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Social work students' perceptions of readiness to practise: a mixed methods approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how social work students perceive they become ready for the workplace during their three year undergraduate course. The study involved two Higher Education Institutions sites in England and was conducted from September 2013 until June 2016. The work provides a unique contribution in that to date little is known from the perspective of students themselves, about how they perceive they become ready for the workplace

This work used an integrated mixed methods methodology that included a mixed methods research synthesis of literature and data that was gathered from a combination of pre- and post- test questionnaires (N=74 participants) and eight semi-structured interviews including the use of pictorial images and drawings.

Four meta themes were generated from the integrated data: (i) social worker attributes; (ii) social work development; (iii) critical reflection for theory to practice and finally; (iv) placement learning. The participants described their becoming ready for practice as a developmental journey in which they become more resilient, confident and reflective. The findings reveal the impact of placement settings and key social work practice skills on becoming ready for the workplace. The findings illuminate the perspective of students and reveal they consider becoming resilient an important factor in being able to 'do' social work and 'being' a social worker depended on having or developing certain attributes. They described resilience as being supported by these attributes and its development challenged and shaped by placement culture. Being supported to become critically reflective was seen as important in being able to 'fit together' theory and practice. The students' responses reveal the importance of the role of emotion management and development of self as they engage with their development as a social worker in the changing and complex social work environment.

Overall, the findings suggest satisfaction with the social work course although for some they perceived themselves less prepared for most statutory social work positions. A strong wish for tailored support for advice and support during placement was identified and students found peer support useful.

The findings raise issues that may be used by academic staff in the preparation of students and practice educators who support social work students on placement by facilitating a supported learning environment that may enhance the social work curriculum. The findings from this study can be used to inform a creative curriculum to enhance student confidence and competence prior to graduation.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

Contents

Tables

Figures

Chapter 1   Introduction and background

1.1   Introduction

This chapter sets a context for this research and contributes to the rationale for the study.   It exposes the problem and challenges social work education faces in addressing a crisis in confidence in social work practice and how the preparation of social workers is caught within an environment that is turbulent, and is required to respond to complex, and at times, conflicting policy and professional directives.

1.2   My research journey

Reflexivity in research is about constantly acknowledging the role and positioning of the researcher within the overall project, rather than trying to exclude it, adjust for it, or subtract it from his/her interpretations (Rheinharz, 1992). In my study there were major institutionalised power differentials between me and the student participants I worked with, which no amount of reflection or reflexivity could dissolve.   I acknowledge this and consider it as a central part of the practices under exploration.

I was aware of my multiple roles and subjectivities within my study. I am not just the researcher. I am employed as senior lecturer on the social work, social care and community development team at a Northern university where my role is course leader for a social work programme. Situating myself and demonstrating the multiple 'selves' I perform daily, I reveal to my reader that I am a white, heterosexual, able bodied woman, a wife and mother, a lifelong feminist, once Marxist woman from a working class background growing up in South Africa during the Apartheid regime with English

as my second language. The topic of this research is close to my own professional practice. This meant that embarking on this mixed methods study, which includes elements of qualitative research, required a reflexive approach. A discussion on reflexivity and the research-practitioner is established in chapters 3 and 8. Chapter 3 identifies that the qualitative strand of the study is based within a relativist constructivist epistemological perspective. Creswell (2009, p8) suggests that *"constructivists seek understanding of the world in which they work."* It was therefore considered important to the congruency and the context of this project that some time was given to describing the researcher's world and my experience leading up to the beginning of this particular research journey. The following section seeks to provide this context.

Before embarking on this study, I wrote the following in my notes (Research journal 24/11/2014):

"I want to use creative mixed methodology to explore how our students manage the mosaic of their learning in being ready for practice and to practise social work in the changing landscape. "Are we ready yet?" as my possible research question. I want to understand the challenges and factors that influence their readiness for practice – what makes the fabric of being a social work student ready for practise?; What are their feelings of being ready?, and I want to look at the implications for their professional identity and how they manage their transition."

Upon qualifying in 1997 in South Africa, I worked in a variety of Health and Social Care settings, in both statutory and voluntary contexts across adult substance misuse and children and families services when practicing there between 1997-2000. I began my

social work journey in the UK from September 2000. As a registered social worker, I have worked across various Social Care Departments and Trusts within the National Health Service for 10 years, mainly in clinical roles, as senior practitioner, team leader and service manager. I entered the social work profession with blinkers on, naïve and under-confident working within challenging child protection teams, busy and over-stretched adult services and complex multi-disciplinary teams. During this time I was confronting cultural changes and challenges facing those working across Health and Social Care as emphasised by Hafford-Letchfield (2008) and Baxter (2001) in managing diversity. My initial reflections led me to question my own efficacy and resilience: 'Was I mentally and physically strong enough to cope? And, was I competent enough to offer a quality placement to students'.

As a social work practitioner, I attempt to apply a local narrative as a basis for truly emancipatory practice, but not losing sight of the wider origins of oppression (Banks 2012). Banks (2012) highlighted the fact that, every day, social workers in practice face conflicts of personal and professional values, which should be explored and challenged. The conflict between my personal and professional values was challenging at times and I used supervision to reflect upon those clashes and frustrations. The use of supervision within Health and Social Care presented me with a 'pick and mix' of experiences.

In 2004, I had the opportunity to undertake the Practice Teaching Award, which introduced me to adult learning theories, issues around assessment of professional practice and the dynamics that are created between a learner and a practice educator/teacher. It is important when working within such a field to be aware of personal assumptions, beliefs, experiences, social identities and values and how these

impact on practice. A further discussion of these takes place within chapters 3 and 7. To these ends Jan Fook (2007, p522) advocated a process of "*critical reflection that must incorporate an understanding of personal experiences within social, cultural and structural contexts*." By striving to follow this advice, I have recognised the importance of more critical forms of reflection and encouraged a move from reflection to reflexivity.

Following two years of being an associate lecturer within the Social Work Department at an HEI, I was appointed to the post as Senior Lecturer in August 2007. Soon, I was allocated to be the year one tutor for the BA in Social Work commencing in the September. This was a 'baptism of fire'. In 2007, I completed the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Later that same year I was appointed course leader for the Masters in Social Work programme, whilst still adapting to the life of 'being an academic' and subsequently completing a Masters Degree in Management Studies in 2010. Again, I have found myself catapulted in the world of concepts such as managing change, transition and multi-disciplinary working, power and professional identity. An opportunity arose when I became involved with a research study by a fellow doctoral student within the University during 2009 where the focus was on transition from being a practitioner to academia. When listening to the voice notes and transcripts, it became apparent that I had undergone a shift in the way I worked, planned and communicated with others. I have valued this experience. It was cathartic in its nature as it helped me to move with greater ease into the life of academia.

As a social work academic, I attended a practice educator's conference in 2013. During the conference, social work practitioners, managers, practice educators and students

gave detailed insights into their roles, responsibilities, skills and knowledge in relation to 'are we ready – are they ready for practice?', and the relevance to applying the learning to the nine domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (TCSW, 2012). Whilst listening to their accounts, I was astounded at how 'clinical' and detached the social work practitioners appeared and their analysis of events contrasted sharply with the often emotive and deeply moving insights given by the students when things go wrong during placement. They expressed doubt in their abilities and they questioned if they were ready enough for practice.

Relating these accounts to my own profession, I began to reflect on how first year social work students' perceive their readiness for practice and how this may impact upon placement and the workplace. Following the evaluation of the readiness for practice module and the mandatory 30 social work skills days curriculum on the social work programme in my own institution, I developed the view that capturing these accounts could potentially provide valuable insight into the experiences of the social work students involved. This reflection offered a sound personal rationale that the exploration of such a phenomenon is complex and challenging, but interesting and necessary. The research interest grew out of these incidents, reflections, concerns and professional experiences.

Although my research journey did not start by looking at students' readiness for practice and to practise, I was interested in the experiences of the team around the students when things go wrong during placement or even breaks down. Following discussions with my Director of Studies, I became more interested in why some practice educators and employers comment on our students' not being 'fit for purpose' or not 'ready yet to do social work'.

In some ways this research offered me an opportunity to find an academic explanation or articulation for how I have intuitively 'felt' about the world. My research journey has allowed me to consider how to represent my research findings on feelings academically, and in a way that is accessible to a wider view. The pictorial work participants produced in this research should resonate with readers also on a level that is not simply academic, but perhaps may evoke recognition and empathy in those entering into social work. I have tried to provide some bridges between the academic/creative/researcher write-up of the data by including the participants' drawings and image cards within the study, as seen in chapter 5.

As a practitioner/researcher my interest in emotions and self-efficacy stems from a background of therapeutic counselling and social work and more recently in reflexive writing in education. For some time, much of the theoretical background to my counselling and therapeutic work assumed a role for emotions that I seldom challenged. Practising psychodynamically within a substance misuse setting, I assumed, for example, that emotions were inner feelings, particular to the individual and their experiences.

As a social worker working within a politicised awareness, recognising the influences of race, poverty, sexuality, age and disability on people I worked with, I still unintentionally had an 'ideal 'emotional state I would work with them towards. This proved relevant for this study as it was also informed by literature on the emotional work performed by social work professionals in considering students' readiness for practice during their course and on their placement learning settings upon entering the workplace.

I also questioned whether I was too familiar with the field and so could not make it strange or different enough. I considered that practitioner research may, but does not necessarily imply an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach, and questioned whether an Ethnographic stance be the best fit or even Discourse Analysis? This led me to question the most appropriate approach and rejected these methodologies. For me, Mixed Methods Methodology provides a more holistic account of the perceptions held by social work students towards their experience of their readiness for practice, and to practise on graduation, and 'what works' well for them within social work programmes.

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on having competence for practice at the forefront but recognising the blurred lines between the two when studying social work as a profession with engaging in practice (practicing) being part of the preparation for qualification. A note about the terminology used within this study is necessary. Various terms are used to describe the readiness for practice element of social work education. For clarification, as will have been noted in the following chapter, this study concerns itself with the concept of 'readiness for practice' but other authors also use the term 'readiness to practise' and preparedness for practice interchangeably.

1.3   Perceived problems and rationale for the study

The rationale for this study rests on an assumption that there is a perceived 'problem' with social work practice, and therefore a natural extension of that 'problem' to the way in which social workers are trained and educated, thus raising questions regarding whether they are fit for the workplace. This study considers this 'problem' through the

perspective of how students consider they become ready for practice and to practise. It can be argued that these problems emerge through a social work environment that is constantly changing, turbulent and subject to at times competing policy drivers. Reish and Jani (2012, p1138) point to how, over a number of decades, the social work context in the developed world has become increasingly politicised and this radically influences the spectrum of the profession: "its underlying assumptions, theoretical bases, research methods and educational foundation". Welbourne (2011), discussing social work in the UK, considers this politicisation makes social work a product of what she terms its unstable institutional context, this instability giving rise to a continuous re-adjustment in practice and renegotiation of its position.

The literature review conducted by Moriarty et al. (2015) into the roles and issues within the social work profession in England also emphasises how roles and responsibilities are greatly influenced by the regimes in which they are located and identify how the views of politicians, the media, service users and carers, practitioners, employers, and educators about what is meant by social work may differ. This review also points to how social work qualifying education is, as a corollary, a conflicted policy area, identifying the two separate reviews being completed in 2014 for the Department for Education and Department of Health.

This complex and turbulent political landscape forms a backdrop against which social work students strive to become ready for practice and to practise, and it can be argued, gives rise to perceptions of a 'problem'.

"Not all newly-qualified social workers are emerging from degree courses with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise." (Munro, 2011: para. 8.18)

"Making the transition from student to practitioner and having to make complex and challenging decisions on your own, is never easy. Employers have a vital role in helping people to make that transition." ('Changing Lives', 2006 Part 10: para.8)

The concern of preparing students to be ready for practice and eventually to practise is important not only in social work, but in any professional occupation (Girot, 2000; Long, 2000; Rodolfa et al. 2004). The transition from student to practitioner can be a difficult, stressful, but exciting period. As Changing Lives suggests, transitioning to qualified practice can be challenging. Many authors report the seminal work by Kramer (1974) as first highlighting the concept of reality shock experienced by newly qualified nurses in the United States of America.

It is important to acknowledge the expectations of employers and service users towards ensuring students are 'properly prepared' by social work educators – usually in a university - to claim the professionalisation of the profession (Frost et al. 2013). Horwarth and Morrison (1999), however, indicate that it is important to acknowledge that training is not a total panacea and it cannot be expected to compensate where external drivers or circumstances such as staffing, retention, recruitment, resources, environment and support are inadequate.

A growing body of research argues for the need to develop a new social work pedagogy that is more firmly grounded on empirical evidence of 'what works' (Wilson et al. 2010; Fook et al. 2000, Trevithick et al. 2004, Richards et al. 2005 and Orme et al. 2009). It can be argued that there remains limited knowledge and understanding of

how social work students perceive their readiness for practice and to practise, or how they acquire, develop and apply professional social work knowledge and expertise.

The Laming report (2009) emphasised the need for highly skilled practitioners, able to understand, analyse and reflect upon the relationships between parent and child, record and present information clearly; practise from a robust evidence-base; recognise non-compliance; communicate effectively with others, and, operate within the key legal frameworks surrounding safeguarding and child protection. Munro (2011) identified a number of concerns in this area with respect to education. Firstly, is the academic content relevant, and, secondly, are the students prepared enough in specific and general skills and knowledge for the role?

One of the main criticisms concerning education is whether social workers acquire relevant knowledge to be able to sustain their practice as social workers over time, to fulfill the duties required by the State (Frost et al. 2013). There appears to also be within social work education an argument that the development of a separate statement for knowledge and skills for Children and Families social work and Adults social work is undesirable in the absence of a clear articulation about why the generic nature of social work education is being abandoned.

There is also an absence of sound evidence explaining why the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) is seen by employers as redundant. Furthermore, there is little evidence to date that the partial solution of the 30 mandatory social work skills days in the social work degree actually assist with 'readiness to practise'. These factors led me to the following research question and aims that guided this study and are presented in the next section.

1.4   Research question, aims and objectives of the study

The research question and the objectives of the study are as follows.

1.4.1   Research question

How do social work students' perceive they become ready for practice and to practise?

1.4.2   Main aim of the study

To offer an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of social work students in order to provide research findings relating to social work education and practice learning to inform a readiness for the workplace.

1.4.3   Main objectives of the study

➢ To generate an understanding of the perceptions of undergraduate social work students regarding their readiness for practice and to practise within the changing landscape in Social Work Education.

➢ To identify the factors that hinder and support social work students in learning and preparing for practice and to practise.

➢ To elicit the descriptions of students of when and how they learn to be ready for practice.

In order to understand the perceptions and experiences of social work students, it is important to understand who and what social work students are within the changing social work education landscape.

1.5   Current contextual issues

The section below considers the national picture in which social work students are currently 'fitted to practise' in England as a response to the previous stated problem of perceived difficulties of students being prepared for the workplace.

1.5.1   Social work education response: under the spotlight

Social work requires professionals with a particular mix of skills and abilities (Social Work Reform Board 2010) and the process by which social work education produces such professionals begins with the education of social work students.   The effectiveness of social work education in preparing social work students for practice has been the subject of political attention in recent years (Lishman, 2011; Halton and Powell, 2013 and Maxwell et al. 2014) and it can be argued that the directions emerging from this attention have lacked congruence and coherence. At the time of writing the proposal for the current study in 2014, The Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC, 2014) and the Association of Professors of Social Work (APSW) responded to the Government's consultation exercise on the knowledge and skills required for child and family social work within England and Wales. Their joint response to this consultation identified that the knowledge and skills statement reflected what was already core teaching on social work and post qualifying programmes and as such provided a helpful summary. The consultation document contained a mix of broad statements alongside some very detailed and prescriptive recommendations, which seemed to focus narrowly on the referral and assessment functions of local authority social work. The profession also underwent

two reviews of social work education led by Sir Martin Narey and Professor David Croisdale-Appleby during 2014.

This unprecedented attention highlights the risks of policy incoherence in previous statements, and the on-going lack of resolution of their differing recommendations continued to cause concern about the feasibility of effective planning for all engaged in the delivery of social work education. Parker (2010) noted that the way in which social work students are prepared for placement, within a rapidly changing and demanding work environment are uppermost in the minds of politicians and also policy makers, social work managers and educators. The Rotherham Inquiry led by Professor Jay (Jay, 2014) highlights the risks of social work being reduced to functions that focus on the individual child within their individual family and community. In particular, skills in community assessment seem core to an effective response to organised child abuse of various kinds, deal with disclosure to offer family support and maintenance and underpin an ecological approach in which social work students require to feel confident for practice.

Social Work programmes are necessarily demanding and challenging because it is important that vulnerable service users and their carers are protected from poor practice. These issues were increasingly highlighted following a succession of child-care tragedies leading to criticism of social work and calls for improvements to professional standards (Wilson and Campbell, 2013). The nature of social work education is seen as both part of, and a solution, to the problem. The mandatory introduction of the 30 days of skills training across all social work programmes from 2013 provided a platform for practice educators, placement tutors and students to

discuss readiness for practice and eventually to practise and to work closely with others to improve services.

The social work qualification remains a generic award. As noted earlier, HEIs are faced with a plethora of documents from different organisations ranging from the Health Care Professional Councils Standards of Proficiency (SOPs) - with 76 standards; Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics - 14 standards and Standards of Education and Training (SETs) with 59 standards. Additionally there is also in the College of Social Work's curriculum guides covering 12 subject areas; the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF with nine domains, currently minded by BASW 2015); as well as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Benchmark statements for social work, and, finally the Department of Education's two Knowledge and Skills Statements for social work (Children and Families/Adult). Furthermore, each university manages the curriculum content and delivery through its course approval and annual monitoring process. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education sets and monitors its own standards for the course. Burgess and Irving (2005, p.13) noted that the "*achievement of a comprehensive and relevant, robust and balanced social work education curriculum in the face of many and various influencing issues and 'forces' – Frontline, Step-up programmes, Teaching Partnerships - is not an easy task.*"

Social work educators have had to respond to all these challenges and prepare programmes that are innovative, creative and appropriate in meeting the needs of the profession in demanding times. They must assist employers in assessing whether social workers have achieved the requisite knowledge and skills after their first year in practice and serve as the basis for the proposed Approved Child and Family Practitioners' Status Test. These activities within England and Wales increasingly align

with countries such as Italy, where the completion of the social work degree itself is not a license to practise. In Italy competence is examined via an additional professional state exam, which serves as a regulatory and standardising tool (Frost et al. 2013).

1.5.2. The role of placement experience in the social work curriculum

Teaching on the BA Social Work degree (BASW) remains generic and, in addition to academic input, the BASW includes 30 skills days and two assessed practice learning opportunities (PLOs) since 2013. The first PLO of 70 days duration is undertaken during the first semester of the second year, and in the second PLO of 100 days in either semester one or two of the third year for the majority of HEIs in England. The content of the different curricula/benchmarks/professional exams/mandatory 30 skills days provides some indication of what a trained social worker is expected to know and be able to do.

The importance of practice learning should not be underestimated by all concerned including the students, their practice teachers/assessors, the different organisations or agencies involved as well as the academic staff supporting students during placement disruption and breakdown (Parker and Bradley, 2010). Drawing on incidents that students had reported back after placement to placement tutors upon returning to university, Usher (2009) suggested, that experiential learning on vocational courses can sometimes be used as a 'domestication' exercise. This underlines that there are cultural differences between education and practice settings (Becker and Geer, 1958; Eraut, 2000, 2007; Sim, Zadnik and Radloff, 2003). Cultural knowledge, that is, knowledge created as a social process, plays a key role in most workplace practices

and has been investigated in medical and nursing education (Cope, 2000; Swanick, 2005; Lindberg, 2009; Ousey, 2009).

Much of this knowledge is acquired informally and is taken for granted as people are unaware of its influence on their behaviour (Eraut, 2007). An understanding of organisational culture helps to explain experiences in social and organisational life and enables a better understanding of oneself (Schein, 2010). The common understanding is that placement learning also involves acceptance into the profession's culture, and by the professional community. This may include having to internalise accepted values and norms of that culture. Clouder (2006), studying student learning on health care placements, recognised that current discourses of care were about professional detachment and altruism. She discussed how these accepted discourses could be challenged by personal experience and how in working through these 'threshold' experiences, students could learn about themselves and others and see the issues in a different, re-conceptualised way.

As outlined by Frost et al. (2004) the practice of social work requires the development of critical, analytical and reasoning skills within degree level education. Subjects taught routinely on degree courses for social work include sociology, psychology, law and social policy. However, teaching on the generic and specific skills required in day to day practice, work with service user groups, personal and professional development, as well as philosophical and ethical stances and the amount of time spent engaging in the field of practice vary greatly across countries. For example in Italy and Sweden nearly half of the modules on the courses each year are devoted to social work methods and linking to practice (Frost et al. 2013).

The introduction of an undergraduate degree qualification as the standard entrance level requirement to the social work profession in 2003/2004 across all four countries of the UK was aimed at addressing concerns about the quality of the previous sub-degree qualification, the Diploma in Social work (DipsSW) and enhancing the overall quality of educational provision (Orme et al. 2009). However, major concerns about competence in undertaking the social work role continues in the UK in the wake of a succession of subsequent child care tragedies that have tarnished the professional image among government and the general public (Munro, 2011; Laming, 2009 and DCSF, 2009).

Eraut (2000) usefully for this professional doctorate report, described a concept of learning based on knowledge as a social construct and as a social attribute. For Eraut, learning is more than a cognitive exercise of acquiring knowledge that is already out there. He described learning as embodied, involving the whole person and about movement within a situated context. Kolb and Kolb's (2005) work on experiential learning, acknowledged the holistic nature of learning, the emotional dimensions to it and the social construction of knowledge. Kolb and Kolb's work referred back to other social constructivist learning theorists such as Vygotstky (1978) and Lave and Wenger (1991), highlighting the role of the social in learning. However, although there is an acknowledgement of the social and holistic aspects of learning, there is still an assumption of a student being viewed as an agentic individual who can change and learn as well as an implied insightful goal of self-fulfillment (Eraut, 2007).

1.5.3 The problem of standards in social work

What was the National Occupational Standards for social work is now being superseded with the introduction of the Professional Capabilities Framework or PCF (TCSW, 2012), providing a structural progression route for all social work students' and post qualifying social workers. At the time of writing up my research, it should be noted that the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is now the custodian of the PCF and has commissioned Research in Practice (RIP) and Research in Practice for Adults (RiPFA) to work in partnership on an update and refresh of the framework. It is envisaged that the consultation may allow for the strengthening of the PCF and its significance to the profession but also the relevance and strengths.

By the end of the first placement students should demonstrate effective use of knowledge, skills and commitment to core values in social work in a given setting working, with supervision and support meeting an holistic assessment by the practice educator, and meeting the nine domains of the capabilities framework. But what is meant by being capable or competent to practise? As Frost and colleagues (2013) found in their study it has proven hard to standardise and define competence for social work. Whilst the "Bologna competence" framework exists, England focuses on the PCF and previously the National Occupational Standards (NOS), to fulfill the defined competences as set out by various governing bodies and not the European standards for social work.

Until 2013, the supremacy of technical-rationalist competency models has been seen in the development of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for a range of professions as well as competency requirements to be met when training. The argument against competency models is that they reduce complex professional skills, knowledge, decision-making, tasks and processes into simplistic units of distinct activity and encourage a tick-box approach to the task of assessment (Eraut, 1994; Owens, 1995; O'Hagan, 1996; Parrott, 1999 and Finch, 2010). For some authors this raises a concern that such models are also far removed from concepts such as anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice (Jayaratne et al. 1992; Kemshall, 1993; Conn, 1993; Brummer, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Burgess et al. 1998b).

The previous NOS competencies are observed and assessed over time in practice by a Practice Educator who delivers a final assessment to affirm that the student is competent at a specific level. The competencies were operationalised from the HCPC standards for entry into the profession. The behavioral and skills-based approach behind competency-based models and the feasibility of measuring competencies at all, are the subject of debate within health and social work education. Talbot (2004) questioned where understanding comes within this model, describing competence as a mono-layer and understanding as existing on many layers. The advantage of competency based placement learning is that it may simplify what is assessed and make it more uniform. However, the disadvantage is that it cannot address the multi-faceted aspects of learning within the placement setting.

1.5.4   Problems with entry requirements

Despite the Social Work Reform Board's (2010) attempt to implement the Social Work Taskforce recommendations (SWTF 2009) of raising the minimum UCAS point threshold for access to social work education, Narey's (2014) review suggested that there is concern amongst social work employers about social work students' lack of confidence and the level of problem solving skills they present at the interview stage and beyond. Narey (2014) suggested further, that some employers have an informal list of the HEI's known to set lower entry requirements, which may suggest a link between higher entry requirements and higher confidence levels, resulting in how new graduates are being seen as fit for the workplace. The Taskforce highlighted concern surrounding the interpretation and implementation of minimum entry requirements to social work education, inconsistency across courses and the extent to which the social work courses provide students' with sufficient experience of child protection work. Thus resulting in the two knowledge and skills statements for social work - as identified by the Chief Social Workers for Children and Families, and separately for Adults, appears to be used during social work employment interviews rather than the Professional Capabilities Framework, by which the students are currently being assessed. It could be argued that this is creating a dilemma and confusion for students as to the perception regarding their readiness for practice.

In England, less than 10% of social workers are educated via 'employer based routes' involving, some continued employment in an agency with part time university attendance (DfES, 2015). Based on some American and Canadian research, Vleich et al. (2015) suggest that more consideration should be given to previous academic success, albeit with consideration also given to social work values and educational potential.

However, HEIs have been faced with the dilemma of whether to set entry standards high so as to attract the 'best' applicants or whether to widen access by setting lower standards to attract those who may be suitable, but lack the traditional academic pre-requisites for entry. Furthermore, determining applicant suitability for social work has been problematic with some HEIs struggling to determine valid and reliable admissions criteria (Dillon 2007). There seems to be tension between academic achievement and personal skills and attributes congruent to future practice.

1.6   Conclusion

This chapter has introduced an argument that there is, and has been over years, a perceived multifaceted problem with social work education in its role of preparing practitioners for the workplace. This study concerns the thoughts and views of undergraduate social work students in two sites in England in relation to their readiness for the workplace upon graduation. It explores students' general overview of whether they feel "fit for purpose" in terms of capability or competence, and then specifically at how useful to this process they perceive their theoretical and practical sources of knowledge and their "personal growth" to be. Specifically, it considers their stance on the different sources (e.g. role of the 30 social work skills days) of knowledge and development made available whilst training.

Learning and development begins during undergraduate education, thus experience as a student impacts on the transition into professional practice. It has been recognised that the transition into practice can be a difficult period that may influence the journey an early career professional takes. This research examines students' experiences of

both academic preparation and practice learning, explores the inter-relationship of these and evaluates the effectiveness of different components of social work education in preparing students' for professional practice.

In this introduction I have opened out the context of the readiness for practice and to practise learning journey for social work students' to expose some of the competing discourses that circulate through their placement experience and curriculum delivery. How the students manage their emotional responses to their work is part of several of these competing and sometimes conflicting discourses.

This mixed methods study is therefore both timely and significant in terms of its relevance for the changing climate of social work policy and practice within England. In order to understand more about the nature of this experience, the second chapter presents an overview and critique of some of the themes in the literature around readiness for practice and to practise within health and social care research.

1.7   Study structure

Chapter 2 introduces a literature review approach called Mixed Methods Research Synthesis (MMRS). In this review, two main issues are being considered: the general perceptions of students regarding their feelings of being ready for the workplace and secondly, how well they consider different sources of knowledge and competences in their social work education in preparing them for the workplace upon graduation.

Chapter 3 provides details and justification for the design of the study. The theoretical paradigms that influenced the study are also explored, as is the methodology, research design and the methods for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 includes the introduction to the findings of the quantitative strand of the study. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative strands of the work are separately presented with statistical analysis employed for pre and post-test surveys located in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysed narrative for the themes and supporting sub-themes that emerged as a consequence of a thematic analysis of qualitative interview data presented. Within this chapter the researcher considers issues of rigour for this study. Issues of ethics and reflexivity are also explored.

Chapter 6 presents the application of a triangulation protocol, as outlined by O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2010), to generate a coherent, explanatory framework for mixing the findings from the three data sets.

Chapter 7 presents a concluding discussion and returns to the research question and aims of the study to offer some final comments on the issues raised throughout the thesis on the readiness of social work students for the workplace. It also considers how the study might have implications for future practice and includes a series of recommendations for research in the field of readiness for practice and to practise, and possible dissemination strategies. It also includes an exploration of what might be considered the limitations of the study.

Finally, **Chapter 8** provides a reflective account of what I have learnt from the research process, both personally and professionally.

Chapter 2   Literature review

2.1   Introduction

This chapter presents a mixed methods research synthesis (MMRS) review of literature concerning social work students' readiness for the workplace in terms of readiness for practice and to practise. MMRS reviews are used widely, including in doctoral theses such as this, to both establish what is currently known about the phenomenon of interest and its methodological use as a primary level study (Heyvaert et al. 2017). The MMRS review provided here serves these purposes in that it elicits what is already known about the substantive topic of the study, providing a rationale for its conduct, and identifies evidence to be integrated into the overall findings of the work. Evidence comes in many forms and is derived from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The adoption of an MMRS perspective for conducting this literature review assists in addressing the complexity of available evidence (Heyvaert et al. 2017) and is congruent with the overall mixed method approach employed in this study.

The main interest in this literature review is the learning journey of social work students' 'readiness for the workplace' from their viewpoint. Preston-Shoot (2004) argued for a separation between competence for practice (prior to qualified practice) and competence to practise (post-qualification). It is considered in this review that the integration of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods primary level studies may both reveal the existing knowledge base and enhance the breadth and depth of understanding social work students' perceptions of their readiness for the workplace and upon graduation.

2.2 Using mixed methods research synthesis (mmrs) for this literature review – a brief overview

There is increasing recognition of the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methods when conducting social work research and evaluation (Cowger & Menon 2001; Grinnell & Unrau 2008; Padgett 1998, 2008, Yegidis & Weinbach 2009). There are many ways of describing the process of reviewing literature which may leave researchers uncertain about the type of review to carry out (Greenhalgh et al. 2005).

Grant and Booth (2009) indicated that no internationally accepted definition of review has been developed and believed that there has been an increase in unacknowledged variations to both the approach and rigour of review. In an effort to provide some clarity to what they describe as a "diversity of terminology", they identify and describe fourteen of the most commonly used review typologies. They concluded that all of these review typologies have their usefulness, but acknowledge a degree of overlap between their typologies.

It is clear that there is a need to be able to identify the process of review so that readers can be assured of how the picture painted has been arrived at. A mixed methods research synthesis is a systematic review applying the principles of mixed methods research which will be discussed later in chapter 3. For Creswell and Tashakkori (2007a) a mixed methods study must also integrate, link or connect the data strands in some way (Bryman 2007). This is reflected in the MMRS review in that the data in the form of results and findings extracted from reports of primary level qualitative and quantitative studies are integrated to add depth of understanding and corroboration (Heyvaert et al. 2011).

There is varied use of terminology of this form of synthesising quantitative and qualitative primary level studies, terminology including 'mixed research synthesis' (Sandelowski et al. 2006); 'mixed studies review' (Pluye et al. 2009), and 'mixed methods synthesis' (Harden and Thomas 2005). The term mixed methods research synthesis (MMRS) is adopted for this study, proposing the view that integration of qualitative and quantitative studies at a synthesis level has promising utility for research and practice (Heyvaert et al. 2011). In general, a MMRS approach for Pluye et al. (2009) and Sandelowski et al. (2006) combines the strengths of quantitative and qualitative techniques and studies.

2.2.1 A framework for conducting mixed methods research synthesis

Heyvaert et al. (2011) state that the MMRS process generally includes eight stages or steps. This stepwise framework is not intended to be viewed as rigid or fixed. Figure 1. is adapted from Heyvaert et al. (2017 p8) to provide an overview of the eight stages for conducting this MMRS literature review adopted for the purposes of this study.

Figure 1   Stages for Conducting MMRS Literature Review as adapted by Heyvaert

et al. (2017, p8)

Review protocol

Including

Review objectives

Review questions

And MMRS design

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Sampling

↓

Systematic search

↓

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

↓

Critical appraisal

↓

Descriptive data extraction

↓

Data synthesis

↓

Writing and editing the report
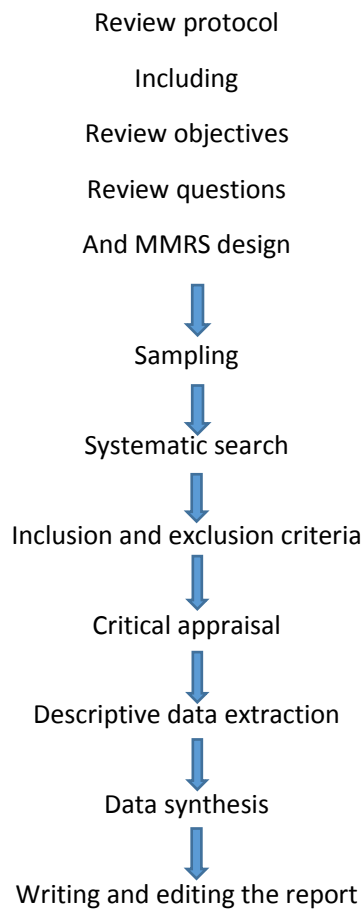
2.2.2   Strengths and challenges of using MMRS

The first advantage of conducting a MMRS literature review is that it can answer

multiple aspects of the research question concerning 'what works 'for this kind of

study or evaluation, for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects, and why?' as

mentioned by Pawson et al (2005) and Harden and Thomas (2005) in comparison with

a mono-methods qualitative or quantitative literature review (Heyvaert, 2017).

Secondly, the combination of qualitative and quantitative findings in a MMRS helps

researchers to (i) add confidence in the literature review conclusions; (ii) uncover and

explain discrepancies between findings of the included studies and (iii) reveal, develop or refute theories through comparing and combining the inferences from the studies (Risjord et al. 2002; Heyvaert et al. 2011 & 2017).

However, there remain several challenges concerning implementing MMRS. I had to deal with a large and divergent amount of data when conducting a MMRS literature review. A second challenge is that without a meaningful integration or "method mix" of the quantitative and qualitative strands, it cannot be called a MMRS (Bryman, 2007). Greene (2006) and Creswell and Tashakkori (2007a) acknowledged that there exists several methodological pitfalls generated by the diversity between and within mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, but that ultimately the research question and the purpose of the review are the key drivers for conducting a MMRS literature review.

2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This review was conducted in order to establish what is currently known in the literature about social work students' readiness for the workplace on graduation. Within this study the researcher also needed to be mindful to flag that discreet differences between respective systems are present and to be cautious about making any claims to representativeness or generalisability from the studies included within the review.

2.3.1 Inclusion criteria

➢ Studies that explore the views and perceived impact of social work students' readiness/preparedness to practise and for practice, including views from newly qualified social workers and managers in the transition

➢ Research between 1996 to 2016 – the former date being the date of the first major study of NQSW 'preparedness' in the UK (Marsh and Triseliotis, 1996)

➢ Studies conducted in the Western world in the field of health and social care where the education and working conditions bear some resemblance to each other

➢ Studies published in the English language

➢ Peer reviewed articles

2.3.2 Exclusion criteria

➢ Non-English language literature

➢ Literature from before 1996

➢ Grey literature

2.4 Literature search strategy

The following electronic databases were used to search for relevant literature: Social Care Online, Social Work Abstracts, PsychINFO, Scopus, CINAHL, Web of Science using the EBSCohost advance search option. The Boolean/phrase and truncation symbols for search terms included: 'social work student*' AND 'readiness' OR 'preparedness' AND 'ready to practise' OR 'ready for practice' AND 'social work'. Secondary search terms included: 'transitions to practice' AND 'social work ed*' AND 'social work graduate'.

