were asked a supplementary question, about their future PQ plans and hopes for their CPD. This question also had a good completion rate, with 43 out of a possible 65 completions (66%).  Perhaps this response rate is to be expected, appreciating the fact that the majority of respondents could be assumed to have a positive CPD outlook, as they took time to take part in this research study, and in that sense where a captive audience.  Examples of candidate's commitment are;

> **Comment 21:** 'I believe in continuous learning and consolidation of learning.  I would like there to be support to people taking post

qualifying courses which are more specialist, such as MA's – attachment and therapeutic interventions.

➢ **Comment 59:** 'The new PQ framework will be/should be flexible enough to accommodate a broader range of awards, with some prospect of being able to design a course around own needs/interests.'

Still as the comments below reveal, almost two-thirds of respondents were keen to undertake further post-qualifying training, which compares favourably with the study Doel et al (2006: p.25) undertook, where he states; '41% of current candidates felt largely positive, compared to 32% of past candidates.' If one takes a combined percentage of past and current candidates of Doel et al's study who were, on balance, largely positive about post-qualifying study, the resulting 37% response rate appears significantly lower than indicated by my current research. I would argue, this may well be due to the homogeneous characteristic of my research sample, where respondents' employer not only funded (95%) candidates, but had clear expectations that they should undertake further post-qualifying training (refer to questions 8, 10 and 11 in Chapter 4).

For a small minority (see comments from respondents numbers; 9, 12 and 36), the prospect of further training, was definitely not a personal priority and could be an indication of PQ fatigue, particularly for those transferring directly from qualification training, as indicated by respondent No. 36, 'No, as already studied several years for social work degree and PQCCA!' It is difficult to tell, whether the 34%, who chose not to answer this open question, could be considered to feel less positive about further post-qualifying training, and therefore the comparisons with Doel et al's (2006) study, are harder to make. Doel et al (2006: p.25) state; 'Overall, one in three of the candidates responding to this survey felt, on balance, negative about their experience of post-qualifying study'. I would suggest, that from the comments made by my questionnaire respondents, this study improves on that negative figure, and presents an overall more positive attitude towards continued professional training.

Where Doel et al's (2006) study went one step further, by quantifying respondent's specific future training under headings, namely, topic; focus; level and career and progression, my findings reveal that candidates are less preoccupied, regarding the variety of available taught practice topics, but more concerned with the style, format and timing of programme teaching. The responses, to what other kinds of post-qualifying training candidates were interested in (see question 18, Chapter 4), clearly focussed on alternative delivery options for PQ. Thirteen respondents, who expressed a preference for alternatives to traditional taught programmes, cited the following as more user-friendly options: One-day workshops (5); in-house programmes (2); modular system (2); portfolio route (2) and master's level awards (2). This equates to over 30% of candidates, looking for a more accessible route to acquiring their PQ Awards (GSCC, 2006: p.4), and endorses Doel et al's (2006) statement in their study, that; 'There is also an interest in developing flexible modes of delivery, especially distance and e-learning.' Another area of similarity, between the two studies, is the lack of 'efficient and effective' (GSCC, 2006a: p.4) management training. Although Doel et al (2006: p.23) makes the point, that for a significant number of candidates, post-qualifying training may lead to promotion and management roles and as they state; 'Continuing professional development is not just about practitioners but managers, too.' At least one respondent, in my study, lamented the lack of discrete inter-professional training for first-level managers, particularly in newly formed specialist multi-disciplinary teams.

> **Comment 29:** '...as a manager I am at a loss as to what is available for me, hence commencing the Practice Teaching Award. Also there was rumour about other qualifications e.g. PCEP (Youth Justice Board) being linked to and counting as PQ Awards. This does not seem to happen, but in an area of specialism like mine it would be a great incentive.'

It may be that, in an attempt to redress this imbalance, that the GSCC published one of its first guidance documents on 'Specialist standards and requirements for post-qualifying social work education and training: Leadership and Management' (GSCC, 2005a). A distinctive feature of these standards, acknowledges the multi-disciplinary nature of social care management '...and

recognises that this can mean managing staff from different professions and discipline across integrated and multi-agency settings and within a range of partnerships.' (GSCC, 2005a: p.4)

## 5.2. Stage 2: Emerging themes highlighted by interviewees

In stage 2, the interview subjects, drawn from a randomly selected stratified sample, were encouraged to talk more freely about their post-qualifying experiences, using a guided conversational technique and a semi-structured list of questions to facilitate this.  The gender, age, ethnicity and disability characteristics of the interviewees were approximately similar to those of original questionnaire sample and mirrored the type of social work agency in which they worked, and their initial professional qualification (see Chapter 4, Tables 1 and 3: Candidate Profiles and 2 and 4: Post-qualifying Experience). The majority of interviewees, were already well versed, in how the current post-qualifying programmes operated, with some already holding at least one, if not more PQ Awards (the sample having achieved, or nearly completed, twenty-eight PQ awards between them). When it came to analysing the data generated by the interviews, I used a combination of quantitative measurement of the frequency of recurring themes, and a qualitative narrative analysis of interview transcript contents.  Becker and Bryman (2004, p.318) comment, on how 'there is no single method of narrative analysis of how individuals understand their lives', but they do believe certain distinctions can be made and they cite; 'Polkinghorne (1995) makes an interesting contrast between 'analysis of narratives' (identifying themes across narratives) and 'narrative analysis' (with a focus on story and plot, for example in case study).' (Becker and Bryman, 2004: p.318) It was this former definition, which interested me most, that is, how often each interviewee identified similar themes and instances that constituted significant motivating or discouraging factors.  The use of a 'mine-mapping' technique and reference to a grounded theory approach (see Chapter 4, Figure 7: Mine-mapping of emergent themes from interviews), enabled me to hone my focus on the common themes, interviewees appeared to consistently return to.

I offer, an analysis and interpretation, of what interviewees appeared to be saying, using the coded themes A to R (with A (n=8) having the overall greatest response and R (n=1) having approximately the least response), and make direct reference to what interviewees actually said in support of these claims. The themes coded AA represent the comments made by interviewees on what they feel are the reasons why it is good to undertake post-qualifying training and finally the themes coded BB, list the advice interviewees would give to those about to begin their PQ studies. Some of these themes, quite clearly reinforced mine and other educators' preconceived ideas and assumptions, gained from anecdotal evidence, for example issues regarding adult learning and workload pressure have been a common concern for those teaching and assessing post-qualifying training for a number of years. What this data now provided, was more concrete evidence on how difficulties in meeting academic standards, were experienced by many more candidates than had previously been assumed, and that this proved to be a significant barrier to progress and completion. Similarly, the majority of candidates in the sample felt managing workload pressures created the extent of stress on them. How well each candidate coped with this, was more dependent on individual styles of time; caseload management; and their general attitude towards professional development, rather than relying on already hard pressed social work teams to provide effective solutions. I was surprised to find, that pay and career progression was much less of a contentious area than I had anticipated. Although the majority of respondents (both from the questionnaire and interview samples), saw pay and career progression as a significant driver and motivator, for these candidates at least, this had become an expectation rather than a desire. This may primarily be the consequence of a very high level of employer strategic financial support, experienced by the selected candidate samples, whereby a majority of candidates had not had to negotiate individual financial support for their post-qualifying studies, but rather received financial and career incentives as a result of established employee CPD strategies. What did emerge from this data, was the evidence in support of these employer

workforce strategies, as methods to motivate and reward involvement in PQ. Other themes were more emergent and grounded in the data.

**Theme A:   Workload relief** (n=8)

Two-thirds (66%) of interviewees recognised the availability and quantity of workload relief, as an essential factor, in achieving their PQ award on time and without unmanageable levels of personal and professional stress. Having described what would help in 'theory' they, almost unanimously identified, that in practice this was hard to achieve and in fact 'non-existent' for some practitioners, for example;

➢ **Georgina (6):** '...because they are meant to have a protected case load if you're doing the Child Care Award and I don't think a lot of people got that.'
➢ **Evie (10):** 'I don't think it can be workload relief because it's not true, it doesn't happen.  It may be agreed to but it doesn't happen, so something's got to change, because you can all say it...the managers aren't being awful it's just the workloads exactly the same, they just haven't got anyone to give it to.'
➢ **Isaac (11):** '...and you also felt that, in terms of, the team you kind of felt a bit responsible for other members of the team as well, because you was aware that if you had to take some time out, then the team would have to carry perhaps what you could have done.  So I think that was...I think if they'd have been a better work load relief really...from the department...actually it's a course that you have to have time to do.'

The situation for a significant minority, is particularly gloomy, where candidates feel unable to give enough time to their PQ programmes and withdraw from their studies;

➢ **Yvonne (4):** 'I think having the time is a big problem, because particularly in the team I'm in at the moment, the volume of work is so much, so that people in my team are dropping out of college courses because they don't feel that they've got the time.'

Again, the majority of interviewees believed that, although the availability of workload relief was sadly lacking, they relied heavily on the goodwill of their teams and line manager to facilitate their studies.  For some, the balance of goodwill, was severely weighted towards their personal commitment and skill in managing their own workload and responsibilities, for example;

- ➢ **Mandy (3):** 'I think it's hard because people have heavy caseloads and it's just seen as an additional burden.'
- ➢ **Meredith (8):** 'Because it's impossible to do the learning if you're worried about who's going to visit that family, who's going to finish off that report. You can't possibly take on that learning if your head's full of that.'

The absence of workload relief, for existing candidates, is seen as a significant disincentive for those considering starting post-qualifying, as voiced by **Anne (5)**, '...I think what puts a lot of people off is the workload...' who was describing the work expectations of managing one's job and the University's academic and practice assessment requirements of PQ programmes.

## Theme B:  Updating knowledge, skills and research findings (n=8)

Two-thirds (66%) of interviewees were very clear, that one of the key objectives of post-qualifying training, was to increase their knowledge base; understand and interpret legislation and statutory guidance; utilise current research and models of good practice and improve their practice skills and techniques.  For some, it was a much needed opportunity to 'take stock' and reflect on their own practice, for example;

- ➢ **Marie (1):** 'It was a good opportunity to stop and take some time to, err...really look into your subject area and have a really good understanding of your own knowledge.'
- ➢ **Georgina (6):** '...it gives you a lot more time to reflect on cases...so it kind of related practice and theory together. I do think the benefits are definitely having that one day off a week to reflect on your caseload, that's really good.'
- ➢ **Kate (12):** 'The most I've liked is taking some time out to think about what I'm doing and why I'm doing it and to learn about what backs that up...'

For others (n=5), they acknowledged that, they had some personal responsibility for their own CPD and keeping abreast of recent research and guidance, which their PQ programme facilitated;

- ➢ **Johnny (2):** 'I think really it's about responsibility for your professional practice and keeping that up-dated...and that you've got to realise you do work in a very, very changeable environment, and you need to keep abreast of that.'

