General
Social Care
Council

The supply of social work practice placements: **Employers' views**

Research report

Contents

Introduction

The General Social Care Council

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) is a non-departmental public body of the Department of Health which regulates the social work profession and social work education in England. It aims to protect the public by requiring high standards of education, conduct and practice of all social workers. The GSCC's functions will transfer to the Health Professions Council on 31 July 2012.

The GSCC's regulation of social work education involves a number of activities, including:

- accrediting higher education institutions (HEIs) to deliver the social work degree;

- approving social work degree courses; and

- ongoing monitoring of HEIs' delivery of the social work degree.

As part of undertaking the social work degree, social work students are required to undertake practice placements, periods of assessed work-based learning, which give students the opportunity to be involved in a wide range of social work practice.

The GSCC regulates social work education against a range of standards and requirements, some set by the Department of Health, some by the GSCC itself and some by the Quality Assurance Agency. With respect to practice learning these include:

- a minimum of 200 days of practice learning during a student's course with experience in at least two practice settings and experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions;

- for students to be assessed as competent and safe to practise by a qualified and experienced social worker; and

- for students to have their final assessment that they are qualified to practice undertaken by a qualified and experienced social worker.[1]

Following a decision from Government, the GSCC will close on the 31 July 2012 and the regulation of the social work profession and education will transfer to Health Professions Council (HPC). To reflect this, the HPC will change its name to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

As part of our continued commitment to the sector, we are working to ensure that the GSCC's knowledge of regulating the social work profession is not lost and is captured in two research reports, of which this is one. The research reports are: **The supply of social work practice placements: Employers' views**; and **The inspections of Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) courses**. We will also publish three learning reports: **Regulating social workers**; **Regulating social work education**; and **Involving service users**. These reports will focus on the GSCC's learning in key areas over the last 10 years.

We hope you find this series of reports a useful overview of our work over the last decade.

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1. The Department of Health's Requirements for Social Work Training and the GSCC's Accreditation of universities to grant degrees in social work can both be accessed from the GSCC's website at www.gscc.org.uk until 31 July 2012. After this date please visit the National Archives; www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Background to this study

The GSCC has been aware of concerns in the sector for a considerable period of time about the supply, quality and relevance of practice placements for social work students. Such concerns have not, though, been fully supported by the data that the GSCC gathers through regulating social work education and training.

The supply of placements is largely dependent on the 'good will' of employers. At present there is no requirement on employers to provide placements. The GSCC distributes funding on behalf of the Government to employers as a contribution towards their costs in planning, delivering and assessing students while they are on placement ('practice placement funding'). However, given that a large proportion of social work employers are within the public sector, there are concerns that the current restrictions on public spending may be placing additional pressure on the supply of placements. The GSCC has received such messages from HEIs and employers and it has been aware of media coverage of this issue.

Given this additional pressure, the existing model for ensuring that social work students are able to undertake a sufficient number of relevant placements of acceptable quality may be under strain. However, many of the concerns expressed in the sector regarding practice placements are 'anecdotal' in that there is little data to quantify the scale of any problem.

The GSCC has data on the demand for placements, through knowledge of the number of students enrolled on social work degree programmes. Further the systematic adoption of the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) tool, a set of quality assurance standards for HEIs to use in their auditing of practice learning placements, across the sector has helped to ensure that consistent data regarding the quality of placements undertaken is being gathered.[2] However, there is a lack of data on how the situation is perceived by employers who provide such practice placements.

In order to investigate how the supply of practice placements is perceived by employers, the GSCC decided to undertake a survey of employers who are involved in the provision of such placements and to complement this by undertaking a small number of more detailed case studies.

What do we already know about the supply of practice placements?

The GSCC collects data on practice placements through its routine regulatory activities. In 2006-07 the total volume of placements being undertaken by all social work students in England was 12,698. By 2009-10 this had increased to 13,802, the highest figure since the degree was introduced in 2003.

This overall increase in placements being undertaken is related to an increase in the volume of enrolments to social work degree programmes, with 2009-10 and 2010-11 having the two largest enrolments to the degree since its introduction. This means that the demand for placements has been growing in recent years.

Over the same period, the proportion of placements that can be classified as 'statutory' has decreased from 59 per cent (2006-07) to 54 per cent (2009-10) of placements.[3] It should be emphasised that this is a *relative* rather than *absolute* decrease – the absolute number of statutory placements provided has remained relatively stable (7,418 in 2006-07 verses 7,425 in 2009-10) although within a context of an overall increase in the number of all placements (statutory and non-statutory) being undertaken.

HEIs have always been required to monitor the quality of the placements students are undertaking as part of the degree. Since October 2010 it has been mandatory for HEIs to use the Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) tool. In 2008-09, a year when the GSCC undertook an in-depth look at practice placements through its annual monitoring, the general picture was that HEIs were finding it challenging to ensure all students undertook a sufficient number of relevant placements of an acceptable quality. However, in general HEIs were matching demand. Less than 1 per cent of placements that had been evaluated were reported as not meeting quality standards.

