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EXPERIENCES OF POST-QUALIFYING STUDY IN SOCIAL WORK

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Editorial note from Skills for Care

This document was originally commissioned by the social work Practice Learning Taskforce, hosted by Skills for Care, for publication as part of the *Capturing the Learning* series summing up the Taskforce's work. However, it became apparent that this particular piece of work had even greater relevance to Skills for Care's post-qualifying in social work project, which supports employers' partnerships with higher education to implement the new PQ framework promulgated by the General Social Care Council. Skills for Care is therefore very grateful to the team at Sheffield Hallam University for this work, and is pleased to publish this full edition of it on www.skillsforcare.org.uk, and extracts from it in the Skills for Care employer's guide to PQ.

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Appendix 4 THE QUESTIONNAIRE for PQ CANDIDATES

Summary

Overview of the findings

Professional development

There is a strong consensus that the primary purpose of post-qualifying study is professional development: enhancing and updating existing skills and knowledge, and opportunities for reflective and analytical thinking. The commitment is more to a broad notion of continuing professional development than a narrow notion of training.

Support and recognition

Support and recognition are the strongest elements in sustaining post-qualifying study. The source of support ranged from colleagues to family members, from supervisor to tutor, though the most consistently mentioned source was the mentor. *'A good mentor is someone who is knowledgeable about PQ, who is approachable and I could ring any day'.* Post-qualifying candidates also want recognition, which can be demonstrated in a number of ways (many of which are illustrated in the headings which follow).

Study time

Candidates need study time, and to be able to *take* their study time without feeling guilty that the service will suffer. *'It is much harder to think than to do'* and this requires 'thinking space' (Kroll, 2004). Lack of time was mentioned most as hindering study and there were recommendations for sabbaticals and secondments so that candidates could devote serious time to their studies. *'It is very hard to combine study with a busy job and a young family.'*

Workload

There is a recognition that study should be a combination of own time and work time, but the latter has to be visible and meaningful. Developing good time management skills was the most cited advice (37%) that existing or past

candidates gave to future ones. These skills help make the best use of what time is available.

Motivation

'If you want to make the time, you can'. Personal qualities, such as commitment and persistence, are an important component of successful study. Although individuals may have different motivations, it is important for them to understand these in order to maintain the drive. As well as 'pull' motivators, 36% of the survey mentioned the 'push' motivator - the requirement to study. However, it seems there is widespread confusion over the nature of the obligation. *'I think it's a requirement?'*

Career

Career development is seen as a significant motivator for undertaking study, though not as strong as the desire for professional development. The financial incentive was mentioned by 28%, perhaps less significant than anticipated. There is a need for advice that links post-qualifying study and career development, with more opportunities for continuing professional development with a focus on progression into management. Also, if we are to avoid the problem that *'[PQ study] refreshed my knowledge, but was soon forgotten once back at the grindstone',* agencies must embed it into practice and policy.

Embedding post-qualifying study

The context in which candidates undertake post-qualifying study is highly significant and the learning culture within agencies varies. Recognition and reward through agencies' human resource procedures (PQ1 and progression, increments for other full awards, etc.) are an indication that a post-qualifying culture is embedded and integral to workforce planning and development.

Course content and structure

Relevance to day-to-day experience and an unidealised practice focus are the most valued aspects of course content. For those whose post-qualifying study lapsed, poor course content and structure were cited most as

contributing factors. Clear guidance is very important, with access to exemplars, to people who know the programme well, and to study skills, especially for those returning to study after a long gap. There is an appetite for more diverse provision, with modules on very specific topics, such as substance misuse. In order to provide a critical mass, universities and agencies will have to collaborate on a regional basis and they will to provide diverse modes of study, such as e-learning. A national database publicising what is available and where would assist. All of this underlines the need for strong partnerships (Mitchell, 2001).

The wider position of social work

One in three of the candidates responding to this survey felt, on balance, negative about their experience of post-qualifying study. However, currently registered candidates were more likely to be positive about their experiences than past candidates, which we hope indicates some improvement. *'Difficult and challenging, but very rewarding.'* Participants in the focus groups set post-qualifying study in a wider frame and linked its future to the future of social work. The status and position of social work in the wider world will have the single biggest impact on the future for post-qualifying education.

Introduction

Opportunities for post-qualifying study have been growing steadily in social work. From a situation two decades ago when continuing professional development was more of an *ad hoc* and personal affair, there is now a well-established framework, with an expectation that study continues beyond the point of qualification.

This research was commissioned by the Practice Learning Taskforce (Skills for Care) to gain a better understanding of the experiences of post-qualifying study in social work. In particular, our focus is the *work-based experiences* of these candidates, across the range of post-qualifying programmes. What helps and what hinders success, and why do staff undertake this kind of study?

The research was conducted at a pivotal time for post-qualifying education, as a new framework is about to be introduced (GSCC 2005a; GSCC 2005b). We hope that the findings from this research will inform the new structures to help them to work well.

What we know from other studies

We began with a search of the available literature on post-qualifying education in social work. Although there is likely to be resonance with post-registration education in other professions (Conneeley, 2005) and other countries of the UK (SIESWE, 2006), our primary focus was social work in England. Manual and electronic searches were conducted, with a mind to accessing unpublished as well as published accounts. The database terms were refined to achieve as much sensitivity (capacity to identify as many as possible of the total available relevant articles) and precision (the number that are relevant divided by the number that are identified by the search) as possible (Taylor et al, 2003).

Brown and Keen's comment (2004: 77) that 'published research on Post-Qualifying Awards in Social Work is scarce' still stands. By its nature, it is

difficult to assess the extent of the 'grey' literature but, typically, the studies in this field are local and focus on an evaluation of a particular programme or of candidates in a specific agency or a particular constituency, such as McClsokey's (2006) evaluation of the impact of a vulnerable adults and community care post-qualifying programme, and Channer and Doel's (forthcoming) study of black candidates' experiences of a post-qualifying child care award. These offer useful insights, nonetheless, and we can reasonably infer that surveys such as Rowland's (2003; 2006) in the West Midlands have much to tell us about the national scene. Based on 130 candidate responses, his findings that more than 80 per cent of award holders saw the process as a way to develop their skills resonates with our research. There are also differences, as we shall see, between the knowledge we already have from existing surveys, and the new knowledge generated by this research. For example, Rowland (2003) reports that 'the most common motives reported for undertaking an award were career progression, recognition and development of skills, and personal ambition', in some contrast to our findings (see later).