- **Frank (7):** '...definitely helping me keep abreast of kind of current... child care topics which is really relevant for me at the moment. The big bit for me I think is just getting out of the office and actually looking back on things that we do, that we never, ever do on a day-to-day basis really.'
- **Meredith (8):** 'I think the job is very, very difficult. I think it's a job that needs considerable levels of skill and knowledge and I think because of that you certainly need to undertake the course (PQCCA). It's the whole thing about what it means to be a practitioner now working in the twenty-first century...'
- **Hannah (9):** 'Professionally you shouldn't expect to become qualified and that's it! It's continuous learning. Continuous development...to learn, not stagnate...and the world is changing so, so quickly and social work is changing...so you've got to, you've got to up-date your knowledge.'
- **Isaac (11):** 'I think for me it was just learning something or adding to my knowledge really. As a qualified social worker I think it was actually learning something new or developing what I already know. So I liked that aspect of it. I think people understanding, actually it can help their practice'

As an educator and previously a Training and Development Manager, I was particularly pleased to receive this feedback so strongly, which demonstrated that the interviewee's experience of PQ met two of the GSCC's main aims of post-qualifying training, i.e. 'focused on the assessment of competence in practice; and likely to enhance the maintenance of national standards' (GSCC, 2006a: p. 4). Again, the strength of this positive feedback could be a consequence of the proactive characteristics shared by this research sample, but it provides clear evidence, that undertaking post-qualifying training can empower practitioners to aspire to deliver the best possible practice, to those members of the public who use social care services.

**Theme C:      Pay grading – career progression – promotion** (n=7)

An overall motivation, for over half of those interviewed (58%), was the prospect of receiving extra pay via an accelerated increment on the qualified social worker pay scale, once they had achieved a recognised PQ award;

- **Marie (1):** 'Yeah, it's definitely an incentive. I think I see it in the long term as an incentive. I think it will always be an incentive as we don't get paid enough.'
- **Mandy (3):** 'The pay rise. Complete honesty... To get senior-ship,

career progression.  To achieve PQSW and get senior social worker pay grading.'

> **Georgina (6):** 'May be a salary increase might be an incentive?'

Certain employers stipulated which PQ awards were required to achieve, not only incremental pay progression but also promotion to higher level senior practitioner roles. As one local authority interviewee explained;

> **Johnny (2):** 'I know that you can become a Senior Social Worker if you have PQ1 and the Practice Teachers Award or the Child Care Award. So that obviously gives you a) money and b) status, so that makes it attractive.'

But there was evidence (n=3, 25%), that there was disappointment with the size of any pay increment, compared to the perceived level of commitment and work involved in achieving a PQ award.

> **Evie (10):** 'You don't really get much for passing.  A couple of grand bonus would be nice!'

For some long-standing senior social workers, this was not always the case, due to the fact that they had reached the top of their career grade and therefore were disadvantaged by their previous length of service.  For example **Meredith (8)**, felt particularly aggrieved, 'I've had not one penny for doing this extra work...not one penny...which I think is diabolical!' and;

> **Kate (12):** 'If you're along-standing worker you could do all this work and you won't get anything financial from it, so why do it?'

Despite individual anomalies and concerns, the prospect of receiving financial reward, and the potential for accelerated career progression and promotion, are a significant key motivating factor for post-qualifying candidates, and as such is a central principle of those employer's strategic commitment to increasing levels of PQ attainment and CPD.

**Theme D:     Beneficial to service users, carers and families** (n=7)

Over half of interviewees (58%), felt less confident in asserting, to what degree their PQ studies directly benefited the service users and carers they worked with and believed this was an area of practice ripe for further research on outcomes. When prompted, the majority of interviewees were able to identify indirect and implied benefits for service users and carers, particularly regarding evidence-

based practice and accountability, as these examples demonstrate;

- ➢ **Johnny (2):** '...generally because it means I've been a more informed practitioner.  Whether or not people take that on board is an entirely different story.  At least I'm starting from an evidence-based standpoint really.'
- ➢ **Mandy (3):** 'I think it does because it's linked to registration and I think it's safer for the public to have social workers who are registered.  I think the more status we have, the more confidence it would instil in them.'
- ➢ **Frank (7):** '...more indirectly because I went on then to supervise a number of students who I certainly hope...well I know some of them still think they're probably doing pretty good practice so I'd like to think I'd played a little part in that.'

What was evident, from their responses, was that interviewees felt more self-confident and competent in their practice and therefore more able to meet the needs of those using their services;

- ➢ **Meredith (8):** 'It means because we have a student we can work with more families.  That means they may not have to wait so long to receive a service.'
- ➢ **Evie (10):** 'So I think the service users do get a lot of benefit from it.  But it all depends on the individual how you take your learning.'
- ➢ **Isaac (11):** 'I think for me it's because it has enhanced my practice and I'm a better practitioner for it.'

For at least one interviewee, they identified the need of agencies to retain social workers in their employ, in order to maintain continuity of service delivery and how post-qualifying training could facilitate this.  **Hannah (9):** 'PQ should help with retention.  Because people moving on is a big problem for the public.  An organisation with a good PQ programme should hold on to its workers.'  This may avoid the common complaint of service users, that they rarely see the same social worker twice!  An interesting link made between the retention of a competent workforce and the quality of service delivery for the public.

**Theme E:    Networking and sharing practical experience with others**
(n=5)
A positive factor, for almost half (42%) of those interviewed, was the opportunity to meet and network with other practitioners attending their PQ programme afforded them, as these examples demonstrate;

- ➢ **Johnny (2):** 'I suppose the networking has increased, with the people you can call on...something about your knowledge being broader.'

- ➢ **Mandy (3):** '...it's about comparing stories with other people and getting practical ideas and really about real practice cases, and complex cases and things...and being able to discuss issues that arise...'
- ➢ **Anne (5):** '...well I enjoyed the whole experience if you like, but I think what I enjoyed most that it was the opportunity to get together, not so much with other students, but other qualified social workers...'
- ➢ **Georgina (6):** 'I think what's really good, is that you do meet with other social workers, because obviously in West Sussex but from all different areas and at different levels...'
- ➢ **Evie (10):** '...meeting colleagues from different settings...err...having fun with them, but also learning from them as well'

This was one of the most enjoyable and worthwhile outcomes of their post-qualifying training, for those interviewed, as it provided an instant and direct feedback on their individual social work practice. Obviously, this was dependent on establishing safe and open group communication, but demonstrates how a positive learning environment can engender confidence and self-awareness.

**Theme F: Difficult to balance conflicting demands of work, family and study** (n=5)

A major concern, for nearly half (42%) of those interviewed, was the difficulty in managing the conflicting demands on their time of work, caring for their families and the expectations of study, as these examples show;

- ➢ **Yvonne (4):** 'I think balancing work and study...I think for me I have found that the hardest part of the course that I'm on at the moment.'
- ➢ **Meredith (8):** '...when you're talking about study; it's not just support from work it's also at home, because it has a huge impact on your home life.'
- ➢ **Hannah (9):** '...but I think I also just struggled to sit down and get it done (finding the time) because of the children... children family and work.'
- ➢ **Isaac (11):** 'Sometimes difficult to do as well as you think you probably could have done, while you're still working. I had quite a lot of work commitments at the time I was doing it. So it was quite difficult fitting it in...'

Add to this, the complexity of working part-time and as this interviewee stated,

**Evie (10):** 'That was a huge thing for me because it took a day out and I only work three days and also my daughter's three years old but she was very little when I joined the course. So I felt I was juggling a lot, because doing that and

the essays and everything else.'  For those who have care commitments, alongside their busy work schedule, considering the prospect of post-qualifying training will be a difficult and complex decision.  Good pre-course planning and negotiation with colleagues and family members are essential tasks, that may go some way to making this more manageable. The timing of a candidate's training may also be a critical success factor.

**Theme G:   Anxiety coping with academic requirements** (n=4)

It was not surprising, when considering the overall age profile of the sample, where two-thirds (67%), of interviewees were aged 33 or over, that a third of the sample (n=4), referred to their anxiety of reaching the academic level of assessment as a problem.  All the PQ programmes available at that time, would have an academic level requirement equivalent to the third year of an undergraduate degree (i.e. level 3). The prospect of returning to formal learning, was seen as formidable, for those interviewees who considered themselves less academic than their fellow candidates;

> **Marie (1):** '...the recognition of bringing up my old feelings about my ability, in terms of my English and written work, you know. That hasn't improved greatly.'
> **Meredith (8):** '...although when I first went to college I was a bit daunted because everyone on the course seemed so young.  It was quite strange going back as a mature student.  Because I hadn't been to college for years...sort of anxieties that doing assignments and having to pass and not wanting to fail.  I found it very stressful from that point of view.'

Other interviewees (n=2), were sensitive to how their colleagues might be feeling and appreciated that although they may find academic essay writing a problem, it was not a reflection on their practice skills and abilities;

> **Mandy (3):** '...some people are not academic minded, they'll be fantastic at their job but try to put an essay together and they fall to pieces.'
> **Frank (7):** '...it's quite intimidating to go back to university and do stuff like that.  Could be an anxiety issue, could be a kind of pre-registration type meeting for those people who'd like to find out about those kind of issues.'

Overall, a third of interviewees (n=4), felt that little or no attention was paid by their programmes to the learning skills needs of candidates.  Where learning

skills were offered, they tended to be delivered externally to the timetabled programme, and hence required candidates to spend additional personal time at University. The consensus of these interviewees was for some pre-course analysis of individual learning needs, which could be addressed by a specific individualised learning plan, to be completed prior to starting the programme. The practicalities of delivering such a learning skills input would be complex. Many prospective PQ candidates are notoriously late in confirming their programme applications and it is not uncommon for candidates to turn-up several days into the commencement of a programme, or indeed pull out almost as soon as they have formally registered. Such a scheme would, rely heavily on prospective candidates having the self-confidence to disclose their anxieties, regarding their academic ability. Clearly a flexible, candidate-focused learning support system, would be welcomed by interviewees and enhance their learning experience. This would also address one of the principle aims for the new PQ framework that it is, 'meaningful and easily understood by practitioners' (GSCC, 2006a:p.4)

**Theme H:    Lack of adequate study leave** (n=4)

The perceived lack of adequate study leave arrangements, by a third of interviewees (n=4), was one of the most common factors raised, as these examples demonstrate;

> **Marie (1):** '...when you're working with a heavy caseload. It's just really horrendous and you feel you're letting yourself down because you're not giving it the time...I think we got three study days, I think that should have been a little bit more.'
> **Meredith (8):** '...definitely that, because I think people are so overwhelmed almost by what work needs to be done, that's it difficult for them to have the time to think outside their little area they're working with really.'
> **Isaac (11):** '...although managers would recognise that you were doing these courses, it didn't really relate in terms of case reduction or an expectation that you'd have extra time to do it. So really I felt I had to do a lot of it in my own time... I think people need to be given time to be able to do it as well. I think people are concerned that it's just another add-on to their workload that they have.'

'Modernising Social Services' (DH, 1998), placed an expectation on employees

to devote at least 15% of their own personal resources, be that time or funds, to their training and development.  This little advertised or acknowledged requirement, has been almost forgotten, particularly by hard-pressed employers keen to promote PQ and encourage candidates. But it did relate directly, to the potential employee benefit, of improved qualifications when it came to career progression and promotion. Candidates would argue that due to the requirements of PQ, they already contribute significant amounts of their own time (certainly more than 15%) to complete their awards, but having the option of discrete study leave from the workplace, in addition to days attending taught sessions, would enable focussed self-directed study and relieve the general stress and pressure of in-service training.  For one interviewee some acknowledgement from her employer of the time and energy required to complete her PQ award would have been greatly appreciated, as commented on by **Kate (12):** '...if it was acknowledged in some way, the amount of work that you put into something, because the majority of that is hours and hours of work at home on top of...' an already busy and complex caseload.