Using citation tracking, I conducted manual searches of the most relevant and frequently cited journals: *Social Work Education*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, *British Journal of Social Work*, *Research on Social Work Practice* and *The European Journal of Social Work*. A further two papers were recommended by professionals with an interest in the field. The database search strategy can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1   Search strategy

Database name	Key words/phrase used	Search limits	No. Results
CINAHL Bibliographic database for nursing and allied health professionals	Social work student* Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	English language Year 1996 onwards	16
Scopus A multidisciplinary database with comprehensive coverage of all Science including health and psychology	Social work student* Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	English language Year 1996 onwards	22

Social Care Online	Social work student*	English language	28
Database of information and research on all aspects of social care and social work	Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	Year 1996 onwards	
Social Work Abstracts	Social work student*	English language	31
The database provides citations and information on the fields of social work and human services and problems.	Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	Year 1996 onwards	
Web of Science	Social work student*	English language	22
This platform provides access to Thomson Reuters multidisciplinary databases for information in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities	Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	Year 1996 onwards	
PsychINFO	Social work student*	English language	14
Database of abstracts of literature in the field of psychology	Readiness for practice/to practise Perceptions /views/attitudes/ experiences Social work Ed* Transition Preparedness for practice	Year 1996 onwards	

This purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990; Booth, 2006) search yielded 133 items published between 1996 and 2016. After the removal of duplicates and limiting the search to peer reviewed and full text articles within health and social care, the sample was reduced to 44 and then 23 articles with a relevance to Social Work. All abstracts were screened against the inclusion criteria and full texts were obtained if eligibility was met. A further four articles were excluded which then produced a total of 19 papers to review (see Fig 2). Figure 2 below shows a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (www.prisma-statement.org) Statement flow diagram of the article selection process according to the guidelines by Moher et al. (2009) for conducting a systematic review.

Figure 2. The PRISMA statement flow diagram of the systematic review
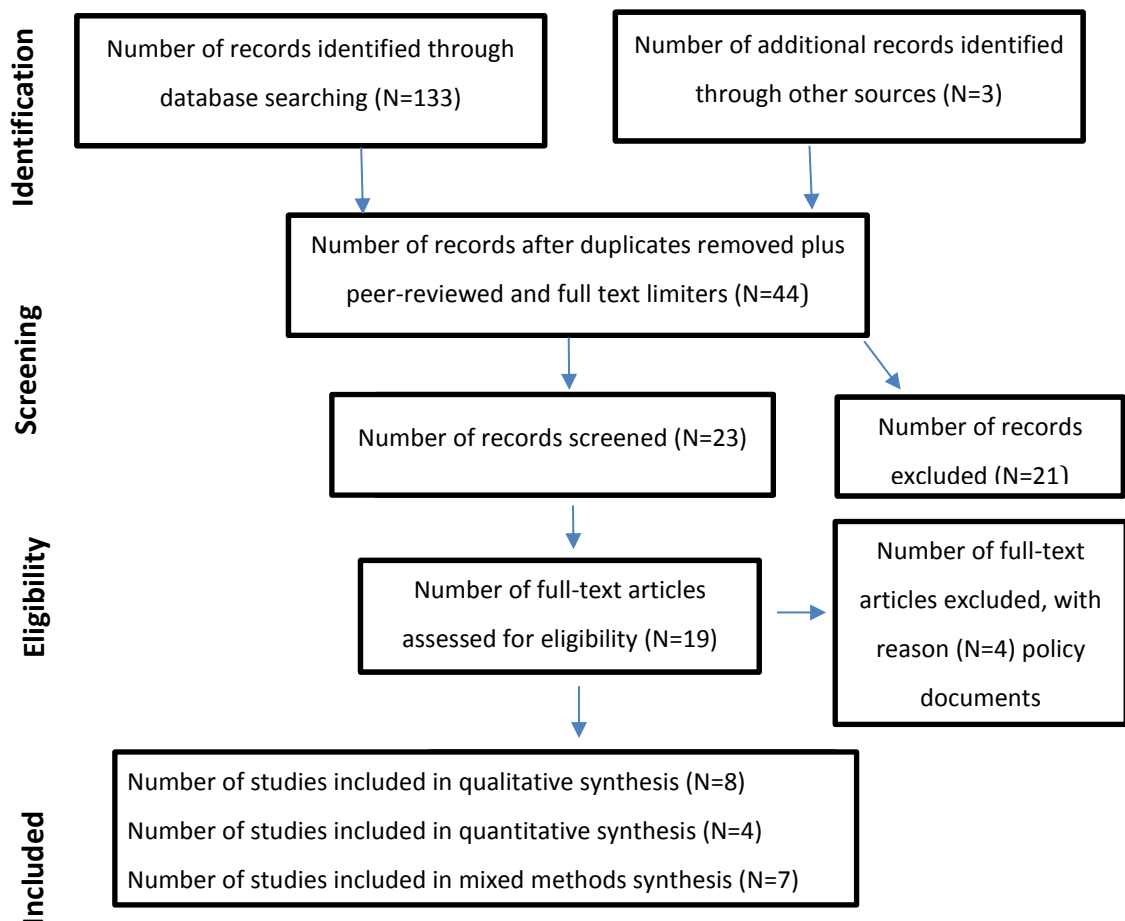
2.5   Method of critical appraisal

Quantitative studies were appraised using Thomas et al's (2003) framework which together with the assistance of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2013) framework tool was used for appraising the qualitative studies. An example of this can be seen in appendix 1. Pluye et al, (2009) identified a comprehensive appraisal tool when conducting MMR studies. I decided not to use the comprehensive appraisal tool as it was viewed more beneficial to use a unique set of criteria for each different strand of evidence (Bryman, 2006).

Each paper was read several times to enable familiarity with the contents. The 19 papers gave clear information about their participants and selection criteria. Most authors identified their data collection method. Five used a combination of focus groups and interviews; nine used interviews alone; four studies used interviews in combination with audio diaries; questionnaires and journal entries as well as five studies used questionnaires. The quality of the reporting of the data analysis was inconsistent. Some gave a clear description of their analysis. Others reported the use of computer assisted data management and analysis tools that they used such as NVivo.

However, unsurprisingly the majority of the studies (15) were about the social work profession. Two papers involved occupational therapists, the remaining related to junior doctors, midwives and nursing. Geographically, the studies originated from Australia, Scotland, Republic of Ireland; and concerned social work students from Italy, Sweden and England. The studies spanned quite evenly across the years 1996 and 2016. Of those that specified a methodology, these were mainly qualitative, including phenomenological studies, grounded theory and mixed methods. Four of the studies

were longitudinal, mainly post qualification or over a period of time following employment. This range of studies gave a comprehensive, comparative overview of the experiences of newly qualified practitioners and student social workers. Only four studies provided insight in the experiences of undergraduate social work students' perceptions of their readiness for practice prior to employment. It is important to acknowledge in the review that follows that any interpretation must take account that the socio-legal, as well as socio-political contexts in which social work students operate within may vary.

It is important to note that not all the studies relate to social work students exclusively, and that I selected some studies that refer to students of other professions but have relevance to the topic of interest.

2.6 Analysis of the literature – a narrative summary approach

Within this study, I used a narrative summary approach for reporting an integrated mixed methods research synthesis literature review (MMRS). The purpose of this approach is to summarise the evidence coming from qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods primary level studies (Heyvaert et al. 2017). According to Dixon-Woods et al. (2005) narrative summaries vary from simple recounting and description of the findings to more reflexive accounts that include commentary and higher levels of abstraction and that aim to account for complex dynamic process (Heyvaert et al. 2017, p231).

The approach adopted in the review presented here is to provide a narrative description that summarises the findings of the review. This approach is not without criticism. Some authors argue that the narrative summary approach is a *"largely informal approach that lacks transparency on the process of how to synthesise the included data"* and suggest using critical interpretive synthesis. That is a critically informed integration of the primary studies as noted by Dixon-Wood et al. (2005). However, it is argued here that my selected approach is pertinent as an important purpose of an integrated MMRS narrative summary consists of clarifying or grouping similar concepts to help refine subsequent research (Levac et al. 2010). In terms of presentation, this approach results in providing headings with sub-headings on a common phenomenon or interest as suggested by (Heyvaert ,2017,p233) and reflected in this chapter.

2.7   Findings of the review

The following section provides the findings from the literature review in relation to social work students' readiness for the workplace and upon graduation. The review is organised under five influential and broad themes: (i) readiness for practice and to practise;(ii) competence, capabilities, skills and knowledge;(iii)preparation for practice learning;(iv) social work curriculum; and finally (v); student perceptions and feelings about their readiness for practice and to practise.

2.7.1 Readiness for practice and to practise

The concept 'readiness to practise' has been explored extensively over the years with a focus on practitioners who qualified with a Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). Five studies included in this review sought the views of newly qualified social workers on their readiness to practise following completion of the previous DipSW programme, these being: Marsh and Triseliotis (1996); Pithouse and Scourfield (2002); Lyons and Manion (2004); Watt (1998) and Wallis-Jones and Lyons (2003) .

Despite the passage of time, Marsh and Triseliotis's study remains relevant. It focused on newly qualified practitioners and first line managers' views about newly qualified social workers' gaps in knowledge. One of the concerns identified in this study was the identified gaps relating to students' understanding of the realities of practice in court work and child protection. This was the first major study exploring the effectiveness of social work education and the readiness or preparedness of newly-qualified social workers (and probation officers) to practise in the UK. The sample of 714 DipSW and CQSW graduates from Scottish, English and Welsh sites completed a mail questionnaire shortly after qualification in 1992 and 1993. The main findings of this study suggested that the majority of newly qualified social workers (85%) felt 'quite well' or 'very well' prepared to practise.

A high figure of 26% of graduates were 'unsure' about how well their course prepared them. The Marsh and Triseliotis's study (1996 p203) reported many strengths of social work education. It was clear that whilst graduates consider they were generally ready to practise, this may not be at the level that they or their seniors would have preferred. One main conclusion from this study was that NQSWs might feel "ready to

practise when they arrive in their new jobs, but they are not fully competent to practise" (March and Triseliotis, 1996,p 207)

Pithouse and Scourfield's mixed methods study (2002) used a postal survey of recently qualified social workers (N=115) who had completed their Diploma in Social Work in Wales, alongside a postal survey administered to workplace supervisors and their employers followed up by 50 telephone interviews with supervisors and senior managers. The findings reveal that 90% of the supervisors and senior managers believed that the newly qualified staff were at least adequately trained in relation to the employer's needs. Interestingly, those ex-students working in the voluntary sector felt better prepared to practise than participants in the statutory sector.

However, when the data were broken into core competences and values, students felt 'less than adequately prepared' or 'poorly prepared'. For 32% of students they felt unprepared to intervene and provide support whilst 27% (30 of N=115) felt unprepared to work in organisations. Pithouse and Scourfield (2002) raised concerns that almost one-third of all respondents felt unprepared for core competence within the social work environment. In their follow-up telephone interviews, they found that the majority of the managers and supervisors perceived social work training as having a positive impact on preparedness for more instrumental skills such as time management and report writing, which is in contrast to the results obtained by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996).

A significant point emerging from Pithouse and Scourfield's study (2002) was that further investigation was needed to explore definitions of what 'preparedness' might mean for students. One of the strengths of this mixed methods study was its triangulation of data from other sources such as the supervisors and managers. One

limitation was that the sample was not randomly selected but self-selecting, and results may have been more positive than if achieved via random samples (Jones 1996).

Lyons and Manion's comprehensive review (2004) of a series of social work employment surveys carried out in England from 1998-2003 focused on newly qualified social workers' perceptions of their experiences of professional employment. From the 'snap shots' Lyons and Manion (2004) collated during the initial enquiry, and building on the work undertaken by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) impetus was given for subsequent enquiry to include questions about the 'fit' between social work practice and education (Grant et al 2014).

One of the main findings to emerge from Grant et al. (2014) includes evidence of widespread satisfaction with social work education. Interestingly, the least satisfactory core competency (68%) was 'intervene and provide' which concurred with the earlier findings of Pithouse and Scourfield (2002). A limitation of Grant el al's study (2014) was lack of qualitative elements and the over reliance on self-selection, with no follow up interviews to explore key themes.

Seven studies were identified that focused on practitioners who qualified with the new social work degree (UG or PG route): Galvani and Forrester (2008); Bates et al. (2010); Jack and Donnellan (2010); Sharpe et al. (2011); Carpenter et al. (2013); Scourfield et al. (2016); Tam and Lynch (2014).

Research into readiness to practise has shown that newly qualified social workers (NQSW) from the new social work degree often feel that their education does not equip them with all the necessary understanding and skills required for the challenging landscape of social work. Several smaller studies have shown that NQSWs report

feeling equipped in the skills and processes such as communication, social work methods and interventions, law, anti-discriminatory practice and research-based practice (Bates et al. 2010), as well as working with individuals and relationship-building (Jack and Donnellan, 2010). Participants felt less well prepared in instrumental tasks such as court room skills, report writing and case management (Bates et al. 2010). Sharpe et al. (2011) identified the lack of knowledge of child protection; dealing with hostility from some people social workers come in contact with and making professional judgements were additional deficits.

A common theme from the above studies following newly qualified students into the working environment is the description of a hard clash with reality, described as a 'baptism of fire' (Bates et al. 2010, p.152). It is suggested in two of the studies that it is important for social work students to gain a realistic understanding of their future work and obtain support from experienced colleagues and from managers during the post qualifying period (Bates et al. 2010; Moriarty et al. 2010).

However, rather than preparing social work students to 'hit the ground running', Moriarty et al. (2011) argued that social work education should be seen as a developmental process, not as the end product. This is echoed throughout the Croisdale-Appleby report (2014,p.71) that states that the role of HEIs is:

"Providing an education in social work of which the student is properly equipped to undertake social work in a professional manner in a supported and supervised role. The initial qualification is the entry point to a profession in which learning should continue throughout the professional life of the individual".

Despite more recent interest in newly qualified social workers' preparedness to practise, the question of how this is measured is not new (Bogo et al. 2002; Tham et al. 2014). Although many authors do agree there are difficulties involved in measuring outcomes of professional education such as in social work, different issues are highlighted across studies (Bates et al. 2010; Orme et al. 2009; Parker, 2006; Preston-Shoot, 2004; Wilson & Kelly, 2010).

However, in common with other studies covered so far in this review of the literature, Bates et al. (2010) found that approximately three-quarters of their sample of NQSWs (N=22) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their social work education provided them with adequate knowledge, skills and understanding to help prepare them for their current role. In contrast to the research conducted by Galvani and Forrester (2008), Bates et al. (2010) found that methods such as lectures, self-directed study and informal peer-discussion were favored above other pedagogical modes such as workshops or seminars. A quarter of participants indicated that social work education had not prepared them for instrumental tasks such as: assessment, report writing, time management and dealing with conflict.

These findings concur with Marsh and Triseliotis's (1996) and Pithouse and Scourfield's (2002) conclusions that NQSWs felt unprepared for aspects of practice such as court work, problem solving and time management. One of the strengths of the Bates et al. (2010) study was that it was a mixed methods, longitudinal, repeat-measure design with inclusion of service users/carers and management views on the skills required for social workers upon graduation.

Galvani and Forrester (2008) conducted an email survey of 248 NQSWs in England who graduated between 2006 and 2007 with the primary interest of exploring how well prepared NQSWs felt in working with people/families with substance misuse problems. The authors found there was a strong correlation between those who felt unprepared to work with substance misuse issues and the lack of significant teaching and input on this subject area with the social work curriculum. Interestingly, Galvani and Forrester (2008) highlighted an important point that self-rated preparedness is not actual preparedness. For them, this differentiated between confidence as opposed to ability.

Moriarty (2011) and Tham et al. (2014) agree with their findings and note that the majority of studies on preparedness or readiness to practise tend to focus on self-reported accounts, drawing little evidence from observable practice. These authors claim there can be no doubt that social work graduates entering the field of child protection and welfare, need to be as well prepared as possible to face the challenges and be able to 'hit the ground running'.

Jack and Donnellan (2010) in a mixed methods study of 12 NQSWs and 10 managers across three local authorities in the South West of England (N=22), found that nearly all NQSWs felt they had grown in confidence in the first year of practice. Worryingly, the participants did not foresee a long-term career in social work. Areas the participants felt more confident and prepared for were around communication skills and relationship- based interventions. It was reported by the above authors that NQSWs felt unprepared for the 'reality shock' (p309) between the tension of work life balance. Jack and Donnelan (2010) referred to what the participants called feelings of 'powerless' they did not perceived that their emotional needs was addressed by social

work employers and this had led to an impact on their personal lives. A limitation of this study was that it only focused on one type of social work setting, children and families and was also a self-selecting sample.

In relation to readiness to practise, research conducted by Sharpe et al. (2011) reported that three-quarters of their sample of NQSWs (N=280) felt they had been 'very' or 'fairly' well prepared by their social work degree. Within Sharpe et al'.s (2011) longitudinal study conducted between 2008-2010, they found that levels of satisfaction with the quality of the new social work degree had increased amongst directors of social work to around 50% in children services and two-thirds in adult services. For Sharpe et al. (2011 p12) employers seemed to focus on training 'functionally ready workers', whereas social work educators conveyed a message of producing learners with a broad foundation of knowledge and skills to be enhanced by further development and training whilst in formal employment. One of the limitations from the Sharpe et al. (2011) study is the lack of qualitative methods used with the NQSWs to explore questionnaire themes in greater depth. The study also found that the dominance of case load management as the core content of supervision resulted in NQSWs feelings of being less supported committing time in supervision to address further learning needs post qualifying. This reflects results mentioned earlier by Bates et al. (2010), Moriarty et al. (2011) and Carpenter et al. 2010).

2.7.2   Competence/capabilities/skills and knowledge

Five studies were identified that focused on competence, suitability and specific knowledge and skills that graduates should acquire during qualifying social work education: Preston-Shoot (2004); Dellgran and Hajer (2005); Nahrin (2002); Sheppard and Ryan (2003); and Floersch (2004). A limitation of these studies was that they failed to capture the views and perceptions of the students themselves, who it could be argued are important stakeholders.

2.7.2.1   Theoretical knowledge and practice knowledge

There seems to be a general agreement that social work training can be conceived as supporting the acquisition of skills, knowledge and values (Thompson, 2002; Parker, 2004; Trevithick, 2004) and that the beginning phase of preparing students for practice is developing an understanding of what social work is.

A comprehensive Swedish empirical study of 1000 social workers (Dellgran and Hojer, 2005) reported that the participants primarily depended on knowledge gained from colleagues, earlier experiences, values and effective supervision which could be referred to as informal knowledge in their daily work. Knowledge from social work education was rated lower and knowledge distinctively gained from research was rated at the bottom of the list. Studies by Nahri (2002), Sheppard and Ryan (2003) and Floersch (2004) around the suitability of social workers' knowledge base suggested the importance of the relationship between practitioner knowledge and practice. Floersch (2004) explored ways that social work theory can be taught that made it more operational in practice whereas Nahri's (2002) work considered what kind of knowledge social workers actually use in practice.

Payne (2001) questioned how a social work knowledge base might be defined and described how social workers require a store of knowledge to draw on as needed because it would not all be in use all of the time. A key point from the above study is that they fail to capture the views and perceptions of the students themselves regarding their readiness for the workplace and upon graduation.

2.7.2.2   Experience

Research conducted by Pellico et al, (2009) suggested that the clinical experience gained as an undergraduate health and social work students affects the confidence and competence of newly-qualified professionals. Although the amount of experience was not specified in most reports, the impression was that some students had little or no hands-on clinical experience. They described being assessed in skills laboratories in university and how different this was from real life. Gerrish (2000) found that in some situations nurses knew the theory but lacked the confidence to act. Interestingly, the mental health nurse participants in the Madill and Gough (2006) study felt that they had theoretical knowledge but could not find a place to use it.

2.7.2.3   Competence and skills development

The Laming Report's narrative on the tasks undertaken by social workers highlighted the need for a highly-skilled workforce, able to observe, understand, analyse and reflect upon relationships between the people/families they work with using evidence-based practice, multi-agency working as well as operating in accordance with the legal framework surrounding safeguarding and child protection (Laming, 2009).

Carpenter et al. (2013) found support for an evolutionary model of professional development where three cohorts of NQSWs within a Children and Families team in England (N=2019) self-reported that confidence increased over the first year as expertise developed. This was shown through the use of self-efficacy measures to evaluate the development of confidence and competence as well as professional development. It may be helpful to note that my operational understanding of the term self-efficacy was drawn largely from literature on social cognitive theory by Bandura (1997). Carpenter et al. (2013) cite Holden et al. (2002, p116) who maintained that *"Self-efficacy is more than a self-perception of competency. It is an individual's assessment of his or her confidence in their ability to execute specific skills in a particular set of circumstances."*

Carpenter et al's (2013) findings support the argument for the use of a developmental process model for understanding the accumulation of professional expertise. They utilise Dreyfus and Dreyfus work of 1980 model of 'novice to expert' to set their study in context. The key strengths of the Carpenter et al's study (2013) include a large sample size; provided adequate multivariate analysis with confidence; supported with sophisticated data analysis, using quantitative software, a country-wide sample of participants. Interestingly, following the multi-variate analysis on the data collected, Carpenter et al. (2013) found no key relationship between demographic variables and self-efficacy with higher levels of self-efficacy at the start of their professional career, which is consistent with the study conducted by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996).

The new Assessed and Supported year in employment (ASYE) built upon the success of the NQSW programme, extending provision to include a personal development plan and a reduced workload (Scourfield, 2016). Moriarty and Manthorpe (2012) assert

there is a need for social work education to move away from a competence based culture to one that recognises the need for continuing learning and development throughout a social workers' whole career.

2.7.3   Preparedness for practice learning

Bogo et al. (2002) determined that field educators in Canada consistently agreed on what constituted 'outstanding', 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' student performance. However, their decision-making criteria were often based on personality characteristics and not on explicit skills (Bogo et al. 2002). Fortune et al. (2007) also raised the question as to whether practice educators' or field educators' ratings of students' preparedness for practice were mostly based on the relationship with the student rather than on the students' skills.

It has been argued that relying solely on the views of students to consider preparedness for practice has its shortcomings. Parker (2006) reminded us that the level of student satisfaction with placement is not necessarily indicative of the placement's effectiveness and that collecting the views of other stakeholders, such as practitioners, managers who supervise student placements is important when assessing students' preparedness for practice (although in the literature other terms such as workbase supervisor, practice educator/assessor or field educator are more widespread).

The work of Maidment (2000) suggested that practice assessor and student perceptions of the validity and effectiveness of methods used by the practice assessor may not always correspond. Maidment's (2003) research in Australia questions the adequacy of preparation for practice. On the basis of her research, a key recommendation for social work programmes was the need to teach students how to survive and negotiate in a workplace culture, and not to rely only on traditional interview and assessment skills.

In Parker's (2006) research, with a sample of 25 pre-qualifying undergraduate and post-graduate social work students prior to their first social work field placement, a key finding is the professional responsibility placed on social work programmes as well as a moral duty towards service users to appropriately prepare social work students for practice. He continues to state that self-belief and self-efficacy may be instrumental in facilitating these assessments by students and the practice assessors involved. One of the key findings from Parker's (2006) study was that student perceptions of competence in relation to specific future performance do increase between pre -to post-test during practice learning. This suggests that the concept of self-belief can be utilized to stretch and challenge student competence or identify areas for future development.

Others such as Carpenter (2011) and Orme et al (2009) propose using a four-level multi-method approach to professional expertise, where not only learners' views are examined, but also should include: the attainment of knowledge and skills; change in attitudes, perceptions and behaviours; organisational ability, as well as the perceived benefits to service users and carers. It is clear that irrespective from which perspective

this question is discussed, the need for longitudinal data is great (Carpenter. 2011; Moriarty et al. 2011).

For Parker (2004) and Kearney (2003) preparing and assessing students as 'fit for placement' adds an important dimension to the education of social workers' and emphasised the centrality of practice. Kearney (2003) stated the preparation stage would also lay the foundations for a social worker to identify and establish an idea of professional practice. Walton (2005) concurred and stated that if preparation for practice were to advantage students, service users/carers, practice educators and universities needed to make the right choices in terms of both assessment methods and content as a means of gatekeeping the profession. In the Social Work Degree the assessment of the preparation for practice stage would present the second opportunity to control entry to the profession, the first being the admissions process.

2.7.4 Social work curriculum

The effectiveness of social work education in preparing social work students for practice has been the subject of some political attention in recent years (Lishman, 2011). The new degrees in social work introduced in the UK since 2003 onwards established more flexible entry requirements for professional social work training leading to a significant expansion in the numbers of school leavers and entrants into courses with a lower level of previous work experience (Holmstrom, 2012; Wilson, 2013).

A key finding from studies by Walton (2005) and Domakin (2014), suggest there is still a lack of knowledge about the academic curriculum amongst practice educators as well as a danger of isolation from universities, which negatively impacts upon students' quality of practice learning. Leveridge (2003) agreed and found that feedback from practice educators indicated that a key element was for students to move from being taught, towards learning. This was perceived as achievable by encouraging students to engage in critical discussion and the application of knowledge to solve problems within the workplace.

2.7.4.1   Entry requirements and admission procedures

Although there has been an increase in student numbers since 2008, recent figures show that local authorities are reliant upon employing high numbers of agency staff to fill their vacancies (Department of Education, 2015). Alongside establishing minimum academic requirements, HEIs were also committed to the widening participation strategy, as prioritised under the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997). In reality, HEIs have been faced with challenges of designing admissions procedures and establishing teaching partnerships with Local Authorities that will both identify the more academic applicant and those with personality characteristics suited for social work (Moriarty and Murray, 2007).

Regarding the concept of preparedness for practice, Furness and Gilligan (2004) explored the definition and measurement of 'good enough' practice and the students' suitability for social work was determined. They recognised the recruitment of a younger, less experienced group into social work courses required HEIs to develop

ways of teaching and assessing students' practical skills to protect people, to facilitate change and, thus, to ensure students' eventual readiness to practise.

Determining applicants' suitability for social work has proved problematic with some HEIs struggling to develop valid and reliable admissions criteria (Dillon, 2007; Grant, 2016). However, Moriarty and Murray (2007) suggested the social work degree in general had been successful in widening access and increasing diversity with more entrants from black and ethnic minorities, older applicants, women and those with a non-traditional educational qualification. The findings of Vleich et al. (2015), Grant (2016) and Leveridge (2003) suggested that more thought should be given to previous academic success as well as consideration to social work values, competencies and skills all that which might influence a student's readiness for the workplace upon graduation (Thompson, 2002; Trevithick, 2004).

Levin (2004) underlined the importance of recognising that the first stage of assessment of suitability for training takes place at the entry point to the course with the selection procedures being the early gate-keeping stage. Leveridge (2003) reported that students beginning the social work programme had on average less experience than previously, fewer relevant qualifications and were younger. Holmstrom (2012) indicates it is very difficult to accurately predict on a range of measures at initial entry stage. For example, who will pass or fail the programme or which students may encounter difficulties during placement learning experiences.

Another important issue is the HCPC accreditation requirements for HEIs when establishing fitness to practise procedures (DH, 2002; HCPC, 2013). Social work students must satisfy the HEI that they are 'fit for practice' prior to going out on placement learning experiences. HEIs have managed this in different ways, with some

requiring evidence from the students' previous work on a Readiness to Practise module and previous work experiences indicating that they are fit for practice. In support of the rationale for this study, developing knowledge of students' perceptions of their experience of social work teaching and learning was considered an important starting point for informing discussions about how the curriculum should be developed and for identifying the continuing professional needs and priorities of newly qualified staff (Social Work Reform Board, 2010).

2.7.5   Student perceptions and experiences of preparedness for practice learning settings.

Seven studies were identified which focused on the views of social work students' preparedness for practice that include: Watt (1998); the comparison study from Frost et al. (2013); Gelman (2004); Wilson (2013); Parker (2006); Wallis-Jones and Lyons (2003); a study by Fook et al. (2000, that comprised a longitudinal evaluation study of Australian students' progression through a degree programme and into practice. The only study that specifically focused on the views and feelings of social work students is the international comparison study by Frost et al. (2013).

The aim of the comparative enquiry conducted by Frost et al. (2013) was to present the views of undergraduate social work students, through a predominately phenomenological approach, from three different welfare regimes (Italy, Sweden and England) with the focus on analysing in what way at the end of their training they feel ready to practise. Only five participants were interviewed from each of the three different universities in which the researchers were teaching (N=15). A key finding from the Frost et al. study was that students expressed a great deal of ambivalence

about the role of theory in their education. Interestingly, Italian students seemed much more positive about the personal growth and development they experienced during the course than their counterparts.

In Parker's (2006) study it became clear that perceptions of competence during practice learning of social work students at both post graduate and undergraduate level increased between pre-test and post-test across the six sub-scales identified within the study. The results of this study indicated a significant change in perceived self-efficacy throughout the placement opportunity. It is evident from the study that practice learning plays an important role in students' perceptions of their development into professional and competent professionals. Limitations of this study included the small sample size and the fact the study focused on one practice area.

Gelman (2004) suggests there is a lack of research into the fears and anxieties of students as they prepare for their first learning experience, suggesting that greater knowledge in this area would enable practice educators to meet gaps that may exist in preparing students for the workplace. Gelman concludes that if students had received some teaching prior to practice on managing their emotions at the start of the placement experience, they may be significantly less anxious.

Across disciplinary groups, transition is reported as a stressful time for newly qualified practitioners (Ross and Clifford, 2002). Toal-Sullivan (2006) and Johansson and Nordstrom (2008), report students experiencing initial feelings of uncertainty and strangeness and even if they felt familiar with the work place, they found their new role challenging. For occupational therapists and junior doctors it was anxiety caused by the uncertainty or lack of clarity about their role that made the transition stressful (Toal-Sullivan, 2006; Brennan et al. 2010). O'Shea and Kelly (2007) found that being

'new' caused psychological stress for some of their participants who felt 'scared, nervous or daunted'. The junior doctors participating in Brennan et al's (2010) study expressed their feelings through the stronger term of 'terrifying'. Within the above-mentioned studies, these feelings lasted only a week or so for most, slightly longer for some but decreasing as they became more acquainted with the working environment.

Among the key developmental priorities that have been identified in the current process of social work reform, Wilson's (2013) mixed methods research study that focused on final year undergraduates' experiences of academic and practice learning indicates that students were satisfied with most aspects of preparatory teaching and learning. However, his research also highlights areas in which students' preparation could be further enhanced, including their skills in dealing with conflict and risk management. Wilson (2013) suggests that social work programmes should not overly depend on practice learning to prepare students to address the challenges presented by a changing and complex working environment. They emphasise the need for closer collaboration between employing partners and educators to ensure the already crowded curriculum keeps up to date with the changing learning needs of practitioners (Wilson, 2013).

2.8   Literature review summary of findings

Within the literature review there was inconsistency across the majority of the studies on the terminology used for readiness to practise or readiness for practice. This narrative summary has used the terms 'readiness to practise' when referring to graduates emerging into qualified practice. As previously mentioned my research is concerned with pre-qualifying students' perceptions of their readiness for practice.

One of the significant findings from the literature review was that the overall majority of NQSWs felt prepared to practise in most areas of social work practice after qualification. They believed they had transferable skills such as teamwork and were prepared to be autonomous learners. Some studies suggested that NQSWs were less prepared for instrumental facets but more prepared in process-orientated aspects of the role. This was influenced by the culture of the workplace into which they have entered and for many it was a situation of 'sink or swim'. However, knowledge of how students understand how they acquire, apply and develop their professional social work knowledge and expertise remains quite limited.

The studies also acknowledge that a measure of self-efficacy should not be seen as a measure of 'actual performance', but rather a belief about what a person believes he or she can do in a specific situation.

The literature review also found a lack of research into how social work students manage their emotional responses whilst learning to become a professional with only one article by Frost et al. (2013) noting the importance of this aspect to the social work curriculum. Within the curriculum content there appears to be a lack of support for emotional growth and personal development for social work students.

Within the literature review, attempts are made to define the attributes, terms, various behaviours, personal characteristics and attitudes that may influence or inhibit students' readiness for the workplace and upon graduation.

Another finding from the review of the literature conducted on NQSWs is that the quality of current social work education is appropriate for the preparation for readiness for the work place and upon graduation, although it would seem there is still room for improvement in terms of pedagogy and content.

2.9   Conclusion

The purpose of this integrative mixed methods literature review was to present a narrative summary of the key literature as suggested by Heyvaert (2017, p219) and used by Parke et al. (2011) thus providing a precedent for taking this approach within social work research. From the literature surveyed, it was striking that issues around graduates' skills, knowledge, curriculum content and readiness to practise were the only themes that could be classified as receiving attention. The others, although featuring strongly in views presented had received much less attention. There were only four articles that addressed undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences to their readiness for practice.

The insights arising from Chapter 1 and the findings of this literature review together underline a perception that shortcomings in social work practice are implicated in successive child wellbeing and safety tragedies in attempts to improve social work services within the UK. The education and preparation of social work students is under the spotlight, but this review demonstrates that how students may be prepared for practice and to practise drawn has received little attention from the perspectives of the students themselves within England. This provides the rationale and justification for this study with pre-qualifying students and leads to the research question of "How do social work students perceive they become ready for practice and to practise?"

The following chapter considers issues of methodology and outlines the research design and the methods used in this study to address the research question.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will present the overall study design and starts with the underpinning research paradigm and methodology adopted for this study. The discussion will consider mixed methods research before proceeding to separate considerations of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study. Following on, the chapter will discuss the methods employed. This will include consideration of participants and sampling strategies, the materials developed and used for the study, tools for measuring primary and secondary outcomes, data collection procedures and protocol, data analysis frameworks and conclude with ethical considerations.

The issue at the heart of this study surrounds social work students' readiness for the workplace on graduation, together with the apparent limited understanding of the views and perceptions of social work students themselves concerning how they become "ready" for practice, giving rise to the question "how do social work students' perceive their readiness for practice and to practise?"

3.2   Mixed methods research

Mixed methods research has been called the third path (Gorard and Taylor, 2004), the third research paradigm (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and the third methodological movement (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2003b). It has its own underpinning philosophical assumptions and techniques which guide inquiry. The essence of mixed methods research is to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches within an overall over-arching methodology. Mixed Methods as the 'third' methodology in social

research has evolved into a set of procedures that can be used in planning a mixed methods study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It may be argued that 'mixing' or blending of data can provide a stronger understanding of the problem or question than by one source itself. This idea lies at the core of 'mixed methods research' (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998 & 2003), which also uses distinct designs involving different philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2014).

However, critics have long argued that epistemological differences between the traditional paradigms made them fundamentally incompatible and incommensible (Kuhn, 1962) insisting, therefore, quantitative and qualitative data could not be combined. This so called 'incommensurability theory' led to what Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) described as a 'paradigm debate' of the 1980s and 1990s. Such debate resulted in the evolution of philosophical foundations that transcended the dichotomy between positivism and interpretivism/constructivism and support mixed methods enquiry as a legitimate third methodology. This study does not suggest that mixed methods research is new. Rather it is an emergent movement, or discourse or paradigm in a response to the held understandings of incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative research. Mixed research is therefore claimed to be a synthesis that includes ideas from quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson et al. 2007).

The multiple factors intrinsic to this research project indicated a mixed methods research methodology as being an appropriate approach to answer my research question. In the Social Sciences methods literature, Campell and Fiske's (1959) work formalised the practice of using multiple methods in research. They also introduced the idea of triangulation where more than one method is used as a part of a validation process. They did so without aligning themselves explicitly to either a positivist or interpretivist perspective. Bouchard (1976, p268) argued that the convergence of

findings from two or more methods *"enhances our beliefs, that the results are valid and not a methodological artefact."* Denzin (1978, p291) extended the idea of how to triangulate findings by "*a combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon*", leading to his recommendation for the use of between-method triangulation. He contended that by utilising mixed methods: "*the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigators, and particularly method will be cancelled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods, and the result will be a convergence upon the truth about some social phenomenon*" (Denzin 1978, p14).

3.3   The Philosophical assumptions underpinning the study

Various epistemological perspectives can be claimed to underpin mixed methods research. Maxwell and Mittapalli in Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) propose a *critical realist* perspective that allows recognition of the relative strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This stance is based on the premise of ontological realism and epistemological constructivism, and that they are integrated and that a 'real world truth' exists independently of our perceptions. However, our understanding of this is inevitably a construction arising from our own perspectives. They argue that alignment to a critical realist perspective can provide a more complete understanding of causal processes and facilitates collaboration between quantitative and qualitative researchers.

Other mixed methodologist have proposed a different paradigm, namely Pragmatism (Howe, 1988; Maxcy, 2003; and Morgan, 2007). Greene and Hall (2010) suggested that pragmatism or the philosophy of free choice is the most suitable philosophical viewpoint for mixed methods research. Pragmatism derives from the work from

American authors such as Peirce, James, Mead and Dewey (Cherryholmes, 1992; Crotty, 2012) and is a worldview arising from actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions as is the case of Postpositivism (Plowright, 2011). Pragmatism concerns itself with 'what works' and values solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Mixed methods research design focuses on a research question and problems, and uses all approaches and methods available to understand the problem (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). The pragmatist philosophical assumption fits well with the intention of this research to understand both the complex problem of readying social work students for the workplace on graduation, and understanding how students perceive they become fit for practice and to practise illuminating 'what works' in assisting their development.