Also of interest are personal accounts of post-qualifying experiences, such as Cohen (2000) and Sloman (2005). Although we cannot generalise from these individual accounts they, too, offer us interesting windows on the experience of post-qualifying study.

Consistency, or lack of it, was noted 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 research commissioned by Skills for Care / Practice Learning Taskforce (Doel, 2005). A degree of inconsistency between programmes emerged as a theme in this current research, such as the difference between *'the ASW model [which] gives you a block of learning, [when] you give virtually all your caseload so you can really concentrate'* to most other experiences of study in which it is jostled by the demands of the workload.

In a study based on an analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews and questionnaires from 23 PQSW holders, Mitchell (2001: 433) found that the post-qualifying awards 'have a positive impact on practice for both individuals and organisations'. Although the focus of our research is on the *experience* of post-qualifying study and does not extend to the impact on practice, Mitchell's conclusions about the complexity of the factors associated with success and failure reflect our current findings.

McCloskey's (2006) evaluation of one particular programme suggested the need for further clarification regarding both course information in general and assignments in particular. Managers' support was highlighted as important, but they often lacked information about the programme and its content.

So, the current research aims to build on these previous studies and to increase our knowledge of the experience of post-qualifying study. It is unusual in its spread beyond one agency or one region. This enables us to derive common themes with confidence that they are not just specific to local circumstances. It has alerted us to some of the differences between regions, such as the nature and extent of support that is offered to candidates.

The research process

Following the review of the existing knowledge, the research process fell into two parts, a postal questionnaire survey and a series of focus groups. We devised two questionnaires, one for the Leads of all 17 post-qualifying consortia in England (Appendix 2) and one for post-qualifying candidates across four English regions (Appendix 3). This second questionnaire had one section for current candidates and one for past candidates. The questionnaires asked similar questions and were designed to be succinct in order to encourage a good response.

Four hundred candidates were selected as part of a random stratified sample, which is to say that they were randomly chosen within five different categories; twenty candidates from each of the five years from 2001 were

randomly surveyed in each of the four post-qualifying regions participating in the research. This was not necessarily a *representative* sample, in terms of overall numbers, but we judged that focusing on the most recent five years would be more likely to reflect current realities. Other than the year of registration, there were no other sampling techniques used; apart from the difficulties in targetting a sample that matched overall ethnic, gender, age and other factors, we estimated that a random sample of 400 would be sufficiently large to reflect the overall profile.

Response to the questionnaire survey

From the 417 questionnaires which were dispatched, we received a total of 91 returns. This response rate of 22% compares to Rowland's (2006) 29% response rate in a more focused geographical area. Just one return was not usable since it consisted of the questionnaire torn in half and the comment 'This sums it up!' Fortunately, the 90 who were more forthcoming answered virtually all the questions; indeed, one question achieved a 100% completion rate, which perhaps indicates that the questionnaire achieved its aim of being succinct and manageable.

10 of the 17 PQ Leads returned completed questionnaires. Although 59% is considered a good response in most circumstances, we had hoped for a high return from a group of people with such a direct interest in the focus of this research. The current changes in post-qualifying education may have prevented the response rate from being even better.

Four hundred questionnaires were dispatched from the four PQ consortia leads (one hundred from each consortium) and 80 completed questionnaires were received, exactly half (40) from current candidates and half (40) from past candidates. This represents a response rate of exactly 20%, though it is proportionately higher for the current candidates (more questionnaires were sent to past than to current candidates). One consortium monitored questionnaires returned as not deliverable (i.e. no longer at that address), and this was 5%, indicating that, overall, approximately 20 of the 400 did not reach their destination.

We had hoped for a greater response. On the brighter side, as mentioned, the completion rates for each question were excellent (see n=X for each of the questions later). Moreover, patterns emerged which suggest that we had sufficient data from these 80 candidates to give a fair representation of the bigger picture and that little new data would have been gaineded by a larger return.

Focus groups were held in three of the four consortia regions. These were based on respondents who stated that they would be willing to take part. 63% of the those who responded to this question (98% did respond) offered to be contacted, with current candidates twice as likely to accept as past candidates. In the end fourteen people participated in focus groups.

Profile of those responding to the questionnaire

The Tables below indicate the profile and post-qualifying record of the respondents. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number throughout.

Table 1: Profile of the PQ Leads (n=10)

Age profile	*21-30:* 1 (10%)	*31-40:* 0 (0%)	*41-50:* 1 (10%)	*51+:* 8 (80%)
Gender	F: 5 (50%)	M: 5 (50%)		
Ethnicity	White: 9 (90%)	BME: 1 (10%)		
Disability	No: 9 (90%)	Yes: 1 (10%)		

Table 2: Profile of the Candidates
(n=80 or less; not all candidates completed each category)

Age profile	*21-30:* 5 (7%)	*31-40:* 21 (28%)	*41-50:* 32 (43%)	*51+:* 16 (22%)
Gender	F: 59 (77%)	M: 18 (23%)		
Ethnicity	White: 69 (90%)	BME: 8 (10%)		
Disability	No: 75 (97%)	Yes: 2 (3%)		
Agency	Stat: 67 (87%)	Private: 2 (3%)	Vol: 5 (6%)	Indep: 3 (4%)

Table 3: Post-qualifying record of the Candidates (n=80)

	Total	*Current*	*Passed*	*Withdrawn*
PQSW	35 (44%)	19 (24%)	13 (16%)	3 (4%)
PQ1 Certificate	66 (83%)	26 (33%)	35 (44%)	5 (6%)
Practice Teaching	13 (16%)	5 (6%)	8 (10%)	0 (0%)
Mental Health	10 (13%)	3 (4%)	6 (8%)	1 (1%)
Child Care	9 (11%)	7 (9%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Adults	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Other	4 (5%)	2 (PQ6) (3%)	2 (PQ6/PQ2-5)	0 (0%)
Total		62 (78%)*	67 (84%)*	10 (13%)*

* i.e. 78% of all respondents were currently registered for some form of post-qualifying study, 84% of all respondents had successfully completed one or more of the elements in the Table, and 13% had withdrawn from one or more of the elements.

The typical candidate was female, white, in her forties and working in a statutory agency. The typical PQ consortium Lead was just as likely to be male as female, white and a decade older than the typical candidate.

The findings

Responses from the 80 candidates and 10 PQ Leads were analysed and coded for themes. Codes were gathered into related categories, to see which themes emerged from the collective response of these 90 completed questionnaires. Categories are not, of course, watertight, but the codings were developed and used independently by three different researchers to try to ensure their validity and reliability.