**Theme I:    Compulsion; mandatory PQCCA for child care workers**
                 (n=4)

The interviewees had rather mixed feelings regarding certain employer's strategies to insist on certain PQ award training, namely in children and families' services. From the comments below it would appear, that at least a third (n=4) of candidates, were on the whole, in favour of discrete training for specific specialist areas of practice;

> ➢ **Marie (1):** '...when we went to out first couple of induction days at the university, I never heard so much complaining about having to do this, and I was like...I was looking forward to do this.'
> ➢ **Johnny (2):** 'From the way I've seen how the new framework (PQ) is going to work is that everybody is going to be expected to do it.  Like this is your on-going professional development...'
> ➢ **Meredith (8):** 'Another thing about PQ I didn't like, lots of people doing the course had to do it!  And that was very much around that you had to do it...also a pressure.  Because it was part of the PQ...you had to do within so many years (PQCCA) and there was this fear that you've got to do it.  I've got all this work to do yet I'm here on the course.  So that spoilt the learning of it.'

> ➤ **Evie (10):** 'I have to say, and I know there are people who hated it, we had a group and we enjoyed it. We enjoyed the time together and we made time for it, whilst some people really hated being there.'

**Theme J:        Helps with GSCC PRTL**  (n=4)

On the whole (n=8, 66%), interviewees were not particularly aware of the GSCC Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) requirements. GSCC registration for qualified social workers is for a period of three years. A requirement of re-registration for registered social workers (RSW) is that they have completed a minimum of 15 days (90 hours) of training and learning in the previous three year period. A PRTL record has to be verified by the RSW's line manager or supervisor and submitted to the GSCC with their re-registration application. It may be because at the time of interview no one in the sample had yet completed their initial registration period (GSCC registration only began in 2004), but it did strike me as surprising that relatively few interviewees (n=4, 33%), appreciated the significance of registration and public accountability. Hence some interviewee's responses below appear fairly vague;

> ➤ **Yvonne (4):** 'Keeping up to date with current policies, procedures, research...keeping your mind refreshed...this in turn benefits the people you're working with.'
> ➤ **Anne (5):** 'You know its evolving all the time and I think if you continue training then obviously it benefits the public...'

At this stage of the GSCC's registration of the social care workforce, it would appear that social work practitioners have yet to acknowledge the link between raising the standards of social work practice and their personal and professional responsibility to continuously develop their knowledge, skills and values. This may in part be due to the expectation that it is their employers' responsibility to provide training and development opportunities as has been the case with traditional in-service, in-house training courses. The lack of a confident professional identity, which practitioners have internalised and the public and other professionals recognise, may also prevent continuous professional development? One may need to identify oneself as a professional, before accepting personal responsibility for the membership conditions of that profession.  A couple of interviewees (n=2, 16%), however, had appreciated

the significance of PRTL requirements and thought that these may act as an incentive for attracting potential PQ candidates, but they didn't think this would be the major motivation to undertake training;

> **Frank (7):** 'Another possible way of selling it is the fact you do have to do a certain amount of hours post-qualifying and certainly when you're on the PQ you don't have to do anything extra to that, which has been a bonus for me.'

> **Isaac (11):** 'It gives you more than enough hours for re-registration, that's the benefit. But I also think it's a benefit because it makes you think that actually there are other learning opportunities out there that you need to continue to do really to improve your practice.'

## Theme K: Travel distance to college too far/wish to stay local (n=4)

A serious disadvantage for a significant minority of interviewees (n=4, 33%), was the travel distances involved in attending taught university-based days. This was exacerbated where interviewees either did not drive or lived on the eastern and north-eastern ends of the county of West Sussex, where their individual programmes were based in Chichester and Southampton, necessitating multiple train journeys or hours driving long distances of over 100 miles. For example;

> **Mandy (3):** '...getting there and back is an absolute nightmare. (Chichester) For someone who doesn't drive.'

> **Hannah (9):** 'When I did the master modules (at Southampton)... there were two of them, they were taught at Southampton so I stayed away overnight... Anything for me at Southampton is a long way (160 mile round trip) when you've got children, my children were younger then.'

Interviewees who lived at the opposite end of the county were frustrated by their long journeys to programmes that took place at Chichester University, especially as certain PQ awards (e.g. PQCCA) were delivered as part of a consortium of Kingston (Surrey), Sussex (Brighton) and Chichester (West Sussex) Universities. Some interviewees cited inflexibility of their employers as a barrier to studying their PQ award at a more local site, for example;

> **Georgina (6):** 'Travelling...definitely, because I live in Brighton and was at Uni in Chichester and I couldn't understand why, when you've got the Consortium saying that they work with Sussex Uni as well as Chichester, why couldn't I have gone to Sussex?'

> **Evie (10):** 'I think the biggest things have been negatively how difficult it was being part-time and travelling to Chichester...it would have been

nice to have had somewhere more local...'

Arguably for some candidates the added stress of travelling to receive post-qualifying instruction is a negative factor and may influence whether they undertake further PQ awards. The GSCC believes that the new PQ framework should be 'accessible' to all candidates (GSCC, 2006a: p.4) and encourages all new programmes to develop flexible modular routes. It may be some time before PQ programmes can truly address this aim, especially as few programmes are offering portfolio routes, preferring instead to deliver traditional taught, university-based courses.

**Theme L:     Little or no direct impact on general public at this stage** (n=4)

Sadly, interviewees reflected the generally perceived attitude held by the social work workforce as a whole, that social workers, and the work they do, receives a very negative press both from the media and the general public, as these examples document;

> **Evie (10):** 'I may be wrong but I don't think the public have a clue what we do?'
> **Isaac (11):** 'I'm not certain that people really appreciate what social workers do, some people do but there's a lot of public misconception of social work. I'm not sure. We're always getting 'slagged off' as social workers.'

However, some interviewees (n=2, 16%), could appreciate that having the knowledge that social workers are required to continue to train and develop their skills, may potentially generate greater public confidence in the social work profession. As these examples demonstrate, although one might have an optimistic view of the public perception of the social work role, this is tempered with a notoriously hard to displace negative attitude of social workers;

> **Georgina (6):** 'I think the general public would expect them to be continuing to train, just like I would, as the general public, I would expect an ambulance person, or a fireman, or a police officer to carry on training. I'm all for it, and I think the general public would probably. But to be honest the general public don't like social workers full stop, so doesn't really matter... especially in child care.'
> **Frank (7):** 'I guess it would be a good thing bringing us in line with people who the public certainly the media and all the rest seem to

portray in a slightly better light than social workers...people like nurses, people like that, because they're all qualified and trained 'proper professionals', also I don't see it any harm if we become 'proper professionals'.

**Theme M:       Management and team support needed** (n=4)

As these interviewee comments demonstrate, a third of the sample, saw having the support and confidence of one's team and manager as essential success factors for the candidate;

- ➢ **Mandy (3):** 'Discuss it with your supervisor and if you're struggling you've got to let them know because you can't juggle everything and if some things got to give and if it ends up being your work that gives, then it's the service user that suffers...'
- ➢ **Anne (5):** '...you need a manager on your side.  I'm fortunate in that respect, as I have got a manager on my side and she's quite committed to training of any sort.'
- ➢ **Georgina (6):** 'I was lucky, I've got a fantastic manager and I did have a protected case load and if at any time I said, I can't cope with this… but it didn't happen because she was always on the ball.  I know at the beginning of the Child Care Award managers were invited along, and mine came along, but I know there were a lot of managers that didn't come along, with their social worker.'
- ➢ **Kate (12):** 'I guess in terms of an incentive, it would be nice if team managers are really recognising that in order to develop and to keep on top of research, to really applying academic learning to your practice that you really need to do some kind of regular study.'

Fortunately, for the majority of those interviewed this was the case and clearly candidates appreciated the collaborative support they received.  The fact that their PQ journey was shared by others in the team, made the experience more manageable and enjoyable.

**Theme N:       Not enough professional supervision** (n=2)

A couple (n=2, 16%) of those interviewed, identified a problem regarding, what they perceived as, a lack of professional practice supervision for some of the candidates they studied with.  This either revealed itself as a problem of quantity, as described by **Johnny (2):** 'The one other thing I didn't like about PQ1, was that there was too many people who were clearly not getting good enough supervision, that they used the lecturers.' Or an issue of agenda setting,

where little or not discussion of their PQ training was shared during supervision, as identified by **Georgina (6):** 'I think, a lot again social workers were saying they were… you know, the Child Care Award wasn't discussed, or the PQ1 wasn't discussed.  Well I'd say to them, make sure it is then!  Put it on the agenda.  When you go in and your manager asks; what do you want to discuss, it's not just your cases...' Although these observations are anecdotal, they do indicate the importance of the shared stakeholder commitment, that is needed from all parties when undertaking post-qualifying training, and in particular the candidates' line manager or practice supervisor, to ensure PQ becomes an integral part of the professional social work role.

**Theme O:      Need for more discrete time and space for reflection, application and evaluation of PQ learning** (n=2)

Some interviewees (n=2, 16%) particularly welcomed the opportunity for discrete time and space, for reflection on their practice that their PQ programme provided. As voiced by **Evie (10):** 'It's time and space to reflect on your practice, which you don't get the opportunity to do as much in your working life...I just really appreciated that time and also the fact that I could do reading and research and all of that really.' This reflective activity, however, might be more difficult to maintain once back in the workplace full-time, something highlighted by **Kate (12):** 'You don't have much space at work to apply this. That's where I get frustrated because I think actually I want to take what I've learnt and put it into practice. But the reality is...is that, that's quite difficult.'

**Theme P:      PQ promotes evidence-based practice** (n=2)

Two interviewees (16%), were particularly complimentary regarding observation and risk assessment topics covered by their PQ programmes, believing these had had a direct influence on their knowledge and skills base, for example; **Frank (7):** '...actually we've just done one of the best bits...the child observation, we've just finished doing, which was really, really good.  That was just fascinating to watch.' Similarly, **Isaac (11):** '...we did a section on risk assessments, which again I think was really useful...looking at different risk

assessments...different risk assessment tools. I found that really, really useful in terms of my own practice...applying it to my own practice.' Both these examples demonstrate how candidates can implement evidence-based practice.

### Theme Q: Anti-discriminatory practice and lecturers experience (n=2)

Some criticism regarding the quality and competency of their PQ lecturers, was raised by a couple of interviewees (n=2, 16%); **Johnny (2):** 'I thought that the (module) co-ordinators were very defensive about equal opportunities, particularly with regard to race' ...and **Evie (10):** '...some of the lecturers...they've been out of the game too long and their lack of understanding of what's actually out there in the real world was quite evident.' Both these observations focus on how difficult it can be, for some University lecturers to remain current in their own practice and their ability to keep pace with constantly changing legislation, social policy and statutory guidance. It also highlights the importance of candidate's completion of programme evaluations, to ensure their concerns are fed-back to those responsible for taking action and making changes.