3.4   Overall study design

Many designs exist in the mixed methods field. My initial plan for this study was to focus on an 'explanatory sequential mixed methods design' by conducting a quantitative survey questionnaire first; then after analysing the data from the survey, building on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative in-depth interviews as suggested by Creswell (2014) and Plowright (2011). However, this strategy was rejected due to the difficulties of timing data collection periods and participant access across two sites and led to a change of direction for the study design. A convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011) was adopted as illustrated in Figure 3 below and will be discussed in more depth in section 3.5.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Quantitative strand:        │
│ Pre and post-test surveys' to│
│ identify and assess factors │
│ impacting upon participants'│
│ readiness for practice post │
│ placement learning experience│
│ 1 on both sites.            │
└─────────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Mixed methods research      │   │ Comparison:          │   │ Interpretation:          │
│ synthesis (MMRS) literature │   │ Use of a triangulation│   │ Generation of a coherent,│
│ review: Narrative Summary   │   │ protocol to identify │   │ explanatory framework by │
│ for conducting a MMRS       │   │ where data converges │   │ highlighting the multi-  │
└─────────────────────────────┘   │ and diverges (Merge  │   │ faceted nature and       │
                                   │ results)             │   │ representation of        │
┌─────────────────────────────┐   └──────────────────────┘   │ participants' readiness for│
│ Qualitative strand:         │                              │ practice experiences for │
│ Using semi-structured       │                              │ better understanding.    │
│ interviews including the use│                              └──────────────────────────┘
│ of creative approaches in   │
│ qualitative research to     │
│ determine models of learning│
│ and interpret how participants│
│ perceive their readiness for│
│ practice journey            │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 3   Overview of the convergent parallel mixed methods design

The revised design incorporates a pre-and post-survey with participants from two Higher Educational Institutions followed through their three years enrolled on a BA in Social Work (BASW) undergraduate degree between 2013-2016 in England, exploring their readiness for practice including the mandatory social work skills days and MMRS. The design also included semi-structured interviews which explored the storied experiences of the emotional and affective responses of social work students prior to, and following, placement experiences in a highly regulated professional social care context.

Figure 4 below illustrates the overall study process followed for this study. Pictorial

drawings and card images produced by participants were used as triggers during the

semi-structured interviews.

Figure 4   Overall study designs

Planning Stage	Quantitative Strand Data Collection	Qualitative Strand Data Collection

- Ethics Approval from both HEI's
- Beginning: Pilot Study
- Designing Pre and post placement 1 questionnaire
- Data Collection: MSW Cohort participants
- Data analysis and revision of questionnaire
- Complete pre and post placement 1 survey
- Designing Questionnaire for interviews
- Data Collection: Focus group MSW cohort
- Data analysis and revision.
- Complete semi-structure interview schedule
- Consult, review & Supervision throughout

- Start
- Conducting pre-placement one Survey at site one & two with undergraduate social work students'.
- Email survey to gatekeepers with instructions for pre-test site two.
- Collecting pre-test surveys' from site one and gatekeeper site two.
- Data Analysis of pre-test survey from both sites. (SPSS + statistical analysis)
- Conducting post-test survey from both sites.
- Collecting surveys' from site one and gatekeeper site two.
- Data Analysis of post-test surveys' from both sites.

- Start
- Semi-structured interviews (site one &two)
- Transcribing
- Data Analysis (Using Thematic Analysis)

Triangulation

3.5   The integration of quantitative and qualitative data

Integration implies the combination and interaction between quantitative and qualitative methods within a study and is a key characteristic of mixed methods research (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The goal of integration is to know more, and to generate new knowledge through a synthesis of findings from different approaches (Foss and Ellefson, 2002). Integration requires that quantitative and qualitative methods are orientated towards a common research question, are not weighted substantially differently, and yet still retain their paradigmatic characteristics (Cresswell and Plano-Clark, 2007). Much mixed methods research integrates at the analysis stage or, more commonly, to the stage of theoretical interpretation (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

Data from the quantitative, qualitative strands and literature review were integrated at the point of theoretical interpretation following the separate analyses undertaken within the parameters of respective paradigms for this study. A triangulation protocol, as outlined by O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2010), was used to generate a coherent, explanatory framework by highlighting the multi-faceted nature of the factors involved in a social work student becoming ready for practice and to practise.

3.5.1   Integrating data at the point of theoretical interpretation

Data generated by different methods can be integrated following separate analyses undertaken within the parameters of respective paradigms and this was the approach taken in this study. There was no interaction between the data during the analysis process and the aim was to bring together the different sets of findings in to one coherent, explanatory framework (Green et al. 2010, 2003 & 1997). O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2010) outlined how a triangulation protocol (Farmer et al. 2006)

can be used at the interpretation stage to allow researchers to identify themes that may be evident across different methods. This technique involves producing a 'convergence coding matrix' to display themes evident from both methods alongside each other and then identifying whether there is agreement, partial agreement, dissonance or silence between them. It is interesting that they include the use of the term 'silence' (where a finding is evident in one data set and not another) and they contend that this reflects the strengths of different methods to identify specific phenomena – a recognition that different methods measure different constructs. Silence may also suggest where further investigation is required (Famer et al 2006). Chapter 6 further discusses the findings generated from the convergence coding matrix.

3.6   Mixed methods in the context of this research study

The use of a convergent parallel design – as outlined in Figure 3 above - was chosen as both quantitative and qualitative strands were implemented concurrently during the research process. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from among the same sample of participants and the methods were prioritised equally. In the context of this research study, the aim of the qualitative strand was not simply to assist understanding of the quantitative data (although it was envisaged that this would occur) but to answer a specific research question regarding how students interpret their journey towards readiness to practise.

The purpose of using a convergent parallel mixed methods design was coherent with Morse's (1991) reasons for using such an approach *to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic in order to best understand the research problem"*. This 'integration at the point of theoretical interpretation' (O'Cathain,

Murphy and Nicholl, 2010) is also the method of mixing the data suggested by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) for this type of mixed methods design.

The two study sites used within this study were the social work education departments of two HEIs in England. Site one was located in the North of England and the second from the South of England. Site one comprised a large cohort of 87 undergraduates students and Site two comprised 50 undergraduates students.

3.7   Quantitative aspects of study design - survey

The first phase of the research involved planning and designing a survey of undergraduate first year social work students' readiness for the workplace. This was administered to students at the two participating Higher Educational Institutions on the final day of their readiness for practice modules that included the mandatory skills days, and prior to them commencing their first practice learning experience within the second year of their professional course. The self-administered pre- and post-test questionnaire has now become a widely accepted and utilised method in social and behavioral research as it ensures a high response rate (Oppenheim, 1992), accurate sampling (Schwarz et al 1991) and a minimum of interview biasness (Sudman et al. 1983).

3.7.1   Questionnaire development

The pre- and post-test questionnaire used within this study was adapted and developed from an analysis of similar tools used to generate equivalent pre-determined data set and variables in comparable studies. However, it is acknowledged these studies were focused on newly qualified social workers' (NQSW), rather than

social work students or focused on placement settings only. Also included were items concerning the impact of the mandatory 30 social work skills days provided by both institutions.

The self-administered pre- and post- test questionnaire (see appendix 2) was used to collect data on social work students' views, perceptions and experiences concerning readiness for their first placement. The post-test questionnaire gathered the students' views of applying the skills and knowledge following their first placement and how ready they felt ready for subsequent placements.   They consisted of the same questions and were matched.   Both Likert scale items and free text items were incorporated and gathered both quantitative and qualitative data that is summarised below:

➢   Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Learning Disability.
➢   Perceived factors impacting upon readiness for practice prior and post first practice learning experience.
➢   The extent to which they felt ready for practice.
➢   The extent to which the skills days and the readiness to practise module enabled them to be prepared for practice.
➢   The extent to which placement experiences enhanced their readiness for practice and which learning styles influenced their ability to learn on placement.
➢   The extent to which their use of the readiness for practice module and the skills days helped them recognises the importance of linking theory with practice.
➢   The merits and limitations of the current readiness for practice curriculum.
➢   The extent to which their confidence in applying knowledge to practice had been enhanced.
➢   Ways in which their experience of using the skills days might have been improved.

Open-ended questions relating to the above themes were also included in the survey component, generating considerable qualitative data, whilst others required participants to rate a specific item by using Likert scale measures and an element of factor scales. The data was analysed and subsequently integrated with the qualitative strand of this study. The pre-and post-test questionnaire also included an item that asked respondents if they would be prepared to participate in a follow up interview regarding their experience. Initial sifting of results from the questionnaire phase helped with the production of an interview guide for subsequent semi-structured interviews.

3.7.2   Process of piloting the questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted with a cohort of pre-qualification social work master's degree students. Twenty four students' (21 female, 3 male) participated. Convenience sampling was employed for conducting the pre-and post-questionnaire design. Changes were made to questions following the feedback from students on the usefulness of the questionnaire and discussion with the supervisory team.

3.7.3   Survey Sample Size

Pre-registration social work students from the two participating universities were invited to participate in the main study following the same process for both sites. It was envisaged that sufficient participants could be recruited from this large pool of students from both sites (site one: N=87 and site two: N=50 - total N=137). 74 participants completed the pre-and post-test surveys and discussed further in chapter 4.

Participants were informed via advertisements posted electronically on course Blackboard (VLE) sites. Participant information sheets were attached and made available on the Readiness for practice module Blackboard (VLE) site. In addition, at site one, I attended the Readiness for practice module evaluation session to personally invite students to participate within the study. At both sites, a gatekeeper or 'helper' ensured the survey was completed at the evaluation session of the Readiness for practice module and was returned to me.

This type of survey administration can also enable the provision of necessary explanations of the questions and provide some degree of personal contact during the completion stage (Oppenheim, 1992). Foddy (1993) cautions that care should be taken in the briefing of 'helpers' involved during this stage to avoid the introduction of fatal biases to the research process. For the purposes of this study, the staff member from each institution who was co-opted to 'help' by administering the questionnaires, introducing the research and to provide any explanations if required, was carefully briefed to ensure that explanations did not become interpretations, and that the process was as reliable as possible.

3.7.4 Validity and reliability

To check and correct for errors during the entry of data in to Microsoft Excel, the guidance of Elliot et al. (2007) was followed. A double data entry technique was employed. Data was entered into two identical spreadsheets during two different sessions and the Excel "IF" statement was used to compare the entry in SHEET1 to the entry in SHEET2 for an exact match. The formula used on a third spreadsheet (empty except for column headers) was:

=IF(EXACT(SHEET1!A2,SHEET2!A2),0,SHEET1!A2&"/"&SHEET2!A2

Where spreadsheet cells in SHEET1 and SHEET2 did not match the statement above put the information from both sheets in to the cell separated by a slash. A total of 19 individual errors were identified and corrected as a result of this process before inputting the data into SPSS.

3.7.5 Quantitative data analysis framework

Microsoft Excel 2010 and SPSS version 21 were used to analyse the data. Following initial descriptive data analysis and testing for normality (Shapiro-Wilk test) a number of further tests were conducted. Pre-and post-test questionnaire data was assessed for equality in each study arm using a chi square test for nominal/ordinal data and an independent sample t-test for continuous data if relevant.

3.8 Qualitative aspects of the study - semi-structured interviews

The second phase of the design included semi-structured interviews supported by creative methods conducted with undergraduate social work students.

3.8.1 Using creative methods in the qualitative strand of this study

There is a large body of literature on creativity in research, from many different disciplinary perspectives (Carter, 2004, p.14; Hesmondhaugh and Baker, 2011, p.2; Toolan, 2012, p.19 and Kara, 2015, p.12). Creativity may also be viewed as a type of behaviour (Walsh et al. 2013). It is not only about making things; creativity can also be

applied to thinking, reading, playing and other activities. Kara (2015) and Selby et al (2005) state there may even be an overlap between creativity and problem-solving. This is supported by researchers such as Cancer and Mulej (2013) who demonstrated that creativity in research is relevant for analytical decisions, based on multiple criteria, aiming for new and useful outcomes.

Plowright (2011) suggests these strategies of using creative processes (drawing and picture cards) to interrogate experience may enable the participant to better reflect on their situation and address perceived inadequacies in capturing the rich nature of the processes involved through interview alone. It may also offer the potential for stories told by a range of participants to enhance their own understanding and critical thinking, which may also lead to transformative practice.

The qualitative part of this study aimed to elicit stories from the participants about their emerging learning for practice and to practise. Andrews et al. (2004) note that these approaches of narrating a story can help researchers understand how people contextualise and recollect their experiences. According to Andrews et al. (2004) this enables the complexities and ambiguities of human experience to be revealed. It can be difficult for people, within an interview, to articulate complex and at times emotionally charged issues such as the learning arena. Therefore, as mentioned previously, strategies of using creative processes to interrogate experience may enable the participant to better reflect on their situation (Plowright, 2011). According to Inckle (2010), creative methods can more accurately reflect the multiplicity of meanings that exist in social contexts. This can lead to methods being creatively layered alongside each other to build a richer picture. Semi-structured interviews have been linked to various other methods of data gathering, such as photos in photo-

elicitation (Smith, Gidlow and Steel, 2010), diaries in diary interviews (Kenton, 2010) and fixed-narrative and interactive developmental vignettes (Jenkins et al. 2010).

The values that seem to be inherent in eliciting a story and using creative methods in research are of giving the participants a voice. It is claimed these approaches promote positive social values (Gobo, 2011) and are flexible enough to take account of relevant contextual factors and are often aligned with mixed methods studies. In this study participants were asked to engage in a creative activity of pictorial drawing and use of cards (see Fig 6) at the beginning of the interview.

3.8.2   Piloting the use of creative methods (drawings and picture cards)

In order to test the concept of asking participants to 'story' their experience and to use drawings and picture cards to support this storying, ethical permission was gained to conduct a small pilot study at one of the study sites. The pilot study was carried out in 2014 with a first year group of pre-registration postgraduate social work students enrolled on the Masters in Social Work degree. The aim was to discover if students' could 'story' their experiences and also how the use of pictures facilitated story telling. The learning through the pilot study was intended to inform the use of creative activities within the main study.

3.8.3   Process of the pilot study focus group

A focus group format was used to pilot the interview process. Ten participants were asked to depict in some way by drawing a representation of how they perceived their readiness for the workplace on graduation. Figure 5 illustrates the focus group members' drawings.

Figure 5　　　Screenshot of various readiness for practice drawings from participants

within the focus group
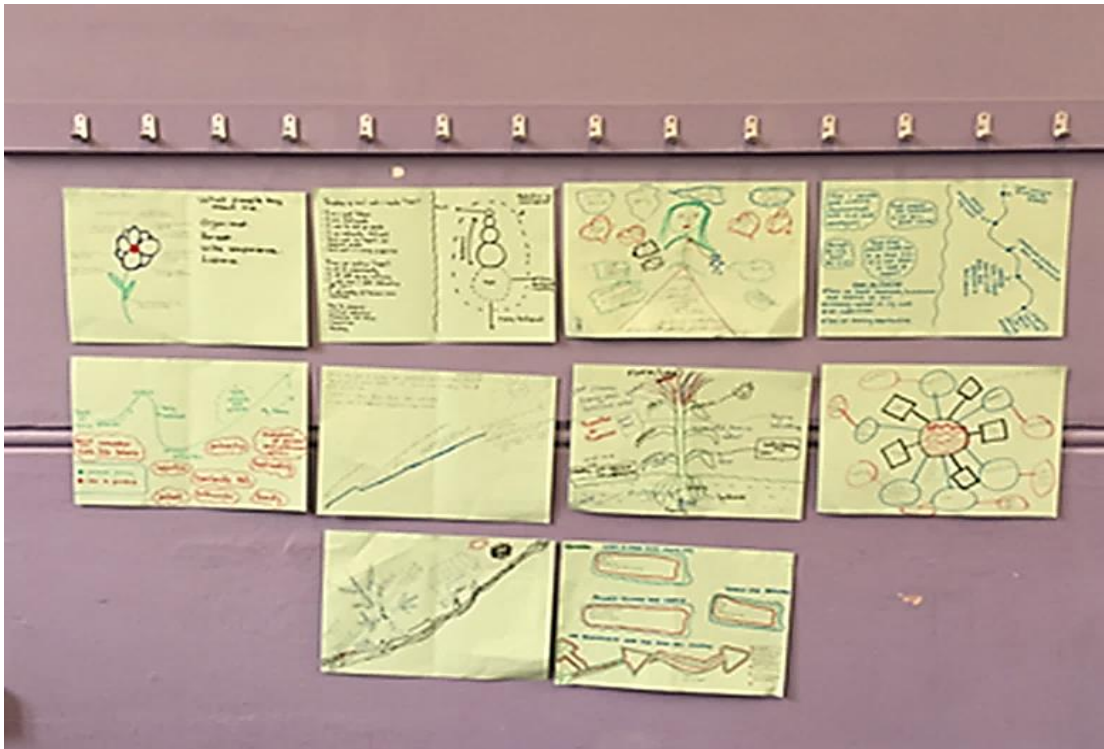
I wanted to establish if the students could 'story their experiences' and also how the use of pictures and cards could inform the main study. Feedback provided by the focus group involved information about refining the structure of the semi-structured interviews and the usefulness of cards being included as triggers. It was found that the pictorials and cards were helpful in generating discussion in the semi-structured interviews and these insights informed the interview process of the main study.

3.8.4　Semi-structured interview participants

Participants in the quantitative strand were asked to indicate on the questionnaire that they were willing to volunteer for interview, thus a sample of convenience was

achieved. Eight participants volunteered across the two sites. Four participants at each site were interviewed (see Table 2 below).

Table 2   Duration and location of the interviews.

Study identifier	Interview type	Place	Time of interview
Participant A	Face to Face	Site one/University	30 minutes
Participant B	Face to Face	Site one/University	50 minutes
Participant C	Face to Face	Site one/University	45 minutes
Participant D	Face to Face	Site one/University	42 minutes
Participant E	Face to Face	Site two/ Placement setting	65 minutes
Participant F	Face to Face	Site two/ Placement setting	47 minutes
Participant G	Face to Face	Site two/University	40 minutes
Participant H	Face to Face	Site two/University	70 minutes

3.8.5 Semi-structured interviews

In this study, participants were asked to engage in a creative activity of pictorial drawing and use of cards at the beginning of the interview. In addition, participants were advised that the pictorial work they had been involved in at the beginning of the interview would act as a prompt and encourage them to expand on their accounts. Additionally, each interview commenced with the following standard opening prompt:

"I'm particularly interested in your readiness for practice and your experiences of the skills days. To begin, could you just have a look at the cards (38 in number) in front of you? They do not represent anyone's views they have been randomly collected and have no meaning to the researcher."

The interview continued with the participant being invited to:

"Think about your development over the past few months. Now try to depict this visually - for example as a diagram, graph or a story mountain etc." (Remember that you do not have to be artistic to be able to do this, as a simple line drawing can be very effective also.)

OR

"Find three photographs or image (Fig 6) that depicts how you feel about your readiness for practice at the moment. Now describe it and try to summarise what this means for you."

Figure 6   Picture cards

This phase of the research was followed by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of the participants, thus gathering rich data in a way that other methods could not achieve (Bridge and Coleman, 2007). Interviews are claimed to be pivotal in the "social production of knowledge" (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.21). These authors believe interviews are active processes in which the interviewer

and the interviewee produce knowledge as a consequence of their interaction and relationship. This knowledge is contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p.21).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to foster exploration, openness and expansiveness through participation in 'talk' (Smith et al. 2008). Semi-structured interviewing was felt appropriate as the interview guide could support the interview to unfold rather than dictate it. This was important for the this study as views of participants regarding their readiness for practice and the usefulness of the skills days is an understudied area (Rogers, 2016) and furthermore a 'social production of knowledge' through an interview process, as proposed by Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), was felt to be relevant.

3.8.6   Interview guide

An interview guide was developed to not only ensure that the research interests were addressed, but also to enable some interpretative freedom on behalf of the interviewee.   The interview guide was designed to capture participants' understandings of readiness to practise and how this related to the social work skills days, placement preparation and curriculum in the social work undergraduate degree (BASW) delivered in their HEI. Prior to each interview the purpose was explained to participants and a request made to audio record the interview for the purposes of transcription. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. Appendix 3 outlines the interview guide.

Participants were also asked if they had any other comments they wished to add at the end of the interview. Due to time constraints, all interviews were transcribed verbatim

by an approved transcription service. I audited every transcript against the original audio-tape. This auditing was extremely important for checking accuracy and gaining a 'close contact and familiarity' with the data and overall trustworthiness (Boyatzis, 1998; Tuckett, 2005).

3.8.7   Qualitative data analysis

The approach taken to the analysis of the qualitative data was thematic analysis and supported by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is claimed to be compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, themes were inductively generated, rather than derived from prior theory and aligned to a constructionist epistemology (Boyatzis, 1998).   An inductive approach means that themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) provided an outline guide summarising the six phases of analysis which were adopted for the qualitative data analysis strand of this mixed methods study and illustrated in Figure 7.
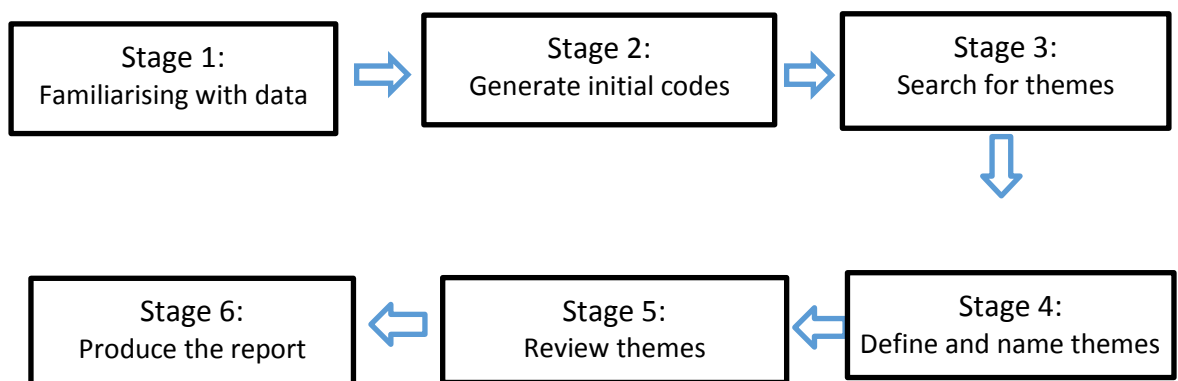
Figure 7   Phases of thematic analysis as adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

The analysis in this study followed a five stage step by step approach, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006): Stage one involved careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts. This allowed early identification of ideas about patterns of meaning in the data, with notes taken of potential themes. In stage two, segments of data coded according to perceived meanings, thus allowing the generation of initial codes that "captured the essence of readiness to practise" concepts as identified by Bazely (2007). The third phase involved sorting the codes into related groups producing broader areas of meaning as themes. Descriptive and interpretative themes were then reviewed and labelled. Theme labels were confirmed by returning to the transcripts, identifying quotations that were consistent with the themes, cards and drawings and the qualitative comments in the survey. Stage four involved further consideration and review of the themes, deciding which were adequately supported by the data and rejecting any that seemed 'thin' or could be subsumed into another theme. Stage five involved a concluding analysis that grouped the identified concepts into sub-themes leading to main themes. This process refined the themes to be presented along with their supporting sub-themes, and ensuring they were named in a way that represented their meaning. This stage was assisted by writing an account of each theme. This produced an over-arching account of the themes, the aim of which was to provide a coherent, concise and logical account of the data (Frith and Gleeson, 2004).

3.9   Trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity of qualitative data

In a qualitative inquiry it is important to employ some form of quality control process in order to ensure the trustworthiness of what has been recorded and subsequently interpreted during participant interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to the

'trustworthiness' of qualitative data and that it is underpinned by its 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and confirmability'. Credibility is concerned with how accurately the subject of discussion can be identified and described; transferability refers to how reliably findings may be applied to another context; dependability is concerned with how the researcher's interpretations and understanding of the subject changes as the research process (and design) develops/changes; and confirmability deals with whether the findings could be confirmed by another researcher, thus minimising criticisms related to subjectivity. A variety of techniques to increase the trustworthiness, credibility and authenticity of qualitative data were employed. These were: audit trails, reflexivity, thick and rich description, peer debriefing and member checking.

3.9.1   Audit trails

Audit trails relate to maintaining careful documentation of the qualitative aspects of the study for the purposes of possible external auditing. Observation notes, interview notes, calendars, digital mp3 audio recordings of interviews and transcripts (subject to where consent had been given) were kept. Such audit trails also serve to enhance the dependability of qualitative study by capturing changes in settings, study design and contexts that may arise throughout the duration of the study.

3.9.2   Thick and rich description

Detailed description and discussion of the setting(s), participants, sampling strategy, interview schedules, data collection, my role and researcher relationship with the participants, data analysis and data presentation in this, and the discussion chapter of this project report provide the thick and rich description required for other researchers

to appreciate commonalities between this and other, similar studies. Such detailed description therefore serves to enhance the credibility, transferability and dependability of qualitative findings. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that thick, rich description may also draw the reader in to the narrative, thus increasing their sense of connection with the study participants.

3.9.3 Peer debriefing

My director of studies and main supervisor acted as peer-reviewers during this study. Lincoln and Guba define peer debriefing as a "*process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind*" (1985, p.308). They may detect whether or not a researcher has over/under-emphasised a point, or missed an alternative, legitimate interpretation. Such critical examination of the research process is significant in enhancing the credibility, dependability and confirmability of qualitative data. The peer debriefing process involved:

- ➢ Critical commentary on the interview guide, interviewing technique and method of coding (thus improving the ongoing research process);

- ➢ Critical commentary on statistical data input and

- ➢ Discussion on coding a sample of transcripts and ensuring the researcher's interpretations are plausible.

3.9.4   Member checking

Member checking is the opportunity for participants to corroborate the interpretation of the data they have provided. It is an effective way of determining whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences. Participants may also be asked to verify the accuracy of transcripts (Padgett, 2008) although, as Cresswell (2009) stressed, member checking is best done with interpreted pieces with themes and patterns from the data available for scrutiny. Participants were given the opportunity to review and comment on transcripts annotated with my notes and a brief summary of interpretations and emerging themes. A selection of participants were also approached during the later stages of analysis with a summary of findings and asked to comment on the authenticity of the analysis.

3.10   Practitioner – research paradigm and reflexivity

All researchers possess experiences, assumptions, personal values and beliefs that can influence their interpretation of data (Cresswell, 1998). While in quantitative research steps can be employed to significantly reduce such biases, this is not as easy in qualitative research. However, it has been suggested by Cresswell (1998) that such potential biases may not be viewed as problematic in qualitative research provided that the researcher accounts for any assumptions, values and beliefs in the research dialogue. By being transparent about these issues and their backgrounds and the relationships between themselves and the research participants, I acknowledge that their interpretations are influenced by them and is adopting a 'reflexive' approach and a recognition that in some ways I have created myself in the research as well as being the one creating it (Rheinharz, 1992; Alvesson et al. 2009)). Reflexivity along with

explicit contextualisation of the project and situating the researcher within that process, are important ways in which to try to make the process and the researcher's role in it more open and understandable (Richardson 2002).

I was aware that not only was my role as the skills development lead, but also a course leader, module leader and placement tutor, all of which were intrinsically entwined in the research interest. To enhance reflexivity in this study I maintained a research journal that recorded and discussed thoughts, feelings, assumptions and values that arose during the research process. Journal entries were periodically shared and discussed with the supervisory team. A reflexive account is included in chapter 8.

3.11   Ethical considerations

Proposals for the pilot and main studies were approved by the Research Ethics Committees of both participating universities (appendix 4). Student participation in the study was voluntary and all prospective participants were given an information sheet prior to the study (appendix 5). All were given time to ask questions and make an informed decision as to whether they wished to participate. Those agreeing to participate completed a consent form (appendix 6). This was then repeated at the interview stage.

All questionnaires and interview transcripts were anonymised and all materials used in the study were kept securely according the Data Protection Act (1998). Student numbers were used on all data collection materials to ensure questionnaires could be collated and matched. All paperwork was held securely for audit purposes.

Participants were asked to provide verbal consent for their drawings to be photo copied. Students were invited to participate in the follow up interviews via the post-

test questionnaire. Those who volunteered provided email or telephone details to allow myself to contact them. Students participating in the interviews were reminded that they were free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason, and without detriment. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with participating students being offered a copy of the recording and transcript if they wished. As above, all transcribed data was anonymised.

The project and its design involved some low-risk ethical implications. Firstly, it was recognised that the researcher-tutor role duality and the perceived 'power imbalance' between student and tutor may influence the students' participation and actions and potentially impact on the outcomes of the research. For example, it was possible that participants may behave in a way that reflects a typical tutor-student relationship in any learning scenario and thus interact with the process of producing creative materials (drawings) in such a way that was not wholly representative of their natural inclinations.

In order to avoid this as much as possible, all participants were provided with clear information regarding the task outcomes and were explicitly encouraged illustrating their perceptions of their readiness to practise in any way they saw fit. Furthermore, it was possible that during the interviews students might react to the perceived power imbalance and offer the interviewer information that they considered she may want to hear (Denscombe, 2007). This issue was managed primarily through stressing to participants that they had complete freedom to express their views during the interview, and could offer an unconditional critique of researcher interpretations at the member checking stage. I had little prior interaction with almost all participants prior to the study, thus minimising the overall impact of the tutor-student relationship in the research. Peer debriefing with the supervisory team following the first few

interviews provided the opportunity to reflect on the approach to interviewing. This enabled identification of power imbalance issues such as leading and prompting that could be avoided in subsequent interviews.

3.12   Conclusion

In this chapter the theoretical framework within which the research sits has been introduced. The underpinning epistemological position of pragmatism and the mixed methods methodology employed have been discussed. The methods employed and the ethical implications related to the study have been presented.   I have acknowledged my own role within this process and the multiple subjectivities that I bring to the research and these will be elaborated in chapter 8. In the next chapter the quantitative findings of the study will be presented. Chapter 5 presents the qualitative findings of the study.

Chapter 4   Quantitative research findings

4.1   Introduction

This chapter reports on the data generated from the pre- and post-test questionnaire. Data were collected between April 2014 and April 2015 across two HEI sites within England, one HEI located in the north of England and the other in the south of England. The pre-test and post-test questionnaires addressed the three aims of the overall research study: (i) to provide a detailed exploration of the perceptions of undergraduate social work students' readiness for practice; (ii) to examine what factors hinders and support social work students' in preparing and learning for practice and (iii) to explore students' understanding of how and when they learn to be ready for practice.

4.2   Sample, procedure and research instrument

The sample size and procedure for conducting the pre-and post-test questionnaires will be discussed in this section. The development of the research instrument is also explained.

4.2.1   Procedure and research instrument

The descriptive statistical results from the questionnaires assessed the perceptions of competence and confidence of first year social work students in terms of readiness for practice – using a measure of self-efficacy and confidence, as well as satisfaction with the 30 social work skills days introduced to social work degree programmes in 2013 at both HEI sites. Data were anonymised but pre- and post-test questionnaires were

matched to determine change at an individual as well as group level. However, there may be a response shift bias as students were aware of the matching process and this may have affected data collection.

The questionnaires can be found in appendix 2, used a four-point Likert scale plus non-applicable comments option to rate responses for Questions 1,3 & 7 and a two-point Likert scale for Question 8 (comprising 1 "mostly prepared" and 2 "prepared"). A range of questions (questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 & 8) addressed what knowledge, skills, values and experiences were considered by social work students to be most important for their readiness for practice and to practise. They focussed on eight areas, these included: (i) confidence in working with different individuals and families/groups; (ii) satisfaction with the social work skills days; (iii) being able to establish relationships; (iv) being able to deal with the written requirements of practice; (v) working together with others; (vi) developing accountable, reflective and professional practice; (vii) being able to link theories of explanation with methods of interventions; (viii) satisfaction with preparatory teaching prior to practice learning.

4.2.2 Sample size

Data were obtained from students enrolled in two HEIs on the undergraduate course in September 2013. Please see chapter 3 section 3.8.1 for further participant and sampling information. The pre- and post-test questionnaires were disseminated to all first year undergraduate social work students at scheduled university lectures. Table 3 summarises the sampling size for the pre- and post-test survey for both sites.

Table 3   Sampling size for pre- and post- test surveys

	Site One	Site Two
Target Population Total: N = 137 students'	N = 87 students' (2013/2014 intake)	N = 50 students' (2013/2014 intake)
Pre – and Post - Test survey Total completed Pre-Post surveys: N =74 (54% response rate)	n=43 participants completed and compared both test (49% response rate)	n=31 participant completed and compared both test (62% response rate)
Follow up semi-structured interview consent	Yes n = 13 No n = 17 Maybe n = 13	Yes n = 23 No n = 2 Maybe n = 6
Interviews	Four participants	Four participants

Whilst the number of responses varied as students' attendance at data collection times changed, the impact of changing numbers of respondents is minimal as an acceptable response rate was achieved at each data collection stage with 74 participants (54%) completing the both pre-and post-test questionnaires (Sample group N137, site one N=87 and site two N=50). The pre- and post-test questionnaire consisted of questions in the first part on demographics, followed by questions focussing on factors impacting upon readiness for practice. Overall response rates of 49% (n=43) for site one and 62% (n=31) for site two were achieved. The questionnaire to both sites surveyed pre and post placement one experience by the same participant who could be identified through the use of student numbers. Unmatched pre-and post-test questionnaires were not used in the analysis.

4.3   Results from the quantitative survey

This section presents the results from the pre- and post-test questionnaires.

4.3.1   Demographic characteristics

The following is a breakdown of the data collected with respect to age, gender, ethnic and racial origin and disability. Where possible, I have compared figures from this study to those presented in the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) report for Social Work Education in England for 2013-2014. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) demographic data is taken from all 4750 students undertaking undergraduate and post-graduate programmes in the 2013-2014 cohort and compared where appropriate with the results from this survey. Table 4 below shows the demographics of social work participants across both cohorts involved in the study.

Table 4   Comparison of demographics of participants from both sites

	Site One N 43		Site Two N 31	
	N	%	N	%
Female	37	86	28	90
Male	5	12	3	10
Other	1	2	0	0
Age 18-24 years	30	82	26	84
Age 25-34 years	5	12	2	7
Age 35-44 years	8	19	3	10
Age 45 year+	0	0	0	0
White	37	86	20	65
Black	4	9	6	19
Asian	1	2	4	13
Other (including mixed)	1	2	1	3
Unknown	0	0	0	0
African	5	12	6	19
British (UK)	35	81	20	65
Bangladeshi	1	2	0	0
Caribbean	0	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	1	3
Indian	0	0	0	0
European	2	5	4	13
Other	0	0	0	0

***Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding**

4.3.1.1   Age

There were a total of n74 responses to this question as outlined in the breakdown above. As expected, given the status of first year students, the sample reflected a younger composition with an mean average age for site one as 25 years and for site two 22 years (almost 50% between 25-34 years old). Although only 10% of UCAS applications are from those aged 25 and over, half of applicants accepted for mainstream social work courses are aged 25 and over (Moriarty and Murray, 2007) showing that social work students may be older than the overall student population.

4.3.1.2   Gender

There were a total of n74 responses to this question. The majority of the sample was female across both sites, similar as the all-HESA tariff groups. The figures represented in the survey mirror the wider composition within the social work sector. As of 2014, the average workforce was 84% women and 16% men. Moriarty and Murray (2007) noted there is a decline in the numbers of men applying for social work courses in general, which may be associated with the perceived lower status and pay for social work (Parker and Crabtree, 2014). This is echoed in the Evaluation of Social Work Qualification in England Team Report (2008). Also indicated is that although men are likely to be accepted onto courses, men are less likely to apply (Moriarty and Murray 2007).

4.3.1.3   Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, high numbers of White British students are represented in both samples (74%) and this is reflected in all-HESA (70%) data. From the HESA data generic social work programmes also have fewer minority ethnic students on programmes and

with respect to workforce, 85% of workers are white with the remaining 15% coming from Black and 'other' ethnic or mixed race groups. In this study participants identifying themselves as either black, Asian or other/mixed differed across the groups. Site two cohort demonstrated a higher number of black participants; however the number of those describing themselves as either other or mixed race was equal across both groups, which may represent the population patterns in the different location of both sites.