NB Figures in the sections below refer to the percentage and number (in brackets) of respondents who made reference to a factor which was coded within that category. For example, when answering the question about the purposes of post-qualifying study, 77 respondents made at least one reference to a factor which was coded as 'Professional development' - this was 89.53%, rounded to 90%, of all those who completed this question (n=86). Many respondents made several references to professional development; these would be tallied under the various codes within the professional development category, but there would be only one count within the overall category. In this way we can develop a profile of the prevalence of each of the categories. Categories scoring less than 5% are not included.

Purposes of post-qualifying study

It is important to understand how social workers view post-qualifying study in the wider scale of things. As far as we are aware previous surveys have not sought to understand the purposes of this study. The principle categories of response were:

- professional development: 90% (77)
- academic development: 27% (23)
- career development: 15% (13)
- outcomes and service development: 15% (13)
- personal development: 6% (5)
- understanding the policy framework: 5% (4)

n=86/90 (96%)

The most significant aspects of professional development were considered to be enhancing knowledge and skills, updating existing skills and reflective and analytical thinking. Writing in the context of a study into the challenges of post-qualifying child care award teaching, Kroll (2004: 653) has argued 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'.

It is interesting that the PQ Leads placed almost as much emphasis on service development and academic development as they did on professional development, perhaps reflecting their wider brief, but professional development was by far the most prominent category amongst the candidates.

The fact that career development was mentioned by only 15% of respondents as one of the purposes of post-qualifying study comes as a surprise and contrasts with Rowland's (2003) regional survey in which 'the top three responses were linked to promotion, salary or a new position'. However, career development becomes more significant when it is linked to motivation, as we shall see.

Motivations for undertaking post-qualifying study

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.

Interestingly, though 90% of respondents cited professional development as a primary purpose of post-qualifying study, only 66% mentioned it as their primary motivation. Career development becomes more of significant factor as a motivator; indeed, the PQ Leads understood both career development and financial incentive to be greater motivations than professional development.

- professional development: 66% (58)
- career development: 60% (53)
- requirement: 36% (32)
- financial incentive: 28% (25)
- academic development: 19% (17)
- personal development/qualities: 15% (13)

n=88/90 (98%)

Of course, these categories are not watertight and there are connections between them all. However, we might surmise that there are differences between '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.

Rowland's (2006) West Midlands survey saw 'Develop Skills', 'Increase Job Prospects' and 'Validate Existing Skills' as the three main motivations for undertaking an award.

Factors which help to sustain post-qualifying study

All 90 responded to the question which asked about the factors which helped to sustain post-qualifying study. These were the findings:

- support and recognition: 71% (64)
- time: 41% (37)
- personal qualities: 29% (26)
- course content and PQ structure: 17% (15)
- career and future prospects: 12% (11)
- supervision and direction: 8% (7)
- organisational (e.g. workload relief): 7% (6)

n=90/90 (100%)

It is not surprising that support emerges as the most significant factor to sustain post-qualifying study. However, within this overall rubric, there are some interesting contrasts. For example, past candidates were much more likely to indicate that the support of their manager was significant than current candidates (33% as opposed to 13%). PQ Leads placed considerably less emphasis on peer support (team colleagues and other candidates), with just one mention (10%), compared to 32 (44%) references amongst candidates. However, 70% of PQ Leads cited the support of the employer (as opposed to the individual line manager) as a sustaining factor, whilst this was recognised by only 5% of candidates. Overall, it was the support of the mentor that was most cited: 31% of all respondents specifically referred to the support of the mentor as a factor which helped to sustain post-qualifying study. This was reflected very strongly in one of the focus groups (see later).

The questionnaire did not specifically raise the issue of *who* should be the mentor, but a study by Turner (2000) underlined the benefit of involving line managers as mentors as they can 'refocus on the developmental and supportive aspects of supervision that may have been eroded over recent years in favour of a narrower, more managerial approach'. Turner (2000: 231) 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'.

Time was the other major factor to sustain study, and for most of the respondents this meant having appropriate study time and, just as important *being able to take it.* Here we have links with support, so that supportive managers enabled candidates to use the time they were allocated.

The most important personal qualities were considered to be motivation and commitment. The most significant aspect of course content was its relevance to day-to-day work, and its ability to interest and to be challenging, though there were many, varied factors within this overall category.

Factors which hinder post-qualifying study

We might suppose that the factors that hinder are just converse of those that help. However, when we consider the detail of these responses, there are some interesting contrasts and divergences. For example, whilst support is by far the most important category for helping to sustain post-qualifying study (71%) its absence as a factor hindering study is mentioned by only 24%. Organisational issues, which were wholly concerned with backfill and cover for work, were cited by just 7% as helping study, yet 43% of respondents mentioned workload commitments as a factor which hindered study. 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).

- lack of time: 50% (44)
- organisational (workload pressures): 43% (38)
- personal commitments: 26% (23)
- lack of support and awareness: 24% (21)
- personal qualities: 22% (19)
- structural (PQ): 19% (17)

- course content (PQ): 13% (11)
- practical issues: 11% (10)
- assessment issues: 6% (5)

n=88/90 (98%)

Half of all respondents mentioned time as a hindrance. Unfortunately, 'time' is a rather diffuse notion and some people did not specify what they meant by it: 26% just wrote 'lack of time' in their list of factors. For those who were more specific, lack of study days and having to study in one's own time figured large (22% of all responses).

Personal commitments (such as family pressures) were more prevalent amongst current candidates (38%) than past candidates (13%), leading to a hypothesis that fresh memories might sometimes be more accurate or, at least, more vivid. Green Lister's (2003) study of mature women students on a qualifying course resonates with the challenges that many post-qualifying candidates face, with practical issues such as length of journey to study sessions mentioned by 11%.

Lack of awareness of the post-qualifying world is a hindrance for many candidates, especially those working in non-social work settings: *'I'm in a team with health workers and I think "I'm doing all this, but is it recognised by colleagues from other professions"?'* However, one participant in a focus group reflected that *'moving to the culture of a multi-disciplinary team was more supportive - this culture includes study time to read journals'.*

The structure and content of the post-qualifying programme figured more prominently in the factors that hinder, and we will return to this theme when we consider the focus group material. Although the various *structural* factors were somewhat idiosyncratic, those 13% who felt that course *content* was a hindering factor unanimously cited a lack of relevance to day-to-day work as the primary concern. This theme echoed through some of the responses to other questions.

Advice for those considering post-qualifying study

Having reflected on the purpose of post-qualifying study and the factors that susatain and hinder those undertaking it, we asked what advice the Leads and the candidates would give to some-one they were supporting through post-qualifying study.