### Theme R: Voluntary sector feel marginalised and separate (n=1)

When asked, if studying alongside local authority colleagues on her PQ programme, had helped foster closer working relationships, an interviewee from the voluntary sector said, 'No difference! No different relationship at all!' She still felt marginalised and separate, and believed this hadn't changed much over time, saying, 'Yeah, definitely and that's how it's always going to be viewed.' These very real feelings of marginality, expressed by an experienced practitioner, are a sad indictment on the expectation of inclusiveness of PQ training. One solution might be, to increase the ratio of non-statutory candidates on PQ programmes, to promote greater integration of practitioners from diverse settings. This may be difficult to achieve, where small voluntary and independent employers, find it especially difficult to access funding streams or cover study leave to support candidates.

**Why undertake post-qualifying training?**

In response to the prompt question (5a) 'Why should you undertake PQ training?' almost all interviewees (84%) identified continuous updating of their knowledge base and becoming a more reflective practitioner as key drivers for undertaking post-qualifying training which echoes Doel et al's (2006: p.13) study and mirrors what others found when reviewing the challenges of the, for example, Kroll (2004: p.653) who argues that 'thinking space' must be made available, otherwise candidates 'will continue to feel undervalued and ill equipped to deal with the increasing complexity of their work'. 16% of respondents who identified career progression and pay as a reason for undertaking post-qualifying study equates very similarly to the rate found by Doel et al (2006: p.13) of 15%.

**Theme AA : Why it's Good to do PQ!** (n=12)

Not surprisingly, those interviewed had a very positive attitude regarding post-qualifying training and CPD, and were able to articulate easily the benefits and advantages they had accrued and were happy to promote the experience to others, as these selected comments below demonstrate;

- ➢ **Marie (1):** 'Oh, I think it's great.  I'm all in favour of PQ training.  I'm a lucky one, because I've come into social work at a time when everything's just 'kicking-off', in a good sense.  We're becoming more recognised, more professional, more training.'
- ➢ **Frank (7):** 'I think, like I say, public perceptions aside, I think it is a good thing for us to be doing something.  I think, you know, it can't be healthy to go and train and then fifteen-twenty years on all you've got to show for it is fairly generic in-house courses...'
- ➢ **Meredith (8):** 'I've been doing it for twenty odd years...but it's nice to have that opportunity to, you know, catch up to date...learn new things, re-evaluate what you are doing.'
- ➢ **Isaac (11):** 'I think you need to do it to up-date your practice, to reflect on your practice, develop it and particularly in terms of what's changing and new.'
- ➢ **Kate (12):** 'To really recognise that if you're going to get anything out of it you have to put a lot in.  You need to do it at a time in your life when you have got the time to...the head space to think about it.'

**Theme BB : Advice for would be candidates** (n=12)

Interviewees, when asked the question, 'Based on your experience of PQ training to date, what would be the best piece of advice that you could give to those about to undertake training?' gave a variety of practical suggestions, which they had found personally useful or wished they had adopted when striving for their PQ award. Not surprisingly they focus on pre-course preparation and time-management skills, as these selective comments indicate;

- **Marie (1):** 'OK, read, read, read everything that is given to you, in the sense of, the course structure and make sure you've got a good understanding of what is expected of you, in terms of, assignments.'
- **Johnny (2):** 'I would establish a work-based contract about what you were going to be expected to do and in terms of study-time etc. and all of that to be clarified beforehand, to ensure your manager protected that.'
- **Mandy (3):** 'I think one of the biggest benefits would be if you had one central contact person who you could liaise with about the best pathway to take, what implications it has for your job role, you know who would know everything.'
- **Anne (5):** 'I think the best piece of advice, because obviously you have to manage the PQ workload with your own workload, is firstly to make sure you take your study days, because you'll need them, to prepare well, things like assignments, presentations and such like.'
- **Georgina (6):** '...stress to management if you feel your case load is too much and you can't be doing it, you just cannot cope with all the cases.'
- **Evie (10):** 'I suppose just take it for what it is, enjoy the time and space and not get caught up in, 'it has to be done'. Don't worry about it, there's always enough people...you can read enough portfolio's, essays, that kind of stuff to give you any help.'
- **Isaac (11):** 'You need to be really organised. You need to be really committed to it, and they need to be organised...and their time management needs to be good.'

## 5.3. Stage 3: Feedback from professional groups

The professional groups were representative of major social work employers and educators across the Surrey and Sussex Skills for Care sub-region and supplemented by a meeting with the PQ Lead Inspector at the GSCC national headquarters in London (18 professionals in total).

1. Skills for Care, Practice Learning Co-ordinator Network
2. Meeting with GSCC Social Work PQ Lead Inspector
3. A South Coast University Research Group

The transcripts of these group discussions are included at Appendices D2-4. Following the PowerPoint presentation of my initial findings, members of each group were given space to ask questions of clarification then comment on three questions. a) What helps promote success in post-qualifying study? b) What hinders success in post-qualifying study? and c) What would improve post-qualifying study?  Again, I have used selected member's actual statements, as supporting evidence for my analysis. Each statement has the professional's coded reference and date of group meeting highlighted in **bold** type.

## 5.4. a) What helps promote success in post-qualifying study?

In discussion with professionals drawn from practice, teaching and social services training managers, there appeared to be a high level of consensus, that promotion of post-qualifying training and CPD in general was a complex and resource intensive activity. Top of their agenda, was the need for a clear policy statement from central government and the regulatory bodies on the primary importance, and funding of post-qualifying training, to address the comment made by, **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'There is a dissonance between expectations and aspirations of the national bodies and the realities of practice at grass roots level...' Similarly, when making comparisons with other professions there needs to be a national consensus on what are the CPD expectations and career pathways for registered social workers? Which may go some way to answer the question posed by **DG: (29.10.07):** 'The big question raised here is about the nature of PQ work vis-à-vis the profession.  What's the expectation nationally of the profession, as it might be for doctors or teachers, in sustaining your professional development, in the context of a reasonable working week?' Having a proactive and productive partnership, with all PQ stakeholders, is seen as essential success factor, by professionals and reiterates what Doel et al (2006: p.15), stated in their earlier study; 'We would concur with Mitchell's (2001) conclusion, that the key to overall success, is an active partnership between individual workers, employers and those providing the training and education.'

## 5.5. b) What hinders success in post-qualifying study?

In terms of hindrances, the professional groups reflected similar themes to the research study. Workload issues and job pressures were strong factors, as was the lack of support and commitment of line manager and team, demonstrated by this comment made by **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'Good practice is not valued, as long as a crisis is averted. Senior managers need to value the extra skills gained by social workers.' This professional goes further, to challenge the perceived understanding of more senior managers, **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'In fact most senior managers may not come from social work backgrounds and have never engaged with PQ and don't particularly value social work, they see 'time as money'. Another professional believes, this may in part be due to the increasing managerialism of social work agencies, with its business-planning ethos, which fails to realise the benefits and value of PQ;

> ➤ **CS (29.10.07):** 'With PQ you're got a degree of ambiguity about its value and if there is any value to it, from the point of view of the employer organisation, it's not an immediate fix. You're not necessarily seeing all the value of improved practice as an immediate pay-back, so what you've got is a fairly long-term benefit which is difficult to implement within organisations that are , by and large, short-term in their objectives, i.e. dealing with today's workload.'

The current rate of attainment of PQ awards, amongst social workers of approximately 13-15% **(GSCC, 26.10.07),** indicates a poor uptake of post-qualifying training and a significant lack of interest, from registered social workers and begs the question raised by;

> ➤ **CC1 (04.10.07):** 'What's the point of putting in all that effort? Once they're into education and training, as this paper shows, it clearly motivates some social workers, it energises them, it excites them, it makes them feel valued, it enhances their knowledge and practice, and they enjoy the networking. Sadly for some those benefits are unseen.'

Preston-Shoot in Tovey (2007, pp.19-22), in referring to the slowly rising numbers of candidates undertaking PQ awards, believes this is from a traditionally very low skills base and overall lack of training and he argues, that employers and staff can no longer ignore what Preston-Shoot sees as a number of 'imperative drivers' for improved post-qualifying education and training. Not

to be forgotten is the lack of adequate post-qualifying funding, for the voluntary sector, so that it could participate fully in these developments, as raised by **CC1 (04.10.07),** who cites this as an indication the continued exclusivity of programme intakes.

## 5.6. c) What would improve post-qualifying study?

The two groups both put post-qualifying education into a broader context. They thought that the status of social work was an important factor in the likely success of the new PQ framework. As Doel et al (2006) state, '...post-qualifying education offers a huge opportunity for the practice community to build its evidence-base 'from the bottom'. Postle et al (2002: p.157) acknowledge that, 'The stage for social work is increasingly complex and fragmented. Post-qualifying education cannot stand alone 'as a remedy for social work's ills' (Brown and Keen, 2004: p.77), but will ultimately prove an essential factor, in finding and implementing solutions. Professional group members suggested how a positive PQ culture could be achieved for stakeholders, for example:

> ➤ **TC (29.10.07):** 'It's not just down to the individuals but also the culture of the organisation, where by as part of an individual's professional development the expectation is to undertake certain learning. The organisation itself needs to be considered as a learning organisation and promote their workers development.'
> ➤ **CC2 (04.10.07)** 'For me its something about organisations, particularly local authorities, as the biggest employers of social workers, is to look at career pathways and mechanisms to keep excellent practitioners at the front line, supporting the people to do and also supporting those as practitioner learners, teachers.'

Doel et al (2006: p.5), have already highlighted the need for workforce planning, and 'the need for a strategic approach to post-qualifying study', as well as, the need for discrete career pathways for all staff, with clear stepping-on and stepping-off points. But, in reality, employers may not be able to afford the aspirational needs of social worker's CPD, therefore creating a tension between aspiration and reality. **CS (29.10.07)** believes,

> ➤ 'There is something that we never really acknowledge in social work education, is the fact that when you're doing PQ education you need to engage in your own time, especially when you may be feeling beleaguered...stress is not particularly acknowledged. ...it's not

surprising then that people don't necessarily want – or don't have a huge enthusiasm – for doing more training.  It seems to me, that often social workers at PQ level almost feel betrayed.  They come into a profession and no body likes them and here I am being made to do this.  This is where national bodies don't actually recognise what happens in practice.'

While Turner, in Doel et al (2006: p.15) suggests that 'although the implementation of the PQ framework presents many challenges in relation to the role of the first-line manager, it has the potential to create work-place cultures of a more developmental and professional nature, which ultimately works to the advantage of those who use social work services'.  For candidates in general, **CC2 (04.10.07)** this research study reflected, the lack of flexibility of programme routes experienced by candidates, but was pessimistic about how the revised standards would address this, **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'The new framework doesn't enable people to take control of their own learning, which I think is a really big issue as far as PQ is concerned, especially around portfolio development which is not in the new system.  I think that is a big, big mistake.' As yet, it is too early, to evaluate the success of the new PQ framework programmes, but clearly employers and educators, can see the benefits of developing portfolio routes, as just one example of accessible and flexible models of delivery.

The findings of this study mirror Doel et al's (2006) research in identifying barriers to study, and the factors supporting the successful achievement of PQ awards. This may well indicate that the overall motivation and uptake of candidates and employers, for post-qualifying study, is equally problematic regardless of regional variation.  In a more positive vain, it provides supportive evidence, of defining what the common difficulties are, and indicates some consensus on what the possible solutions might be.