4.3.1.4   Disability

In the sample, 7% of participants disclosed a disability, although a few more identified themselves as having learning difficulties such as dyslexia once the course commenced. Thirteen per cent of HESA high tariff group and 17% of all-HESA students are reported as having a disability of some form but no further information was available.

From the demographic findings it is clear how typical the overall sample is compared to the overall social work student population and how similar the cohorts of the two sites are. The next section below moves to more specific questions focussing on satisfaction with preparatory teaching, skills days, preparedness for practice learning settings, the ways students indicate they learn and student perceptions on their competence for practice.

After running further analysis on the data, I did not find a significant relationship between demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity or disability) and self-efficacy. However, some evidence emerged that may suggest a relationship between those with a higher degree of previous non-qualified social work/care work experience and higher levels of self-efficacy at the start of their readiness for practice journey.

This is consistent with similar findings by Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), Moriarty et al. (2011), and Parker (2006) on the currency of previous social work experiences. Although, by the end of the final stage, it seemed that self-efficacy had levelled out across the cohorts, with little change distinguished between those with previous work experiences and those without.

4.3.2   Satisfaction with preparatory teaching

The following section presents findings that include participants' overall satisfaction with the social work curriculum including the social work skills days combining pre- and post- test responses from both sites.

4.3.2.1   Social work curriculum

Item 1: "I felt confident and prepared for my first placement learning one experience" asked the participants to rank their satisfaction with the preparatory teaching on the first year of the social work course (5 = Strongly Agree and 1 = N/A) as illustrated in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Comparison of both sites responses in first year students' pre –test and post-test satisfaction and confidence with preparatory teaching

Prepared and confident with knowledge, skills and understanding from preparatory teaching	Pre-Test				Post-Test			
	Strongly Agree/ Agree		Disagree/ Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree/ Agree		Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Site One (N 43)	40	93	3	7	33	77	10	23
Site Two (N 31)	25	81	6	19	27	87	4	13

Overall, the readiness for the first placement element was well received by the first year undergraduate students with 88% (65/74) agreeing or strongly agreeing that the first year of the degree provided them with the right knowledge, understanding and skills for their first practice learning opportunity from both sites (see Table 5 above). There was no significant statistical difference between the two sites in feeling prepared and confident with the preparatory teaching prior to the first placement experience. Only 12% (9/74) disagreed within the free comments option for question 2 in feeling dissatisfied with their preparatory teaching post test responses. The qualitative comments from question 2 are integrated in the qualitative findings presented in chapter 5.

4.3.2.2 Social work skills days

For item 7 the participants were asked to rate specific skills and knowledge regarding their readiness for practice during year one. Table 6 below provides a comparison of the responses from both sites.

Table 6 Comparison of answers and differences between pre-test and post-test satisfaction with preparatory teaching regarding readiness for practice from both sites

	Site One N 43							
	Pre-Test				Post-Test			
	Strongly Agree/ Agree		Disagree/Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree/ Agree		Disagree/Strongly Disagree	
Skills and Knowledge well prepared for:	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
The skills days increased my interest in the social workers role	39	91%	4	9%	24	56%	19	44%
Confident in linking theory to practice	42	98%	1	2%	40	93%	3	7%
Confident to practise social work skills	41	95%	2	5%	41	95%	2	5%
Apply social work values into practice	42	98%	1	2%	43	100%	0	0%
Confident to communicate with service users and or carers	42	98%	1	2%	42	98%	1	2%

	Site Two N 31							
	Pre-Test				Post-Test			
	Strongly Agree/Agree		Disagree/Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree/Agree		Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	
Skills and Knowledge well prepared for:	Freq	%	Freq	%s	Freq	%	Freq	%
The skills days increased my interest in the social workers role	29	94%	2	7%	30	97%	1	3%
Confident in linking theory to practice	30	97%	1	3%	31	100%	0	0%
Confident to practise social work skills	30	97%	1	3%	31	100%	0	0%
Apply social work values into practice	30	97%	1	3%	31	100%	0	0%
Confident to communicate with service users and or carers	29	94%	2	3%	31	100%	0	0%

Please note that the percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding

Despite the large reduction post-test in the percentage at site one that agreed or strongly agreed that the skills days increased their interest in the social workers' role, no statistical significant differences were noted between the two groups. These

findings could suggest a degree of consistency in the overall pre- and post-test results and indicates that students felt that undertaking the social work skills days prior to practice learning leads to an increase in levels of self-confidence alongside the practice learning practice itself. There was also a high agreement to start with at both sites and completing the first placement learning opportunity made little difference to the levels of agreement.

Table 6 presents the areas in which participant satisfaction levels tended to be the highest and included social work values (98.5%); communication skills (98%); applying theory to practice (96.5%); social work skills (96.5%) and professional identity (83%). These findings are similar to Wilson's (2013) study where the vast majority of students rated social work values at 95%. An interesting change of responses were from 44% of site one participants' during the post-test that the skills days did not increase their interest in the social workers' role, a decrease of 47%. Professional identity achieved a lower score of (73%) post placement learning one. This is a 10 percentage point decrease in the overall score participants selected prior to placement one (83%). It may suggest that students' were not well prepared for the practice realities of being a social worker prior to commencing placement one.

4.3.3   Preparedness for practice learning settings

Item 3 asked the participants "What factors helped you to prepare/be ready for placement learning one?" Figure 8 below provides data about the factors participants identified as impacting upon their readiness for practice.

Figure 8   Personal and organisational factors impacting upon readiness for practice
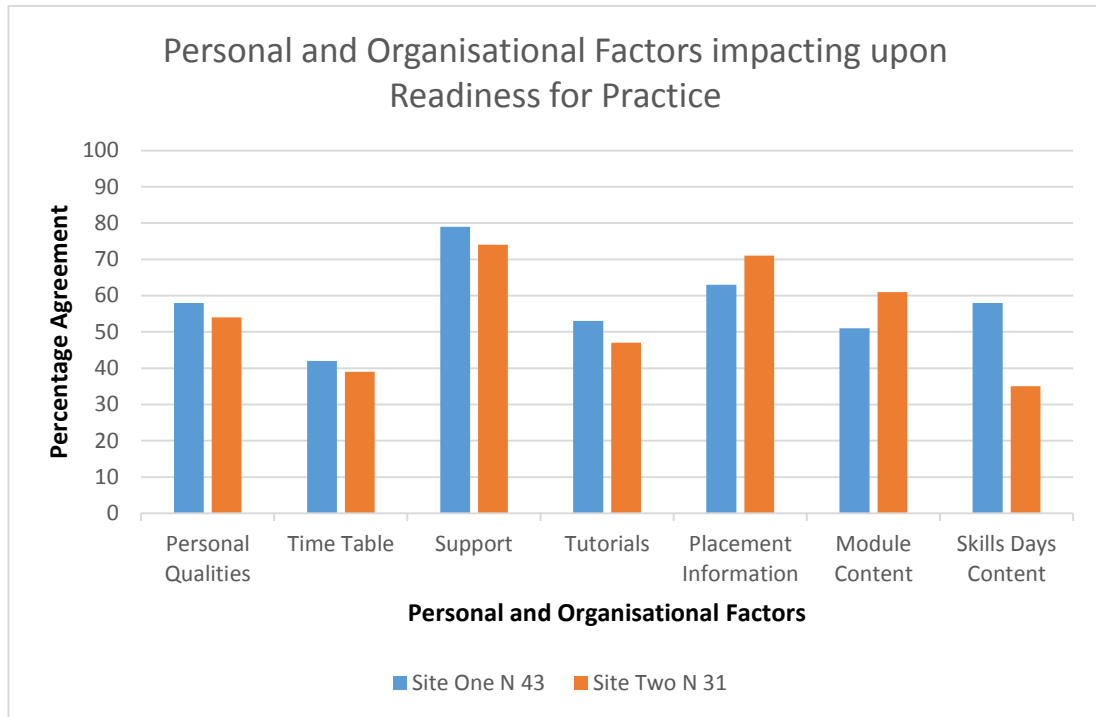
Some of the key strengths from both sites respectively were noted to be participants personal qualities such as motivation and drive (58% and 55%), support (78% and 74%), tutorial support concerning their written work (79% and 74%). The lack of placement information was identified as an important barrier for students preparing for practice (63% and 71%). The lowest organisational factors identified by the participants from both sites impacting upon their readiness for practice were their individual time tables (42% and 38%). Overall, there was no clear statistical difference in the patterns identified by both sites apart from the responses from both sites toward skills days content impacting upon their readiness for practice, with site one at a p-value of (67%) and site 2 (34%).

To try and understand some impediments faced by undergraduate students in preparation for practice, respondents were asked (Item 4) to identify factors that most held up their readiness for placement one (see combined answers for both sites in Fig 9).

Figure 9   Barriers to readiness for practice learning one both sites post-test

Barriers for Readiness for Placement One
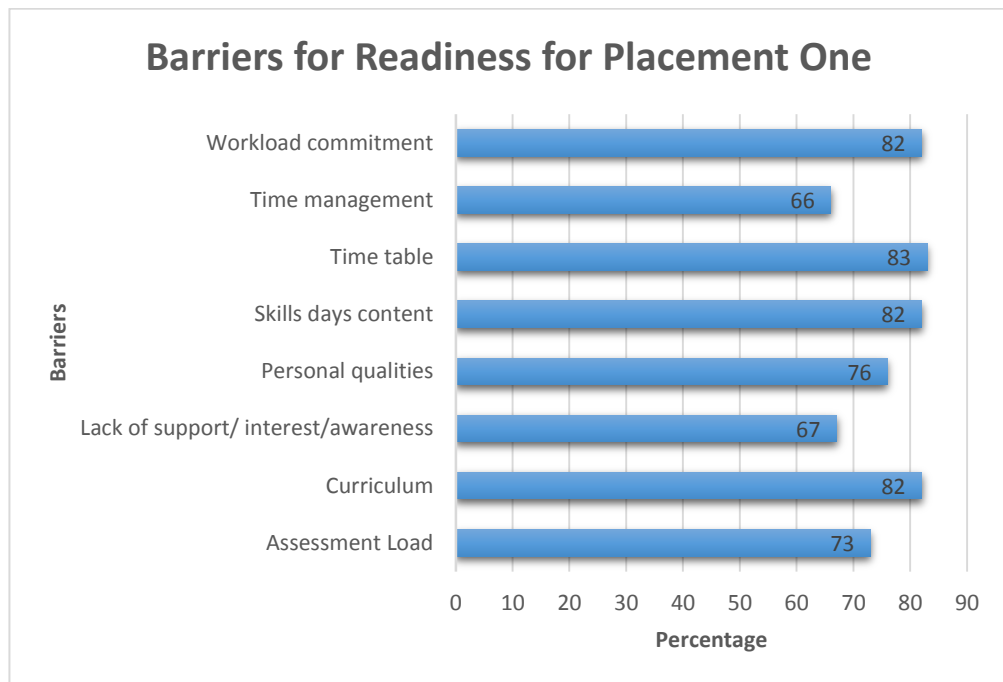
The majority of the participants', reflecting back on post placement one, identified that time management (66%); work/load commitment (82%); content of the first year programme (82%); content of the skills days (82%) and assessment load on the course (73%) all impeded on their preparedness for placement one. It is interesting that participants identified course content actually impedes preparedness for placement. There were no significant differences between the post-test survey responses from the group to those collated from the pre-test. It would seem that the impediments were identified prior to placement and remained the same after placement.

Within the free comments section for item 4, participants listed other factors hindering their readiness for practice which could be seen in the Table 7 below. The factors are listed in ranking of no particular importance.

Table 7   Factors that undermine readiness for practice during placement

Not feeling safe to express self-doubt/ discuss difficulties with placement
Placement not challenging enough
Student preparedness/ time management/Life
Negative experience at the start of placement
Negative attitude of staff/ overly hierarchical / lack of respect for me as a student
Concerns regarding performance not being discussed early on/ overly monitored during placement

Item 5 asked participants to answer yes or no to " in your view, do you feel you have developed the relevant skills and knowledge during your first year on the social work course to help you to feel prepared for your placement one experience?". 88% (65/74) of participants replied yes that the first year of the degree provided them with the right knowledge, understanding and skills for their first practice learning opportunity. Nine respondents commented that they did not develop the key skills and knowledge on the first year of their social work course prior to going out on placement one.

4.3.4   Informal and formal learning

To try to understand how social work students learn to be ready for placement learning situations, respondents were asked (Item 6) to provide free comments on "How do you learn to be ready for placement learning one?" The key elements that

affected participants learning and practice both directly and indirectly towards their readiness for practice are set out in Figure 10.

Figure 10   Elements of how students learn to be ready for practice.

The key factors participants' identified in how they learn to be ready for practice and to practise could be summarised as: learning with and from each other; different and contrasting placement experiences, the role of the 30 skills days, assessments and the module content. Interestingly, pedagogical methods, such as lectures, seminars, tutorials, self-directed study, informal peer supervision, group work and varied assessment methods were favoured over workshops and e-learning by more than 60% of the respondents. These elements contained a number of professional learning models, including peer support and encompassed a wide range of content. There does not seem to be consensus on how students learn best with the majority of the

participants (75%) preferring a combination of didactic methods with the opportunity for face-to-face discussion appearing to offer an ideal model to learning for the undergraduate student.

Other responses from participants included learning from different professional disciplines within the multi-disciplinary team as opportunities to develop their readiness for practice, with some placement experiences achieving this better than others. Some participants listed mixed views from the contrasting learning experiences, with some participants viewing other non-children and families local authority placements as a distraction from "real social work" (e.g. adult placements within the third sector or private sector) in how they learn to be ready for the workplace.

4.3.5   Students' confidence and competence

For Item 8 the respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence on a scale that reflected the 15 social work skills days prior to starting their placement learning one experience. Table 8 below provides comparison details of the responses collated from the pre- and post-test surveys focussing on the previously mentioned eight themes: (i) Confidence in working with different individuals and families/groups; (ii) satisfaction with the social work skills days; (iii) being able to establish relationships; (iv) being able to deal with the written requirements of practice; (v) working together with others; (vi) developing accountable, reflective and professional practice; (vii) being able to link theories of explanation with methods of interventions and finally; (viii) satisfaction with preparatory teaching prior to practice learning.

Table 8   Pre- and post- test comparison of answers and percentage to *"Please rank the skills and knowledge you feel prepared you the most for the placement learning one experience regarding the following skills and processes"*

	Pre Test N=74						Post Test N=74					
	Mostly prepared		Prepared		Unprepared		Mostly prepared		Prepared		Unprepared	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Transcultural communication	25	34	23	31	26	35	23	31	24	32	27	37
Communication skills (written and verbally)	23	31	24	32	27	37	21	28	26	35	27	37
Task centred practice	22	30	23	31	45	61	21	28	24	32	29	39
Knowledge on safeguarding children, families and adults	21	28	22	30	31	42	21	28	26	35	27	37
Supervision and reflection (professional development - knowledge and resilience)	21	28	22	30	31	42	17	23	29	39	28	38
Interprofessional skills and being professional (working with other professionals and team working)	20	27	23	31	31	42	16	22	28	38	30	41
Planning and interventions	20	27	23	31	31	42	16	22	26	35	32	43
Roles, boundaries ,consent, confidentiality and working with others	19	26	23	31	35	48	16	22	27	37	31	42
Solution focus intervention	18	24	25	34	31	42	16	22	27	37	31	42
Building a rapport	17	23	25	34	32	43	15	20	25	34	34	46
Motivational interviewing	17	23	26	35	31	42	15	20	23	31	36	49
Managing risk and personal safety	18	24	27	37	29	39	14	19	28	38	32	43
Office skills (writing letters, case notes , assessment reports)	16	22	28	38	30	41	13	18	30	41	31	42
Clarifying, probing and challenging skills (working with conflict)	13	18	30	41	31	42	13	18	29	39	32	43
Assessment skills, risk assessment skills (gathering information)	12	16	35	47	27	37	12	16	32	43	30	41

*Please note that the percentage may not equal 100 due to rounding

Table 8 shows the majority of the participants agreed that their skills increased post – test from both cohort sites. These findings may suggest that changes occurred in the level of the students' self-belief in their competence across the eight themes. The greatest increase in percentage occurred in working and communicating with others (Transcultural communication and interprofessional working) with a 7% increase.

Supervision and reflection had 4 less responses post placement one (mostly prepared n17 (23%) than prior to placement one (n21 (28%). This may be directly linked to participants' experiences following on from the practice setting. At both sites pre- and post- test; written assessments and learning through observations caused some discontent amongst students. The least increase in percentage points (n12 (16%)) occurred concerning assessment and risk assessment skills following placement learning one experience.

Participants from both sites regarded the learning to be positive regarding working with service users, and receiving support from practitioners during the skills days. Interestingly, for a majority of the participants, particular methods of interventions such as Task centred practice (TCP), Motivational interviewing (MI) and Solution focussed interventions (SF) were identified as methods of interventions where they felt less confident in their own abilities from both pre and post placement one.

In Item 9 respondents were asked: "From the list in Question 8, please identify 3 skills or knowledge you felt unprepared for during placement one."(See Table 9)

Table 9   Skills and knowledge unprepared for from both data sets at post-test

Skills and Processes unprepared for:	Both Sites N 74	
	Freq	%
Assessment	12	16
Writing Reports	9	12
Advocacy skills	5	7
Dealing with conflict	8	11
Time Management	7	10
Communication skills	5	7
Dealing with the emotional part of the role	15	20
Record keeping	9	12
Court Skills	4	5

A total of 50% of participants felt less prepared in such instrumental areas of social work practice e.g. assessments (16%); record keeping (12%); report writing (12%) and time management (10%). Participants were also less satisfied with preparatory teaching on the writing requirements for the role (12%) and managing the emotional part of the role (20%). A few (n8) participants from both sites felt unprepared for dealing with conflicting situations (11%).

4.4   Summary of quantitative findings

The results show that social work education appears to be perceived as adequately preparing social work students for the challenges of the workplace. A concerning proportion of participants responded with either a negative or neutral answer with the ranking questions (Questions 1, 3, 7 and 8), and may require further investigation or examination to help understand the distinctions as well as the more noticeable skew towards negative reporting by the respondents in their preparedness for practice and to practise.

The results indicated that the vast majority of the students were either satisfied or very satisfied with the preparatory teaching, including the 15 social work skills days they had received. The findings regarding the 15 social work skills days in the curriculum were broadly positive, and there was some evidence of variation regarding rating of the content of skills days made between pre-test and post-test. They ranged from a higher percentage score for knowledge on basic children and families safeguarding, confidence in some methods of interventions and communication skills (written and verbal). The lowest percentage score was students' confidence in assessment skills and conducting risk assessments.

The readiness for practice module was generally well received by the majority of the participants. The placement preparation element of the readiness for practice module was considered problematic by many of both site one and site two participants. It should be noted, however, that different starting points of the skills days could have implications for like-for-like comparison between the two groups.

Perceptions of the universities varied across both HEIs. Participants had favourable views about their placements, reporting that they had prepared them with the skills of assessing need, assessing and managing risk, developing plans and record keeping.

Overall the perceptions of students from both sites of the quality of the social work curriculum were positive over time, albeit their lack of practice experience and confidence was noted by several participants at the outset in the free comments responses for question 2 and 5.

The next chapter will present the findings from the qualitative strand of the mixed methods study.

Chapter 5   Qualitative research findings

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative strand of this study that explored the participants' experiences and perceptions of their readiness for practice journey, focussing on: (i) their general feelings of readiness for practice; (ii) the standing of different sources of knowledge and competence; (iii) how well social work education had prepared them for this; and finally (iv), how they learn the 'when and how' to be ready for practice.

The thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in the generation of five themes. These are: (i) becoming ready and resilient; (ii) feeling shut out; (iii) navigating my placement; (iv) trying to fit things together and (v) having what it takes. Together these themes provide an interpretation of how students describe the experience of their learning to become ready for the workplace, their readiness for practice and to practise.

The analysis is discussed below. However, it is pertinent, to firstly provide some background about the eight students who participated in the interviews and to show the images they created as part of this participation.

To protect their confidentiality, the participants were allocated a pseudonym (see Table 10). Table 10 shows the order the interviews were undertaken, their placement setting, with the pseudonym indicating their gender.

Table 10   Participant pseudonym, study site and placement setting

Site	Placement setting	Pseudonym
1	Children Social Care	Helen
1	Mental Health	Michael
1	Older Adults Social Care	Sarah
1	Children Social Care	Kate
2	Children Social Care	Hayley
2	Mental Health	Salma
2	Older Adults Social Care	Rosie
2	Independent Sector / Mental Health	Lucy

5.2   Student profiles

Within the following section the eight participants are introduced by the use of 'profiles' that describe the background of each student and includes, taken from field notes in my researcher's journal, my impressions of important factors in the interview.

5.2.1   Helen's profile

Field note: This is Helen, a mature female student. She has a significant amount of work experience within social care. She is battling with a serious health problem whilst a student on the course. She described herself as a very strong person as she has had to overcome difficult personal circumstance and she is not fazed by what the role of a social worker involves. She learns best alongside her peers in smaller group seminars and least well from formal lectures. She enjoyed both of her placement settings and

group supervision with fellow students and practice assessors/educators helped to put everthing into place.

This is the picture images and drawing from Helen which triggered her interview. Helen described her picture as depicting a journey of ups and downs and noted significant events on the way. The picture cards she selected focussed on her learning journey with peers and having the physical space to reflect.
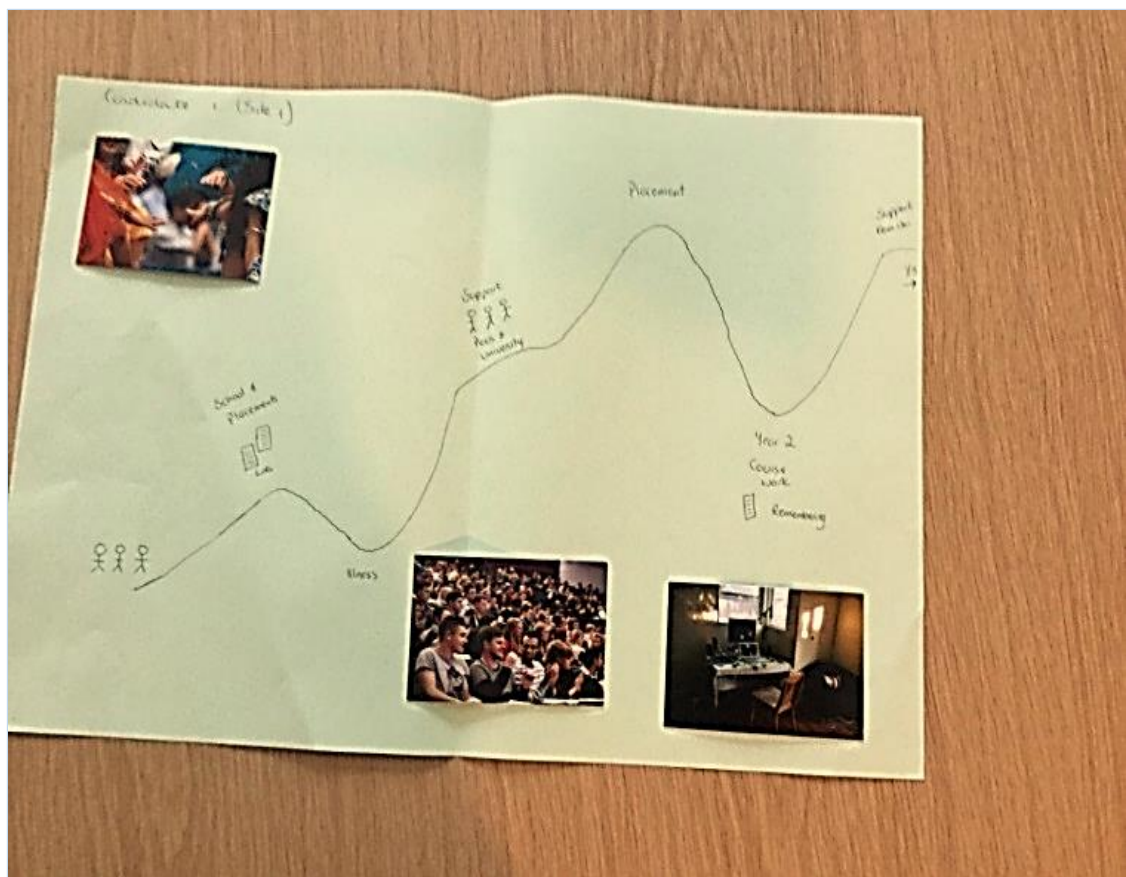
5.2.2 Michael's profile

Field note: This is Michael. He is a mature student with more than 15 years' work experience in health and social care. He also had management experience prior to joining the social work programme. He described himself as a strong and confident person. The social work skills days were not challenging enough for him prior to the first placement. In his view they were too basic and repetitive. It was important for Michael to know he was being assessed on the 9 domains of the PCF, and he knew that everything would work out. He found working as part of a team difficult at times and his practice assessor's feedback during supervision helped him to reflect on his skills and learning needs.

This is the picture images and drawing from Michael which triggered the interview. Michael described his picture as a trajectory with the PCF being his main focus on why he felt ready for practice. He described his learning journey with three picture cards as standing on the edge amongst a sea of students waiting to go into a direction of social work practice.
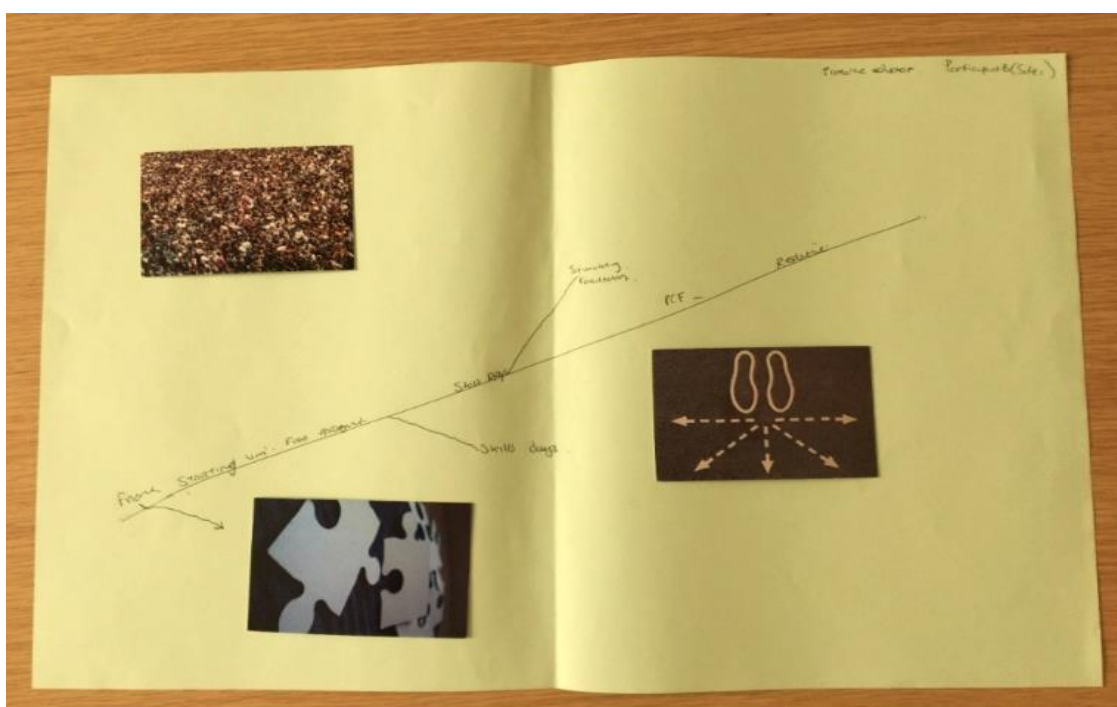
5.2.3   Sarah's profile

Field note: This is Sarah a mature student with a young family. Sarah has worked in social care for more than 12 years. She found her second placement demanding and struggled to find her place in a busy children and family's statutory team.   She mentioned the role of the manager frequently during the interview as a factor impacting upon her placement experience. The interview took place following Sarah's second placement. She did not feel her voice as a social work student was being heard during placement two. She stated that '*I learn best when I can see how everything stacks up against each other. I guess you can say I am a social work builder*.'

This is the picture images and drawing from Sarah which triggered the interview. Sarah described her journey as running a marathon with challenges along the way and where gates open up a new way of learning and reflection.
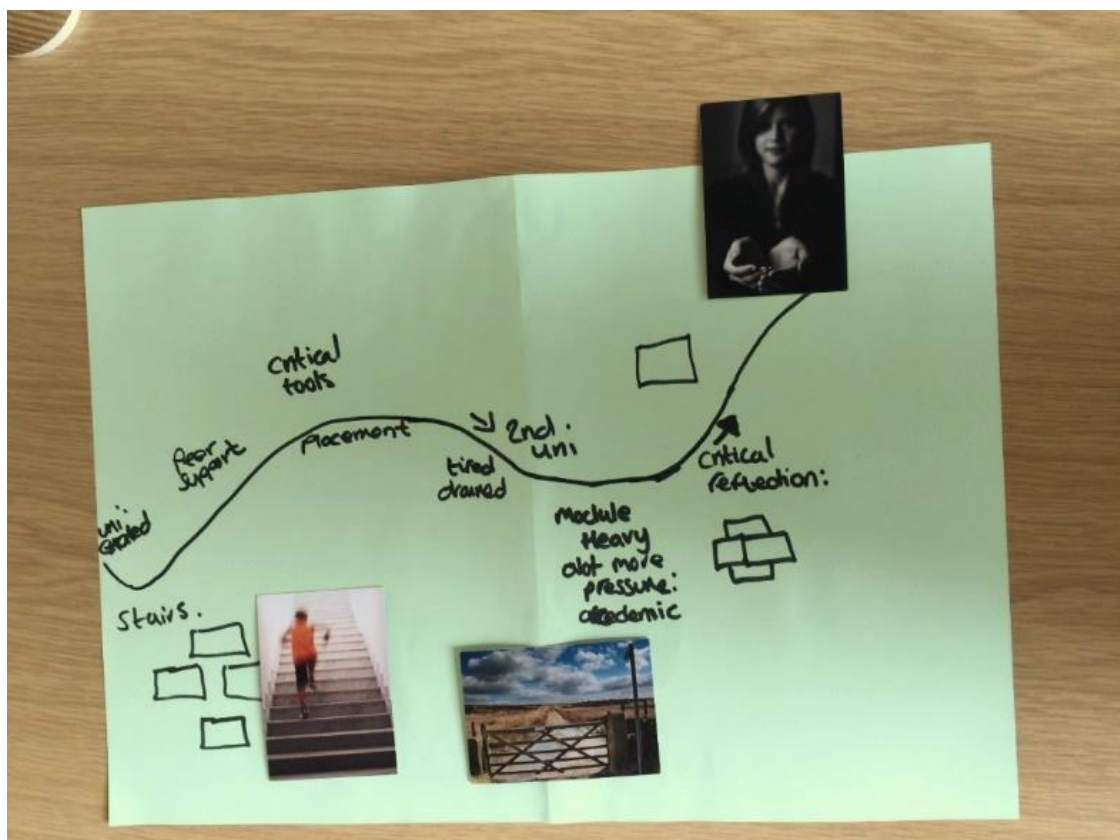
5.2.4 Kate's profile

Field note: This is Kate, a mature student with a significant amount of managerial and social care experience. She described herself as an emotive learner when she receives feedback from others. She was one of three social work ambassadors for the course and demonstrated leadership qualities amongst her peers. Her placement experiences were a discovery of her own strengths and development needs. Practice teaching supervision was a factor in helping her to be ready for practice where she was reminded by her practice assessor that 'I *must be able to walk before I can run on placement.*'

This is the picture images and drawing from Kate which triggered the interview. Kate depicted her journey as being on a rollercoaster with key peaks and scary troughs.
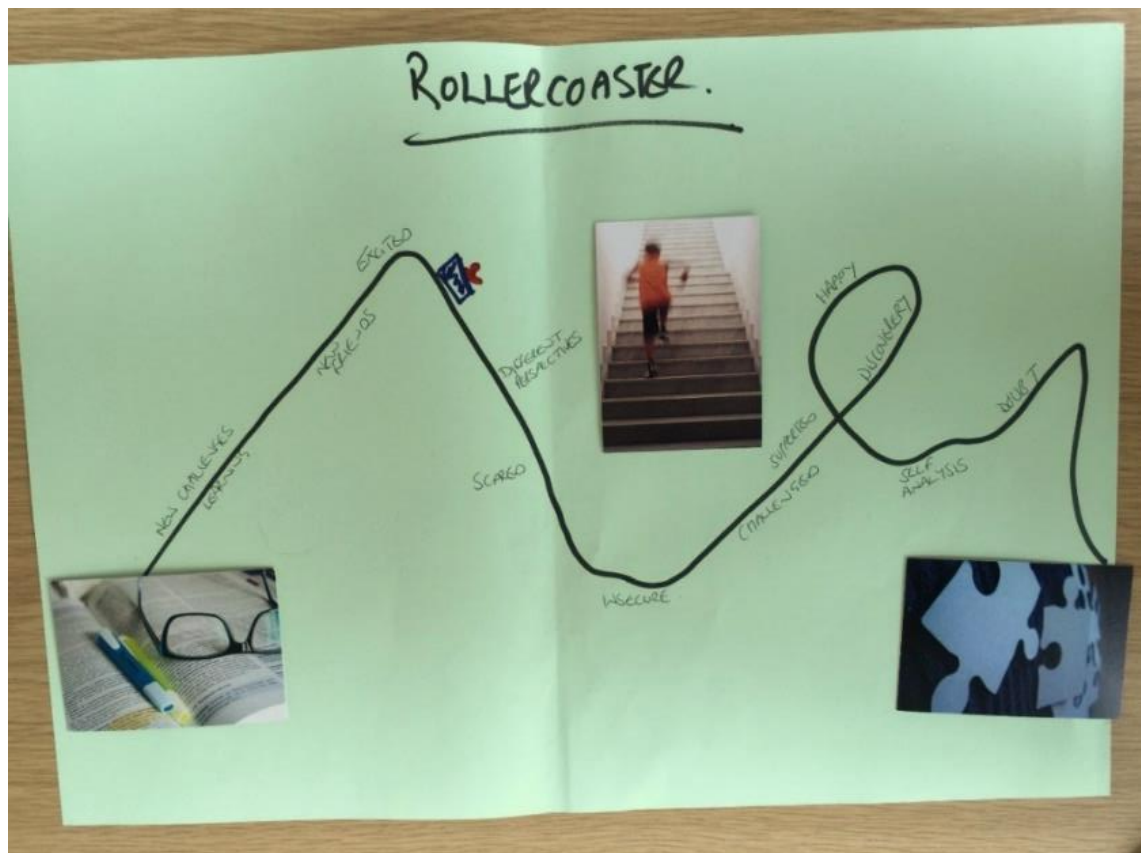
5.2.5 Hayley's profile

Field note: This is Hayley a single parent with more than 5 years social care work experience. She described herself as being of mixed race. She had two positive placement learning experiences. She described herself as a keen learner and just wanted to get '*stuck into the work*' when she started placement. She felt she had a voice as a student learner on placement. She wanted to be more assertive when working in a multi-disciplinary team and advocate on behalf of her service user group. She felt she did not want to be bullied by other professionals whilst being on placement.