Again, though there were resonances with themes from previous questions, the emphasis was a little different. 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.

- time management: 37% (30)
- time/timing: 28% (23)
- personal qualities: 21% (17)
- support: 20% (16)
- specific skills: 10% (8)

  there were 17 other pieces of advice which did not easily fall into the above categories

n=82/90 (91%)

Current candidates were more concerned to stress the support of the supervisor or line manager (19%), compared with past candidates (3%). Writing skills (especially reflective ones) and knowing how to produce a portfolio were amongst the specific skills that respondents advised were important to hone. Perhaps more assistance to consider what 'reflective writing' actually means would be helpful (Rutter and Brown, 2005; Saltiel, 2003). The 'Other' category was especially large in this section, with individual pieces of advice varying from 'consolidate your experience before

starting the PQ1' to 'get on top of the direct observation requirements and how these can be achieved'. The significance of direct observation also emerged strongly in one of the focus groups. Although most of the advice was given in a positive light, three people felt it was important to 'jump through the hoops' and 'write what they want to hear'; again there was an echo of this in one of the focus groups. Two of the PQ Leads felt strongly that it was difficult to generalise advice and that each candidate's needs varied considerably.

In Rowland's (2003) regional survey, the re-focusing that can come as a result of post-qualifying study reminded many people why they chose their career. The 2003 survey found that an encouraging 96% of the respondents would recommend the awards to others, though it is worrying that this dropped to 82% in the most recent (2006) survey.

What might have prevented a lapse in post-qualifying studies

Past candidates who had withdrawn from post-qualifying study were asked what might have prevented this. Thirteen people completed this question (33% of the subset of past candidates) of whom one responded even though s/he had passed (*'I passed but really needed the support - emotionally and practically - of my partner').* Numbers are too small to draw any general conclusions, but the individual responses to what might have prevented a lapse of study are noted below.

- course structure and content
  greater relevance [of the course]; *some 1:1 mentoring from some-one in the same area of work; methods of fulfilling competencies other than written work (such as viva voce or supervision or presentation); more focus on how to do the portfolio; more time to study; no choice of tutor, so I withdrew and opted to do a self-funded MA.*
- personal
  more commitment; *more support (2 respondents)*; *my retirement [was why I withdrew]*; *my own desire to achieve; not starting until I had more experience – 3 years post qualification minimum.*

- practical
  not having computer; computer failure.
  n=13

In Keville's (2002) study of candidates dropping out, conducted prior to the new social work degree, the two main factors were lack of confidence in study skills and, with a small number of social workers, specific and possibly unrecognised, learning needs such as dyslexia. '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). 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'.

Although none of the respondents made specific mention of learning needs, there were pleas for clearer written guidance and concern about lack of knowledge in relation to finding and synthesizing information. Brown *et al's* (2003) research suggested that many students found these demands 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.'

Future post-qualifying plans or hopes

The post-qualifying candidates were asked about their future plans and hopes. This question also had a good completion rate, with 77 out of a possible 80 completions (96%). This is what they planned or hoped for their post-qualifying study:

- continue with further awards: 42% (32)
  Child Care: 9; Practice Teaching: 9;
  Advanced Specialist Award: 5;
  ASW (Mental Health): 5; PQSW: 2;
  MA: 1; MSc: 1; PhD: 1
- no plans: 29% (22)
- achieve current award: 25% (19)
- other CPD: 5% (4)
  disabilities: 1; family therapy: 1
  therapy course: 1; management: 1
- not sure: 4% (3)
- wait: 4% (3)
  for new Awards/formats: 2
  complete when mandatory: 1
- failed to be selected: 1% (1)

n=77/80 (96%)

We can feel encouraged that two out of three of our respondents (67%) want to achieve their current award or to continue with further awards. A further 5% indicated their plans to continue with other kinds of continuing professional development. However, 29% have no plans, a further 4% are unsure, and another 4% are awaiting developments. One 'no plans' respondent remarked, "At this moment I am still in recovery". One person returned to a sub-theme of discontent with the lack of relevance of the course content, remarking that they hoped 'to see the PQ become more practical and less academic'.

Other kinds of opportunity for post-qualifying study

Building on the answers to the question about plans and hopes for post-qualifying study, the questionnaire asked all respondents (PQ Leads, past and current candidates) what other kinds of opportunity they would like to see developed. Most questions achieved a completion rate of 96% or more, but just 74% (67) people responded to this question, five of whom wrote 'None'

(*'the job is stressful enough as it is'; 'wait for new awards')*. Altogether, then, 62 (69%) people declared they would like to see other kinds of opportunity for post-qualifying study. Their suggestions were coded into the following categories (note that individual respondents may make responses that fall into more than one category):

- arrangements and modes: 28% (19)
- topics: 24% (16)
- focus: 21% (14)
- career and progression: 12% (8)
- level: 12% (8)

n=67/90 (74%)

There is enormous variety within each of these categories and it is important to capture the details, so they are presented below. The numbers of mentions is noted in brackets.

Arrangements and modes

secondments/sabbaticals for PQ study (6); distance learning, e-learning (5); agency in-service training (3); more smaller pieces of work/at student's pace (2); placements/exchanges with other teams (2); work-based portfolio routes/modular (2); adaptation of PQ1 to needs of long-qualified staff (1); better use of presentations (1); competence-based short courses (1); NVQ-based portfolio (1); range of learning and assessment methods (1); social worker/academic collaborations in evaluating interventions (1).

Topics

therapy (family; drama; psychotherapy) (4); adoption (3); counselling (3); interdisciplinary (2); mental health (not ASW) (2); substance/drug/alcohol misuse (2); child protection (1); disability (1); dual diagnosis (1); fostering (1); older people (1); other cultures (1); physical disability / MS (1); sexual abuse, domestic violence (1); supervision (1); transition/supported living project management (1); vulnerable adults (1).

Focus

more job and work focused/less idealised/not too theoretical/academic (6); research/specialist/subject-specific interests (5); on-going professional development/study opportunities (3); reflective practice (1); something aimed at voluntary and independent sector (1).