**5.7. Comparison with Nursing and Teaching CPD Requirements**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD), as generally defined, by the Chartered Institute Personnel Development (CIPD, 2008), is a combination of approaches and techniques, that help individuals to manage their own learning and growth, with a focus on developing professional practice and improving career prospects. To gain an appreciation, of similar CPD requirements of other social welfare professions, in order to benchmark expectations; the following section gives an overview of their regulatory bodies' standards for comparison. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is the national regulatory body for nurses and midwives in the UK. It has responsibility for registering all nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses in practice and assures the public of competence and nursing standards. The NMC role is to:

- Maintain a register of qualified nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses
- Set standards and guidelines for education, conduct, performance and ethics
- Provide advice on professional standards
- Consider allegations of lack of fitness to practise due to misconduct, lack of competence or ill health. (NMC, 2006)

'The PREP Handbook; Protecting the public through professional standards' (NMC, 2006) is the national guidance on continuous professional development. 'Post-registration education and practice (PREP)', provides standards and guidance for nurses on the provision of 'the best possible care' for patients and clients. The emphasis, is on nurses' self-directed learning and practice development, and encourages reflective practice in caring for their patients or clients. 'PREP provides an excellent framework for your continuing professional development (CPD), which, although not a guarantee of competence, is a key component of clinical governance.' (NMC, 2006) Every three years, nurses must renew their registration and provide a signed notification of practice (NOP) form, when they pay their re-registration fee. The NOP is a declaration by the nurse that they have met the PREP requirements; [a minimum of 450 hours nursing practice in their specific role e.g. nurse, midwife or specialist community public health nurse, if they undertake more than one role they need to have completed multiples of practice hours i.e. Nursing (450 hours) and

Midwifery (450 hours) equates to 900 hours practice.]  In order to meet the requirements of the PREP (CPD) standard, nurses and midwives, have had to undertaken at least 35 hours of relevant learning activity in their chosen field, during the previous three years.  The NMC have a very broad interpretation of learning activity, and do not provide any approved format, or expectation of what this would look like. However, they do stipulate, that any learning activity should be relevant to the work a nurse or midwife is doing, or plan to do in the future.  To test nurses' compliance, the NMC then carries out random audits of registrants PREP (CPD) documentation, in order to be able, to demonstrate to patients and the public the rigour of the PREP standards. The key difference between a nurse's PREP requirement and that of a GSCC registered social worker's PRTL, is there is no requirement for guidance and verification by the employee's line manger or supervisor.  'Registrants must document in their personal professional profile, the ways in which their learning informs their practice...they may wish to share with others, including their employer, manager...this is entirely their choice' (NMC, 2006).  A nurse has overall control of what CPD activity they decide to undertake, 'The best thing about PREP is that it is entirely up to you to decide how to meet the standards.  The NMC believes, that you are the best person to decide what learning activity you need to undertake' (NMC, 2006).

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was established as a non-governmental agency sponsored by the Department for Education in 1994. Lawlor in Green (2004: p.9) The Agency's statutory objectives are set out in the Education Act 1994 as:

- 'to contribute to raising the standards of teaching;
- to promote teaching as a career;
- to improve the quality and efficiency of all routes into the teaching profession; and
- to secure the involvement of schools in all courses for the initial training of school teachers.' Lawlor in Green (2004: p.9)

The TTA has designed and is responsible for the National Standards for qualified teacher status (QTS) and standards for headteachers. These standards are, as described by Lawlor in Green (2004: p.14), 'at the beginning of the

professional development framework and the means by which each teacher could plan developments, keep up to date with research and developments in pedagogy and in particular subjects, and continue to grow as a professional.' All newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are required to complete a satisfactory period of three terms' statutory induction, in order to remain eligible, to teach in a maintained school or non-maintained special school. To facilitate this headteachers must ensure that their new teachers:

- 'have a reduced teaching load, equivalent to 90 per cent of the normal average timetable of other teachers in the school;
- are enabled to use their release time to further individualised development needs;
- are allocated an induction tutor who will work closely with them throughout their induction period.' Lee in Green (2004: p.80)

The intention, is that NQTs should be allocated teaching timetables or groups, which do not place unreasonable demands upon them, and receive additional support from an allocated mentor, in order to create a bridge from initial training to induction into their first teaching post.

The General Teaching Council for England (GTC), regulates the profession by upholding professional standards and publishes 'The Teachers' Professional Learning Framework' (TPLF) on their website www.gtce.org.uk , which reflects the commitment of the GTC, alongside partners for continuing professional development. It outlines a professional entitlement for all, irrespective of where teachers work and in what capacity. 'It is based on in-depth consultation with teachers, teaching associations and unions, teacher educators, LEA advisers and others who support teachers' learning.' (GTC, 2007: p.4) The TPLF offers a map of professional development experiences, encouraging access to a diverse range of opportunities and activities. It is designed so that all teachers, through performance review and other ways may choose a route that matches their professional needs. GTC (2007: p.4) 'Evidence demonstrates that teachers who collaborate, learn together, share ideas and model best practice are more likely to remain in teaching. They feel valued and supported in their development and in their work.' 'Making CPD better: Bringing together research about CPD' www.gtce.org.uk [accessed 15th May2007] is one in a series of

leaflets (TPL07) written for teachers in the state sector, their supporters, educators and researchers, emphasising the benefits of CPD.

'The research findings provide convincing evidence that good CPD:
- improves teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills;
- impacts positively on pupils' learning, confidence, attitudes and achievements;
- enhances teachers' motivation and morale; and
- all in all, is central to school improvement.' (GTC, 2007: p.4)

The comparison of professional regulation and CPD expectations between nursing, teaching and social work, reveals some commonalities, as well as, significant differences. All three professionals have a national governing and regulatory body, to oversee registration and standards of practice. Each require their registrants to pay fees and meet certain pre and post-registration requirements, including a set number of hours devoted to CPD (e.g. social work require 90 hours over a period of three years, whilst nursing only expect 35 hours for the same period). Here is where the differences appear. All newly qualified teachers (NQTs), have to complete a whole (3 school terms) introductory year and are given time and space by their headteachers to achieve this. Once having reached a qualified status, all three professions take a more flexible attitude to, what can be considered as CPD, and recorded as such at re-registration, but social work does require a senior manager to verify CPD. The Care Standards Act (2000), introduced protection of the title 'social worker', which means only those who hold a recognised qualification and are registered with the GSCC, can officially call themselves, or be employed as a social worker. In bench-marking post-qualifying continuing professional development across nursing and teaching, social work has lessons to learn; for example, from teachings' introductory year for newly qualified teachers and good practice to share, in the verification of individual CPD activity by senior managers.

## 5.8. Concluding thoughts on what this research tells us

At an individual level, there is clear evidence, that professional development is generally highly valued and that participating in these opportunities is more

likely to increase confidence, but not for every-one (Mitchell, 2001; Rowland, 2003).  It is also evident, that motivations vary, and we can perhaps infer, that it is important for individuals to be aware of what drives them, so that they know how to keep reinforcing their commitment.  Individuals have different capacities to cope with the demands of work, study and home, and feel the need for support at different intensities.  The quality of support is significant, and these findings suggest that of all the sources for support, it is perhaps the mentor who is best placed to provide the best quality.  The agency context is influential, though of more importance to some than to others.  Study time and workload relief seem to be the best gifts that an agency can give its staff; however, these need to be *meaningful.*  It is one thing, to write a policy that states a right to so many days study leave, and another to nurture a culture where it is expected to take these days.  If, study time and workload relief are meaningful, practitioners perceive this as *recognition* - of individual achievements, and of the importance of post-qualifying study.  Recognition by the agency, is probably linked to staff morale, and we can infer has an impact on recruitment and retention (Parker and Whitfield, 2006).

PQ programmes need to be able to respond, individually to practitioners who have been away from study for a long time, and to candidates who have specific difficulties with study skills. Something one of those interviewed identified as a possible barrier to training;

> **Frank (7):** 'I think there's the bit about going back into education for a lot of folk, particularly if they've done a DipSW or a CQSW...it's quite intimidating to go back to university and do stuff like that.  Could be an anxiety issue, could be a kind of pre-registration type meeting for those people who'd like to find out about those kinds of issues.  How scary would it be? ...is it going to be exams? ...all this kind of stuff which people do twitch about.'

As reminded, by one of the professional group members **SW (29.10.07):** '...we mustn't forget that social workers form a very small part of the general social services workforce.' This is similar to Doel et al's (2006: p.6) concerns that 'social workers are increasingly working as a minority profession in

organisations whose mission is not social work.' In both situations **SW (29.10.07)** asserts; 'Organisations are not going to necessarily prioritise social worker's PQ when this might be a minority group of employees.'

Having said that, Preston-Shoot in Tovey (2007), believes that there are at least five 'imperatives' (see Figure 8), social work employers need to appreciate and embrace in order to make post-qualifying a reality for all registered social workers.

| Imperatives for PQ | |
|---|---|
| **Legally** | The Care Standards Act 2000 created protection of title for social workers. The GSCC Codes of Practice (2002) makes social worker's accountable for the quality of their work. Employers must provide opportunities to develop social worker's skills and knowledge. |
| **Policy** | The National Occupational Standards (Topps, 2002) Key Role 6, requires social workers to reflect on their practice and continuously develop professionally (CPD) Modernising Social Services (DH, 1998) focuses on improving quality, public confidence and accountability of social work practice. |
| **Partnership** | Working in partnership with service users and carers to critically analyse the quality and delivery of social care whilst promoting inter-professional working across boundaries has been highlighted in current legislation and Department of Health guidance. |
| **Personal** | Potentially social workers themselves will become consumers of social care services in the future; therefore there is a critical self-interest in ensuring that improvement in attitudes, skills and knowledge are on-going. |
| **Practice evidence** | Increasingly the existence of practice development for social workers, their service users and carers, human resource CPD workforce planning and learning organisations are highlighted by Commission for Social Care Inspection reports and academic articles. Evidence of good practice in implementing research, new knowledge and skills. |

**Figure 8: The imperative need for Post-qualifying Training; adapted from Preston-Shoot (2007) in 'The Post-Qualifying Handbook for Social Workers'**

A taster, of what might be in store for the social work profession, when as Lawson-Brown in Tovey (2007) suggests, '...in future social work will be perceived as having the high status it deserves'. Lawson-Brown (2007), gives an example, based on work carried out by Readhead and Mather (2006), on what a skills escalator might look like for social workers, compared with NHS and public-sector roles. This may, fit well with the new PQ framework, and acknowledges post-qualifying levels of skills, knowledge and values.

| Job title | Generic criteria | Academic criteria | NHS role | Public-sector role |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Practitioner** | Work without direct supervision, take accountability for actions | Professional Qualification | RGN Associate Practitioner | Environmental Health Officer, Social Worker |
| **Senior Practitioner** | Higher degree of autonomy, expertise in one area, may be managing services | Degree Postgraduate | Clinical care practitioner Liaison Nurse | Healthy Schools Coordinator Social Work Team Manager |
| **Advanced Practitioner** | Contribution to planning and development of services | Master's degree in specialism | First contact practitioner | Home Manager Senior Researcher Senior Manager |
| **Consultant Practitioner** | High level of expertise and responsibility | Professional Doctorate | Matron Nurse Consultant | Assistant Director of Specialist Service |
| **Professional Lead** | Professional lead with corporate and strategic responsibility | PhD Professional Doctorate Master's | Consultant | Director |

**Figure 9: Potential skills escalator for local authorities; adapted from Lawson-Brown (2007) and Readhead and Mather (2006) in 'The Post-Qualifying Handbook for Social Workers'**

These, are some of the considerations, that may influence the implications and recommendations, which my research findings point to, as discussed further in Chapter 6.