This is the picture images and drawing for Hayley which triggered the interview. Hayley described her journey as getting stuck in and feeling confident in her abilities to do social work.
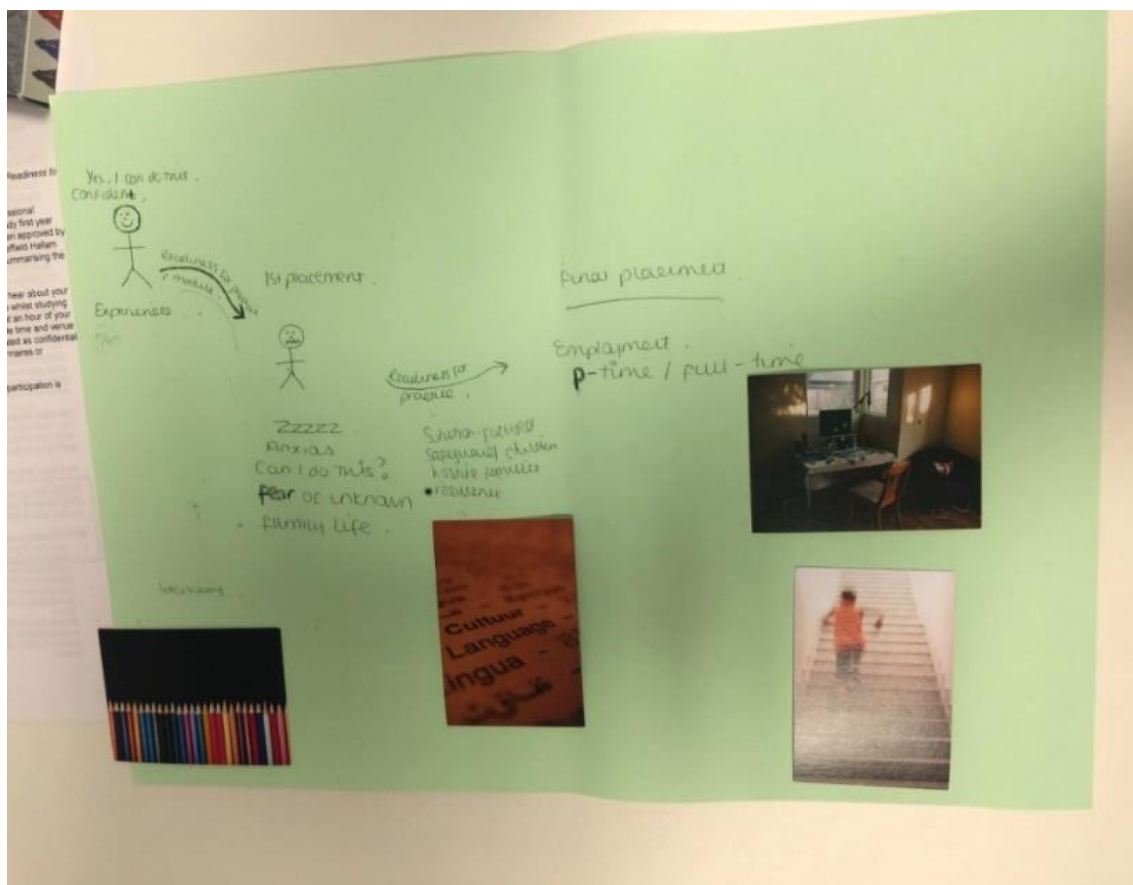
5.2.6 Salma's profile

Field note: This is Salma a mature student with a young family. She described her readiness for practice as "*I have passed the driving test and I have my L plates for going out to placement*". She found her final placement setting difficult and the working environment demanding. She learnt best when she could "*connect*" with others and found herself at the crossroads of her professional journey.

This is the picture images and drawing from Salma which triggered the interview. Building her learning step by step, brick by brick and putting things together helped to describe her journey.
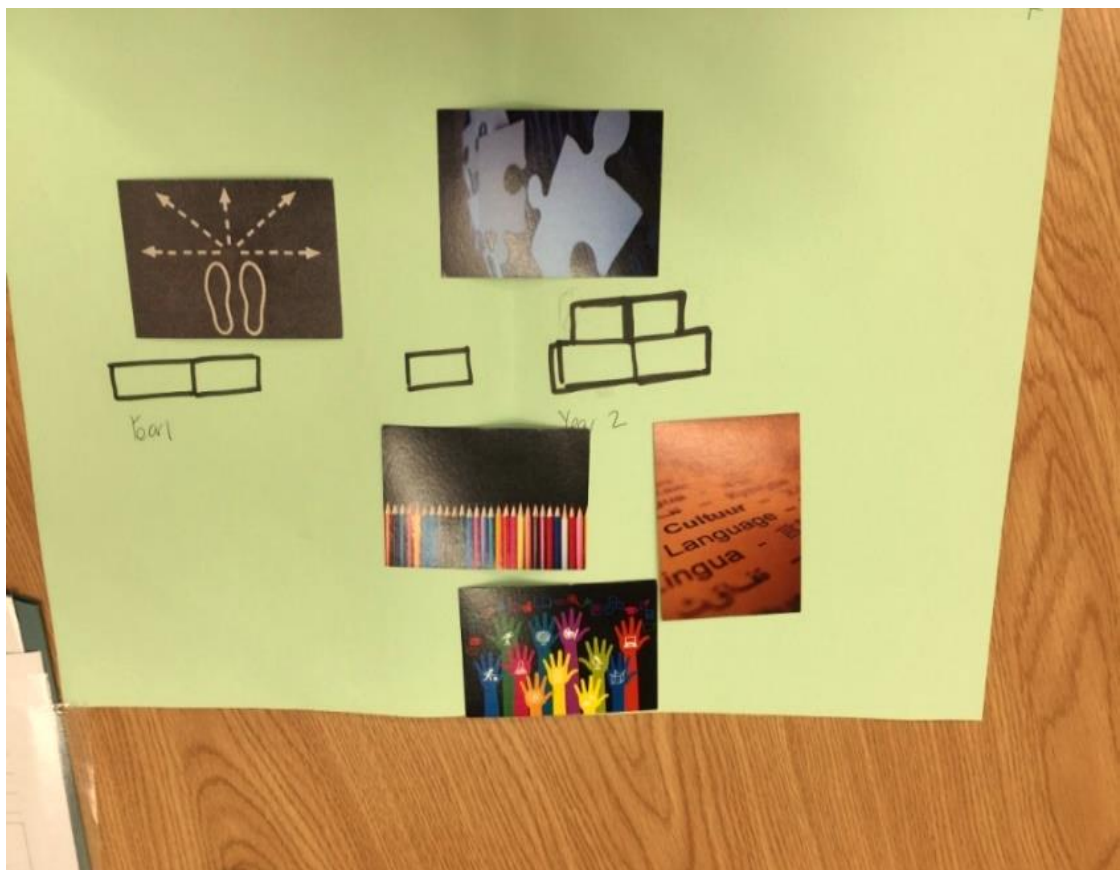
5.2.7   Rosie's profile

Field note: This is Rosie a mature student with a large family of seven children. English was not her first language and she sought practice knowledge for being the "best" social worker she could be. Her drawing was a self-portrait and the figures were important as well as the body language, as they were a celebration when she achieved a milestone during the course. As her confidence and knowledge grew from feedback from assessments and practice assessors, the image became bigger. She saw herself as being part of the wider social work community and described herself as a professional learner.

This is the picture images and drawing from Rosie which triggered the interview. Rosie described her journey as a celebration of learning events where she was part of a wider community, exploring how everything she learnt came together. The drawings depict how she personally and professionally developed over the three years.
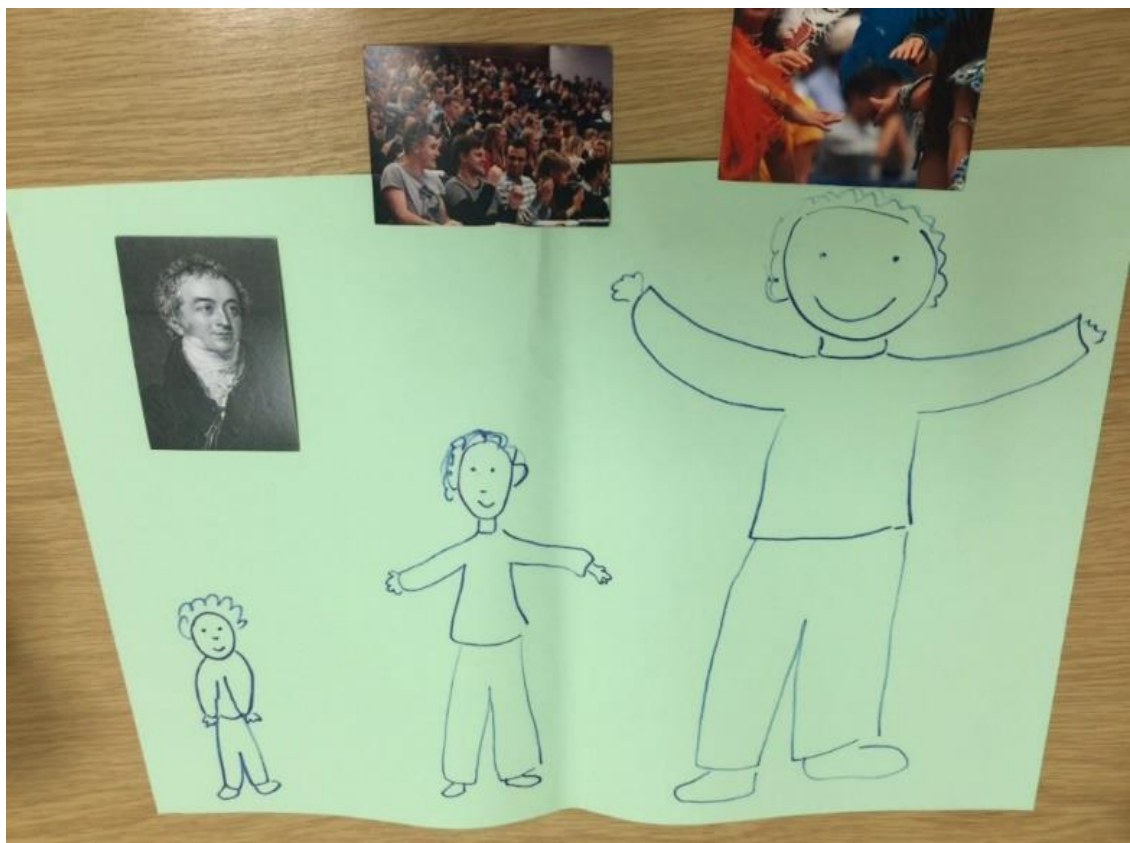
5.2.8 Lucy's profile

Field note: Lucy has a young family and worked in social care for 4 years. She became emotionally upset during the interview and cried when she described her final placement learning experience. She questioned her own abilities and competence, and commented "*I felt clueless on placement and am I fit to be a social worker?*" She described herself as being resilient but after the placement "*I am struggling to deal with the emotional part of the role*". The role of supervision and receiving constructive feedback from her practice assessors was a barrier for Lucy in her learning. She called herself an emotional survivor.

This is the picture images and drawings from Lucy which triggered the interview. Lucy's described her journey of becoming ready as being stuck in a bubble, looking out and looking at things differently. She selected a dice to depict her varied placement experiences, not knowing the placement settings and being excluded.
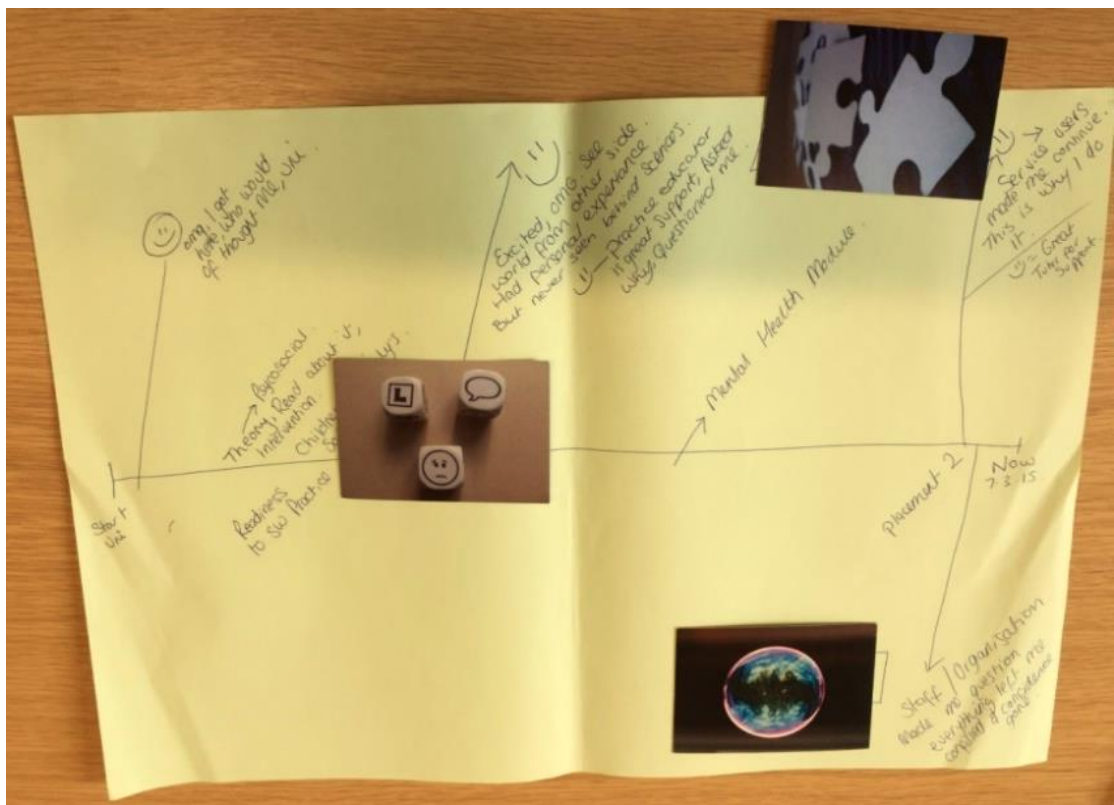
From the above profiles it is clear all the participants were mature students with significant life experience, and most had extensive work experience in a related field. The profiles and image cards seemed to suggest a trajectory of some sort, and could suggest a journey of ups and downs. All participants considered practice learning to be hugely influential in their development as a social worker. They recognised its importance but encountered some challenges.

5.3   Themes from the interviews

The initial data immersion and coding stages identified ninety-five individual codes. I have utilised the approach to analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), supplemented by Easterby-Smith et al's (2012) suggestions of using personal reflection in the interpretation of the data. I discussed my initial ideas with the supervision team. Subsequently, the codes were grouped and further refined, eventually developing into five main themes. That is: (i) becoming ready and resilient; (ii) feeling shut out; (iii) navigating my placement; (iv) trying to fit things together; (v) having what it takes. These themes together provide an interpretation of how students' describe their experience of learning to become ready for the workplace (see Fig 11 below).

Figure 11   Five themes from the eight interviews
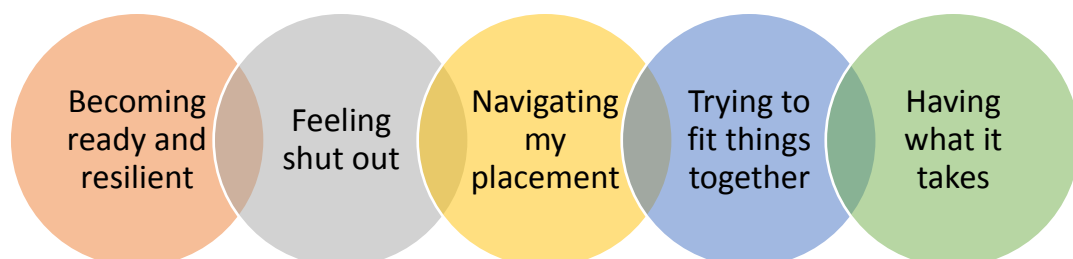
5.3.1 Becoming ready and resilient

Social work practitioners need to be empathic, reflexive and resilient for responding to adversity in the workplace, have stress-resistant personality traits and the ability to 'bounce back' (Kinman and Grant, 2011). This indicates social work students need to develop resilience and to manage their emotions whilst dealing with the stressors of training to be a social worker. Furthermore, it suggests they need to be offered the space on the curriculum to attend to these aspects of personal growth and development.

Within this study, the participants used the terms self-reflection and reflection consistently throughout the interviews when discussing how their social work course facilitated their growth and development, enabling them to become resilient and manage their emotions. For example, Kate commented *'I thought what a learning journey. I thought I was an insightful person but this is, this course has enhanced it. I think I have changed a lot on the course and I know some of the other students too. I have changed the way I think and I have also grown as in individual.'*

Becoming resilient appeared to be based on having or developing certain personal qualities. Participants in the study through their interviews and creative drawings articulated a large range of personal qualities and attributes that they felt helped them to be ready and resilient for practice, these can be found in Table 11.

Table 11   Personal qualities identified by participants about becoming ready and resilient

Personal quality	Detail
Determination	"I think that I have worked so hard to be where I am today, that giving up is not an option. I have always been resilient and it's too late to turn back now" Lucy "Being a mature student, I don't know if I would make it or not, I was excited to start the course at the beginning….I have got a young family but I am determined to and I enjoy the course and placement" Sarah
Seeing the bigger picture	"If you see a difficult case it can knock you back and lose your confidence…but putting it into perspective helps why you are there to protect the most vulnerable in society, helps to get me through the day" Michael "Everyone has bad days and it feels like you are in a bubble of your own, but not all days would be like that" A picture card identified by participant Lucy - Bubble
Patience	"I have learnt, you have to take small learning steps …. That sometimes I might take a step back to learn something new but then I can continue on my journey when I've learnt that" Kate "…because it's been a long journey and it feels as though I am nearly at the top of the stairs" A picture card identified by participant Hayley – Steps
Calmness	"I think you just have to stay calm…. I think to stress about the work is not going to get the work done" Kate " Knowing that I have a body of knowledge to support my decision making, even the most difficult ones, give me strength in knowing I am ready for practice" A picture card identified by participant Rosie – Researcher
Positivity	"I just think if I don't do this task, it still needs to happen. I have received constructive criticism before and I know I can complete this task well " Sarah "I have learned and developed many skills and I feel positive that I can apply the skills I have gained over the time in order to practice as a social worker" Rosie
Motivation	A picture card identified by participant Sarah – Climbing stairs – "if you are not willing to climb the stairs it will be even harder work, I can see the top of the stairs and I know I've got to reach it….to get to the point of being comfortable and confident in what I am doing, it is coming and I know it is…"
Reflection	"I think that students' need a good reflective ability and making us question ourselves, and discuss 'who am I?'…what do I convey to the service use? so we have that light bulb moment and find out how much you are continuously learning" Lucy "I think it is important to get to know yourself while you're studying, and what a kind of practitioner you are going to be and what your value base as a social worker would be" Salma

Confidence	"I am more confident in what I am doing as I am much more competent in my practice… I felt that I had to prove to everyone that I am capable in chairing the meeting with other professionals… I did feel the pressure during the meeting but I did not allow that to influence my work" Helen
Empathy	"But I have got to understand the professional side of the role too, the impact on the child, so, that challenged my thinking, I can understand that more, different choices" Kate "…your role is varied and having empathy with the different service users situation is important in developing trust with them" A pictured card identified by participant Salma – Different colour pencils and hands
Being strong	"I've got to accept that I am going to be challenge during my practice by others and that they would keep coming back and challenge my decisions, erm, I have to learn to not take that personally and be think skinned, that's the emotional resilience part, isn't it?" Michael
Purposeful	"The one thing that kept me going was not letting my children and partner down" Lucy "It's a bit like reaching out and if you can give something back." Sarah
Adaptive	"If something does not work, accept it and adjust your practice and find a different way where you feel comfortable as the work is difficult enough as it is…" Sarah

The most frequently mentioned attributes within both groups were confidence, determination, calmness and having a purpose. Empathy was closely linked to professionalism and being a professional alongside other professionals in the presence of service users/carers. The participants appeared to see an interconnection with power, diversity and self-identify. These findings would suggest, from these mostly mature participants, that they had some understanding of how not to burn out, and this depended on becoming resilient. The participants perceived they needed to manage emotions in social work. Reflecting on how to do this by developing resilience was a key finding as they integrated the professional and personal aspects of self. However, the course's role in helping them to personally develop and grow in this way was hard to identify.

The students indicated that underdeveloped personal qualities, lack of awareness of the work requirements and concerns about their own abilities to cope hindered their development of resilience and preparedness for placements ' *It felt difficult to balance everything as I have a young family.' (Lucy)*

As well as changing from a student at university to a social work student on placement, participants identified other aspects of their personal situation that were in a state of change. Other major life events occurred for Helen and Salma during the transition, such as dealing with cancer, moving house and getting married.

'I had to plan for when chemo would be so I could inform my placement as I don't want the placement to be suspended. I have invested too much already and I am ready for going out to placement. I know it's going to be difficult in a way, but I am strong and nothing can worry me anymore. I am an emotional survivor.' (Helen)

Within England, certainly, the issue of capacity of the social worker to survive in practice without burning out has attracted a significant body of interest (Jones et al. 1991; Lloyd et al. 2002; Trevithick, 2014). Current understandings of resilience tends to mainly focus on the psychological resources of the individual worker (Kinman and Grant, 2012). Resilience is a positive construct and within social work context, has been given a protective factor engendering well-being (Bonnano, 2004) and linked to emotional and social competencies (Kinman and Grant, 2011). Trevithick (2014) takes a very positivist stance, based on neuroscience and the work of Damassio (2006) and Le Doux (2012). Le Doux saw the answer to counteracting the managerialist tide in health and social care lay in promoting emotional intelligence to assist social workers' to manage their emotions within the social, political and cultural context they work in.

5.3.2 Feeling shut out

The placement settings the student participants described in the drawings and interviews in response to the question: "Tell me about your worst experience on placement" often appeared quite inaccessible. This could relate to something physical, such as being able to find the department and get in through locked doors or no desk space provided to enable them to feel part of the team. It could also relate to inattention to their emotional responses to these, and other factors in the environment, that can be overpowering to the point where they cause anxiety, alienation and self-doubt. What they were describing was a learning environment that was not easily accessible, which they perceived does not have a place for them and where they had to find their place as best they can.

Emotion management is one part of this power relationship between the different people concerned. The creative drawing and picture images gave the students the opportunity to explore and express this relationship with the placement setting. Their management of their feelings of anxiety, nervousness, alienation and fear were part of their development of 'becoming a professional' experience.

Sarah reflected on her final placement 'It *is surprising how organisational culture does strengthen and reinforce your learning but it's also hard to break down the barriers and I think I felt that being a student. My practice educator was lovely and the team was fabulous and I think that helped me through the placement as the manager was awful to me. When my practice educator was not available and I wanted some support, she would say I'm not your supervisor and asked me to get support somewhere else. Apparently, a few other students had left because of her and how she treated them.'* (Sarah)

There is shock in the words she used, conveying perceived hostility and an explicit reference to what Sarah sees as a lack of support from this manager in an adult community mental health setting. Sarah drew herself as being on the outside looking in, and in fact it is difficult to see where she is at all. If multi-disciplinary settings are spaces within which professional identities are constructed (Halford and Leonard, 2003) then this piece of drawing and images suggested Sarah was not altogether happy within this space although she did enjoy some of it.

Other participants also described feeling somewhat 'shut out'. Lucy, who had a third sector placement, was very unsatisfied with her final placement and consequently felt she had missed out on something of value. Interestingly, her drawing and images reflected a sense of alienation, almost oppression and well conveyed by her saying' I *feel I look at things differently than my peers during teaching and on placement*.' Lucy's descriptions of difficulty in getting into the placement, alongside what she reported as a problematic setting and management style resulting in her saying: 'I *find it difficult to accept constructive feedback and I become defensive and protective. I feel so confused.'* Lucy conveyed a sense of an unwelcoming and chaotic, voluntary sector placement setting that contrasted vividly with her previous descriptions of a children and family statutory placement.

The geography of the placement is more than just the place and includes the psycho-geography and cultural aspects of the setting. Knowing how to navigate ones feelings are one part of how social work professionals learn how to constitute themselves within the space that is the social care setting. Eraut's (2000, 2007) studies highlight how much placement learning is tacit and this is nowhere more evident than in these 'feeling rules'. Other authors also illustrate the socialisation (Ousey, 2009; Lindberg,

2009; Cope, 2000; Swanick, 2005) and domestication (Usher, 2009) aspects of their learning on placement.

There seems to be a connection with emotion management and being a professional as the students learnt to 'govern' themselves on placement.   Being emotionally intelligent involves being able to control one's emotions, being able to identify others' emotions and being able to manage emotional situations effectively (Goleman, 1995).

5.3.3   Navigating my placement

Placement settings seemed to be the most significant aspect identified by all the participants in their readiness for practice journey. The students appeared to feel they needed to navigate their placement in order to gain the most learning. A considerable amount of discussion during the interviews took place about the relevance, time and duration of this component of social work education and the students' feelings of their readiness for practice depended on how they navigated through placement. From the interviews participants accounts showed variations in their views about how preparatory academic teaching on the programme as a whole supported their ability to navigate their placement, and some described feeling well prepared:

'I feel that the course prepared me well for placement.' (Helen)

'I've just started to restore and remember everything I need to know such as procedures, theories and models for practice.' (Hayley)

However, other participants reported that they felt less well prepared for placement learning and had concerns about the extent to which their academic learning had prepared them for practice. Typical comments included the following:

'I feel like I might be out of my depth and be asked questions I don't know the answers too.' (Kate)

'I cannot wait to go out on placement but I am nervous so therefore the feeling of not being ready creeps in.' (Rosie)

'The made up scenarios provided us with limited learning experiences within the classroom environment.' (Hayley)

'I would have benefitted more from practice realities and direct involvement from more service user and shadowing experiences during teaching.' (Michael)

Academic preparation included recall days to the university whilst attending the two respective placements over the three year course. The majority of the responses from participants suggested that they did not find the recall days useful, and would have benefitted more if they could have stayed on at placement for the day. *'The 3 recall days were a waste of time and would have been more useful as a placement day.' (Hayley)*

Participants also indicated other factors they felt important upon their placement preparation one student mentioned drawing on personal resources *'My personal life experiences and skills enhanced my preparedness for placement.' (Kate)*

Salma felt meeting someone from the setting prior to the placement was helpful *'pre-placement meeting with the practice assessor/educator made everything fit into place;* and Rosie mentioned researching the setting prior to going there helped *Pre-reading on service user group and setting helped me to feel more confident about what I know and not.' (Rosie)*

It became clear through the interviews that practice learning was the most appreciated element of the student social workers' education and that they found it

very important to be able to navigate the placement. From the interviews, it appeared that this navigation fulfilled different learning needs for different students. For some students it was to understand and learn what social work is, and for some to get the opportunity to see if they could *be* a social worker or can they *do* social work. Sarah highlighted this notion of 'becoming' by commenting ' *I am looking forward in seeing what kind of social worker I would be and put what I have learned so far in practice.'* *(Sarah)*

Becoming a social worker was difficult for some students to navigate as they struggled with what social work involved on placement. One commented '*I found it difficult on placement to prioritise my work load; I could not cope with the volume of work my practice educator allocated to me. I feel frustrated that I was not able to develop my social work skills further in my training.' (Hayley)* Hayley went on to mention time management as one of the areas she requires further support with. Students knowing they had the support from university tutors became important when things went wrong on placement, with one participant commenting that '*it was good to have my university tutor at meetings as it helped me to feel more relaxed and supported. I found the support from my university tutor essential when I was going through a difficult patch at placement.' (Lucy)*

Whilst academic staff input was valued if things became difficult, peer support seemed to be the most featured element in the participants' formal and informal learning. The support from fellow students when navigating placement was highly valued by the participants. The formally organised group supervision, group tutorials and workshops also rated highly amongst the students and they valued the informal support from

colleagues. Kate commented 'I *felt I could fly and be a super-hero social worker when learning with other students being on placement with me.' (Kate)*

Placement learning was seen as a kind of socialisation, that included learning to work with other disciplines and at the same time students developed a professional identity as a social worker. This could be difficult to navigate, but one student seemed to be successful in this respect ' *at a multi-disciplinary meeting I'd challenge appropriately, I remark that one of the comments a nurse practitioner made was oppressive and I supported my professional judgement with evidence from practice' (Sarah).* Sarah reported that the nurse went on to commend her on this intervention after the meeting.

It was apparent from the participants' accounts that being able to navigate the placement was seen as vital to being able to acquire practical knowledge and capability. The following reflection emphasised some of the problems social work students faced as part of their preparation for practice learning: Michael, reflecting on how his university learning had prepared him for practice learning, commented '*I did not learn anything from the placement. It would have been more useful if we could learn to complete assessments, write a report for court or a social circumstances report. Having templates or the assessments and previous reports would have helped me to prepare for placement better*.' (Michael)

Sarah, however, described how her placement enabled her to use what she had learned at university to advance her practice capabilities:

'*My theory to practice went off the scale, I can say that and I'm really grateful to my placement practice educator, and for the opportunities that she gave me. I thought she would be more with me during the placement, but she wasn't, it was more like – Come*

on Sarah, go and complete the assessment and the review, come back and we could

discuss the work. I felt quite anxious about that and I think it was more lack of self

confidence in my own ability.' (Sarah)

The comments of Michael and Sarah, from different perspectives, illustrated how important being able to navigate the placement through having supported opportunities to undertake activities was in becoming ready for practice. It became clear that the type of experience available in placements was seen as vital in becoming a social worker. In this respect, during the interviews, students stressed how important they believed it was to undertake at least one placement within a statutory setting in order to experience fully the processes involved in undertaking statutory tasks. Salma commented' *I am grateful that my first placement was in a children and families statutory team. It was not an easy ride, but I learned a great amount of what I am able to do as a student before qualifying.' (Salma)*

Lucy stated ' *I don't feel that I am employable to work in a statutory setting as I have no idea what the work would be involving as both my placements were in the third sector. I am nervous as I would not know how to complete an assessment or write a report. '(Lucy)*

This importance of statutory placement was echoed across all the participants' accounts. The student drawings and picture discussion challenged this notion of placement as a unified place or experience. They highlighted how diverse, fluid and highly contested a learning placement was with some participants' privileging practice and practice understanding above theoretical knowledge. The landscape of social work placement turned out to be a much more changeable, interpreted and contested site than I had originally imagined at the start of this research.

5.3.4 Trying to fit things together

Linked to the notion of students feeling they had to navigate their placement in order to gain the most learning, a process of trying to fit aspects of learning together was also described by them. One student remarked that in order to start to fit things together, she needed to know where she was going for her placement, and found it difficult in the face of a delay. Salma commented '*I don't feel 100% sure about where I am going to be placed so more nervous and anxious of not knowing where my placement would be.*'

Trying to fit things together often referred to attempts by the students to apply theory whilst on placement. They expressed that understanding theory might be important, but knowing how to fit it into their placement experience in a meaningful way appeared problematic for the students.

Sarah described difficulties in fitting things together '*I was very excited to come to university but nervous too…. But as I went to lectures and learn what is expected from students (PCF) and the values, oppression and personal practices all the theories erm, but what I couldn't get my head around was how does that all fit in the real world…. It is not something like butter that you spread on bread. I think I got myself in knots about that and I wished that I'd done more reading in the first year before I went on placement one.*' She continued '*I didn't understand what is meant with critical reflection. My practice educator used critical tools during supervision to help me reflect on my practice. I didn't understand and that really frightened me that I was not able to link or see the theory.*' (Sarah)

The mandatory skills days were introduced into the social work curriculum to support students' being able to make the most of the learning opportunities provided through

their placements. However, there were mixed feelings about the importance of the 15 social work skills days prior to the first learning experience. They were intended to be beneficial through shaping the direction of students' learning and linking theory to practice.

Asking participants to reflect on the social work skills days brought varied responses regarding how well they enabled the students to make these anticipated links between theory and practice. Helen commented '*I know that some of the skills days were long and they needed some tweaking, but in all honesty they are a good thing definitely, and I think you have to go through the stages where you think, what is going on, why are we learning this, and then you realise once you start placement that everything is coming together and for me, after placement that's when it struck home to me, what everything's starting to mean.' (Helen)*

For Michael '*learning about empathy during the skills days was very important as I always knew about being empathic but not as deep was what it's been learnt at university, and how important good listening skills are for a social worker. I do have a map, I do refer back to the PCF domains as they proved guidance if I am ready or not for practice* ' (Michael's drawing also reflected this stated view).

These two students saw value in their skills days. However, there was still a struggle sometimes in how students conceptualised 'theory' and 'practice' and as Watson et al. (2002) stated, they should be intertwined and mutually constitutive. From the interviews it became clear the students were talking about theories in different ways. The issue of "what can you do with the theory?" came from the majority of the students. All the participants had uncertainties what theory is, and/or what to do with it, and some ambivalence about theory in social work education was demonstrated.

Some of the participants understood the potential and importance in the application of theory

'We attended the psycho-social module and it helped me to understand the people we work with better… I have a tool-bag and it is up to me to learn more about the subject as part of my professional development and learning.'(Sarah)

For some students, theories were seen less clearly *'I don't think that theory means a lot as it gives me some concepts but I don't find it useful in practice and it's confusing.' (Michael)*

Looking more closely at how the students discussed what theory underpins practice, many of the responses of the students refer to skills and/or interventions that guide their work with service users/carers. There was little difference in what was taught, and how it was perceived by the students across both sites. There was a strong case made by some students' on the usefulness of Ecological Systems Theory in helping them to understand the world of the service user/carer. Attachment theory and Solution Focussed interventions were the mostly frequently identified theories of explanation and of intervention that the majority of the students would drew on in their practice. However, the eight participants stumbled to identify social work theory in general and Michael commented *'It is stuff you just do and you don't have to go to your manager and say I have used this theory or that theory; it is all a very natural process.' (Michael)*

There were somewhat contradictory responses regarding the value of linking theory to practice, or how difficult it was to list which specific theories to use. Rosie commented *'before placement I liked to read up on the theories I may use but I am worried that I*

would not be able to recognise the theory or know how to apply it in my practice.'

(Rosie)

Responses varied as to who was responsible for putting theory into practice. For the majority of the participants, it was firmly located within the placement realm but for some students there was an expectation that this was the responsibility of the course curriculum. It was important for the social work students' to see how social work education programmes provides clarity when linking skills days learning with modules and bridging the gap with practice.

5.3.5   Having what it takes

There was some evidence that periods of transition, such as progressing to placement, were times when social work students felt challenged, required support and felt they needed to demonstrate resilience. In particular, participants commented on the experiences of being on placement as a student and feeling pressured to show that one 'had what it takes' to be perceived as a professional.

For some students showing they had what it takes included an element of taking on a professional identify going into placement. There was a desire to cast off their 'lay' identity as they moved into placement and eventually practice. Salma explained the following '*You go from being a person walking down the street to seeing very distressing and upsetting things being done to vulnerable people on a regular basis, it's something you need to learn to get used to, I guess…'* (Salma)

What came out from the interviews was for some students the concern about showing a professional face was demonstrated by the way they talked about themselves in the

first or third person. For Lucy and Rosie it was important how they appeared to other people on placement. They were conscious of who was watching them on placement, and felt the pressure of the effort required to meet the standards they were being assessed upon and what was asked of them by other social workers within the team. Lucy assumed this to be to hide her own true emotions, and only presented what she thought they wanted to see. She mentioned on two occasions how closed she was '*My face was open but I was closed, I was engaging and interested but never opened up' (Lucy).* For some students, having what it takes was a performance element of embodying the professional. However, Kate's response was different. In her account nothing was mentioned about the stress of 'doing' social work. It was viewed as part of her role on placement and she commented '*Having what it takes is what she is there to do.*' (Kate)

The students' role was constantly changing, as they moved between levels of study, getting ready for their first placement and progressing to their final placement. Some of the concerns raised were how they would be perceived by other professionals. The students thought about how they were came across to other professionals, and how they were judged when they suddenly required dealing with challenging things or topics. Interactions with other professionals were raised as an issue by all the participants. As their confidence grew stronger they however felt more able to put forward their professional opinion and show they had what it takes.

Support from peers, academic advisors and members of the staff team were identified as the main source of help for the participants when they needed support or advice. Surprisingly, the topic of receiving feedback was not raised by the majority of the students.

Some students identified that they felt thrown in at the deep end during placements but for three participants, being stretched was a positive learning experience. However, the majority of the participants indicated changes in perceived self-efficacy throughout both placements '*my placement was a discovery of my own strengths and development's needs' (Helen).* Michael reported '…*knowing I am not super-man was something my practice educator highlighted frequently during supervision… but I felt really ready and able to do the work' (Michael).* For Rosie, her time on the course practice learning experiences provided her with opportunities to become more capable and confident in her own abilities. She stated '*my drawing – size of the figures are important as well as body language as it is one of celebration when I have achieved a milestone during the course and on placement.' (Rosie)*

In a different situation, Lucy still lacked confidence with other professionals and with her own practice, suggesting her own doubts about having what it takes. She discussed her experiences in a voluntary mental health setting where she stood back while other professionals were working with the service users, and she did not quite know when her turn would be. Lucy found her placement difficult and the way she perceived her own practice may have provided a barrier to successful performance, and she questioned if she was ready for social work and if this was the right time for her being on placement. She identified she had a lack of trust in the practice educators' ability to help her make appropriate choices and felt unable to manage the complex organisational culture. These were key elements in why she was struggling on placement and made her feel she didn't have what it takes to be a good social worker. '*I don't feel I can share my anxieties with my practice educator as she is also the*

manager and I don't want to be in trouble. The team is going through huge changes and I don't want to add to problems.' (Lucy)

For the majority of participants their perceptions of confidence increased mainly in the second year following placement one. Critical reflection and communication skills both written and with others, featured highly amongst the participants as the skill that had developed the most. What this was due to was unknown. Unstated by the students, it could be due to the impact of skills days facilitated by practitioners and service users or the role of placement and the working relationship with the practice educator during placement. Interestingly, it may also be the previous work experiences, life experiences, placement opportunities that have helped them to develop their perceived competence.