Career and progression

management training/role at PQ+ level (4); care managers with older people eligible for mental health and child care awards (1); clear progression for candidates /what after? (1); PQ made compulsory and linked to national pay structure (1)

Level

study at Masters level (3); conversion to degree for Diploma holders (2); national learning outcomes (1); PhD (1); recognition of academic achievements (1)

There is firm support for blocks of time, such as secondments away from the workplace, in order for candidates to do justice to the study, and to enable them to experience other work settings. There is also an interest in developing flexible modes of delivery, especially distance and e-learning. This may be the only way in which the very wide-ranging interests in topics for post-qualifying study might be satisfied, since the support for any one particular topic (with the possible exception of counselling) is dispersed. So, though there is widespread interest in following further specialisms, a critical mass of candidates for any one specialism may only be attained over a relatively large geographical area. It suggests an urgent need for universities and agencies to collaborate and harmonise in order to address the wide-ranging interest in and demand for post-qualifying study.

We should also note the interest in post-qualifying study leading into management roles. Continuing professional development is not just about practitioners but managers, too.

Hopes for future developments in post-qualifying study

Recognising the breadth of their experience, the PQ Leads were asked how they would like to see post-qualifying study develop. Their responses fell into four main categories: workforce planning, choice, flexibility and partnerships.

- workforce planning: (50%)
  more strategic approach to workforce planning (which job needs which qualification?); links to career pathways; awards embedded within practice; higher value given to workbased learning; compulsory and built into a national pay structure
- choice (30%)
  ensure all minority interests are covered
- flexibility (30%)
  credit transfer and collaboration between HEIs; modular approach by universities
- partnerships: (20%)
  university-agency partnerships, collaboration, shared understandings, especially around the purpose of practice assessment

n=10/10 (100%)

The loudest message concerned workforce planning and the need for a strategic approach to post-qualifying study to embed it in agencies and to make career paths clearer and more flexible. In Rowland's (2003) regional survey, 32% of award holders said they were more likely to remain with their employer after receiving their award, and this has risen to 50% in his most recent survey (Rowland, forthcoming). Some of those who said they would not remain explained that this was due to a lack of recognition of the award or a lack of support with continuing professional development.

Other comments included a desire to see more integrated learning with other allied professions, more emphasis on evaluation and research into the impact on practice resulting from post-qualifying study, courses approved and quality-assured on a regional basis, a hope that future developments will absorb the

best of existing practice and that universities come to a realisation that employers may have other training priorities. There was also a hope for an ethos of continuing professional development rather than 'training' and a note of the apparent lack of influence the GSCC may have in the future.

Other comments about experience of post-qualifying study

All but two of the candidates had further comments to make about their experiences of post-qualifying study. No particular themes emerged in this section but, taken with the rest of the questionnaire, some were relatively positive about their experiences, some relatively negative and others rather mixed. We coded the responses, therefore, according to these three categories and have included illustrative quotes below. (Some of the quotes may not wholly reflect the category in which they are situated, but we aimed to set the response to this question in the context of the rest of the candidate's responses).

One difference worth noting is that current candidates were generally more positive than past candidates: 41% of current candidates felt largely positive, compared to 32% of past candidates. Where only 26% of current candidates felt largely negative, 42% of past candidates felt largely negative. Overall, one in three of the candidates responding to this survey felt, on balance, negative about their experience of post-qualifying study - a figure that the new framework for post-qualifying study will no doubt wish to improve on.

On balance positive *n = (14 current + 10 past) 24 (37%)*

Illustrative quotes from current candidates:

'Fortunate to have a tutor who listened to the group'; 'the presentations were invaluable; feel the whole PQ1 route could be in this form'; 'difficult and challenging, but very rewarding'; 'very good opportunity to reflect'; 'I found studying stressful at the time, but overall I enjoyed PQ1 ... a good mentor is essential'; 'enjoyed it'; 'good sessions led by practitioners'; 'accelerated route'; 'access to mentor'; 'thoroughly enjoyable'.

Illustrative quotes from past candidates:

'CPD is important'; 'overall very rewarding'; 'hard work, but rewarding'; 'I enjoyed the challenge, especially looking at research relating to practice'; 'lot of work, but glad I did it; 'opportunity to realign knowledge base was enjoyable unless I'm just sad!'; 'lucky to study at local uni'; 'my PT training was funded by CCETSW as part of the African-Caribbean workforce'; 'enjoyed the lectures immensely'; 'sense of achievement - it was worth doing'.

On balance negative *n = (9 current + 13 past) 22 (34%)*

Illustrative quotes from current candidates:

'Too theoretical - should be more practice based'; 'strict criteria and lack of creativity not enjoyable'; 'lack of support of in-house training'; 'case studies too long'; 'PQ1 is only about doing your job - do not feel I have learnt anything new'; 'it was a huge pain especially making sure I covered all the CRAs and CRBs'; 'portfolio evidencing was more taxing than the content'; 'it is very hard to combine with a busy job and a young family'; 'extremely time consuming and not particularly enjoyable'; 'I didn't get feedback on my work'.

Illustrative quotes from past candidates

'I hope that improvements have been made to the PQ1'; 'took nearly 4 yrs to attain the Award'; 'a chore - I didn't learn anything'; 'not pleasant'; 'PQ1 was too basic'; 'I'd be reluctant to experience it again - stress of study and work'; 'I was disappointed with the overall programme of support and structure e.g. essays for marking often took 6 months to return and in one case was lost…in the end I just withdrew from the course'; 'workshops need to be more informative and time better utilised'; 'not at all enjoyable - left me feeling very stressed with an acute sense of failure'; 'would not like to travel 2/3hr'; 'not helpful or worthwhile study'; 'feel I have jumped through hoops to show that I can do what I do already'; 'job is stressful enough not to expect us to do extra'; 'off-putting if you think the PQ system is all going to change'.

Mixed *n = (11 current + 8 past) 19 (29%)*

Illustrative quotes from current candidates:

'Lack of individual study space at uni for P/T students'; 'good support system essential'; 'good mentor needed'; 'tutors very picky over assignments'; 'tutors don't understand pressures on candidates'; 'why do I have to take PQ1 with existing qualifications?'; 'good refresher, but would have been a drain if I'd been in practice for 20 years'; 'more colleagues would go beyond PQ1 if there were more specialist awards'; 'the contact I have had with PQ facilitators has been positive;' 'there should be a PQ route more specific to my specialism – substance misuse/therapy'.

Illustrative quotes from past candidates:

'refreshed my knowledge, but soon forgotten once back at the grindstone'; 'everything geared towards social workers in child protection'; '3 hours travel was tiring'; 'a struggle to maintain work commitments and study'; 'inconsistencies in the marking identified'; 'I feel I was a guineau pig; some things have improved'; 'found my ASW role in conflict with my belief in empowerment'; 'felt it was a standstill qualification (PQ1) - but a big thank you to my mentor for guidance and support.'

n = 65 (81%)

The focus groups

Three focus groups each considered three questions: what promotes success, what hinders it and what might improve the experience of post-qualifying study in social work. A variant of the nominal group technique was used to help the participants in the focus groups to consider and then prioritise their responses to these questions. The nominal group technique has been well-researched and used successfully across a number of different disciplines (Vernon and Borthwick, 2006). It is a useful technique when the group participants are relatively expert in the subject under discussion. Although the facilitators set the questions, the material is generated by the participants. The facilitators use their position to help the participants to sort, code and prioritise the factors they identify, but the facilitators make no input regarding content.