# Chapter 6: Practice Implications and Recommendations

In this final chapter, I consider the implications for post-qualifying practice, indicated by this research and suggest a number of recommendations, which could lead to improvements in the uptake and delivery of future PQ programmes. I have made direct reference to the supporting data, from the three stages of my research as evidence. I begin with concluding comments, on the authenticity, credibility and verification of this PQ research study and how this can contribute to the PQ and CPD debate.

## 6.1. Verifying knowledge claims and validity

My research took place at a point of crucial change for post-qualifying social work education, with the introduction of a new GSCC framework for PQ awards in September 2007. Although, a small regionally based study, it draws upon and extends larger contemporary, publicly funded PQ research (Dole et al, 2006). Using a primarily qualitative methodology, my intention was to reveal the authentic experience of PQ candidates, and give voice to how they overcame any barriers to their post-qualifying studies. My intention, was also to 'give voice' to the recipients of social work education and to learn from their extensive knowledge and experience. From the outset of this research I negotiated clear aims, objectives and boundaries, in consultation with the University of Southampton, where my doctoral studies are based and with the south coast University where I am employed, as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work. I received research governance approval from West Sussex County Council (see Appendix A) and ethical review permissions from the Universities of Southampton and Chichester. All participants were qualified social workers, registered with the GSCC and subject to the professional Codes of Conduct (GSCC, 2002). I have been a GSCC registered social worker since June 2004 and renewed my registration in 2007, having met all the Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) requirements. I undertook my research in good faith, using proven ethical and good practice approaches. I was clear in my preparation and design, that my research technique and implementation should 'do no harm', and allow participants the opportunity to withdraw at any time.

Stage 1 participants had the opportunity to self-select whether or not to be involved with the Stage 2 interviews. Great care was taken to ensure participants anonymity and where appropriate gain permission for the use of actual names and roles.  To my knowledge, to date, no participant has experienced any detrimental or adverse affect due to taking part in the research.

## 6.2. Credibility and validity of findings

The triangulation of my methodological approaches, underpins the credibility of my data and findings, which have been verified as objective, and a true reflection of contemporary post-qualifying education. Beginning, with the general profile of post-qualifying candidates nationally, referring to the GSCC reporting for the period April 2006 to March 2007 (see Figure 10), the Stage 1 sample compares favourably, when looking at candidate characteristics such as gender, age, disability and award achievement.  The one characteristic showing marked difference, between this regional sample (Stage 1) and that of the wider national picture, is ethnicity. The percentage of candidates in England who identify as Black and/or Minority Ethnic (BME) is 22%, compared with only between 5-8% of candidates in this regional sample. Arguably, this is most likely due to the demographic nature of these south coast communities as predominately white. This is partly confirmed by the Office for National Statistics, Census 2001 (most recent available data). www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk (Appendices E 1-3), where an average of the ethnic mix of local towns where candidates lived, equates to a 98% White to 2% BME split. The ethnicity population ratio for the south east region is 95% White, 5% BME and 92% White for the UK in general. These population statistics are now at least seven years out of date and do not reflect the considerable changes due to immigration, both nationally and regionally. However, as the majority of candidates, in both samples began their studies up to five years prior to taking part in this research, the ethnicity ratios of the 2001 Census may offer reasonable comparisons.  The small size of the Stage 2

interview sample and the desire to accommodate volunteers' requirements has resulted in differences across the candidate's profiles (see Figure 10).

| Candidate characteristics | PQ registrations GSCC (England) 2006-07 | Research sample Stage 1 (2006) | Research sample Stage 2 (2007) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender: Female | 79% | 82% | 75% |
| Age (NB different age ranges used) | 75% over 35 | 80% over 33 | 67% over 33 |
| Disability (those who confirmed) | 8% | 5% | 17% |
| Ethnicity (those who identified as BME) | **22%** | 5% | 8% |
| Achieved PQ1 | 74% | 72% | 84% |
| Achieved PQSW | 24% | 22% | 91% |
| Achieved AASW | 2% | 4.5% | 8% |

National data extracted from www.gscc.org.uk/aboutus/statistics (GSCC, 2008)

**Figure 10: Comparison of national (England) and Research Sample PQ candidate characteristics**

## 6.3. Comparison with National Post-Qualification Statistics

GSCC registration of qualified social workers began in 2003. Currently there is no national database on PQ award holders, held by either GSCC or Skills for Care. Any records of PQ award achievement were previously held by the 19 UK Post-qualifying Consortia, which have recently been disbanded. Their PQ responsibilities transferred to the Skills for Care Learning Resource Networks. Clear operational links between GSCC and Skills for Care data-bases have yet to be established. In the absence of nationally available statistics, from either the regulator or employers, it is difficult to accurately calculate the percentage of registered social workers involved in post-qualifying education. The Lead Professional for Post-Qualifying Implementation believes the numbers of PQ1 and PQSW award holders are in the region of 13% and 4% respectively, of all qualified social workers, some of whom may not have formally applied to the GSCC Social Care Register. Although, it should be possible to obtain the

numbers of PQ awards holders from www.gscc.org.uk/aboutus/stats , the absence of an accurate link with the GSCC registered workforce, makes it difficult to determine what percentage of registered social workers nationally have achieved PQ awards. Hopefully, this situation will soon be resolved, as GSSC and Skills for Care integrate their data collection activities. The available specific PQ award statistics maintained by GSCC appear more robust, which has enabled a direct comparison between national achievement and those of the Stage 1 research sample (see Figure 10). Across the range of PQ1, PQSW and AASW awards, the Stage 1 sample candidate achievements, demonstrate a close correlation with the national ratio for completions. When reviewing the qualitative data, the Lead Professional for Post-Qualifying Implementation at the GSCC, was able to concur with my local findings, regarding the major barriers for social workers engaging with post-qualifying training. Further comments from a variety of social work professionals and educators confirmed the validity and relevance of my research findings;

> **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'Research confirms what anecdotal evidence we already have, holds no surprises...I think what you've come up with are the things that all of us know in our bones anyway... It's what we would have suspected. Although small, this research provides evidence to support our understanding and moves it from the anecdotal to the factual.'
> **S4C (04.10.07):** '...we know this (what this research tells us) and are aware of the expectations of those candidates who want to, or have to undertake PQ awards career and pay progression works...'
> **SB (29.10.07):** 'The mandatory nature of the Child Care Award now has less of an impact...Younger candidates appear more prepared to accept the concept of continuous professional development.'
> **DG (29.10.07):** 'I know some managers are very pro-learning and would use their discretion to support learners in their team.'

This, I believe, adds justification to my analysis and interpretation of my research findings, and the subsequent recommendations, which the evidence suggests. As the Stage 3, sharing of my initial findings demonstrates, this study, although limited in its scope, is already contributing to the PQ debate. It has raised questions amongst the professional group members regarding current practices and has whetted the appetite for further more detailed research as demonstrated by these queries raised;

- ➢ **DP (29.10.07):** 'It's great from an educator's point of view to say that isn't it lovely that people want to increase their knowledge and improve their practice, but you could say –I'm only begging the question- does this say something about how the self-worth and identity of social workers and the profession feels about its self?'
- ➢ **CS (29.10.07):** 'What is interesting, and its early days, is how the new PQ framework might affect the responses that you've had, specifically with reference to the Child Care programmes.'

## 6.4. Researcher's reflections on their role in undertaking this study

As stated earlier, in the introduction to this Chapter, I began this study with a dual perspective, from that of a previous PQ candidate with my own experiences of managing one's learning whilst working full-time, and that of a professional stakeholder in planning, design and delivery of new PQ programmes.  It would be fair to say, I believed that social workers within this particular sub-region of the South East, had more access to PQ opportunities than most, and that they were luckier as their employers, not only funded and resourced their training but offered financial and career incentives on completion.  This is why I was perplexed, that the engagement with, and attainment of PQ awards, was only occupying the minority of social workers, hence my interest in researching the subject further.  By working directly with social work practitioners, who were currently undertaking post-qualifying training, or had recently completed their studies, I was keen to gain direct insight, on why the 'theory' of the GSCC PQ Framework didn't appear to be working in practice?  I felt, that having been a PQ candidate myself, gave me knowledge and access to the candidates I surveyed and subsequently interviewed, smoothing the way for my research questions.  We shared a common understanding, of terminology and many of the difficulties and frustrations of in-service study, whilst also acknowledging the personal and professional benefits of new learning. I really enjoyed the interaction with candidates and felt humbled by their personal biographies, and how they overcame individual barriers. It soon became apparent, that I needed to revisit my initial preconceptions regarding social worker apathy to CPD.  On the contrary, I felt candidates were keen to access post-qualifying training, given adequate space, time and support, to be able to successfully achieve their

awards. It was these structural barriers to PQ, which began to preoccupy my thinking, which in turn was ably articulated by a colleague of long standing, who described the lack of joined-up theory in our group discussion, as a 'dissonance between the expectations of national bodies and the realities in the workplace.' If I were to identify the most significant message from my work with candidates, it would be to lobby operational managers for realistic support mechanisms, whilst advocating for clear and achievable assessment expectations for hard-pressed working practitioners. On reflection, I now have a more accurate understanding, of the dilemmas that face contemporary PQ candidates and will endeavour to appreciate their workplace pressures, when planning and delivering my own teaching. It has also raised my awareness, of the importance of operational management commitment, to workforce planning linked to clear regulatory body requirements. The latter is more difficult to personally influence.

## 6.5. Comparison with Skills for Care, CPD and Workforce Planning Strategies

The lack of national targets for PQ award completion, Skills for Care (2006a), sees as problematic, as it leaves the level of priority given to the involvement and achievement of PQ at the discretion of the individual employers, which they believe makes it a low priority for social work organisations. One argument is to link PQ Award achievement to the Performance Indicator Framework, introduced by Government to drive-up standards in social services.