Enhancing their ability to perform certain social work tasks successfully was pointed out by the participants as a role for the practice setting. They also pointed to their own responsibility in taking up new opportunities for developing and enhancing their skills and knowledge underpinned by core criteria such as the PCF and KSS. Michael commented *'knowing that I was being assessed on the 9 domains for social work practice by the PCF, I knew that everything would work out well. It is confusing that we have the knowledge skills statements for social work as well as the PCF. I know I have passed both placements so I should be ready for practice' (Michael)*

5.4   Summary of qualitative findings

Becoming ready for the workplace was seen as relying on being or becoming more resilient in the face of challenges. These included challenges in the participants' personal life that made studying difficult, and problems encountered on practice learning placements. The development of resilience was understood to be founded on having certain personal qualities: determination; seeing the bigger picture; having patience; being calm; having positivity; being motivated; being reflective; having confidence; being empathic; being strong, purposeful and adaptive. These attributes were seen as aspects of personal development that were required to strengthen the resilience needed for having what it takes in being ready for practice and eventually to practice. This learning and development was seen to be promoted by practice placements, however, it was not always straightforward, with students explaining that the organisational culture of some placements leaving them 'feeling shut out'. Students described the pain of, as they saw it, being treated badly and left feeling they did not belong. They described some placements as inaccessible in terms of actually being able to enter the space, or their emotional reactions to being criticised or unsupported as isolating, but also accepted as part of a professional socialisation process that demanded resilience.

Students described how important preparation was for helping them navigate their placement; they expressed anxieties in terms of being able to get through successfully. Many positive aspects of their placement experience were described, although these tended to be when students had undertaken more placement experience, initially they reported worries about not knowing where they would be placed and how it would be, but expressed appreciation for support from pre-placement meetings and university tutors.

Some of the participants struggled with the concept of 'theory' or how they could use theoretical constructs in practice. They described being able to 'fit together' the theoretical components of the course to their practice experience as difficult and varied in their perceptions of how helpful skills days were in assisting them do this. Some continued not to be able see connections and how this learning would help them be ready for the workplace, but others described lightbulb moments of working in practice and realising what they had learned in university helped their understanding of a practice situation. These issues were related to students concerns regarding 'having what it takes'. It should be noted that all interviewees were mature with a great deal of life and social care experience. Some were struggling with challenges to getting through the course due to personal and health related factors. Showing that one has what it takes to meet the standards required was described as stressful, but most described a transition of personal and professional growth and increasing resilience as they gained experience through the course.

As social work students learning to be professionals, their issues around their sense of self, student self and professional self was interesting particularly because their emotional experiences and reactions were part of how they constituted and were constituted by their professional self on placement.

The next chapter will provide a framework for integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Chapter 6   Explanatory framework

6.1   Introduction

This section aims to combine the quantitative and qualitative data in order to develop a coherent explanatory framework for how students' views their readiness for the workplace upon graduation. This will be contextualised through reference to specific participant examples.

6.2   Integrating the quantitative and qualitative results

A triangulation protocol (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2010), employing an approach similar to that described by Farmer et al. (2006), was used to combine the findings from the literature review and the quantitative and qualitative data. This approach is recommended when all sets of data have already been analysed individually. The primary purpose of triangulation involves identifying convergence, dissonance and complementarity, to enhance the validity of the research or 'convergence validity' (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). More detailed discussion of the use of a triangulation protocol can be found in section 3 of chapter 3.

Farmer et al. (2006) and Tonkin-Crine et al. (2016) suggest integrating different data to provide a more complete picture. Four types of triangulation have been identified in the literature namely methodological triangulation, data triangulation, theoretical triangulation and finally, investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). The types of triangulation used in a research project should reflect the individual research project.

This study used two types: methodological triangulation, with the use of more than one data collection technique (literature review, questionnaire and interviews), and data triangulation involving the use of the resulting multiple data sources. Theoretical triangulation was not a feature of this study as all research activities had been carried out from a pragmatist perspective, and investigator triangulation was not pertinent for this lone researcher study.

Using the two different types of triangulation enabled a more holistic approach to collecting and analysing data. This involved examining original data, interpretation and reports of all analyses presented in the findings chapters. The process of triangulation involved key findings for each data set being identified, discussed and refined with the supervisory team and then presented as statements (Tonkin-Crine, 2016) to aid comparison. The convergence coding matrix displayed in Table 12 below illustrates the final list of key findings emerging from comparing the data sets.

Developing and implementing a triangulation protocol involves a process of convergence coding and subsequent analysis where the relationship between data was marked as one of four categories: Agrees (A), Partially Agrees (PA), Silent (S) or demonstrates Dissonance (D) (O'Cathain et al. 2010). Silence corresponds to where evidence is seen in one data set but not in others, and does not necessarily imply that confidence in the overall findings is weakened. Dissonance refers to there being some disagreement between the datasets.

The aim of using a triangulation framework as outlined by O'Cathain et al. (2010) is to identify meta themes. O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl (2010) outlined 2 further techniques for integrating data: the first being use of a mixed methods matrix and the second being 'following a thread' (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). The technique of 'following

a thread' begins with an initial analysis of each method within relevant paradigm parameters and identifies key themes and analytic questions that require further exploration. These 'threads' are then followed across the other component(s) to create Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) describe as a "constellation of findings" and aims to interweave findings from each dataset. This technique tends to favour qualitative studies and seems to have many of the hallmarks of a grounded inductive approach. This is recognised by the authors who argue that it preserves the value of open, exploratory, qualitative enquiry while incorporating the specifics of quantitative data. It was found to be useful when applying the "constellation of findings" for this study as outlined in Table 12 below.

The triangulation framework applied to the data sets in this study indicate that students perceive that their readiness for the workplace upon graduation is dependent on a complex interplay between individual and organisational (or situated) characteristics. Further reflection and analysis led to the development of four higher-order overarching meta- themes presented in Table 12 across all data collection methods. The four meta-themes are: (i) social worker attributes; (ii) social work development; (iii) critical reflection for theory to practice and (iv) placement learning.

TABLE 12   Convergence coding matrix

Meta-themes	Quantitative findings	Qualitative findings	Literature review findings	Convergence code
Social worker attributes (1-3)	1. No significant relationship between self-efficacy and demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity or disability. However, some evidence emerged that may suggest a relationship between those with a higher degree of previous non-qualified social work / care work experience and higher levels of self-efficacy at the start of their readiness for practice journey.	Mostly mature students who gave no indication that participants viewed gender, age or ethnicity characteristics as important in enhancing their readiness for practice knowledge. Participants mentioned previous work experience as an important element towards their readiness for the workplace. For some of the participants, age and maturity were factors enhancing their readiness for practice as they drew upon life experiences and previous strategies in dealing with demanding situations.	Some identification that participants viewed these characteristics as important in enhancing their readiness for the workplace. The findings highlighted that previous work experience played a role in confidence upon graduation (Parker, 2006; Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996; Moriarty et al. 2011).	A (section 6.3.1)
	2. Developing coping strategies in how to deal with the demanding role was identified by students as key to being a professional social worker. Personal qualities and attributes were listed as prominent factors in enhancing students' readiness for practice and managing their emotions on placement. Although, by the end of the final stage, self-efficacy had levelled out across the cohorts.	Participants in the study articulated that what is meant by being professional was being resilient, being tough, getting through and being a survivor. From the interviews, participants identified increasing confidence levels as they progressed and were able to keep going through the early years of their social work education programme, into their placement setting and into their professional life.	Resilience and emotional intelligence are mentioned in the literature post-qualifying; however, there is limited research on personal growth and development of social work students prior to going out on placement.	PA (Section 6.3.1)

	3. Limited comments on the need for personal development and growth during the course. Focus on placement in helping students to keep going and getting through.	Becoming ready for the workplace was seen as relying on being or becoming more resilient in the face of challenges. These included challenges in the participants' personal life that made studying difficult and problems encountered on practice learning placements. The development of resilience was understood to be founded on having certain personal qualities: determination; seeing the bigger picture; having patience; being calm; having positivity; being motivated; being reflective; having confidence; being empathic; being strong, purposeful and adaptive. These attributes were seen as aspects of personal development that were required to strengthen the resilience needed for having what it takes in being ready for practice and eventually to practice. As social work students learning to be professionals, their issues around their sense of self, student self and professional self was interesting particularly because their emotional experiences and reactions were part of how they were constituted by their professional self on placement. The interviews revealed the need for peer support groups to discuss personal development on the course so students' to develop their self-reflection but there was little comment whether the curriculum facilitated this need.	Finding from the literature review also found a lack of research in how social work students manage their emotional responses whilst learning to become a professional, with only one article by Frost et al, (2013) noting the importance of this aspect of the social work curriculum. Within the curriculum content there appears to be a lack of emotional growth and personal development for social work students. Literature found that students talk about their self-development and how they would describe having more confidence , many still perceived themselves as less prepared for the workplace (Tham & Lynch, 2014)	S (Section 6.3.3)

147

Social work development (4 -10)	4. Weak but statistically significant correlation between enjoyment on the course, ease of use in assessment tasks , impact of the skills days and knowledge enhancement in all participants pre – and post-test.	In the individual interviews, participants discussed consistently that developing skills and knowledge was scaffolding their learning. Capabilities, confidence and competence appeared to be closely associated with their education through the transition into practice and how they learn. Prominent indication that students exploited personal learning preferences that included assessment activities in resourcing their learning.	The findings of this literature review underline a perception that shortcomings in social work practice were implicated in successive child wellbeing and safety tragedies. Social Work education and preparation of social work students is under the spotlight but attention to how students may be prepared for practice and to practise from the students themselves has received little attention. (Moriarty & Manthorpe, 2014)	PA (Section 6.3.1)
	5. Weak but statistically significant positive correlation between higher self-efficacy and positive placement experience for both groups. Student perceptions in relation to their own readiness for practice were statistically more positive in both groups during the post-test.	Managing emotions, self-belief and self-efficacy featured highly during the interviews. Prominent indication throughout students' accounts that their interaction during placement improved their resilience and self-efficacy but limited evidence of personal growth and development being taught in modules on the course. Feelings and placement rules featured highly, with the majority of the responses indicating impact upon their readiness for practice.	The literature findings acknowledge that a measure of self-efficacy should not be seen as a measure of 'actual performance', but rather about what a person believes he or she can do in a specific situation. Attempts are made to define the attributes, terms, various behaviors, personal characteristics and attitudes that may influence or inhibit students' readiness for the workplace and upon graduation.	PA (Section 6.3.1)
	6. Personal actions and wellbeing were listed as factors in enhancing the students' readiness for	Personal actions and wellbeing were listed as important in managing the emotional labour of being a professional. Prominent from the interviews was how participants	Literature found that where students talk about their self-development and how they	PA (Section 6.3.1)

practice in both the pre- and post-test questionnaires.	were seeing readiness for practice as a journey of development with different and varied opportunities to develop capabilities and competencies to 'do' social work. Elements of 'performing' the professional were identified by the participants as part of the transition from learner to practitioner. One of the picture drawings, by participant Rosie, was a self-portrait with picture cards of a mask selected. The image of herself 'growing up' and the mask were seen as representative of the professional mask the Social Worker wears when at work or on placement. Some participants hid their own feelings behind the professional mask and had to be resilient and develop coping mechanisms to get through the day-to-day pressures they experienced working with others and developing their professional identity	would describe having more confidence , many still perceived themselves as less prepared for the workplace (Tham & Lynch, 2014)	
7. The results show that social work education appears to be perceived as adequately preparing social work students for the challenges of the workplace. A concerning proportion of participants responded with either a negative or neutral answer with some of the ranking questions (Questions 1,3, 7 and 8)	Some of the participants were struggling with challenges of getting through the course. Showing that one has 'what it takes' to meet the standards required was described as stressful, but most described a transition of personal and professional growth and increasing resilience as they gained experience through the course.	A finding from the review of the literature conducted on NQSWs is that the quality of current social work education is appropriate for the preparation for readiness for the work- place and upon graduation.	PA (Section 6.3.1)
8. The findings regarding the 15 social work skills days in the curriculum were broadly positive,	Features of the 15 social work skills days and placement one in particular assisted them in successfully implementing personalised	The literature suggests there is room for improvement in terms of pedagogy and	PA/ D/ S

149

and there was some evidence of variation regarding rating of the content of skills days made between pre-test and post-test. They ranged from a higher percentage score for knowledge on basic children and families safeguarding, confidence in some methods of interventions and communication skills (written and verbal). Social work skills days played a role in students' critical reflection of their confidence in their own abilities and competencies in retrospective post-test. In a retrospective post-test questioning, students identified that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the preparatory teaching, including the 15 social work skills days they had received.	strategies for identifying their own strengths and development needs. There was limited evidence on assessing either academic performance or professional suitability. Student progression was not investigated within this research study nor was their previous educational attainment. Within the picture images, previous work experience influenced how the participants viewed their readiness for practice. Students' with extensive social care experience identified this to the lack of content within the skills days meaning they were not demanding or challenging enough for their skills development prior in going out on placement one. Prominent indication that the participants agreed that the course prepared them well in areas such as communication (written and verbal), methods of interventions and cultural awareness. However, lack of confidence in court skills, report writing, conducting assessments and dealing with conflict and time management were amongst skills students felt less well prepared in. All participants agreed that placement experience prepared them well for practice.	content. Nevertheless, what follows in the development and transition from student to practitioner would appear less clear (Pithouse and Scourfield, 2002; Parker, 2006 and Preston-Shoot &McKimm, 2012). Some studies suggested that NQSWs were less prepared for instrumental facets but more prepared in process-orientated aspects of the role. There is limited discussion within the literature on the role and impact of the 30 social work skills days on the preparedness of social work students' for the workplace.	(Section 6.3.4)
9. The readiness for practice module was generally well received by the majority of the participants. The placement preparation element of the readiness for practice module was considered problematic by many of both site one and site two	Timing of placement, reading up on the setting prior to going out on placement alongside planning and organisational skills were identified in the participants' comments as important elements in placement preparation. Many considered the timing and lack of communication from the university as problematic and stressful.	Different approaches to the content of placement preparation are also apparent within the literature. Students' academic performance cannot be separated from the assessment framework	A (Section 6.3.1)

	participants. It should be noted however, that the different starting points of the skills days could have implications for like-for-like comparison between the two groups. No statistically significant difference was noted between the pre-test and post-test with regards to the content of the placement preparation sessions.	Varied assessment methods were identified as being helpful in developing their confidence and competence. The majority of the participants viewed the readiness for practice module as satisfactory.	they are being assessed within.	
	10. Positive supervision, developing critical reflection skills and peer support were psychological resources identified as useful by participants, at both pre- and post-test, in managing the challenging role of being a social worker.	The participants noted the importance of social networks, support, varied experiences with supervision and changes to the environment as psychological resources in helping them to reduce the stress during placement and on the course.	Marsh and Triseliotis (1996, p.154) found that "a significant number of newly qualified staff experience their supervision as totally instrumental in nature by focusing wholly, or almost wholly, on accountability". Formal supervision experience in the Grant et al. (2016) study it is reported more as a caseload management instrument, rather than a professionally reflective domain to develop and enhance critical analysis and skills development.	PA (Section 6.3.1)
Critical reflection for theory to practice (11 & 12)	11. Integrating theoretical knowledge with understanding practice realities was a prominent feature in the majority of the responses. More service users/ carers and practitioners involvement on the course	Some of the participants struggled with the concept of 'theory' or how they could use theoretical constructs in practice. They described being able to 'fit together' the theoretical components of the course to their practice experience as difficult and varied in their perceptions of how helpful	Within the literature the connections between critical social work practice and reflection upon personal stories and the students' voice are limited but important to discuss	A (Section 6.3.1)

151

	seemed to be a preference amongst the participants in establishing the link between practice and theory.	skills days were in enabling them to do this. Some continued not to be able see connections or how this learning would help them be ready for the workplace, but others describe 'lightbulb' moments of working in practice and realising how what they had learned in university helped their understanding of a practice situation.	narratives through the prisms of social justice, personal and professional identity, empowerment and diverse journeys through social work education. Literature poses a problem that suggests courses are ineffective to bridge the division between theory and practice.	
	12. Critical reflection was required by participants to manage in this intellectually and emotionally demanding social work job. Interestingly, there were differences in responses as to who is responsible for helping put theory into practice, with some students from site one expecting it to be a course responsibility compared to Site two where it was located firmly in the placement arena.	What does seem to come from the students is the 'what do you do with it (theory)'question. How do they apply the knowledge and skills that underpin the methods they are using in working with service users and guide their practice? Critical reflection, peer support and learning with each other featured highly amongst the participants as a community of professionals to help put theory in context. The importance of reflection in their learning and developing reflection skills featured strongly amongst the participants' views.	The literature looks closely at theory of and for practice, with little in the way of identifying different approaches taken by education providers and course content supported by service user / carer enhancement. Various sources of value knowledge, practice knowledge and theory knowledge are identified and discussed within the literature (Nahri, 2002).	A (Section 6.3.1)
Placement learning (13-16)	13. Organisational and system resources were identified in both pre- and post-test as impacting upon students' readiness for practice. Many of the participants' identified issues within the HEI and placement settings that affected negatively their readiness for practice such as inhospitable team cultures, demanding role,	Inhospitable organisational culture and busy and demanding teams alongside lack of strong leadership and management and poor support or lack of feedback were also factors that were identified across the data collection as having a negative impact on a student's confidence of being ready for practice. This learning and development was seen to be promoted by practice placements; however, it was not always	One of the significant findings from the literature review was the overall majority of NQSWs felt prepared for practice in most areas of social work practice after qualification, believed they had transferable skills like teamwork and were prepared to be autonomous	A (Section 6.3.1)

high work load, difficult cases and being treated unfairly.	straightforward, with students explaining that the organisational culture of some placements left them 'feeling shut out'. Students described the pain of, as they saw it, being treated badly and left feeling they did not belong. They described some placements as inaccessible in terms of actually being able to enter the space, or their emotional reactions to being criticised or unsupported as isolating, but also accepted as part of a professional socialisation process that demanded resilience.	learners. This was influenced by the culture of the workplace into which they have entered and for many it was a situation of 'sink or swim'. However, knowledge of how students understand how they acquire, apply and develop their professional social work knowledge and expertise remains quite limited.	
14. Participants also had favorable views about their placements, reporting that they had prepared them with the skills of assessing need; assessing and managing risk; developing plans and record keeping. Overall the perceptions of students from both sites of the quality of the social work curriculum were positive over time, albeit their lack of practice experience and confidence was noted by several participants at the outset in the free comments responses for question 2 and 5.	Students described how important preparation was for helping them navigate their placement; they expressed anxieties in terms of being able to get through successfully. Many positive aspects of their placement experience were described, although these tended to be when students had undertaken more placement experience; initially they reported worries about not knowing where they would be placed and how it would be, but expressed appreciation for support from pre-placement meetings and university tutors.	Within the literature review there was inconsistency across the majority of the studies on the terminology used for readiness to practise or readiness for practice. As previously mentioned this study is concerned with competence for practice and therefore incorporated the term readiness for the work place and upon graduation. Integrating theory into practice is also linked to a positive learning experience.	A (Section 6.3.1)
15. The role and importance of supervision between the student and the practice educator appear to be a factor impacting on specific skills and knowledge learned and developed by students.	Good leadership and effective practice education supervision were seen as enhancing an individual's ability to be ready for practice.	Navigating and managing a placement through supervision seems still varied and complex with the majority of NQSWs feeling that supervision is adequate and satisfactory although it	S (Section 6.3.3)

		appears to be instrumental in nature with limited ongoing support, future training and meaningful learning.	
16. Factors identified as impacting upon placement experience were for example lack of placement information, how to manage difficulties on placement, learning styles, time management, demanding assessment load as well as linking theory with practice.	Dealing with one's own feelings during placement was a common factor identified by the participants as lacking in the curriculum. Perceptions that the curriculum enhanced personal development and growth in managing the emotional aspect of the role was lacking. How to deal with difficulties on placement and self-doubt concerning if they are able to do social work or be a social worker featured highly amongst students' expressed levels of self-efficacy.	Literature identifies the complexities in managing placement difficulties, lack of placement information and demanding assessment load on students impacting upon their confidence, competence and skills development. Quality of learning opportunities within the learning environment has been identified to equip students to feel prepared and skilled in the face of challenges presented.	S (Section 6.3.3)

NOTE: A = Agreement, PA = Partial Agreement, S = Silence, D = Dissonance

6.3   Summary of integrated findings

The table above presents an integrated representation of the findings from the 19 peer reviewed articles and results from the 74 participants returning the questionnaires, as well as findings from the eight interviews indicating participants' perceptions of being ready for the workplace upon graduation. As a result of the mapping exercise, independent key findings were identified in the three data sets. I compared all findings to identify any overlap between data sets and to create a convergence coding matrix as outlined above (Table 12). Sixteen key comparison findings appeared in three of the data sets. This led to twelve findings across all the data sets that were categorised as in agreement or partial agreement and three that were categorised as silent. One (number 8), concerned the mandatory skills days, although issues regarding the skills days were also discussed in other findings. This proved difficult to categorise due to the data collection methods employed. The selected coding system, was marked as A/PA/D, indicating a nuanced interpretation of the finding that showed aspects of agreement, partial agreement and dissonance.

6.3.1   Instances of agreement and partial agreement

Across the datasets there was agreement or partial agreement in relation to the impact of most characteristics and social work attributes. The findings revealed some nuances of many salient aspects such as characteristics of social work students. These included gender, age, previous work experiences, placement et cetera. However, the study sought to present an overall picture of the key findings of the converged data and therefore, what is provided is a holistic picture of students' readiness for the workplace upon graduation, and the identification of factors supporting or hindering that process.

There was a high level of agreement seen across all datasets indicating good corroboration. Examples from qualitative data helped to explain findings in the quantitative data. The importance of developing coping strategies in how do deal with the demanding role of social worker was identified by students in the quantitative strand and indicated as key to becoming a professional social worker. Personal qualities and attributes were listed as prominent factors in enhancing students' readiness for practice and in managing their emotions on placement. The qualitative strand helped to explain this further. It highlighted that for the majority of the students becoming ready for the workplace was seen as relying on becoming and being, more resilient in the face of challenges. These included challenges in the participants' personal life that made studying difficult, and problems encountered on practice learning placements. The development of resilience was understood to be founded on having certain personal qualities: determination; seeing the bigger picture; having patience; being calm; having positivity; being motivated; being reflective; having confidence; being empathic; being strong, purposeful and adaptive. These attributes were seen as aspects of personal development that were required to strengthen the resilience needed for having what it takes to be ready for practice and eventually to practise.

The interview data illuminated personal actions and wellbeing as important in managing the emotional labour of being a professional. Prominent in the interviews was how participants saw readiness for practice as a journey of development with different and varied opportunities to develop capabilities and competencies to 'do' social work. Elements of 'performing' the professional being were identified by the participants as part of the transition from learner to practitioner enabling them 'to act'

in a professional way when entering the workplace. In the interviews, Lucy chose one of the picture cards of a dice with different faces, like wearing a mask. This was interpreted as representing the face that social workers' present when they are at work, hiding their own feelings behind the professional mask. This ability to 'act the part' was described by the students as helping them become resilient and able to cope with the daily pressures they might experience on placement and post-qualification.

Participants' responses in both pre- and post-test questionnaires identified that critical reflection was required by students to cope in the intellectually and emotionally demanding job of social work. There were differences in responses as to who was responsible to help make sense of putting theory into practice through a process of critical reflection. The qualitative data set helped to explain this further. It seemed the students raised questions of; (i) 'what is to be done with theory'?', and (ii) 'how are the knowledge and skills that underpin the methods used to guide their practice in working with service users applied'? In terms of partial agreement, students from site one expected it to be a course responsibility compared to site two, where it was firmly located in the placement arena.

A number of comparisons related to the role of placement in preparing students to be ready for the workplace upon graduation. Perceptions about placement learning, including its importance, and its difficulties (inaccessibility), were identified in all three datasets and were predominantly explained in the qualitative data set. Participants described how important timing and preparation was for helping them navigate their placement. They expressed anxieties in terms of being able to get through placements successfully. Many positive aspects of their placement experience were described, although these tended to be when students had undertaken more placement

experience. Initially they reported worries about not knowing where they would be placed and how it would be, but expressed appreciation for support from pre-placement meetings and university tutors.

Organisational and systemic issues such as unsupportive or inhospitable team culture and lack of strong leadership, as well as limited feedback and peer support were factors identified across all three data sets as having a negative impact on students' ability to develop their confidence and competence in becoming resilient social workers'. Within the qualitative strand, partial agreement was demonstrated by good leadership being seen as enhancing students' learning as one might expect. In Sarah's and Lucy's cases, leadership described as dismissive or even hostile was seen as detrimental to their resilience and confidence. This partial agreement suggests the students' perception of the importance of a welcoming, affirming placement culture to promote learning.

6.3.2 Instances of dissonance

Statements that indicated dissonance between the data sets were noteworthy. There is little discussion within the literature as yet on the role and impact of the 30 social work skills days on the preparedness of social work students for the workplace. The quantitative strand identified that social work skills days played a role in students' critical reflection on their confidence in their own abilities and competencies in retrospect, following reflection on placement experience at post-test. The post-test results indicated that the majority of the students were either satisfied or very satisfied with the preparatory teaching. This included the 15 social work skills days they had received and suggested that skills days had a positive impact upon social work students' confidence and competence in preparing for their readiness for the

workplace. In contrast, the findings of the qualitative strand revealed that the students interviewed considered the content within the skills days was lacking, and not demanding enough for skills development prior to going out on placement one. There may be dissonance here because the two different courses do not introduce the same content on the corresponding skills day's curriculum. Whilst satisfaction with the skills days was generally high in the quantitative strand, it appeared much lower during the interviews. The majority of the responses from the interviews revealed that students expected their education generally to be more practical and linked to practice realities of the social work environment.

6.3.3   Instances of silence

The interviews indicated a need for personal development and growth during the courses, and the participants' comments were focused on placement experience being key in helping students to keep going and get through. Participants in the interviews also discussed the importance of social work courses to provide the space for developing oneself. The qualitative data captured social work attributes, characteristics and detailed experiences and explanations from placement learning and reflected the importance of these in becoming resilient practitioners. However, this need to promote personal development was absent in the pre-and post-test data. This silence was also reflected in the literature review that revealed no mention of any social work curriculum content that promotes emotional growth and personal development among social work students.

Within the qualitative strand, participants' accounts featured descriptions of their dealing with difficulties on placement and expressed self-doubt about whether they are able to 'do' social work or 'be' a social worker. This aspect was 'silent' in the

quantitative strand indicating that students appeared to become more self-confident and reflective about the developmental changes they underwent during placement. This enabled them to identify areas where their practice had developed on the respective social work programmes.

In summary, although silent in the literature and quantitative data, the qualitative data set captured students' perceptions that supervision is adequate and satisfactory although it appears to be instrumental in nature, with limited ongoing support, planning for future learning or meaningful learning in itself. The role and importance of supervision between the student and the practice educator appear to be a factor impacting on specific skills and knowledge learned and developed by students during placement.

6.3.4   Skills days

The integrated finding shown as number 8 (table 12), and the discussion in section 6.3.2 indicates that the categorisation of data concerning the 30 social work skills days revealed a complexity in the students' responses to the skills days. The results of the pre- and post-test agreed an overall satisfaction with the skills days. However, there was dissonance between the post-test responses showing increase in the skills days promoting confidence during placement learning that differs from the interview accounts. Students' interviews revealed a perceived lack of quality in the content of the skills days in terms of providing sufficient learning to challenge the students. This should, however, be viewed in the context of the interviewed students being mature and having work related experience prior to entering the course. The literature review was silent regarding evidence of the impact of the mandatory skills days, although it is acknowledged that little time has elapsed for publication since their introduction.

6.4   Conclusion

The triangulation of data has facilitated the development of an explanatory framework for how student social workers perceive they develop their readiness for practice and the influence of the social work skills days in this. The triangulation protocol added to and enhanced the findings generated from the previous individual analyses of the three data sets. Combining findings from the quantitative and qualitative datasets and the literature review has shown that social worker attributes; social work development; critical reflection for theory to practice and placement learning all appear to impact on the social work students' readiness for practice journey. The four meta-themes identified in this chapter will be used in chapter 7 to structure the concluding discussion. This is a dialogue between these findings and relevant literature.

Chapter 7   Concluding discussion

7.1   Introduction

This chapter brings together the significant issues and findings that emerged from this mixed methods study. Limitations to the study are highlighted and implications of the findings are discussed. Recommendations for practice, and suggestions for further research are made. A summary of the findings and the contribution of this work can also be found in this chapter.

7.2   Research aims and objectives

This mixed methods study set out to address the research question: *How do social work students perceive they become ready for practice and to practise*? It aimed to offer an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of social work students' readiness for the workplace within the changing landscape in Social Work Education. The objectives were the following:

- ➢ To identify the factors that hinder and support social work students in learning and preparing for practice and to practise;
- ➢ To elicit the descriptions of students of when and how they learn to be ready for practice

7.3   Summary of the mixed methods design

In order to fully address the aims and research question a convergent parallel mixed methods study design was employed. The multiple factors intrinsic to this research project indicated a mixed methods research methodology as being an appropriate approach to answer the research question. It rested on a pragmatist philosophical assumption that fitted well with the aim of the research to understand both the complex problem of readying social work students for the workplace on graduation, and understanding how the students themselves perceived they became fit for practice and to practise. Pragmatism concerns itself with 'what works' – and values solutions to problems (Patton, 1990) and focuses on a research question and problems, and uses all approaches and methods available to understand the problem (Rossman & Wilson, 1985).

A convergent parallel mixed methods design was adopted, incorporating a mixed methods research synthesis (MMRS) review of the literature; a pre- and post- survey and eight qualitative semi-structured interviews with participants from two Higher Educational Institutions in England. The pre- and post-test questionnaires explored social work students' perceptions regarding their readiness for practice including the the impact of the mandatory social work skills days. The interviews elicited the storied experiences of the emotional and affective perspectives of social work students prior to, and following, placement experiences in a highly regulated professional social care context. Pictorial drawings and card images produced by participants were used as triggers during the semi-structured interviews. Microsoft Excel 2010 and SPSS version 21 were used to analyse the quantitative data. The approach taken to the analysis of the qualitative data was thematic analysis as guided by Braun and Clarke (2006). A

triangulation protocol (O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2010) was used to integrate the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data and from the literature review.

7.4   Limitations of the study

This section acknowledges the limitations of the mixed methods study:

➢ The study used a novel design by undertaking a triangulation protocol to analyse the data collected through a mixed methods approach. In practice, using the triangulation protocol presented some difficulties in mixing the findings and determining how to present the data according to the examples provided by Farmer et al. (2006) and Tonkin-Crine (2016). Guidance on the use of the protocol was explicit and I have found the shortage of information on operationalising the protocol within the literature incomplete. This led to difficulties in coding and categorising the skills days theme within the convergence coding matrix. It may indicate a possible methodological limitation within the coding matrix as presented by O'Cathain et al. (2010).

➢ I was the only researcher involved in analysing the three data sets, which could also be seen as a limitation, and discussion in the literature tends to refer to multiple researchers working on large projects (Farmer et al. 2006; O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl, 2010). It may have been helpful during the triangulation process to have more than one researcher in coding and labelling the themes and meta-themes to increase the confidence in the credibility of the study findings. Triangulation possesses strengths and weaknesses, and as Sim and Sharp (1998) pointed out that triangulation is only as strong as the researcher's skills and abilities and the presence of strong underlying theoretical,

methodological and analytical paradigms. This small study was founded on clear theoretical approaches and the researcher's analytical processes were supported by the supervisory team to enhance credibility.

➢ The participants involved in the interviews were all mature students. This could be seen as reducing representativeness as they could be seen as different to many in the total population of social work students and those involved in the pre-and post-test questionnaires in which the age range was varied. This may indicate that their experiences may be different and not applicable to the wider social work student population. Although every attempt was made to recruit participants across a range of ages and experiences, this was not a mandatory process and those volunteering happen to be more mature and experienced individuals. It is not known what motivated the participants to volunteer, nor can it be determined how representative their views are. However, the scale of this component of the study indicates that representativeness in terms of quantitative approaches would not be possible, and what was produced is a rich account of these particular students' experiences that may be transferable to the experience of others.

➢ This small scale study only focussed on England, with limited scope for discussion and focus on quality of experiences such as the role of supervision, induction and continuous professional development within the wider UK context. Furthermore, the aim of the study was to solely capture views and reflections from students at the two participating HEIs. Collecting the views from other stakeholders such as placement tutors, practice assessors in the field would broaden the perspective.

- ➢ The presentation of the participants' creative drawings and selected picture cards within this thesis has given them an artificial/academic sense of coherence within this 'scribing' process (Badley, 2011). I have felt the need to focus on the reader in terms of providing a coherent account, whilst at the same time preserving some sense of the incoherence of participants' narratives within their drawings and discussions. I have made no attempt to analyse the pictorial drawing and image cards and only use them as illustrative examples of the participants' attempts to represent their readiness for the workplace as a journey.

- ➢ My role as a social work tutor undoubtedly impacted on what the student participants felt able to share with me. The dialogue of 'good student professional' circulates everywhere within social work environment and within my research. I have touched upon my role within the research but it had to play a smaller role in the write up (in order to provide a structured account) than perhaps it warrants. My own personal feelings throughout the research and in particular the writing up process and the content and form of this thesis have been a dynamic and dialogic relationship, which will be explored in the following, and final, chapter.

7.5   Concluding discussion of the findings

This section is based on the four meta themes emerging from integrating the three data sets; (i) social worker attributes; (ii) social worker development; (iii) critical reflection for theory to practice; (iv) placement learning; and mentions the implications of the findings by drawing on current literature.

7.5.1   Social worker attributes

The importance of developing coping strategies in how do deal with the demanding role of social work was identified by students in the quantitative strand, and indicated as key to becoming a professional social worker. Personal qualities and attributes were listed as prominent factors in enhancing students' readiness for practice and managing their emotions on placement. Becoming ready for the workplace was seen as relying on being or becoming more resilient in the face of challenges. These included challenges in the participants' personal life that made studying difficult, and problems encountered on practice learning placements. Gerrish (2000), discussing the transition into qualified practice of student nurses also identified significant challenge and stress could brought on by individual accountability and due to the fear of litigation and loss of registration, and that such challenge remained poorly supported.

The development of resilience was understood in this study to be founded on having certain personal qualities: determination; seeing the bigger picture; having patience; being calm; having positivity; being motivated; being reflective; having confidence; being empathic; being strong, purposeful and adaptive. These attributes were seen as aspects of personal development that were required to strengthen the resilience

needed for having what it takes in being ready for practice and eventually to practice. These findings concur with the work done by Anghel et al. (2010) in which first year social work students experientially learned skills and knowledge essential to social work practice such as self-awareness, empathy and confidence. A number of interesting aspects of many of the qualities associated with resilience appear to be 'double edged' from the data sets. For example, for some social work students being determined is an important quality, however, this can lead to inflexibility with a strategy rather being flexible in the approach which would also support resilience. Similarly, the student participants identified being purposeful as being important for social work as we work within a person centred way. However, that same purpose may undermine resilience and could lead to burnout if they are unable to achieve the intended purpose.

These issues are related to students' concerns regarding 'having what it takes'. It should be noted that all interviewees were mature students with a range of life and work experience. Some were struggling with challenges to getting through the course. Showing that one has what it takes to meet the standards required was described as stressful, but most described a transition of personal and professional growth and increasing resilience as they gained experience through the course. The issues of self-regulation, scrutiny and discipline are evident in the data and are all bound up with these students' emotional experiences on the course that resemble Zembylas's (2003) accounts of the expression of emotion as discursive and performative, embodied practices in themselves. What these accounts illustrate is how the participants create themselves as 'professional' and are shaped by the social practices in which they engage in these contexts.