Participants self-selected following their agreement to be contacted. In fact, half of the 14 who took part were new to the research and had not been part of the questionnaire sample.

Table 4: Profile of the Focus Group participants (n=14)

Gender	F: 12 (86%)	M: 2 (14%)		
Ethnicity	White: 13 (93%)	BME: 1 (7%)		
Disability	No: 13 (93%)	Yes: 1 (7%)		
Agency	Stat: 11 (79%)	Private: 0 (%)	Vol: 2 (14%)	Indep: 1 (7%)
SU group	Mental H: 3	Adult: 3	Children: 3	Phys Disab: 1
	Medical SW: 1	Substance: 1	Jewish Fed: 1	Freelance: 1

Table 5: Post-qualifying record of the Focus Group participants (n=14)

	Proposed	*Current*	*Passed*	*Withdrawn*
PQSW		2	2	
PQ1 Certificate		3	11	
Practice Teaching			2	
Mental Health	1		1	
Child Care				
Adults			1	
Other	1	3	2	

The median year of qualification was 2000/01 and the range was 1984 to 2004.

The findings from the focus groups are presented below. Under each of the three questions at issue, a table presents the themes which emerged from each of the three focus groups. Each person scored each theme on a scale of one to ten ('not at all important' to 'of complete importance'). The first figure relates to the average score and the figures in brackets refers to the range. The focus groups were relatively small and self-selected, so we should treat the information as providing further detail to the survey, and not necessarily 'representative'.

What helps promote success in post-qualifying study?

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Motivation: 8.3 *(6-10)* Study time: 8.3 *5-10)* Support: 7.8 *(5-10)* Peer support: 7.0 *(4-10)* Consistency across programmes and agencies: 7.0 *(4-10)* Course content (e.g. not repeating DipSW): 6.0 *(4-10)* Incentive: 6.0 *(3-8)* Physical environment: 5.0 *(3-6)*	Protected time: 9.75 *(9-10)* Good, not conflicting, advice: 8.75 *(8-10)* Content that is varied, with choices: 8.5 *(6-10)* Content that is relevant: 7.75 *(7-8)* Meaningful support:7.25 *(7-8)* Flexible PQ structures: 7.0 *(6-8)* Supervision: 6.5 *(4-8)* Incentives and feeling valued: 5.75 *(5-7)*	Good guidance and information: 9.0 *(7-10)* Time off: 8.75 *(8-10)* Support from the team, peers and agency: 8.5 *(5-10)* Having a mentor: 8.5 *(7-9)* Use of university resources such as library: 6.75 *(6-8)*

There are resonances with the larger survey, in terms of the importance of study (protected) time and support. However, there was rather more focus on the courses themselves. The plea for content that was seen as relevant chimes with the survey findings, but these groups placed greater emphasis on the importance of clear, succinct and consistent guidance. As one person remarked, in relation to conflicting advice, '*My head was a shed!'* This was a surprisingly strong theme across all three focus groups. Payments and career incentives figured relatively little.

One group emphasized the significance of *meaningful* support, i.e. support that was more than talk. Having access to some-one who had been through the process was seen as providing real support. *'My manager did it and so knew what it was all about'; 'I could have done with some-one who'd already done it'.* The mentor, a person who has almost always been through the process themselves, came through as crucial to some people's success: *'There was no support from the team but my mentor made up for it, I could ring at any time.'*

What hinders success in post-qualifying study?

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Workload constraints: 9.5 *(9-10)* Lack of time: 8.0 *(7-10)* Lack of motivation: 6.3 *(5-8)* Practical issues (such as timetabling): 6.3 *(5-9)* Inconsistency (between programmes and within agencies): 6.2 *(4-9)* Timing (e.g. to access learning materials): 5.8 *(4-8)* Isolation: 5.8 *(2-9)* Lack of access to support: 5.5 *(3-9)* Lack of knowledge (of PQ system, etc): 5.3 *(3-9)* Lack of CPD experience / time since qualifying: 5.0 *(3-8)* Lack of I.T. support: 4.3 *(3-5)*	Lack of time 9.75: *(9-10)* Lack of direction and conflicting advice: 8.5 *(8-10)* Lack of motivation: 8.5 *(7-10)* Lack of support: 7.25 *(7-8)* Poor content / jumping through hoops: 7.25 *(4-9)* Lack of (access to) resources: 6.5 *(5-8)* Changes to PQ structures (what's happening?): 6.25 *(5-8)* Pedantic demands made by courses: 6.0 *(5-8)*	Financial cost (for self employed): 9.0 *(8-10)* Quality of mentor: 8.75 *(8-10)* Family pressure: 8.0 *(5-10)* Continued workload: 7.75 *(4-10)* Lack of information: 6.5 *(3-9)* Lack of peer support: 5.75 *(5-7)* Lack of motivation and self discipline: 5.25 *(3-8)* Programme content: 4.5 *(3-5)*

In terms of hindrances, the focus groups reflected similar themes to the survey. Lack of time and workload issues were strong factors, as was the lack of support and quality of the mentor, lack of motivation, poor information about the course and other inconsistences, uninspiring course content and difficulties accessing resources such as library materials.

In two groups in particular there was a belief that it was more difficult for people who had not had recent experience of social work education, not just because it was difficult 'to get back on the bike' but because the bike itself had changed fundamentally. *'I didn't mind the lack of information as being newly qualified I was still in learning mode - I used the university library and the web for information'.* Access to these kinds of resources varied: *"you had to struggle to get membership of the library - it should've been automatic'.*

One piece of advice came loud and clear: *'get the study days booked in at the very beginning.'*

What would improve post-qualifying study?