However, recent social policy announcements appear to indicate the relaxing of these conditions by the Department of Health. Skills for Care (2006b), believe the following factors, need to be in place to underpin and promote social work post-qualification training:

- 'The active involvement of directors and senior operational managers;
- all those involved in partnerships being flexible in understanding each others' perspectives and drivers, and valuing and making use of contributions of the individuals involved;
- Planning ahead, from meeting schedules to more strategic issues' (Adapted from Skills for Care, 2006b: PQ Briefing Paper 5; Learning from the current system)

Amanda Hatton (2006a), as Programme Head for Post-qualification, at Skills for Care, has highlighted a number of critical success factors, at regional and national level, which need to be in place to support implementation of the new PQ framework. In particular, she refers to the need for employer-driven support and essential partnership initiatives, based on sound workforce planning. This would appear at odds with the feedback from professional groups of employers (see Appendices D2-4), who appear to be suffering partnership fatigue. It may be because, as fairly proactive employers, who already operate pay and career progression policies, they are still waiting for those less motivated employers to catch-up in their CPD commitment to their workforce. From my own previous experience as a local authority Training and Development Manager, obtaining accurate workforce data was complex and problematic and could not be relied upon for accuracy. Arguably, social workers are a minority of the social care workforce and although a vocal minority, appear to lack the strategic influence, to raise their professional development much higher up the operational social services agenda. Hatton (2006a), believes that accurate workforce data is a priority, that will underpin workforce planning, and has great hopes that the National Minimum Data Set a Skills for Care electronic data gathering tool, will provide this essential link. Employers and educators are not so optimistic, as they know that the quality and reliability of such data is notoriously variable across the country and without clear strategic direction from national bodies or specific ring-fenced funding, post-qualification training will remain a marginal activity in many of our social work organisations. Skills for Care (2006a), published 'Continuing Professional Development for Social Care' in collaboration with the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), which launched a CPD strategy for all employees across the social care sector, with specific objectives to develop a qualified workforce as members of an organisation that promotes a learning culture for all. Any successful learning culture requires, 'a shared vision, enabling processes and structures', which includes managers able to empower and motivate employees to take advantage of facilitating, 'systems and policies to encourage and sustain learning' (Skills for Care, 2006a). Skills for Care (2006a)

identifies a CPD strategy as 'essential for service improvement and good people management', and as such should, 'cover the whole spectrum of learning', including post-qualification learning for social work practitioners, which should be an integral part of any strategy; 'so that workers can achieve awards linked to roles and standards' (Skills for Care, 2006a).

## 6.6. Overcoming barriers to PQ training, final comments

The professionals in the group discussions, acknowledged the importance of comprehensive workforce planning, and appreciated that, the much awaited work that Skills for Care are currently undertaking, but as social workers form a very small part of the general social services workforce, **SW (29.10.07):** 'Organisations are not going to necessarily prioritise social worker's PQ when this might be a minority group of employees.' Even within the registered social worker staff group, there will be significant differences in motivation and career choices, for example, **DG (29.10.07):** 'Differences in motivations between adult services and child care social workers engaging with PQ, with child care workers making a more automatic progression to further PQ.' To avoid fragmentation, CPD and post-qualifying study needs to become an essential part of the supervisory relationship, even more so, where increasingly a social worker may be the only one in a multi-disciplinary team. Involvement in PQ can provide a source of professional support. 'This has particular import for social work, which has, for much of its history, worked in a subordinate role to other professions, particularly medicine' (Lymbery, 2003: p.377).

There appears to be a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction at the lack of national leadership and overall development of social work as a profession. Lymbery (2003: p.369) argues '...social work has been subjected to an ever-increasing volume of public debate and criticism, and its claims to professional status are under threat.' He believes that, the contribution social work makes to society is contested and 'are susceptible to public devaluing of the services they provide' (Lymbery, 2003: p.369). Professionals from academia and practice alike, felt frustrated by the absence of guidance and resolve in the

implementation of the revised PQ framework, which some believe has been presented as a 'fait a compli' **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'I think the difficulty has come with the 'straight-jacket' the GSCC has given us for these awards. I think sometimes with new organisations they want to keep things so tight that that's what has happened with the GSCC.' In the context of ever changing practice, where social work has as Lymbery (2003: p.369) states; '...has been subjected to increased managerial control and social worker's levels of autonomy have been reduced.' It is not surprising that practitioners have focused their attention on keeping pace with new operational directives, rather than their personal CPD and when they do find time and space to consider improving their practice, they are shoe-horned into generic PQ programmes. **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'I don't think there has ever been consultation with practitioners themselves on what they would want!' This may be a sentiment that many social workers identify with, as they feel that the PQ framework has little to offer their own area of expertise.

When it came to the professional groups considering, what would make a difference in, expanding PQ and the numbers of registered social workers actively engaging and enrolling on programmes, there were a range of ideas mooted. Initially, further research data on the reasons why social workers don't engage with PQ training, was seen as essential. **DG (29.10.07):** 'This would be influenced by good workforce planning.' These particular candidate samples appear to be fortunate, that the majority of their employers (95%) were willing to fund their PQ studies and many received incremental pay progression on completion of certain awards. As an established, and fairly universal retention strategy across the region, employer representatives saw this as a major attraction for social workers new to the profession, but less so for the majority of long-serving practitioners. Therefore, career pathways are necessary for all social workers and not just the newly qualified. **ULA (04.10.07):** 'I would agree with others that it is about career pathways, for newly qualified workers in the authority up to three to four years post-qualified they all need career pathways. But there is a sad lack of direction from the top.' Meeting with the

GSCC Lead Professional for PQ (26.10.07), a focus on the reframing and development of learning organisations and cultures was recommended. Referring to GSCC (2002) 'Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers and Employers' Number six, where there is a requirement for social work teams to have regular agenda items on learning and development, greater emphasis on how learning can take place in the workplace, avoiding the necessity to travel. This theme was highlighted by **TC (29.10.07):** 'It's not just down to the individuals but also the culture of the organisation, where by as part of an individual's professional development the expectation is to undertake certain learning.  The organisation itself needs to be considered as a learning organisation and promote their workers development.' In examining alternatives to traditional taught programmes, an academic suggested that, **DP (29.10.07):** 'One of the things you might need to analyse is what they mean by teaching, because there's a big difference between teaching and learning, because different people have different views on what being taught is about.' Some respondents, suggested a monthly input, not constrained by the academic year, others talked about flexible learning e.g. on-line training packages, a county meeting or team Away-days?

Given that all those who responded to the Stage 1 Questionnaire, had already or where currently studying for a PQ award, it was pleasing to see so many candidates where prepared to consider further post-qualifying training (63% of respondents commented positively on their plans for future PQ training). This arguably, indicates that once social workers have engaged with PQ and overcome the many personal and operational hurdles, they truly develop a taste for CPD in general. Although, the majority of candidates cited PQ1; PQCCA, PTA, GCPA or ASW as their most popular future choice of PQ training, there were many others who were looking for more diverse areas of knowledge, including; fostering, attachment, therapeutic interventions, adolescents, psychology, multi-professional working and research in general. The responses to question number 18 of the Stage 1 Questionnaire, revealed a wide range of interest and suggestions on how promotion of post-qualifying education in

general could be improved and the diverse areas of interest social workers were keen to explore:

- ➢ **Comment 1:** 'Very interested in new PQ Framework and how this will develop vis-à-vis Higher Awards'
- ➢ **Comment 21:** 'I believe in continuous learning and consolidation of learning. I would like there to be support to people taking post qualifying courses which are more specialist, such as MA's – attachment and therapeutic interventions.
- ➢ **Comment 29:** 'Yes – as a manager I am at a loss as to what is available for me, hence commencing the Practice Teaching Award. Also there was rumour about other qualifications e.g. PCEP (Youth Justice Board) being linked to and counting as PQ Awards. This does not seem to happen, but in an area of specialism like mine it would be a great incentive.'
- ➢ **Comment 53:** 'On-line, distance study may help.'
- ➢ **Comment 59:** 'The new PQ framework will be/should be flexible enough to accommodate a broader range of awards, with some prospect of being able to design a course around own needs/interests.'
- ➢ **Comment 60:** 'Relevant to specialised teams, e.g. Meeting requirements of PQCCA is sometimes difficult as opportunities not always present in leaving care work and I am not prepared to take on work with another agency as would feel contrived and further reduce the time I have available for my own caseload.'
- ➢ **Comment 62:** 'I think there is quite a lot of overlap with some courses and the time spent on PQ studies is too much. The course could be streamlined but this may be happening with the revised PQ awards.'

Almost all, of the Stage 2 Interviewee sample, demonstrated their enthusiasm for post-qualifying training, and believed CPD was their personal responsibility. When the question was asked, by **SW (29.10.07:** 'Did any of the respondents say, 'I want to do this because I should be doing it', not just to get the money, but to develop professionally?' The data provided clear evidence, that some candidates understood the concept of life-long learning and appreciated the inputs at University, were distinct from any in-house training programmes their employer provided. **DG (29.10.07):** 'There's also a concept that you as an individual can be refreshed by new learning.' They talked about a boost to their confidence and how infectious learning had become. Certainly a number of candidates interviewed, did believe that their PQ study had made a real difference for the people they serve, especially in complex areas of child protection and vulnerable adults. Ultimately, PQ is intended to improve the

experience of service users and carers! Where workers feel isolated, for what ever reason, PQ becomes almost like group supervision.  Often a social worker can be the only one in a multi-professional team.  PQ can provide a source of professional support, particularly in its opportunities to network with other practitioners. As one interviewee described, '...it's about comparing stories with other people and getting practical ideas and really about real practice cases, and complex cases and things...and being able to discuss issues that arise...'

## 6.7. Summary of Recommendations.

As I undertook my research, I noted a shift in my own preconceptions, from that of a managerial and teaching perspective, to a greater appreciation of the candidate's perspective.  The data generated, led to a positive reframing of my expectations and an acknowledgement of individual adult learning needs and each candidate's skill in overcoming their personal barriers and support needs, rather than confirming what I wanted to find or prove. It is from the wealth of candidate's shared knowledge and data provided, I have concluded that the following recommendations have important implications for future post-qualifying education.  The recommendations 1 to 5 require consideration, by all PQ stakeholders, if they wish to remove the major barriers to post-qualifying training for registered social workers.  Recommendation 6, focuses on measuring the affect PQ training has on the delivery of services to the public while, recommendation 7, asks 'what is it?' that prevents more social workers from undertaking PQ study.

## 1) Improve consistency of national policy rhetoric and operational commitment.

Almost all members of the professional groups I spoke with, felt little optimism for the national implementation of the new PQ framework. A regional Skills for Care consultant believes there appears to be, 'a dissonance between the expectations of national bodies and the realities in the workplace.' Similarly, an academic believes, **CS (29.10.07):** 'This is where national bodies don't actually recognise what happens in practice.'  In addition, the feeling that the new

framework would not be adequately funded, was also apparent for those academics responsible for delivering PQ programmes under the new GSCC requirements; **CS (29.10.07):** 'Employers may not be able to afford the aspirational needs of social worker's CPD, therefore creating a tension between aspiration and reality.' But as Lymbery (2003: p. 381) believes we are, 'At the start of the new millennium social work stands at the crossroads, to accept its marginalized and demoralized condition, or to seek a new future and sense of mission.' This is where post-qualifying training can provide social workers with their underpinning knowledge and skills to promote their professional competence in public.