Changing from student on campus to social work student on placement has implications for the students. As they move into practice one of their main concerns was how they would be perceived by other practitioners. It became clear that participants were seeing readiness for practice resulting from a journey of development with different and varied opportunities to develop their capabilities and competencies to 'do' social work. Elements of 'performing' the professional, and perhaps demonstrating the attributes of a social worker, were identified by the participants as part of the transition from learner to practitioner enabling them 'to act' in a professional way before others when entering the workplace. This could be viewed through a lens of Goffman's seminal study (1959) in which he describes the management of impressions of self as being much like a theatrical performance. The data of this work suggests that these emergent social workers' are performatively produced, as described by Ruitenberg (2007), by the practices they engage in thus shaping their professional identity. The findings from Marlowe et al. (2015) study on the integration of personal and professional selves amongst social work students', found that over time, social work students' demonstrated a growing critical awareness to better identify and respond to their self-reported tensions.

Putting on a professional face and performing as a professional seem to be key themes for students looking ahead to their future identities, which would incorporate the social worker attributes they perceive to be required for developing resilience to do the job. These issues may carry implications for recruitment and selection of social work students, and in particular when considering younger, less experienced students in terms of life experience, previous social care work experience and their requirement for resilience on social work courses and their subsequent future careers.

7.5.2 Social worker development

It has been highlighted by Moriarty and Manthorpe (2014) and Maidment (2003) that within the social work literature there remains a lack of discussion on curriculum delivery. The findings of this study illuminate some of the challenges students face engaging with the curriculum in order to become ready for practice. The literature review indicated that shortcomings in social work practice, and therefore the education that prepares social workers' for this practice, comes into focus when child wellbeing and safety tragedies occur. This study has found that from the perspectives of students, that their personal growth and thus professional confidence in terms of perceived self-efficacy was associated with a positive placement experience in which they were supported to 'fit together' theory and practice. Eraut (2007) highlighted the different cultures of education and practice, and noted that transferring knowledge from higher education to practice is complex. For Eraut (2004) the complexity involved in the transfer of knowledge, suggests that there are five interrelated stages: extracting potentially relevant knowledge; understanding the new situation; recognising what knowledge and skills were relevant; transforming them to fit the new situation and integrating the existing knowledge with the new requirements for the new situation.

Students reported experiencing high levels of stress when having to show they 'had what it takes' to be a social worker and perceived their readiness for practice to be enhanced by their personal wellbeing, and they often hid any difficult emotions behind a professional mask. However, they reported developing resilience through the course but indicated that they experienced little in their course to promote or support personal growth except supervision, with this being highly valued in developing

readiness for practice. Maidment's (2003) study found that the problems students experienced on field placement should be used by social work educators to inform the curriculum design and content with the view to provide additional opportunities for students to engage both before and during the placement with teaching material of personal safety, dealing with stress and conflict in the workplace.

The academic part of the curriculum generally, including the skills days, was viewed positively although some students did not perceive its worth until after placement and observed that certain practical or instrumental preparation was missing. This lack of core skill preparation has been noted in other areas with Gerrish (2000) and Newston and McKenna (2007) reporting that student nurses felt unprepared in time management and delegation. In Toal-Sullivan's (2006) study, occupational therapists felt initially overwhelmed by their workload, but they developed coping strategies and time managements skills that led them to become more efficient over time, reflecting Eraut's (2007) suggestions that with the right amount of support and supervision as tasks become routinized and take less time.

These findings indicate that any dissatisfaction with the course concerned how links with the skills days were not transparent. Student comments suggested that some teaching on the skills days presented an idealistic notion of social work that did not adequately address the real world difficulties of working with vulnerable people or instances of challenging behaviour. The PCF provides some consensus about the knowledge and skills that students should have at the end of their qualifying programme; however, it seems that students have difficulty in linking policy drivers with such topics such as substance misuse or domestic violence and how the policy landscape influences social work practice, perhaps suggesting students do not perceive

a coherent path in their learning. This may also reflect the divide between filed/practice vs academy.

However, students readily distinguished between the importance of procedural knowledge (how to apply the knowledge) and substantive knowledge (information about facts, concepts and relationships) in helping them to fit things together. This resonates with Freire's (1986) concept of praxis that highlighted the importance of acquiring a balance between reflection and action. Ruch (2000) described how the two inform each other, with almost a symbiotic relationship whereby if one is sacrificed the other suffers. For Freire's (1986) praxis is a framework which could help social work students' understand and use the concept in a thoughtful and explicit way as supported by Alvarez (2001) study. Both authors suggested that praxis strives to reveal personal and situational limitations that can or do hinder growth and development. The findings from Alvarez (2001) and Marlowe et al's work (2015) provide developmental insights into how social work students' integrate professional and personal selves, potentially shifting from reflexive and reflective practices, to incorporating praxis in their direct work.

Interestingly, whilst satisfaction with the skills days was generally high in the quantitative strand, it appeared much lower during the interviews. The majority of the responses from the interviews revealed that students expected their education generally to be more practical and linked to practice realities of the social work environment.   This perception of the students that they needed to develop instrumental skills is supported by studies conducted by Fook in 2000 and Preston-Shoot in 2004, which highlighted that social work students still need to develop their skills in assessment processes and court room capabilities. The findings of this study,

where students report feeling ill-equipped in managing instrumental aspects of the role, a question is raised about further strengthening skills acquisition in the curriculum to allow social work students to navigate the social work landscape. This is in the context of an increased acceptance of the vocational purpose of higher education with a stronger focus on practical skills development, critical thinking and analytical skills and responding to employers expectations (Bates et al. 2010; Knight, 2006)

7.5.3 Critical reflection for theory to practice

The findings of this study indicate that in considering their readiness for practice, students struggled with the concept of 'theory' or how they could use theoretical constructs in practice. They described being able to 'fit together' the theoretical components of the course to their practice experience as difficult, and varied in their perceptions of how helpful skills days were in helping them do this. Some continued not to be able see connections and how this learning would help them be ready for the workplace. Others described lightbulb moments of working in practice and realising what they had learned in university helped their understanding of a practice situation. Other authors have discussed these issues and found that the successful integration of theory into practice is associated with a positive practice learning experience (Regerh et al. 2002) or dissatisfaction expressed amongst newly qualified practitioners associated with little opportunity to reflect (Marsh and Treseliotis, 1996).

The findings suggest that space for critical reflection for students to consider their development, was perceived as important in enabling them to cope in the intellectually and emotionally demanding occupation of social work. Grant (2014) study on critical reflection found that self-assessment and self-regulation are tools

which supports the development of resilience. Ruch's (2000) study on reflection in social work practice, found that it facilitates empathy and it supports insights into how personal backgrounds affect learning and practice. There were differences among the students as to who they considered responsible for helping them use processes of critical reflection to make sense of putting theory into practice and of using creative ways to help them 'fit things together'. Beddoe (2004), Fook and Askeland (2007) and Cooper (2011) claimed there is a need for more critically reflective social work by students. The authors suggest that reflection in and critical reflection on social work should take place within a learning environment that encourages learning about learning, and thinking about thinking in social work. Beddoe (2004), Fook and Askeland et al. (2007) suggested social work students needed to view reflection and analysis as a conscious journey and if we are to move to a greater understanding of effective learning, there may be implications for how practice educators facilitate and promote critical reflection within supervision during placement. Within the work done by Beddoe (2004), Fook and Askeland (2007) and Cooper (2011), there seems to be something about the skills of critical reflection being important in 'doing' social work, but also in learning about 'becoming' a social worker – making this an important concept for students and practice educators/ assessors to grapple with. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) and Fook and Askeland (2007) concurred that reflection has perplexity and questioning at its heart but stressed the importance of including thoughts and feeling to this process. This supports the findings of my study and leads to a conclusion that to achieve this, during the course, social work educators and placement settings could encourage students to use more creative approaches to promote learning and enhance their ability to 'fit things together'.

The way students perceive they learn to be ready for practice neatly reflects what appears to be the competing perspectives of HEIs providing a broad knowledge base on which to base continuing professional development (CPD) (Smith et al. 2013), and employers wanting "functionally" ready social workers' (Shepe et al. 2011) equipped with practical skills for the job. Students in this study report needing space and direction for critical analysis on practice in order to link theory to what they are required to do, and thus develop deeper critical thinking and understanding; but at the same time feel pressure to attain the functional skills of 'doing' associated with the work. This suggests a collaborative approach to supporting students' readiness for practice. Much work, such as the provision of skills days, can be undertaken in HEIs to prepare the students to be more functionally ready for the working world, but it is also important to make space for the development of critical thinking both on campus and in placement settings. Educators, practice educators/staff in different teams or individual practitioners can all contribute to the students' readiness for practice. This was also consistent with similar findings reported by Bates et al. (2010) whose research focussed on NQSW perceptions of the effectiveness of the degree in preparing them for social work employment. Bates et al's work (2010) identified key social work practice skills that requires more development by social work educators and highlights the importance of statutory placements for social work students. Bates et al (2010) identified that student social workers' in their study felt unprepared in instrumental areas such as assessments, record keeping and report writing.

It can be argued that more emphasis needs to be placed upon linking social work skills days content and context to other modules to reduce the fragmentation that may be experienced across the curriculum leading to a perceived alienation of theory from

practice. Sheppard et al's work (2000) highlighted the importance of the role of supervision in providing the reflective and cognitive development space as a way of looking at social work knowledge. For Sheppard et al. (2000) there was a need to develop educational processes that would encourage learners cognitive abilities for linking theory with practice and recognising the relationship between them. In a study by Moriarty et al. (2010) of graduating social work students in Britain, student participants' most valued topics were those rated as being 'relevant to practice' and where 'practice wisdom' of experienced social workers' could be observed. The notion of critical reflection assisting in helping students 'fit together' theory and practice during their course may assist in enabling earlier perceptions of feeling ready for practice through promoting greater understanding of the field they are working within.

Studies that have attempted to capture views on readiness for practice among other professions such as nurses and teachers, also suggest that feeling 'ready' can be delayed as students of these professions viewed 'practice readiness' as not occurring at the time of graduation, but after some time in practice (Wolff, Pesut and Regan, 2010). Other authors such as Mooney's study (2007a) found that participants felt that they were expected to know everything and were also made to feel inadequate if they asked questions. Sheppard's idea of process knowledge would become important here as it could lead the students experiencing a loss of confidence and feeling shame created by the blame culture that exists within the organisation.

7.5.4 Placement learning

The findings of this study suggest that students perceived that their learning and development was promoted by practice placements, concurring with the findings of other studies (Maidment, 2003; Buck, 2007). Placement learning experiences can be viewed as transformative for students. However, the placement experience was not always found to be straightforward, with participants explaining that the organisational culture of some placements left them 'feeling shut out'. Students described the pain of; as they saw it, being treated badly and feeling they did not belong. They described some placements as inaccessible in terms of actually being able to physically enter the space, or support for their emotional reactions being inaccessible due to being criticised. This, they felt, was isolating, but also accepted as part of a professional socialisation process that demanded resilience. What they described is a learning environment that is not easily accessible, that does not have a place for them, where they have to discover and find their 'right' place.

Being part of an integrated community of practice and being included during decision making processes was found by Thrysoe et al. (2012) and Buck (2007) to be an important factor in feeling part of a fully functioning team. Wenger (1998) suggested that social participation within the community requires informal learning at work. However, Fenwick et al's (2012) study describes the workplace as a 'pond', sometimes calm and peaceful and at other times mucky and infested. Agllias (2010) work highlighted that some social work graduates both expected and experienced resistance to the fresh perspective they took to the work environment.

Place is also significant in how power is negotiated and the landscape of placement for these participants included voluntary sector projects, locked forensic wards, people's homes, child protection and adult social work departments, all with their own cultures of emotion management and their own enforcement of organisational dynamics. The manager influences some of the culture in the workplace and Kelly and Adhern (2009) highlight they had the power to facilitate or inhibit a smooth transition into the workplace. Studies related to other professions such as Rungapadiachy, Madiill and Gough, 2006), reported nursing students feeling unsupported by their nurse managers and experiencing a 'blame culture'. Eraut (2007) suggested that it is part of a manager's role to develop the culture of mutual support and learning. Students' also identified a problem of moving to different placements and the need to 'fit in' all over again. Kelly and Ahern (2009) called this 'double reality shock'. For the social work students' participating in my study, changing placements required adapting and re-establishing their professional identify in the new working environment.

The way social work students engaged with the management of their emotions during placements was a complex part of their accounts as being students and potential professionals, whilst being assessed. They had to manage their emotions on various levels, appear competent to their practice educator/assessor and demonstrate their ability to manage their own emotions in order to ultimately manage those of the service users during placement. Some students experienced a 'lack of voice' during their placement when reflecting on such experiences. This concurs with the work done by Pellico, Brewer and Kovner (2009) where a participant in the study summed this up when they spoke about nursing being a profession but not being treated as a professional.

Warne and McAndrew's (2008) specifically point to the transformative nature of emotional learning on placement, seeing emotionality as a pivotal aspect of learning. They discussed how we occupy a space between knowing and not knowing where attitudes and emotions from our habits and dispositions could influence how we learn or not in that space within the placement environment.

Students described how important preparation was in helping them navigate their placement. They expressed anxiety regarding achieving a successful placement outcome. Many positive aspects of their placement experience were described, often only after students had undertaken further placement experiences.

What is also evident is the way in which power circulates around these practices of being a professional within placement. In the drawings, questionnaire responses and discussions there are many narratives about negotiating roles with practice educators and university tutors, as well as dealings with the multi-disciplinary team. In the narratives the participants openly wrote or talked about what it felt like to use power themselves and the role of their emotions and emotional expression in that. That power is a fundamental thread running through the participants' contributions is not unsurprising given the contextual setting of social work practice and the professional expectations placed on them as highlighted in Buck (2007). Placement experiences for students were also identified as an area in which resilience was not only stretched, but also developed. Eraut (2007) identified tackling challenging tasks as one of the work processes that had learning as a by-product. In a study by Wangensteen, Johansson and Nordstrom (2008), nursing students found that situations where they felt supported developed greater confidence in them when dealing with challenges and viewed these as positive learning opportunities.

It is clear from the all data sets that the majority of the participants wished for a greater number and longer practice learning placements, as well as additional encounters with practitioners and service users within skills days. When reflecting on their own competence, many students also related their lack of self-confidence at having insufficient practice experience. As discussed by Doel et al's (2007) concerning the new social work degree, placements are seen as the bridge between academia and the practice world. They went on to suggest that there is no typical pattern for the arrangement of placement learning settings. The majority of the participants in this study favoured a statutory placement, considering it provided an optimum experience. Not all students had this opportunity, which may explain why some felt unprepared for practice as was found by Bates el al. (2010) study. Tham and Lynch (2014) suggest social work education should find an optimal balance between time spent in the field of practice, vocational training and personal development on the one hand, and more theoretical courses and supporting academic skills development on the other. This can also lead to opportunities for students to develop their professional social work identity (Bridges, 2011).

7.6   Summary

The study reported here is a mixed methods investigation into the perceptions of undergraduate social work students in two universities in England of how they become ready for the workplace upon graduation. A mixed method research synthesis of the literature, pre-and post-test surveys and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. In answering the question "How do social work students perceive they become ready for practice and to practise?", the findings indicate that students understand the profession of social work to be stressful and demanding and they

consider that social work students need to possess resilience, based on certain attributes, to become ready for practice as students, and to practise as qualified social workers'. This readiness, from the perspective of students, is a journey based on the development of resilience throughout their course, the capability of performing certain fundamental tasks and the capacity for critical reflection that supports their being able to link theory to practice and so deepen understanding of their practice. Practice learning experience is seen as fundamental to supporting a successful journey, but what is seen as inaccessible or inhospitable placement experience both tests and supports the development of resilience and necessary skills, but can fundamentally disrupt the journey. Skills days, are perceived as useful but their value can be limited through students not immediately recognising their relevance, or not paying enough attention to instrumental skill development and the curriculum overall not providing a coherent pathway that supports students to be able to 'fit things together'.

Whilst the findings indicate that social work students appear to consider themselves adequately prepared for the workplace, this should be considered with caution. The students were all conscious of their incompetence and inexperience in many respects, and can be situated as being somewhere between novice and advanced beginner (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986). Carpenter et al. (2015), drawing on the work of Dreyfus and Dreyfus, and using the concept of self-efficacy as a means of assessing perceived competence and confidence found that self-efficacy increased between the start and the end of the programme, however after three months into employment, NQSWs realised they had not been as competent as they thought. The findings of this study suggest that social work educators need to view the students' preparation for the workplace holistically, rather than focussing primarily on the curriculum content of the

degree. The participants expressed confidence across the nine categories of the PCF after attending both their social work placements, and they identified supervision in the placement as key to their readiness for practice and how they develop a professional identity. To support these processes there is a requirement for aspects such as integrating into skills days development of critical reflection skills, to assist in linking theory to practice. Space for personal growth and development was seen as important by the students in helping to be prepared for the realities of the demanding and challenging social work settings in which they will work.

7.7   Recommendations

The purpose of a professional doctorate is to contribute to the body of knowledge for practice. This is a small scale mixed methods study that does not claim generalisability beyond the specific context in which this research took place. However, the insights presented may offer further readers the opportunity to use their existing professional and experiential knowledge to consider the value of the research and its relevance to their situation, thus promoting transferability of the findings. The findings of this study suggest the following areas for consideration:

➤ Social work recruitment and admissions procedures could consider selection activities to incorporate exercises on how prospective applicants are fitted to cope with the stresses of the work.

➤ Readiness for practice is viewed by students as a journey. By implementing scaffolding support into the induction of social work students into their placement experience, would facilitate a smoother transition into practice. This relies on close relationships between social work educators and employers during the qualifying period. This issue is considered to have the potential to

inform the policy and practice of other professions in which students gain experience and are assessed in practice.

➢ The skills days component of the curriculum should be reviewed in order to develop and better target learning opportunities to increase functional skills and critical reflection abilities to enhance perceived self-efficacy of social work students across the three years of the undergraduate degree. This promotion of confidence would help students to develop a professional social work identify and feel more ready for practice.

➢ Areas where social work students lacked confidence were assessment skills, report writing and critical reflection. As experience builds confidence, pre-registration education programmes for social work including placements should include as much experience in these areas as possible across the curriculum, including in the 30 skills days and offer learning activities such as simulation, to encourage students to learn and build confidence before placement and between placements.

➢ Social work educators and practice educators on placement should consider using creative approaches to enhance critical reflection when helping students to link theory to practice.

➢ Educators and practice assessors alike need to look at the holistic readiness for practice journey and look at ways of enhancing personal growth and development alongside resilience strategies before students' first social work placement, provide ongoing support throughout the course in preparation for professional life.

➢ Practice educators should consider developing strategies to reduce potential inaccessibility experienced by students within the organisation. Practice

educator courses could also seek to accommodate this aspect on the training schedule to ensure practice educators reflect on their immediate working environment and what organisational factors may impact on a student's learning.

➤ Social work programme designers and other professional disciplines should explore the right vehicle and approach for creating a safe environment to allow exploration, emergence and development of self within the curriculum. This would allow scope for including elements of personal growth and development, to enable students to become more resilient practitioners in coping with the emotional challenges of the work and to become ready for the workplace.

➤ Further work arising from this study

a. This work, comprising the student voice on what supports their readiness for practice and to practise provides an impetus for further work to be undertaken:

b. Further work exploring the student perspective/voice should be undertaken

c. Case studies could be developed to provide insights into the students' voice to inform and support practice education workshops.

d. The power of creative work could be shared with relevant social work education and research communities through publishing journal papers.

e. The insights developed concerning students' perspectives on readiness for practice and to practise should be disseminated in order inform social work educational policy and practice via conference presentations and within journal publications.

The following, final chapter, provides a reflexive account of my journey through this research experience.

Chapter 8   Final reflexive and reflective account

8.1   Introduction

The process of reflecting on the research journey and how the varied aspects of the project design actually worked in practice is considered good practice for all research projects (Fook, 2012). I provided below an account which reflects on and is reflexive of my influence on what has happened during my research journey.

8.2   Reflexivity

The process of holding oneself open to question, seeing oneself as both the researcher and the researched has been an important element of my research and an acknowledgement that in some ways, I am creating myself in the research as well as being the creator (Fook, 2012; Rheinharz, 1992).   Reflexivity along with explicit contextualisation of the project and situating me within that process are important ways in which I try to make the process and my role in it more open and understandable (Fook, 2012; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Richardson, 2002).

I perform multiple roles in my life, both in and out of work. To the students participating in my research I am their placement tutor, academic advisor, module leader, skills lead and course leader and they know little else about me. I am the person who also often marks their work and may hold the power to prevent them from progressing within their chosen profession.

The dilemmas of language, writing and representation were a challenge for writing up the project and left me in a predicament about how to use language to represent my

research as best as possible. Whilst, of course, I am writing for the examiners of this thesis, I am also writing for the participants and other social work students who are sent out on placement within health and social care settings, for social work colleagues and for practice assessors/educators. At time I have felt myself pulled in different and conflicting directions and the route I have taken is one particular to my values. It surprisingly (to me) reflects the pragmatic social work practitioner in me who finds meaning in doing. It also situates me in the place in which I worked and wrote up much of this research, the family study, at a desk looking out onto the back garden, a long way from the aloof grey room at university where I held the majority of the interviews.

Following one supervision session with my Director of Studies, I pondered if perhaps my style of writing and representing my research is an attempt to keep the 'me' in this research? The choice of using creative methods in my research was not just an epistemological or methodological decision. I am a visual learner. I am someone who uses varied creative methods to help me make sense of the world. The very process of using drawings and pictorial cards itself enables me to make connections and create a pattern or form for otherwise free-floating concepts, ideas, events or feelings in my own thinking and my own life. For that purpose, I wanted to see if this could enhance my research project where the voice of the student was perhaps not well understood and where exploration rather than discovery was a central aim. At the end, I decided to use the creative drawings and cards only as prompts for the interviews.

A major part of the students' comments and creative drawings during the semi-structured interviews were about their attempts to take up a position within this professional social work landscape and their ease or unease with this in specific

situations. Some of the mechanisms and processes that the University, and I, as part of it, put in place to assess students' written work and practice on placement are also an integral part of the hidden power which exist (Foucault, 1998). It was revealing to see the complicity of my role as a university tutor in these discourses, and I am also aware of the interaction of tutor/student relationships and the power differences that lie within that.

8.3   Reflections on the research process

Reflective practice is seen by many in health and social care as a tool for personal and professional development (Schon, 1983; Fook, 2012). Indeed the HCPC and PCF include it as a professional competency that is demanded throughout a social workers' career. The HCPC's Standards of Proficiency state that a registrant must "understand the value of reflection on practice and the need to record the outcome of such reflection" (2008. 2c.2).

8.3.1   Why I selected the study

According to Maso in Finlay and Gough (2003), the importance of the research question cannot be underestimated. For research to really search for something, the research question should be 'true', in that there must be a real uncertainty that the researcher has a passion to answer. I was very drawn to my research question because during the planning phase, Social Work Education underwent two major reviews by Nairey (2012) and Croisdale-Appleby (2013). Both reviews highlighted the fact that newly qualified social workers' are not 'ready enough' when they enter the profession.

Social work programmes went through a revalidation process in 2012 with a new professional regulatory body – HCPC - and the introduction of the professional capabilities framework with nine domains for progression. The research topic was very timely as in 2012 the introduction of the mandatory 30 skills days as part of preparing social work students to become ready for the workplace was included in the curriculum. Most recently from 2016 onwards, social work education has witnessed the influence of the Teaching Partnerships on placement provision and the profession also awaits news of a new professional regulatory body. These factors make this study timely.

Throughout the different strands of this mixed methods study, I was very aware that I was taking up these students' valuable time. They were busy completing large amounts of work before going out to their first placement and, in the final year, completing their degree work. I was grateful to them for giving up their time and often felt guilty that I was doing this and so I tried hard to make them feel listened to. I was interested that I felt so uncomfortable asking people to participate in the research. It was not because I felt it was not around a useful topic; I felt it was a neglected part of student life and raising awareness of it could improve students' experience and also that of service users in social work. I felt I was making the students jump through my hoops and that my aims were not entirely selfless, as I needed to complete the research for my own DProf as well as to be able to raise these issues.

8.3.2 Reflecting on using mixed methods research synthesis (MMRS) for literature review

The literature review sought to use a method that allowed for the synthesis of a diverse body of literature. A MMRS model appeared to do this. It was also an attempt to apply the principles of mixed methods research when conducting the literature review. In supervision sessions we discussed what makes mixed methods research synthesis different to the mono-method quantitative and qualitative literature reviews. Heyvaert et al (2017 p5) developed an approach where researchers combine qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research studies and apply a mixed methods approach to synthesising and integration of those studies. I felt that by using this approach, the breadth and depth of understanding the complexities, problems and issues around social work students' development of readiness for the workplace would be enhanced. I considered the multi-layered components used with social work education and in comparison to the mono-method literature reviews (meta-analyses and meta-syntheses) thought it would allow study of how these components and layers interact and relate to each other.

I felt it might also provide some meaning and appropriateness to the study, especially focussing on the feasibility of the social work skills days across the various strands. I needed to consider the complexity of the social work education programme; as Pawson et al (2005) state, programmes are not magic bullets that will hit the target and researchers also need to keep in mind the context and implementation of the curriculum. I thought it would be interesting to use this approach to help me to answer questions on 'why' the skills days helped students to be more prepared for practice and to practise, but also what did not work for them.

By adopting the MMRS literature review I embraced the opportunity to integrate the different types of research evidence regarding students' readiness for the workplace upon graduation within a single literature review. Following the eight stages for conducting a MMRS literature review, I found myself venturing into new territory in using different critical appraisal tools when appraising the literature and I chose the narrative summary approach for synthesising quantitative, qualitative and mixed primary level studies in integrated MMRS literature reviews.

I was mindful that the literature review did not aim for theory-building. But was this Doctoral thesis enough? I am aware that the approach may be open to criticism as it may lack transparency on the process of how to synthesise the included data, but I had faith in the process and trust that the literature review can stand up to scrutiny. As mentioned by Dixon-Woods et al. (2005) narrative summary approach offered a reflexive component which could also include a commentary to account for complex, dynamic processes.

8.3.3   Reflecting on using mixed methodology

After reading work by Creswell (2008a), Greene (2008) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003b) on the development phases for mixed methods, I needed to consider the advantages and controversies in engaging with mixed methods research in social work. During one of my supervision sessions we discussed the issues and priorities in the mixed methods field. I had to read more around the topic and began to interrogate the assumptions underpinning mixed methodology in giving more weight to the positivist tradition, and I needed to be aware of not marginalising the qualitative data for this study (Howe, 2004). I considered how my study could add value in providing a

better understanding of how social work students perceived their readiness for the workplace.

I decided that this mixed methods study would produce the 'best of both worlds' in providing a holistic picture of students' experiences and answering my research question. Adopting a convergent parallel mixed methods study design proved to be challenging and complicated as I was the only researcher analysing the data and I struggled with what Freshwater (2007, p.137) has claimed, that a mixed methods approach is too "focussed on fixing meaning". Throughout my journey I tried to keep this in mind when blending data from the surveys and interviews to provide a balanced account of the voice of social work students' development of readiness for the workplace.

8.3.4   Reflecting on using surveys

The timing of placement experiences on social work programmes and when to ask social work respondents to complete the pre-test/post-test questionnaires for both sites had to be carefully considered. Depending on the timing of the skills days and placements on the respective courses, it was possible that some changes in the expected direction of results could have taken place without the impact of the placement or skills days.

The participants were aware that they were participating in the survey and in itself this may have produced certain changes such as them becoming more aware of the quality of the skills days, varied experiences and pre-existing work experiences. I had to consider the possibility of them developing expectations about the outcome, and I

became aware that they might try to respond positively to the questions. In planning the self-administered questionnaires, I could have used previous self-efficacy questionnaires, but I decided against this as the ones previously used were based in hospital settings and did not focus on the 30 skills days. Some of the questions in both questionnaires could have been changed to ranking questions and included fewer open ended comments sections and I could have paid more attention to what Oppenheim (1999, p.110) calls the funnel approach. On reflection, my skills in designing a questionnaires are emergent, but I feel I have learned a great deal from this process.

8.3.5   Reflecting on using SPSS for analysing the quantitative data

Using SPSS software provided challenges at times with not just the software package itself but in how I used the software and how I selected the different types of test. I discussed my frustrations or gaps in knowledge with my supervisory team and they gently guided me to further reading. I spent months considering how to capture and present the data from the pre-test and post-test from both HEI sites. The data was large and complex and I had to go through each individual survey, match up students' pre- and post-tests and compare across the two sites for the final analysis. I needed to consider how to present the data in a clear and concise way and reflected on occasions that having another researcher look at the data would add another dimension to the validity and reliability of the analysis.

I did however, access supervision with a statistician to help me with this challenging journey in finding my way through the language of statistics and the different statistical procedures to use, such as multivariate techniques, interval variables, scale scores and coding frames. This perhaps mirrored how the students described their

readiness for practice journey as one of ups and downs, as I felt the quantitative data analysis journey had some highs and lows but overall was one I think I have enjoyed.

8.3.6   Reflecting on the interviews

The semi-structured interview format provides an opportunity to generate, through a conversational approach, rich data (Kvale and Brinkman, 2015). As mentioned in chapter 1, I had previous work experience of being involved in social work and in person-centred counselling within psychiatric teams and am trained in psycho-dynamic interventions. As such, I thought that my extensive experience of active listening and probing in interviews would be useful skills to possess. It provided a good fit with the qualitative strand for the mixed methods study, and therefore seemed to be an ideal conduit for gathering data.

The interview process took place according to the guide and appeared to be satisfactory. Interviews seemed to flow, participants talked, no ethical issues emerged, and everything appeared to be running smoothly. The student participants found, however, the creative activity at the beginning of the interview challenging and different. Some participants became nervous about the mere fact of drawing their experiences and a level of ambivalence emerged. I reassured them that their artistic abilities were not the focus and that the activity was merely used as a prompt for the interview questions. This enabled the student participants to relax and feel more comfortable with this activity.

I came to question whether there would be any meaningful data in the interviews. As the analysis process progressed and I became immersed in the data, it became clear

that there was significant depth in the participants' contributions. The creative activity and accounts reflected deep thinking, all shared generously with little preparation and thinking time and I found this immensely motivating and interesting as I did not expect this level of engagement by the students. A development point for my future practice is to try and understand how to develop my listening skills to allow me to hear some of this richness amongst the confusion and noise of everyday conversations. I found myself at times entangled in trying to analyse every word and overlooking the richness and hidden depth in the moment of the interview that was revealed later in the analysis.

8.3.7 Using creative approaches during interviews

I struggled for many months with the creative drawings and card images the student participants produced and how this informed the interview discussions, what it meant to me; whether to use a formal thematic analysis, a literary analysis, a discourse analysis; just what this process was all about and who it was for, and then, how to represent it all. After a follow-up supervision session, it was decided not to use analyses from the creative drawings for this study, as it would add another layer of complexity, beyond the scope of the study, when coding the themes for triangulation within the mixed method matrix.

I decided to just present the drawings and picture cards with a short synopsis of the students and present each student's profile and his/her work as it had been given to me during the interviews, but wondered if I was doing justice to the students' work. I presented at two conferences presenting the participants' work. The reactions were very positive, both students and placement educators commenting on the impact it had on them, recognising the new way it made them think about placement learning

and how they critically reflected. This identified an area I could further explore at a different time.

The writing is not just the product of the participants' reflections on their readiness for practice and to practise. I asked them to draw about very specific aspects of their experiences. What they chose to do was up to them, and when looking at their drawings, I felt as though I had a multi-faceted and dimensional object in front of me that looked very different from each of its surfaces. I have used pseudonyms throughout for the participants in order to preserve anonymity. These names were applied later in the process and this has had an interesting impact on my writing up as the participants I came to know during the research were transformed into characters/profiles in my writing. I pondered how to write about their creative drawings and their contributions during the interviews. I had to internally translate their profile names into their real names so that I could picture and re-call the 'feel' of their contributions. I decided not to integrate the findings of the creative drawings and cards for this project but hope to revisit this in the future.

8.3.8   Reflecting on thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases thematic analysis process was used in analysing the qualitative data. The first phase of this model suggested that the researcher should become immersed in the data. This phase involved reading, re-reading and listening to the recorded interviews across the whole data set. I would have preferred to benefit from transcribing the interviews myself. After a great deal of consideration and reflection following an earlier transcription experience, I opted for a pragmatic

approach that balanced the available time and depth of data immersion, and decided that a professional transcription service would be a worthwhile compromise.

8.3.9 Reflecting on the triangulation process

I had been thinking about my research and how to 'capture' what the student participants had identified and discussed in the strands of the study and turn it into 'data' as a chapter for my thesis. It felt like a continuing struggle to find a way to represent the student responses from the pre-and post-test questionnaires together with the interviews, including the creative drawings, in a way that could maintain some of its feeling as discussed at the beginning of chapter 3 and 5. Developing and implementing a triangulation protocol for integrating the quantitative findings with the qualitative findings was challenging at the best of times. I was overwhelmed with the amount of data available and which type of triangulation protocol to use when attempting to achieve clarity through mixed methods triangulation. Within the data there was a range of complementary findings, dissonance and silence and consequently, it felt I was floundering my way through the process.

However, with perseverance, undertaking triangulation enabled me to bring together multiple perspectives on how social work students perceived their readiness for the workplace, tapping into different elements of the issue that contributed to a more complete picture. Bringing together themes from the literature, survey analysis and interview findings, facilitated the identification of overriding meta-themes that cut across social work curriculum, respondents, skills days and methods. The structure of the triangulation protocol at first seemed simplistic. However, it proved to be a complex process to undertake and presented challenges at several stages. One of the

difficulties I encountered was in determining the sources of dissonance, silence and agreement within one theme across the three data sets. For example, the 30 skills days sub-theme within the social work development meta-theme provided some complexity in the categorisation of the codes as (i) there was dissonance between the pre-test and the retrospective post-test on skills days; (ii) post-test skills days and the interviews highlighted dissonance in students experiences of the skills days and (iii) there was silence as the literature reviewed had limited mention of the impact of the skills days on students' readiness for the workplace. There was also agreement of the content on the skills days between data sets. This posed a challenge to determine the source of dissonance or silence on themes across data sets. I also found that the richness of interview data might be better suited to addressing my research question. I had to be cautious in not placing too much weight on the findings of the qualitative strand, as the interviews probed the role of placements in how students became ready for practice, whereas the surveys did not include any such reflections. This process was far messier than Table 12 in chapter 6 indicates.

The exercise of conducting statistical analysis, thematic analysis, and building on the 'constellations of findings' during the triangulation process was an interesting experience. At times it was not explicitly clear that anything useful had emerged until after quite an extensive investment of both time and energy on my part. The advice of the supervision team was to trust and be true to the process that had been initially identified during the design stage. This required absolute faith in their skills and their advice. Without this, insecurity regarding the value of the time investment and the worth of the subsequent research findings might have led to a debilitating crisis of confidence and self-efficacy.

8.2.10   My overall impressions

Creating the meta-themes has been a journey that I have taken with the support of both my supervisors. These meta-themes have been changed, adjusted and wrestled over, often in light of additional reading of literature. The final meta-themes, I believe, reflect the integrated findings and provide a balanced account of the research. My initial concern about being too focussed on the preparation for practice was unfounded as much of the analysis discusses issues relating to practice. The theme about social work student attributes focussing on personal development and growth in developing resilience was a surprise finding and is an area that I will be interested in exploring further. As well as peer support being highlighted in my research, my peers have been invaluable in supporting me during my transition into research for which I am very grateful.