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Improve social work status overall: 9.3 *(9-10)* Sound funding for voluntary sector: 9.2 *(8-10)* Clarity about PQ structure / no more change: 8.3 *(8-10)* Courses up to date and stimulating: 8.3 *(8-9)* Incentives and clear career progression: 8.2 *(8-9)* Formalising support, making it more consistent: 7.7 *(5-9)* Caseload reduction: 7.7 *(7-8)* More study time: 7.3 *(6-8)* Courses - consistency: 6.8 *(5-8)* Peer support: 5.3 *(3-8)*	Protected time / extra study days: 9.25 *(9-10)* PQ coordinator role strengthened: 8.5 *(8-10)* Promoting social work more generally: 8.5 *(7-10)* Choice of routes/variety (inc vivas): 8.5 *(6-10)* Varied and wide-ranging content: 8.5 *(5-10)* Supervision by some-one who's done PQ: 8.0 *(7-9)* Incentives: (pay/leave) 8.0 *(7-10)* Employers valuing PQ: 7.75 *(7-9)* Better guidance and documentation: 7.0 *(4-9)* Firm deadlines and clear processes: 6.75 *(5-8)*	More direct observation: 6.75 *(2-10)* Having a good mentor: 9.25 *(8-10)* Incentive linked to pay and progression: 9.0 *(8-10)* Clear information of what is needed from the start: 8.75 *(8-10)* Having sight of previous portfolios: 8.25 *(7-10)* Time off: 8.25 *(6-10)* Groupwork in programme delivery: 7.5 *(7-9)* Support from colleagues who have completed PQ: 7.25 *(7-8)* Distance learning: 6.0 *(5-9)*

Alongside the by now familiar themes of extra study time and better support from mentors, there were some more singular themes emerging from the focus groups. Two of the groups put post-qualifying education into a broader context. They thought that the status of social work (and whether it was a rising or falling star) was an important factor in the likely success of future post-qualifying systems. *'If the service itself is near crisis point, PQ is hardly going to be a priority.'* In a workforce that is punch drunk with change, there was a plea to allow the new post-qualifying framework to bed down before any more changes were contemplated.

The need for sound post-qualifying funding for the voluntary sector, so that it could participate fully in these developments, was raised by an individual but quickly attracted support from the rest of the focus group.

One group felt particularly strongly that there was a need for a wide variety of topics in post-qualifying provision, so that the content reflects the breadth of settings that social workers find themselves working in. There was also quite

strong criticism of the teaching methods on the courses, that they are relatively prescriptive, pedantic in what they expect, a case of 'jumping through hoops'. One group focused more on improving the courses (structure, content, modes of assessment, etc.) They did not think that current assessment methods were stringent or testing enough and that they relied on too much self-report. They advocated much more direct observation, though it was recognised that this might be more sensitive in some fields, such as child protection.

It is interesting that a theme that was relatively muted in the survey became very strongly articulated in all of the focus groups - a call for much more, and much improved direction and guidance, with better documentation to guide candidates through the process.

In one group the majority had experienced post-qualifying study as a chore rather than a learning experience. However, this same group stressed the importance of a good mentor, and that it was necessary for mentoring to be the primary role of that person. Approachability and accessibility, regular 1:1 sessions, reading and commenting on work and helping focus the work through the use of deadlines were seen as important qualities and functions of the mentoring role.

Finally, incentives and clear progression were identified by all three focus groups as important factors in improving the post-qualifying scene.

Conclusion

'I enjoyed it. It was an opportunity to look back at theory, to ask why do I do that and consolidate – it became my baby'

'It felt like jumping through hoops and everything was so pedantic'.

It has been our task to map the experience of post-qualifying study, to gather the findings into coherent themes and to make some judgements about the relative significance of each of these. What can be said with confidence is that the experience of post-qualifying study is very varied and that the factors which explain this variety are complex and multi-layered.

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, 2006). 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.

Individual candidates live and work in environments that differ in the level of demand they make on the individual, and the degree of support they provide. 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. Knowledge of the post-qualifying framework (and experience of it where possible) are important factors; line managers might be expected to have knowledge and mentoring experience.

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, 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).

> *'The presentations were invaluable; feel the whole PQ1 route could be in this form'*
> *'Too theoretical - should be more practice based'.*

The programmes of study are remarkably varied in the way their content and structure is experienced by the candidates. If a course gives clear guidance with exemplars of successful work, has a practice focus with new and relevant research findings, and is pitched as an obvious progression from qualifying studies rather than a replication of them, we can be confident that virtually all candidates will experience it positively. 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. As Sloman (2005) noted in his personal account: 'Having just finished my social work training I was still in tune with the language used and expected by academic institutions, but for colleagues who might have qualified more than ten years ago this has been an all together more difficult challenge'.

Any conclusions must consider the wider arena, especially the continuing diffuse nature of social work, by which we mean the potential for dissipation as social workers are increasingly working as a minority profession in organisations whose mission is not social work. The stage for social work is increasingly complex and fragmented (Postle *et al,* 2002: 157) and post-qualifying education cannot stand alone 'as a remedy for social work's ills' (Brown and Keen , 2004: 77). This study suggests a need for further research to understand the changes that post-qualifying study makes to candidates' social work practice (if any) and the service users' experience of this.

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. Indeed, post-qualifying education offers a huge opportunity for the practice community to build its evidence-base 'from the bottom' (Marsh and Doel, 2005) and unique access to large numbers of practising social workers to gather research data about current practice concerns (Daniel, 2000). Post-qualifying education is most definitely part of the solution.

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APPENDIX 1

CHECKLIST FOR THE POST-QUALIFYING JOURNEY (INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATE)

Here is a series of questions for individual candidates to consider before starting post-qualifying study.

The questions are derived from the analysis of the survey questionnaires and the focus groups in this research. This is not intended to be a quick tick-box, but an opportunity to spend some time with yourself (or some-one whose opinion you value) to consider in some depth the questions that could make the difference between an enjoyable and successful experience, and a burdensome chore that risks a wasted journey. It would be useful to write your responses and to share them with the person who figures in your response to the first question.

Does this post-qualifying study come at the right time for you?

Do you know what alternatives are available to you?

What is going to motivate you to carry on this journey if and when things get tough?

What do you hope success in your post-qualifying study will bring? What (and who) are going to help you enjoy this journey?

How do your colleagues view your post-qualifying study?

Is it important to you that they are supportive?

What will happen to your workload whilst you are studying?

Who do you need to talk to about this? What needs to happen to ensure that you have the time to ensure that your studies will be successful?

How will you make sure you 'have a life' during your studies?

What kind of support do you need from family and friends?

What aspects of your post-qualifying journey do you fear might be disappointing / go wrong?

What will you do about this if it happens?

Practicalities

Like all journeys it is important to make preparations and decide what to take with you.