## 2) Promote, encourage Learning Organisations with clear workforce planning and CPD strategies

The consensus voiced by the professional group members, was that PQ was not just down to the individual's motivation, but depended on the culture of their employing organisation, where by as part of an individual's continuous professional development there is an expectation to undertake certain learning. **TC (29.10.07):** 'The organisation itself needs to be considered as a learning organisation and promote their workers development.' Preston-Shoot in Tovey (2007: p.24) sees CPD as an essential joint undertaking and responsibility:

> '...employers to provide learning opportunities, staff to develop their knowledge and skills (Skills for Care/Children's Workforce Development Council 2006); agencies to become learning organisations, staff to value their contribution when learning and facilitating the learning of others, whether in formal roles of appraisal, supervision and seminars, or through opportunities that arise through the lived experience of work'. (Preston-Shoot in Tovey, 2007: p.24 in The Post-Qualifying Handbook for Social Workers)

One of the initial steps towards a learning organisation is an inclusive CPD strategy for all employees, clearly indicating who is eligible for post-qualifying training and when this is likely to take place in their career pathway. An easily understood and accessible CPD strategy statement will enhance the recruitment and retention of registered social worker. As highlighted by, **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'For me its something about organisations, particularly local authorities, as the

biggest employers of social workers, is to look at career pathways and mechanisms to keep excellent practitioners at the front line.'

## 3) Continue with career and pay progression. It works!

For those employers who operate a pay and progression scheme for PQ award achievement (almost all employers in the questionnaire sample, see Stage 1: Chapter 4), candidates saw this as a major motivation and incentive to undertake PQ study. 90% of candidates asked, saw this as a major motivating factor. Employers too, in the professional group discussion, saw this also had the benefit of retaining the most qualified and experienced members of staff; **U1 (04.10.07):** 'Certainly the use of pay and career progression by employers may be an attraction.' Another group member stated; **CC2 (04.10.07):** 'The linking of pay and progression to the achievement of PQ awards, so successfully used in CC2 enabled candidates to see clearly how this would bring personal and professional benefits.'

## 4) Need for agreed and resourced candidate support packages, including workload relief; adequate or improved agreed study leave and learning support and advice for returnees.

Candidates who responded to the questionnaire and all those who were interviewed, where clear, that the existence of agreed package of support was essential for successful completion of their PQ awards. 84% of respondents found their line manager and team support beneficial, as did 70% who received regular study-time or study days. Where such support was unavailable, candidates found it more difficult, as one respondent commented; 'I think having time is a big problem...the volume of work is so much, so that people in my team are dropping out of college courses because they don't feel they've got the time.' The most significant factor that hindered candidates study, was workload and job pressure (85%). Some employers have tried to develop local workload strategies, for example, **ULA (04.10.07):** '...some child care teams also operate a case-weighting system to ensure equitable workload distribution.' Candidates welcomed what regular study leave they were

allocated and found this one of the most useful support mechanisms, even if they felt some of their employers could have been more generous. When it came to the academic or assessment load of their PQ programmes, 43% of questionnaire respondents found this problematic.  This may, be age related for those returnees to higher education, but as one group member wondered, **DP (29.10.07):** '...the age differential may need further analysis, just in case there are significant factors.' It is difficult to tell, from current data, what specific assessment elements those respondents are referring to and how best to support their learning needs, asserts **DP (29.10.07):** '...whether indeed the academic end assessment load is too high... rather than making the assumption that the student is struggling, maybe we need to look at the expectations of PQ.'  Learning support and advice for returnees are important and necessary activities for those undertaking PQ study at undergraduate and post-graduate level, and where they exist as an integral programme component, will reduce candidate anxieties when being assessed.

## 5) More flexible and locally available teaching

The majority of candidates studied their PQ award via a taught university-based route, whereas a significant minority experienced difficult and extended journeys to attend their 'local' programme. 30% of questionnaire respondents indicated the lack of access to local PQ award course was a significant barrier they needed to overcome.  The GSCC (2006a: p.4) requires programmes to be 'flexible and accessible' but Lawson-Brown in Tovey (2007: p.215) believes, 'The reality may be that employers, funding or resource issues and availability of regional courses may determine the routes practitioners are able to follow.' Employers, when reframing and developing as learning organisations, need to incorporate the GSCC (2002) 'Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers and Employers' Number six, where there is a requirement for social work teams to have regular agenda items on learning and development.  Also, that learning can take place in the workplace, avoiding the necessity to travel.  The issue of flexibility and accessibility, is complex for all stakeholders, as Preston-Shoot in Tovey (2007: p.24) reminds us, 'There is the challenge of ensuring that there is

suitable and flexible provision, capable of offering higher education institutions the stability they require to invest in programme development, while guaranteeing employees and employers access to quality education tailored to workplace needs (Skills for Care/Children's Workforce Development Council 2006)'.

## 6) Further research on how PQ impacts on the outcomes for service users and carers.

Additional research is required, on how to calculate and evaluate whether post-qualifying training, has a (positive) affect on service user and carer experience of social care provision.  This proved a difficult area for interviewees to comment on, as they believed, the overwhelming negative public perception of social work, counteracted any potential positive affect their intervention may have had. Although, Skills for Care have undertaken consultation with service users and carers on the New Types of Worker, regarding the mixture of skills, knowledge and values they need to improve their lives, Tovey (2007: p.201) believes this may have implications for social worker's roles, be they post-qualified or not; 'Service users may want services that do not currently exist or they may want elements of services provided by different professionals.' (Tovey, 2007: p.201)

## 7) Further research with social workers not yet engaged with PQ.

It became clear, from feedback from respondents and interviewees, that as these research samples were drawn from those already involved and committed to their post-qualifying training, it was unrepresentative of the social work workforce as a whole.  This research did not attempt to measure the opinion of those social workers, the majority, who have yet to engage with PQ.  Lymbery (2003: p.379) argues that social workers need to take a proactive part in determining the future of social work, '...since managerialism has had marked effects on social work, practitioners must develop ways of articulating the importance of their work.' As one of the professional group members stated, **U1 (04.10.07):** 'It would be useful to carry out further research with those

social workers who don't engage with PQ training.  'Why might that be the case?', one might argue, that as yet the infrastructure to support a greater number of PQ candidates does not exist, or that employers would be hard pressed to release such numbers of workers to train. Clearly, there is a need for further research, to gain a wider picture of the CPD aspirations of social workers, for as one academic highlighted, **CS (29.10.07):** 'Whether we can make any generalisations from this small research project that reflects a wider national perspective needs further exploration.' An indicator of what social workers in general might feel, about increasing their practitioner knowledge and skills base is a recent 'Community Care' (the social work and social care magazine) reader's poll. 88% who responded to the on-line survey question, 'Would you like to further your career by becoming a well-paid senior frontline social worker rather than progress into management?' answered yes! (Community Care, 1st November 2007, p12)

## 6.8 Limitations of the research

From the outset, this research was limited by operational and practical considerations. The choice of sampling existing post-qualifying candidates, rather than the larger social worker workforce, was born out of practical considerations of accessibility and study size.  It was easier to locate existing PQ candidates. Although this was exacerbated by the lack of access to regional PQ data, it was still less time consuming and more convenient to engage with this sample group.  The lack of a robust national or regional database on registered social workers was also a factor in not engaging with non-PQ practitioners.  Time constraints of part-time study and the need to meet PQ programme planning deadlines, meant the following decisions, in consultation with my supervisor, and were made to the original research schedule:

> ➢ Apart from recording their initial reasons for the delay in completing their PQ studies, the research did not explore further why candidates dropped-out of their PQ courses.

- The research did not investigate programme teaching content; achievement or attrition rates; or the specific learning support offered to candidates.
- In order to contribute to the University's PQ planning process, it became expedient, to re-arrange the intended focus group schedule, to a smaller professional group activity.

Finally, as referred to in the above recommendations, this study did not attempt to measure the service user or carer experience, of receiving support from social workers, whether they are qualified or post-qualified. This is a much more complex area of study, necessitating experience of consumer satisfaction audits and surveys.


## 6.9. Final concluding remarks

Since completing the writing-up of my Thesis, in May 2008 and reflecting upon the recommendations of my research, whilst placing these within the current post-qualifying context, I was fortunate to attend the 10th UK Joint Universities Social Work Education Conference at Homerton College, Cambridge (9th-11th July 2008) where a number of workshops and papers focussed on PQ education. I presented my own paper, based on this research, 'The candidate speaks-overcoming barriers to post-qualifying training' now published on the JSWEC website http://www.jswec.co.uk/programme.asp?day=1, Accessed 21st July 2008 see also Appendix D1), which was warmly received by an audience of academics, social work educators, regulators, practice assessors, PQ candidates and newly qualified social workers. Anecdotal feedback I received on my presentation, confirmed the inconsistency of PQ uptake and support across the country. Although, I was heartened to hear of individual examples of commitment and stamina demonstrated by PQ candidates everywhere. Sadly, the GSCC conference newsletter 'Social Work Education News: JSWEC July 2008' (GSCC: 2008), revealed registration statistics for the new PQ framework as low, which provides evidence for the continued need for my **recommendations 1 and 2**, if involvement in post-qualifying training is to reach and surpass the previous level of PQ uptake.

A more positive application of my **recommendation 2,** was demonstrated by employers and universities in South Wales. 'Sounds good in theory…employer engagement in PQ' by Dr Colin Young, Linda Brunt, Eve Rees, Judith Evan (http://www.jswec.co.uk/programme.asp?day=2 , Accessed 21st July 2008) shared examples of good practice in workforce planning and collaborative working between stakeholders, which demonstrated the importance of partnerships. For me, the most positive developments in support of **recommendation 4**, where the announcement of a 3-year project funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to investigate the introduction of a Newly Qualified Social Worker status(NQSW), which on the face of it, appears to mirror the NQTS for newly qualified teachers. The Care Council for Wales (2007), has published its own guide 'Making the most of your First Year in Practice: Guidance for newly qualified social workers', that acknowledges the need for a protected and managed workload and clear arrangements for supervision and mentoring, to support a social worker in their first year of practice. The experience of the newly qualified was discussed further in the workshop 'Ready to Practice? Managing the Transition from student to qualified professional' by Gillian Butler and Carleton Edwards (http://www.jswec.co.uk/programme.asp?day=3 , Accessed 21st July 2008) It was these debates and the national and UK experiences of others that interested me most and grounded my own research in the contemporary PQ arena. On the whole, the conference lifted my PQ spirits and gave me evidence that we are all travelling hopefully, to achieve a greater confidence and competence in post-qualifying social work education, which will benefit all stake holders, not least the public we serve.

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# List of Appendices

**A**                        **West Sussex County Council Research Governance Permission, August 2006**

**B 1**  Stage 1:  **Pilot Questionnaire Covering Letter, June 2006**
**2**                   **Pilot Questionnaire, June 2006**
**3**                   **Questionnaire Covering Letter, August 2006**
**4**                   **Final Questionnaire, September 2006**
**5**                   **Questionnaire Coding (Excel Spreadsheet) October 2006**

**C 1**  Stage 2:  **Interview Sample Profile, December 2006**
**2**                   **Interviewee Geographical Locations Map**
**3**                   **'Guided Conversation' Interview Questions, December 2006**
**4**                   **List of Interview Transcripts, January-April 2007**
**5**                   **12 x Candidate Interview Transcripts**

**D 1**  Stage 3:  **PowerPoint Presentation 'Overcoming Barriers to PQ: The Candidates Speak'**
                         **Professional Group Discussion Transcripts:**
**2**                   **4th October 2007**
**3**                   **26th October 2007**
**4**                   **29th October 2007**

**E**                        **Office for National Statistics**
**1**                   **UK Population by ethnic group, April 2001**
**2**                   **Neighbourhood Statistics, Chichester**
**3**                   **Neighbourhood Statistics, Worthing**