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Appendix 1 CASP assessment tool and literature review record (example)

Title of peer reviewed article: Frosts, E., Hojer, S. and Campanini, A. (2013) Readiness for practice: social work students' perspectives in England, Italy, and Sweden. European Journal of Social Work, 16(3), pp327-343,

1.Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? Consider: What the goal of the research was Why is it important Its relevance	There were very clear aims for this research presented in a separate paragraph. It explored experiences of social work students', pre and post-graduation.
2.Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? Consider: If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants	The qualitative methodology was appropriate in seeking the opinions of social work students'
Detailed questions 3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? Consider: If the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)?	The researchers have justified their method. Semi-structured interviews were appropriately used in order to generate natural talk and reduce the impact of the researcher
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? Consider: If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)	The recruitment strategy has been clearly presented and justified
5. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? Consider: If the setting for data collection was justified If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.) If the researcher has justified the methods chosen If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews were conducted, or did they use a topic guide)? If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why? If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.) If the researcher has discussed saturation of data	The key questions used to generate discussion during the interviews have been presented. These clearly address the research question. The interviews were audio recorded
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? Consider: If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during: o Formulation of the research questions of Data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design	The researcher has examined their role to some extent regarding data collection but not within the analysis. There is limited evidence of reflexivity

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? Consider: If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study) If approval has been sought from the ethics committee	Ethical issues have been considered in a clearly presented way. Approval for the project was received from the 3 universities ethics committee
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? Consider: If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data? Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process If sufficient data are presented to support the findings To what extent contradictory data are taken into account Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation	There is clear discussion about the analysis process. They stated they used thematic analysis and IPA approaches.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings? Consider: If the findings are explicit If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst) If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question	The findings are clear under suitable headings and use direct quotes to validate results
10. How valuable is the research? Consider: If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature? If they identify new areas where research is necessary If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used	The authors clearly considered the contribution their research makes

Appendix 1 Literature review matrix record - example

Author	Year of publication	Main idea	Summary	Type of study	Themes
Pithouse, A and Scourfield, J.	*2002*	The study was conducted in Wales between 1998-1999 Purpose of the study was to explore how well the DipSW prepared graduates for practice and how prepared they felt after a period in post.	Findings suggest that the majority of participants felt adequately prepared for practice, however, less prepared in terms of exploring definitions of what preparedness might mean. Felt less prepared in risk management and intervention skills and organisational context. **Strengths** Mixed Methods study. Good sample size. Triangulation of data – included managers and supervisors **Limitations** Mainly 25 closed questions for the postal survey. Limited options for qualitative comments. No university tutors included in the triangulation data. Purposive sampling, low response rate. **Ethics** Ethical and research governance permissions were received. No ethical issues mentioned. **Reference** Pithouse, A. and Scourfield, J.(2002) 'Ready for practice? The DipSW in Wales: Views from the workplace on social work training', Journal of Social Work, 2(1),pp.7-27	Mixed Methods Postal surveys (n=115), followed up telephone interviews (50 supervisors(25) and senior managers (25)	Adequate social work education Skills development such as assessment and organisational context and culture. Competence and confidence Preparedness
Shereen Hussein, Jo	*2011*	Organisational	Satisfaction with different	Longitudinal / Mixed	Transition

| Moriarty, Martin Stevens, Endellion Sharpe and Jill Manthorpe | | factors, job satisfaction and intention to leave among newly qualified social workers in England. The study examined a conceptual framework which linked NQSWs' evaluation of how well their qualifying education prepared them for the job and the different aspects of the work environment with the NQSW s's job satisfaction and future plans to stay in or leave their jobs | organisational elements and aspects of work contributes to overall levels of job satisfaction and intention to leave amongst NQSWs. NQSWs, especially immediately after graduation, self-perceived competence and their confidence in their educational preparation are also important, as this is linked to readiness for practice. This article reports on a longitudinal study following 280 social work students into social work employment in England using data collected as students and six months after graduation. The study focused on their experiences as NQSWs, thus only including those working in social work jobs, reporting the relative importance of their satisfaction with different work elements, such as supervision and job engagement. These were used to construct a model of NQSWs' overall satisfaction and intentions of leaving their social work jobs. The model incorporated NQSWs' perceptions of how well their degree courses prepared them for their current social work jobs in addition to personal, organisational and specific role characteristics. Using statistical techniques of factor analysis and regression modelling the study highlighted the complexities of how job satisfaction is constructed | Methods (17 semi-structured interviews 2 group discussion with 14 service users and carers 5 group discussions with senior education staff from 31 universities. Survey data gathered from 56 online surveys with Directors of social work in England (during 2009) | Supervision Job engagement.

Social work education,- quality of qualifying education.

Fitness / readiness to practice

Self-perceived competence and Confidence.

Self-Efficacy

Manageable workload.

Supportive Team

Supervision

Value into Practice

Pay prosperity.

Job engagement

Stable job

Structure

Induction / Training |

			and the researcher argued that the data reveal the importance of team support and self-efficacy in relation to whether social workers are thinking about leaving their current social work job. **Strengths:** The study was a longitudinal study of NQSWs. It explored personal characteristics (such as age and other demographics) in relations to job satisfaction and intentions to leave. **Limitation:** **Ethics:** Ethical and research governance permissions were received from the National Research Ethics service and participating local authorities. The researcher noted that no ethical issues arose as participation was completed in voluntary, data were anonymised and participants could withdraw if they wished **Reference:** Sharpe, E.,Moriarty,J.,Steven,M.,Manthorpe,J. and Hussein,S. (2011), London: Kings College London, Social Care Workforce Research Unit.		
Jo Moriarty, Jill Manthorpe	2013	Post - Qualifying Education for Social workers	This article is a scoping review on post qualifying education for social workers. The authors explored the issues of regulations of worker post qualifying and the approach to continuing professional development (CPD) amongst social workers. The	Scoping Review Methodology	Post- Qualifying Education, Continuous Professional Development

			article seemed to provide a baseline from which an agenda for future research into CPD. It explored the history of social work regulations the introduction of Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The findings of this research highlighted the lack of research into post qualifying awards, a lack of information about work-based and self-directed learning or participation, which meant that the effectiveness of post-qualifying education cannot be compared and whether CPD leads to greater improvement in practice.		ASYE Induction Regulation
Gordon Jack and Helen Donnellan	2010	Recognising the person within the developing professional: Tracking the early careers of Newly Qualified Child Care Social Workers in Three Local Authorities in the South West of England.	The study was focused on the experiences of social workers employed in children and families fieldwork teams in three local authorities. Recognise the person within the developing Professional by studying the transition of NQSWs from qualification to the first year in the workplace to consolidate the stage of post- qualifying training. *Strengths:* Themes were consistent across the sample and they echoed many of the findings from other studies involving NQSWs *Limitation:* The study focuses on the experiences of social workers employed in children and families fieldwork teams ; one type of organisational setting. The study was strongly skewed towards assessment	Empirical Study. 22 NQSWs started and 13 were part of the final sample who participated. 10 line managers participated	Confidence Job Satisfaction Reality Shock Workloads and Time management Coping with stress In- service training Continuing Professional development Personal commitment

			and management (safeguarding children) and not preventative. Relatively small sample size. Restricted to one geographical area ***Ethics:*** No issues identified and ethics consent gained. ***Reference:*** JACK, Gordon and DONNELLAN, Helen (2010) Recognising the Person within the developing Professional: Tracking the Early Careers of Newly Qualified Child Care Social Workers in Three Local Authorities in England, Social Work Education.		
Marsh and Triseliotis	1996	This a study which is documented as book titled, Ready to Practise: Social Workers and Probation Officers: Their Training and First Year in Work.	The aim was to evaluate the extent to which new social workers and probation officers felt themselves and were considered by their supervisors to be ready to practice as a result of their training and their first year in work. This study had a national focus on social work provision across the Uk. NQSWs felt prepared for practice, satisfied with their teaching and education programme, very good support from the informal and formal sources. Divergence between managers perceptions of NQSW perceived learning and supervision. ***Strengths:*** The sample size of the students was large enough. It is a mixed methods study. Repeated measure design. Good response rate.	Mixed methods Mail questionnaire (n=714), and 60 semi-structured interviews Followed up work-based questionnaire	Supervision Induction and inservice training Values Placements Professional Education Readiness to practice Effectiveness of training Overall satisfaction with social work education and

			Limitation: As the book looked to address readiness to practice; the study was skewed as it interviewed students, supervisors but did not include academic/ tutors who are responsible for getting the students practice ready. Sample size included probation officers as well. Time of study- given the social context between 1992-1994. Self-directed sample for semi-structured interviews. *Ethics:* No issues mentioned *Reference:* MARSH Peter and TRISELIOTIS John (1996).Ready to Practice? Social Workers and Probation Officers: Their Training and First Year in Work. Avebury. England.		teaching 36 social work tasks identified (instrumental and process elements) Induction
Jill Manthorpe, Jo Moriarty, Martin Stevens, Shereen Hussein and Endellion Sharpe	2014	The 'Making' of Social Workers: Findings from Interviews with Managers of Newly Qualified Social Workers	Social work education, social work practice and social work skills have been long-standing policy interests in England but the views of line managers of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) have not always informed debate. This article reports on interviews with 23 line managers which asked about their experiences of managing NQSWs. Interviews were held across a diverse range of local authorities in England between 2009–2010 and covered participants' general expectations of NQSWs and how far these have been met, or not; support and induction arrangements	Qualitative	NQSWs Social work managers workload caseload Induction ASYE

			for the newly qualified; and how the managers responded to variability among their newly qualified staff. The study participants present their management style as being combinations of modelling, workload and staff management, being open, and exercising their judgment over NQSWs. The researcher locate their findings within the wider literature highlighting the lack of attention paid to the experiences of social work line managers and the diversity that can be found within them.		
			Strengths: The participants were from all around England. They from different types of social work settings which allowed good comparisons between different social work settings; such as Mental health setting to Child Protection setting. *Limitation:* Sample size was a bit small. *Ethics:* None identified *Reference:* Jill Manthorpe, Jo Moriarty, Martin Stevens, Shereen Hussein & Endellion Sharpe (2014) The 'Making' of Social Workers: Findings from Interviews with Managers of Newly Qualified Social Workers, Practice.		
Jo Moriarty and Jill Manthorpe,	2012	Shared Expectations? Reforming Social Work	The article presents findings from a scoping review undertaken in 2011 to inform proposals for a review of social work qualifying curriculum in	Scoping Review	Skills Teaching Competency

		Qualifying Curriculum in England	England made by Social Work Reform Board. The review used published and unpublished sources to compare the issues raised by the report of the SWTF with what is known from published research investigating the ways that the current requirement for social work training. The research found that evidence base on which the key issues relating to the concerns about initial social work qualifying programmes was very variable. ***Strengths:*** Methodology was clear ***Limitation:*** limited amount of research was included ***Ethics:*** No ethical concerns ***Reference:*** *MORIARTY, Jo and MANTHORPE, Jill (2013) Shared Expectations? Reforming the Social Work Qualifying Curriculum in England, Social Work Education.*		Fitness to Practice Suitability Employer views NQSWs Policy
Nina Maxwell, Jonathan Scourfield, Meng Le Zhang, Teresa de Villiers, Mark Hadfield, Pau; Kinnersley, Liz Metcalf, Andy Pithouse and Sadia Tayyaba	2016	Independent Evaluation of the Frontline pilot. The evaluation aimed to assess whether frontline is successful in attracting high quality graduates,	This was a report on the evaluation of Frontline pilot. The authors explored the course curriculum and compared it to Step Up and to mainstream social work degree. ***Strengths:*** It considered most of the previous review and report by other researchers ***Limitation:*** The pilot was funded by DfE and I question if there was not an element of biasness from the researchers. It does not explore	Mixed method	social work values competency Workload Emotional resilient confidence

			whether frontline trainees would stay in the profession. Evaluation of trainees was not done in a real everyday practice encounters but in artificial environment. *Reference:* Nina Maxwell, Jonathan Scourfield, Meng Le Zhang, Teresa de Villiers, Mark Hadfield, Paul; Kinnersley, Liz Metcalf, Andy Pithouse and Sadia Tayyaba. (2016). Independent evaluation of the frontline pilot: Research report. Commissioned by Department of education		
examine the quality of the delivery of frontline and if delivery is to a high standard, and to measure how well frontline prepares participants to be outstanding social workers					
Lyons and Manion	2004	NQSWs and their experiences within employment. Snapshots – provide more enquiry into the 'fit' between social work education and practice since Marsh and Triseliotis study.	Overall satisfaction with social work education. Evidence of NQSWs feeling prepared for practice. Less prepared in skills which include interventions. **Strengths:** Longitudinal study Fixed questionnaire being used Included repeat-measure design Adequate response rate SPSS data analysis use **Limitations**: Lack of qualitative elements Only focussed on NQSWs Self-selection in the sample size – some biasness Fixed questionnaire No follow up with different qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to follow	Review Quantitative study Longitudinal – five years (1993-1998) Surveys (postal)	Social Work Education – satisfaction with data from 2003 study Bridge between academia and practice Competence Job satisfaction Professional development Stress Lack of supervision Skills less confident in was intervene and provide

			up main themes **Ethics**: No issues identified.		
Jonathan Parker	2006	Developing Perceptions of competence during practice.	The paper explore the concept of perceived self-efficacy as an indicator of development of competence during practice learning, examining whether self-beliefs in students competence do increase during placement and considering how this might be harnessed to enhance the experience and effectiveness of it. Findings from the study showed that students perceptions of competence within particular performance increased during placement. *Strengths:* pilot study was undertaken for reliability. *Limitation:* Represented by one geographical area. Small sample size *Ethics:* None was discussed. *Reference:* PARKER, Jonathan (2006) Developing Perceptions of Competence during Practice Learning. British Journal of Social Work.	Qualitative	Competence self-efficacy, practice learning, social work education
John Carpenter, Steven M. Shardlow, Demi Patsios and Marsha Wood	2013	Developing the confidence and Competence of Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers in England. Study explored the the	The aim of the study was to assess the development of competence and confidence for participants in a one year national programme of supervision and support for NQSWs working in children and families setting. The study also explore job satisfaction, stress role clarity and role conflict as variables associated with. Findings of this study showed	Longitudinal	Job satisfaction, NQSWs, Self-efficacy, Child welfare Social work education,

					Stress,
		associations between self-efficacy, demographic variables and other key outcomes for NQWSs	that self-efficacy ratings increased between the beginning and the ending. *Strengths:* This was based on outcomes of a national programme. Comparison of the study was completed with a contrast group. *Limitation:* The study was focused on child welfare setting *Ethics:* The research design and methods were approved by University of Salford Research Ethics Committee and the Department for Education *Reference:* CARPENTER, John, SHARDLOW, Steven, PATSIOS, Demi and WOOD, Mars,A (2013) Developing the Confidence and Competence of Newly Qualified Child and Family Social Workers in England, British Journal of Social Work		
Natalie Bates, Tikki Immins, Jonathan Parker, Steven Keen, Lynne Rutter, Keith Brown and Sheeran Zsigo	2009	'Baptism of Fire': The First Year in the Life of a Newly Qualified Social Worker.	The study aimed to track the learning and development needs of NQSWs through their first year in employment. Findings from the research highlighted the the perceived importance of statutory placement. *Strengths:* The study explored the perspectives of managers, service users and carers *Limitation:* This study was commissioned by Skills for Care South West. *Ethics:* The project was approved by	Longitudinal Study was carried out in South West of England	Placements NQSWs, Learning and Development, Social Work Education, Induction, Probationary

			the university's research committee and was endorsed by the research group of the then Association of Directors of Social Services. *Reference:* BATES, Natalie, IMMINS, Tikki, PARKER, Jonathan, KEEN, Steven, RUTTER, Lynne, BROWN Keith and ZSIGO,Sheeran (2009) 'Baptism of Fire': The First Year in the Life of a Newly Qualified Social Worker, Social Work Education		
Alison Domakin	2013	Are we making the most of learning from the practice placement	This study explores a mixed method in surveying practice educators' response on their perceptions of the social work programme and their views on how greater integration of academic and practice learning can be achieved. The findings of the study noted of the importance supervision with practice educator can play in integrating learning on placement with academic curriculum . The conclusion was that a greater focus on learning from practice may offer opportunities to maximise the learning potential of the placement as social work's signature pedagogy. *Limitation:* No scope in exploring student s, academic staff, service user or carers *Ethics:* Not discussed *Reference:* DOMAKIN, Alison (2013) Are We Making the Most of Learning From the Practice Placement	Mixed method	Placement, Supervision, Practice educator
Pia Tham and Deborah	2014	Prepared for	The article encompassed the views of	Longitudinal - qualitative	Fitness to practice,

242

Lynch		Practice? Graduating Social Work Students' reflections on their education, competence and skills	13 Swedish graduates on their education, competence skills and expectations for their future roles as social workers. The findings presented are to be used as a comparative data on how students in both Sweden and Australia perceive their social work education, their preparedness for work and the transition from education to practice. ***Strengths:*** Findings echoed previous studies such as the quantitative study completed by Tham (2007b) and Tham and Meagher (2009). ***Limitation:*** The paper encompassed the views of Swedish graduating social work students. Sample size was small ***Ethics:*** No issues identified*.* ***Reference:*** THAM, Pia and LYNCH, Deborah (2014) Prepared for Practice? Graduating Social Work Students' reflections on their education, competence and skills. Social WORK Education		Reflection, Profession, Students
Galvani and Forrester	2008	NQSWs feeling prepared in working with service users with substance misuse problems.	NQSWs feel less prepared in working with people who may have substance misuse problems. Lack of teaching on the social work curriculum. **Strengths:** Questionnaires included both closed and open-ended questions in the survey. Data coded with SPSS and thematic	Quantitative Email survey of 249 NQSWs in England (2006 & 2007) N=248	Perceived preparation for social work practice Perceptions of the importance of diffeernt elements in training CPD and training needs

243

			coding was applied to the qualitative comments **Limitations**: Low response rate, not clear for how long a NQSW was qualified. No observable practice Focus mainly on substance misuse Reliance on self-selection No qualitative follow up via interviews or focus groups **Ethics**: No issues identified **Reference**: Galvani,S. and Forrester, D. (2008) what works in training social workers about drug and alcohol use? A survey of student learning and readiness to practice. Final report for the Home Office (October 2008). London: Home Office.		Ongoing learning Lack of teaching imput on the curriculum Self-rated preparedness is not actual preparedness Confidence measure
Frost, E,. Hojer,S. and Campanini,A	2013	Views of social work students from three different welfare regimes. An analysis of social work students competence and how these impact on the countries. Social work education,	**Strengths:** Rich qualitative data Perspective from students Comparison study **Limitations**: Small sample Lack of quantitative data Self-reporting Lack of empirical study **Ethics:** No mentioned issues regarding consent **Reference**: Frosts, E., Hojer, S. and Campanini, A. (2013) Readiness for practice: social	Qualitative study Phenomenological approach.	Social work education Preparedness for practice Personal growth and development Theory and practice Role of placement Reflection Comparison study Self-efficacy

		reflection and similarities.	work students' perspectives in England, Italy, and Sweden. European Journal of Social Work, 16(3), pp327-343,		
Preston-Shoot, Michael	2004	Survey the process of change within the wider policy modernisation agenda.	**Strengths**: Comprehensive review of the changing landscape of social work education and policy influence **Limitation**s: No primary research **Ethics:** None identified **Reference:** Preston-Shoot, M. (2004) Responding by degrees: surveying the education and practice landscape. Social Work Education, 23(6), pp667-692	Review survey	Social work education Role of placement Change management Social work landscape Readiness for practice Interprofessional education Competence for practice Organisation culture Critique skills development
Orme,J.MacIntyre,G., Green Lister,P., Cavenagh, K., Crisp, B.R, Hussein,S.,Manthorpe,J., Moriarty,J., Sharpe, E. and Steven,M.	2009	Evaluation of the new social work degree	**Strengths:** **Limitations:** **Ethics:** **Reference**: Orme,J.MacIntyre,G., Green Lister,P., Cavenagh, K., Crisp, B.R, Hussein,S.,Manthorpe,J., Moriarty,J., Sharpe, E. and Steven,M.What a difference a degree makes: the evaluation of the new social work degree in England, British Journal of Social Work, vol.39, no.1,pp.167-178		Social work education Different models Changing landscape Teaching and assessment Role of placement Readiness for practice Critical reflection Linking theory into practice
Grant, S,. Sheridan, L. and Webb, S.	2016		NQSWs feel prepared by social work education. Less supported by employers regarding CPD. Good quality induction, supervision.	Quantitative study Online survey (n=205) Study commissioned : Scottish Social Service	NQSWs experiences, Scotland study. Social work education and

			Strengths: Mixed methods study Triangulation of data Good response rate **Limitations:** Empirical data **Ethics:** No issues or problems identified **Reference:** Grant, S, Sheridan, L., and Webb, A.S. (2016) Newly Qualified Social Workers' Readiness for Practice in Scotland. British Journal of Social Work. 0, pp1-20	Council – strategic review of social work education Mixed methods design	training Competence Preparedness Skills development Supervision CPD training Induction Professional identity and social work tasks
Narhi, Kati	2002	Action research project Aimed at exploring the practitioners' own descriptions of their knowledge and expertise on the theme of spatial marginalization – Fiendish study	Explore community –based social workers descriptions of their knowledge and expertise on spatial marginalization. Service users influence and experience, constructing values and morals, importance on doing and in action. **Strength:** Rich qualitative data, self-response rate **Limitation:** No empirically based resarch Finish students **Ethics**: None mentioned **Reference:** Narhi, K. (2002) Transferable and Negotiated Knowledge: Constructing Social Work Expertise for the Future. Journal of Social Work, 2(3): pp 317-335	Action research Finish students Longitudinal study Mixed methods study Interviews, observations, participants writing	Constructing knowledge in knowing that and knowing how. Peer learning Reflective practice Transferability of shared knowledge

| Wilson Watt, J | 1998 | Developing Social work education in the Baltic states and Poland; students assess their programmes | **Strengths:** Focus groups – rich qualitative data Good response rate **Limitations:** No quantitative data Some biasness with respondents and might be more motivated and determined Baltic state and Poland students Only three questions developed for the focus group **Ethics:** Funded by Soros Foundation No ethical issues identified **Reference:** Wilson Watt, J. (1998) Social Work education in the Baltic states and Poland: Students assess their programmes. International Social Work, 41, pp103-113 | Qualitative study Focus groups Baltic states and Poland Two focus groups | Social work education Theoretical competence Observational experience Interpersonal learning Satisfaction with the programme More placement opportunities Varied teaching and learning tasks Skills development in dealing with conflict Core social work values |

Appendix 2 Pre- and post-test questionnaire

Social Work Students: Readiness for Practice Learning One Survey Pre-Placement One Learning Experience. Thank you for taking time to answer this survey. Marelize Joubert

Your Student Number:
Your Gender:
Your Age:
Your Ethnicity:
Do you have a disability?:   Yes   No   N/A

Q1. I feel confident and prepared for my first placement learning one experience? *(Please Rate the following statement; and circle the statement that represents your view.)*

5 = Strongly agree   4 = Agree   3 =Disagree   2 = Strongly Disagree   1 = N/A

Q2. If Disagree, please specify?

Comment:

Q3. What factors, help you to prepare / be ready for placement learning one? *(Please circle as many statements that represent your view)*

Personal Qualities: Time :   Support: Tutorials :   Placement information: Content of the readiness for practice module: Content of the skills days: Other (Please specify)

Comment:

Q4. What are the factors, which most hinder your readiness for placement one? *(Please circle as many of the statements that represent your view)*

My Time Table: Time Management: Work / load commitment: Personal commitment: Personal Qualities: Lack of support / interest / awareness / : Content of the first year programme: Content of the skills days: Assessment Load on the course **:** Other (Please specify)

Comment:

Q5. In your view, do you feel you have developed the relevant skills and knowledge during your first year on the social work course to help you to feel prepared for you placement one experience? **Yes / No**   (*Please circle*)

Q6. In your view, how do you learn to be ready for placement learning one?

Comment:

Q7. Please rate the following elements regarding your readiness for practice learning one? *(Please mark with a X the statements that represent your view)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The skills days increased my interest in being a social worker				
I feel I have gained knowledge in linking theory to practice				
I feel more equipped to practice social work skills				
I feel able to put Social Work values into practice				
I feel able to communicate with service users and or carers				

Q8. Please rank the skills and knowledge you feel prepared you the most for placement learning one *(Please rank them in order of 1 = Mostly Prepared and 2= Prepared)*	1 = Mostly Prepared 2 = Prepared
1. Office and Recording Skills	
2. Rapport, active listening and empathy	
3. Clarifying, probing and challenging	
4. Assessment and Risk assessment skills	
5. Task Centre practice	
6. Motivational interviewing	
7. Solution Focused Interventions	
8. Personal Safety on home visits	
9. Safeguarding knowledge with children and Families / vulnerable adults	
10. Supervision, reflection and handling feedback	
11. Communication skills	
12. Roles, boundaries, consent and confidentiality	
13. Inter-professional skills and being a professional	
14. Transcultural communication	
15. Planning and Interventions with service users	

Q9. From the list above, please identify 3 skills or knowledge you think you may be unprepared for during placement (*e.g. assessment skills, communicating with others, advocacy skills, report writing etc.*)

Comment:

Q10. Have you any other comments about your experiences of the how ready you feel to go out on placement one?

Comment:

As part of my Professional Doctorate Study at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, I would appreciate your participation to take part in a follow-up interview. Would you be willing to be contacted by myself to take part in this project? (*Please circle*)   Yes   No   Maybe

Social Work Students: Readiness For Practice Learning One Survey (Post-Placement Learning One Experience) *Thank you for taking time to answer this survey.   Marelize Joubert*

Your Student Number:	
Your Gender:	
Your Age:	
Your Ethnicity:	
Do you have a disability?: Yes No N/A	

Q1. I felt confident and prepared for my first placement learning one experience? *(Please Rate the following statement; and circle the statement that represents your view.)*

5 = Strongly agree   4 = Agree   3 =Disagree   2 = Strongly Disagree   1 = N/A

Q2. If Disagree, please specify?

Comment:

Q3. What factors, helped you to prepare / be ready for placement learning one? *(Please circle as many statements that represent your view)*

Personal Qualities: Time :   Support: Tutorials :   Placement information: Content of the readiness for practice module: Content of the skills days: Assessment tasks for the readiness for practice module;   Other (Please

Comment:

specify)

Q4. What were the factors, which most hindered your readiness for placement one? *(Please circle as many of the statements that represent your view)*

My Time Table: Time Management: Work / load commitment: Personal commitments: Personal Qualities: Lack of support / interest / awareness /: Content of the first year programme: Content of the skills days: Assessment Load on

Comment:

the course **:** Other (Please specify)

Q5. In your view, did you feel you have developed the relevant skills and knowledge during your first year on the social work course to help you to feel prepared for you

If No – Please Comment:

placement one experience? **Yes / No** (*Please circle*)

Q6. In your view, how did you learn to be ready for placement learning one?

Comment:

Q7. Please rate the following elements regarding your readiness for practice learning one? *(Please mark with a X the statements that represent your view)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The skills days increased my interest in being a social worker				
I feel I have gained knowledge in linking theory to practice				
I feel more equipped to practice social work skills				
I feel able to put Social Work values into practice				
I feel able to communicate with service users and or carers				

Q8. Please rank the skills and knowledge you feel prepared you the most for placement learning one *(Please rank them in order of 1 = Mostly Prepared and 2 = Prepared)*	1= Mostly Prepared 2= Prepared
1.Office and Recording Skills	
2.Rapport, active listening and empathy	
3.Clarifying, probing and challenging	
4.Assessment and Risk assessment skills	
5.Task Centre practice	
6.Motivational interviewing	
7.Solution Focused Interventions	
8.Personal Safety on home visits	
9.Safeguarding knowledge with children and Families / vulnerable adults	
10.Supervision, reflection and handling feedback	
11.Communication skills	
12.Roles, boundaries, consent and confidentiality	
13.Inter-professional skills and being a professional	
14.Transcultural communication	
15.Planning and Interventions with service users	

Q9. From the list above, please identify 3 skills or knowledge you felt unprepared for during placement one. (*e.g. assessment skills, communicating with others, advocacy skills, report writing etc.*)

Comment:

Q10. Have you any other comments about your experiences of "how ready you felt to go out on placement one?"

As part of my Professional Doctorate Study at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ I would appreciate your participation to take part in a follow-up interview. Would you be willing to be contacted? Please circle.

Yes	No	Maybe

Appendix 3 Interview schedule

Stage	Question	Comments or prompts	Material used
1	(Identify three cards). Find a photograph or image that depicts how you feel about your readiness to practise at the moment. Now describe it and try to summarise what this means for you.	Layout of cards Ask for consent to take a photograph of the drawing and cards. Discuss specifics	Cards, Take a photo of the card.
2	Think about your development over the last three years. Now try to depict this visually – for example as a story mountain or tell us about your journey on the course?	Discuss in general, Feelings, experiences, resources etc. Transition, managing change	Paper, pens, shout outs, take a picture
3	What helped you to prepare for placement?	Discuss in general, Skills days? Learning styles?	Recording equipment
4	What does readiness to practise or preparation for placement mean to you?	Where, when, why, how, what do they access?	Recording equipment
5	Reflect on the best placement experience for Placement learning one or two.	What skills and knowledge do they access?	Recording equipment
6	Tell me about your worst experience during placement?	General, experiences, feelings.	Recording equipment
7	What are your greatest fears and concerns about being ready for practice?	General to specific. Knowledge skills statements for social work /employability	Recording equipment

Appendix 4 Project approval ethics form (both sites)

Sheffield Hallam University

GT/RDSC
11 December 2014

Tel no: 0114 225 4047
E-mail: rdscadmin@shu.ac.uk

Mrs M Joubert
9 Forres Road
Crookes
Sheffield
S10 1WD

Dear Mrs Joubert

Application for Approval of Research Project and Supervisory Team

Your application for approval of research programme was considered by the Chair of the Research Degrees Sub-Committee on 8 December 2014 and I am pleased to inform you that it was approved. Please find attached rapporteurs' comments for your information.

The next stage for you will be the Approval of the Examiners and Doctorate Project Report title for Award of the Doctorate in Professional Studies. These details should be proposed on form DPS3 by your Director of Studies, and submitted to the Graduate Studies Team at least 4 months in advance of submission of your doctoral project report. In your case we would expect to receive a DPS3 no later than 26 April 2019, you will no doubt wish to discuss this with your Director of Studies. Your registration details are also attached.

If you have any queries, please contact Student Systems and Records (Research Degrees) based at City Campus, using the contact details above.

Yours sincerely

Secretary
Research Degrees Sub-Committee

cc   Director of Studies
      Head of Programme Area (Research Degrees)
      Research Administrator

Enc

Email copy on the 17th January 2015 for Ethics Approval Site 2

Dear Marelize

Thank you for discussing this issue with me and for sending the documentation.

I am happy with the approval of your project's research ethics from your institution. I have made a note and I believe that you can go ahead with your research.

Good luck with it!

Best wishes,

██

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██████████████████████

██████████████████

Research Ethics Officer

Department of Social and Policy Sciences,

█████████████████████████████████
████████████████

Introduction form

Dear First Year Social Work Student

Project Title: *First Year Social Work Students Perceptions of their Readiness to Practice: A Mixed Methods Approach*

My name is Marelize Joubert and I am currently involved in a Professional Doctorate degree at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ looking at how ready first year social work students are for practice. The research project has been approved by the Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee at both ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and ▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮.   I enclose an information sheet summarising the project.

As part of this work, it would be very helpful if I could come and hear about your own experiences and perceptions of your readiness for practice whilst studying to become a social worker. I think the interview may take about an hour of your time and I would like – with your consent – to arrange a suitable time and venue to conduct the interviews. Any notes or recordings will be treated as confidential and will not be replayed other than for analysis of the questionnaires or interviews.

Thank you for your participating with this research and your participation is entirely voluntary.

Regards,

Marelize Joubert (Researcher) M.Joubert@shu.ac.uk

Study Sponsor: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title:

First Year Social Work Students Perceptions of their Readiness for Practice and to Practise: A Mixed Methods Approach

1.   The Aim of the Study

To provide a detailed exploration of the perceptions of first year social work student's preparedness and readiness for practice learning within the changing landscape in Social Work Education.

2.   How will we achieve this?

I would like to learn more about how ready you feel to practice social work in your placement, by listening to your experiences and capture your suggestions by completing a survey and participation in a follow-up interview. Your perceptions and experiences will be used to identify and inform important areas for action and to decide what improvements to make within the wider social work educational context.

3.   Who will decide what improvements if any should be made?

The feedback would help the academic staff team and management to identify areas within the current social work programmes for improvement and the actions that may need to be taken to support all parties involved.

4.   How can I help and what will this involve?

You can help by completing the questionnaire prior to placement one, and then if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview to further explore areas you may wish to discuss during an interview following placement.

5.   What would be involved for participating students?
- One hour of your time
- The opportunity to be involved in an interesting and important project to inform social work education - all voice recordings will be securely handled and will not be used for anything other than the evaluation
- Complete anonymity – only the researchers will know the names of the participating students and which social work education programmes they are on.
- Student data will only be used for the purposes of the evaluation, unless anything happens which makes us really worried about your fitness to practice, in which case we would have to contact your Programme Director.

6.   What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no disadvantages or risks from taking part in the study apart from possible talking about potentially emotional experiences. If anyone becomes upset when recalling their experiences they will be able to leave the room for however long they wish - and may even decide not to return.

7.   What if there is a problem or I want to complain?

If you have any queries or questions please contact: Principal investigator: Marelize Joubert Tel:xxxxxxxxxxxx m.joubert@shu.ac.uk xxxxxxxx University, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor: xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

8.   Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

I will check that the recording and the written transcript are the same. I will keep both the recording and the transcript on a password-protected computer. Identifying details will be taken out of any final report and any publications so people reading these will not be able to identify you or the situation talked about. The written transcripts and recording will be kept for 5 years after the project and then destroyed.

It might be that in the focus groups that something of concern arises relating to patient care. If that happens, I will consult with my supervisor to discuss what to do. I will act in accordance with my professional Code of Conduct.

The documents relating to the administration of this research, such as the consent form you sign to take part, will be kept in a folder called a site file or project file. This is locked away securely. The folder might be checked by people in authority who want to make sure that researchers are following the correct procedures. These people will not pass on your details to anyone else. The documents will be destroyed three years after the end of the study.

9.   What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be written up and form the main part of the dissertation for my D.Prof. The results may be written up for publication in professional journals or presentation at conferences. Participants will have some option to be involved in articles and conference presentations.

10.   Who is sponsoring the study?

The sponsor of the study has the duty to ensure that it runs properly and that it is insured. In this study, the sponsor is Sheffield Hallam University.

All research based at Sheffield Hallam University is looked at by a group of people called a Research Ethics Committee. This Committee is run by Sheffield Hallam University but its members are not connected to the research they examine. The Research Ethics Committee has reviewed this study and given a favourable opinion.

11.   Further information and contact details

If you require any further information please contact

Marelize Joubert Tel: xxxxxxxxx m.joubert@shu.ac.uk

xxxxxxxxxx University, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing

Appendix 6   Participant consent form

<div style="background-color:#8CC63F; padding:10px;">

Consent form for survey
(1 copy for participant and 1 copy for interviewer)

Study title: First year Social Work Students Perceptions of their Readiness to Practice: A Mixed Methods Approach

Chief investigator: Marelize Joubert - Interviewer or Gatekeeper
Telephone number: xxxxxxxxxxxx

</div>

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.   **YES / NO**

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time.   **YES / NO**

3. I understand that I can ask for any comments I have made in writing to be removed.   **YES / NO**

4. I understand that my comments may be used in different formats such as paper to share with others the benefits or evaluating social work education.   **YES / NO**

5. I understand that any of my comments may be edited and appear anonymously.   **YES / NO**

6. I agree to take part in the above study.   **YES / NO**

<div style="background-color:#8CC63F; padding:10px;">

Name of Participant: *Date:*   *Signature:*

Name of Interviewer: *Date:*   *Signature:*

</div>

<div style="background-color:#8CC63F; padding:10px;">

Filing instructions

1 copy to the participant
1 original in the Project or Site file
1 copy in the medical notes (if applicable)

</div>

Consent Form for Interview
(1 copy for participant and 1 copy for interviewer)

Study Title: First year Social Work Students Perceptions of their Readiness to Practice: A Mixed Methods Approach

Chief investigator: Marelize Joubert - Interviewer or Gatekeeper
Telephone number: xxxxxxxxxxxx

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.   **YES / NO**

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time.   **YES / NO**

3. I understand that I can ask for any comments I have made in writing to be removed.   **YES / NO**

4. I understand that my comments may be used in different formats such as paper to share with others the benefits or evaluating social work education.   **YES / NO**

5. I understand that any of my comments may be edited and appear anonymously.   **YES / NO**

6. I agree to take part in the above study.   **YES / NO**

Name of Participant: *Date:*   *Signature:*

Name of Interviewer: *Date:*   *Signature:*

Filing instructions

1 copy to the participant

1 original in the Project or Site file

1 copy in the medical notes (if applicable)