- **deadlines** *as soon as you have deadlines for course work put them in your diary*
- **study leave booked in your diary** *work backwards from the deadlines to book study leave and, remember, these days must remain highest priority*
- **course handbook** *read through the course handbook carefully and make a note of questions that you want to ask and of whom*
- **library membership** *is library membership automatic or do your need to pursue it yourself?*
- **IT / computer support** *what I.T. support do you need / can you expect? do you need help to learn how to conduct electronic searches?*

Who is your agency contact person?

What will be the arrangements for contact and support?

Do you have regular access to some-one who has done this, or a similar, journey before?

If so, who is this? If not, is this going to be a significant void? If so, can you find some-one? What role will your line manager play? Can you have sight of material that has been successful (e.g. a successful portfolio) - whilst recognising that the new systems will mean that there will be differences?

How will you know that the post-qualifying study has had an impact on your practice?

APPENDIX 2

CHECKLIST FOR THE POST-QUALIFYING CLIMATE (AGENCY and PROGRAMME)

Here is a series of questions for agencies and programmes to consider to support post-qualifying study.

The questions are derived from the analysis of the survey questionnaires and the focus groups in this research. This is not intended to be a quick tick-box, but an opportunity for agencies and pos-qualifying programmes to review their systems in the light of these research findings.

What arrangements are there for candidates' workload?

What workload allowances are available? How will the agency and the programme ensure that workload allowances are effective? Are there mechanisms to harmonise these arrangements across agencies?

What arrangements are there for candidates' study time?

What study time is available? How will the agency and the programme ensure that study time is taken? Are there mechanisms to harmonise study time allowances across agencies?

What support is available?

Who provides support for candidates? How is the quality and level of this support monitored and evaluated? How is the support from the agency and support from the programme coordinated? Will there be a mentor available?

What are the incentives for post-qualifying study?

(e.g. career progression, increments, team honoraria, academic credit and further degrees). What kinds of agency expectation are there that post-qualifying study should be pursued? How 'embedded' is post-qualifying study in the agency?

What information does the post-qualifying programme supply to people who might be interested (or obliged) to study?

Are publicity materials and Handbook current? Do they give consistent and clear guidance? Are there exemplars of work available for candidates to view? Are the arrangements for assessment clearly detailed (criteria, deadlines and governance for appeal and re-take)?

What are the main practical issues for candidates and how does the agency and the programme respond to these?
For example, what kind of I.T. support is needed and provided? Is membership of a library/resource centre automatic? Are e-learning materials being explored and developed to complement face-to-face contact?

How is the programme evaluated?
What mechanisms are in place to find out how the programme is being experienced by current candidates, especially in terms of its relevance? How speedily is assessed work returned and is feedback consistent across markers? How is the impact of the programme evaluated over a longer period of time (for example, follow up with past candidates six months and a year after completion)? What happens to these evaluations?

What are the arrangements for the assessment of practice in the new post-qualifying arrangements?
Who will do the assessment of practice? how will that be monitored and evaluated?

What will indicate that the programme is having an impact on practice?

APPENDIX 3

THE QUESTIONNAIRE PQ LEADS

POST-QUALIFYING SOCIAL WORK STUDY

ABOUT YOU

Your name:

Your job title:

Your consortium:

Your Gender:

Your Ethnicity:

Your Age:

Do you have a disability:

Contact details: (*tel. no. and email*)

ABOUT YOUR VIEWS

(Please feel free to add further factors in each section if you wish)

1 What do you think the main **purposes** of post-qualifying study should be?

2 What do you think are the main **motivations** for undergoing post-qualifying study?

3 What are the factors which you think most **help** candidates to sustain their PQ study?

4 What are the factors which you think most **hinder** candidates to sustain their PQ study?

5 If you were supporting a PQ candidate, what **advice** would you give to them?

6 Would you like to see other kinds of **opportunity** for post-qualifying study and, if so, what?

7 How would you like to see post-qualifying study in social work **develop**?

8 Any other comments you would like to make about the factors which help candidates to complete their post-qualifying studies?

APPENDIX 4
THE QUESTIONNAIRE PQ CANDIDATES

EXPERIENCES OF POST-QUALIFYING STUDY

ABOUT YOU

Your name:

Your agency:
Please indicate type of agency
S (Statutory), P (Private), V (Voluntary), I (Independent) or O (Other):

Your job title:

Is this the same job title as when you started your post-qualifying studies: YES / NO
If no, what was your job title previously?:

Your Gender:

Your Ethnicity:

Your Age:

Do you have a disability:

Contact details: (*tel. no. and email*)

Your Post-Qualifying record at a glance.
Please indicate with a 'Y' for Yes in the appropriate boxes below:

	Currently registered	No longer registered		
		Passed	Failed	Withdrawn
Post-Qualifying Social Work Award (PQSW)				
Mental Health Award (ASW)				
Child Care Award (CCA)				
Practice Teaching Award (PTA)				
Working with Adults				
PQ1 Certificate				
Other PQSW courses *(please describe)*				

FOR PEOPLE WITH CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF POST-QUALIFYING STUDY

Turn to next page if your experience isn't current

Please continue overleaf if completing this by hand and you need more space

1 What do you think the main **purposes** of post-qualifying study should be?

2 **How long** have you been registered as a PQ candidate?

3 What were your main **motivations** for registering?

4 What are the factors which most **help to sustain** your PQ study?

5 What are the factors which most **hinder** your PQ study?

6 If you were supporting a PQ candidate, what **advice** would you give, based on your own experience?

7 What **future PQ plans** or hopes do you have?

8 Would you like to see **other kinds of opportunity** for post-qualifying study and, if so, what?

9 Have you any **other comments** about your experience of PQ study?

10 Would you be willing to be contacted to take part in a follow-up Focus Group? **YES/NO**

FOR PEOPLE WITH PAST EXPERIENCE OF POST-QUALIFYING STUDY

Turn to previous page if your experience is current

Please continue overleaf if completing this by hand and you need more space

1 What do you think the main **purposes** of post-qualifying study should be?

2 **How long** is it since you registered for a PQ Award?

3 What were your main **motivations** for registering?

4 What were the factors which **helped** your PQ study?

5 What were the factors which **hindered** your PQ study?

6 If your PQ studies lapsed or you failed to achieve the Award for which you were studying, what might have **prevented** this?

7 If you were supporting a PQ candidate what **advice** would you have to give, based on your own experience?

8 What **future PQ plans** or hopes do you have?

9 Would you like to see **other kinds of opportunity** for post-qualifying study and, if so, what?

10 Have you any **other comments** about your experience of PQ study?

Would you be willing to be contacted to take part in a follow-up Focus Group?
YES/NO