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3. Placements are designated as being 'higher rate' and 'lower rate' for funding purposes. This does not indicate a value judgement concerning the quality of the placements but, rather, indicates in which sector the placement is taking place, with 'lower rate' placements taking place in local authorities. There is currently considerable debate in the sector about what constitutes a 'statutory placement'. The definition of a 'statutory placement' used in this study is 'placements that give experience of social work tasks involving legal intervention'. It is likely that a lower rate placement will give students experience of statutory interventions, and the data on numbers of 'statutory' placements in this report refers to the categories in HEI annual monitoring responses.

Executive summary

Aims of the study

These were to:

- gain information from a range of employers on the supply of practice placements;

- compare numbers between 2009-10 and 2010-11 placements overall, with predictions for numbers of placements for 2011-12;

- consider increases/decreases of placements across regions in the survey and reasons for these;

- identify any particular issues for provision of designated 'statutory' placements; and

- identify any key issues for employers.

Methods used and response rates

An online survey was undertaken in late November 2011 using Survey Monkey, an online software tool, and a number of interviews with local authorities were undertaken in January and February 2012 to provide some sample case studies.

Of a potential 1,400 respondents contacted, 466 responses to the survey were received, a response rate of 33 per cent. The respondents to the survey were responsible for providing a total of 4,672 placements in 2010-11, estimated to be approximately one-third of all placements provided that year. Of these 4,672 placements, 3,709 (66 per cent) were 'statutory' placements, which were provided collectively by 198 of the respondents. This 3,709 equated to approximately half of all the statutory placements provided that year.

The limitations of this research are discussed fully in the methodology section at Annex B. However, it should be noted that whilst a 33 per cent response rate is good for this kind of research, it may be the case that those who did not respond would have given a different - perhaps more negative - picture of supply.

Summary of key findings

1. The majority of the 466 respondents to the survey reported that the number of placements their organisation provided between 2009-10 and 2010-11 had remained the same.

2. The total number of placements that respondents collectively anticipated that their organisations would provide in 2011-12 was almost identical with 2010-11.

3. The supply of placements amongst respondents has remained steady. However, this is in a context of increased demand.

4. One hundred and ninety-eight respondents provided 3,079 **statutory** placements between them in 2010-11, this being 66 per cent of all placements provided by respondents to the survey.

5. The majority of respondents providing **statutory** placements reported that the number of statutory placements their organisation provided between 2009-10 and 2010-11 had remained the same.

6. Respondents anticipated that the organisation they were working for would provide 3,194 **statutory** placements in 2011-12. This would be a slight increase from the figure they gave for the number of placements provided in 2010-11.

7. Amongst employers who reported that they had provided fewer placements in 2010-11 than in 2009-10, the most frequently stated explanation for this was a reduction in demand from universities. The second most common explanation, given by 25 per cent of respondents, was 'Restructuring/funding/staffing issues'.

8. For respondents anticipating an increase in placements between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the two most frequently cited reasons are 'responding to university demand' and 'organisational commitment to taking students'. Amongst those anticipating a decrease, 44 per cent attributed this to issues of restructuring, funding or staffing issues.

9. Respondents who reported a decrease in the number of **statutory** placements most frequently identified the reason for this decrease as 'Restructuring/funding/staffing issues', and this accounted for roughly a third of explanations offered. Amongst respondents reporting an increase, no single explanation stood out, with respondents giving a wide range of different explanations.

10. Regional variation was a noticeable feature of the results. Respondents from certain regions - particularly the East and West Midlands and Yorkshire - were far more likely to report a decline in provision over the period covered by the research.

The case studies largely complement the survey findings. What came across most clearly from the former was that many local authorities are deeply committed to providing practice placements and are ensuring that supply increases or at least does not decline. Important factors identified here were a strong leadership commitment to providing placements, and the embedding of a learning culture throughout an organisation.

Another theme recurring in the research was the important link that many employers made between providing placements and recruiting social workers. The fact that many employers do not believe that they will be recruiting many social workers soon is an additional factor placing a strain on supply, the important link that many employers made between providing placements and recruiting social workers. The fact that many employers do not believe that they will be recruiting many social workers soon is an additional factor placing a strain on supply.

Summary of key issues identified by employers

In a free text question at the end of the survey respondents were given the opportunity to make any further comments they wanted regarding the provision of practice placements for social work students.

1. The most frequently made comment was that having a student on placement within an organisation was a positive experience for that organisation, particularly in terms of bringing in new ideas and providing staff with their own learning experience.

2. The current pressures that organisations are under is making it increasingly difficult to maintain the current supply of practice placements.

3. Some respondents found communication from universities poor, particularly when their placements were not being used, or in terms of the notice period given before a placement commenced.

4. There is considerable concern regarding changes to the requirements around practice educators.

5. The daily placement fee is crucial to the continued supply of placements for a number of organisations and any reduction or removal of this would cause serious problems.

6. There are strong, but often contrasting views, regarding the value of non-statutory placements and what proportion of placements undertaken by social work students should be statutory.

Conclusions

Certain factors were identified by respondents as being particularly important in ensuring practice placement provision. These included:

- practice placement funding. Many respondents identified this as crucial to continued supply;

- senior leadership commitment to placement provision. A number of respondents identified the importance of having senior management in place who considered involvement in practice placement provision positively;

- the embedding of a learning culture in an organisation. For instance supporting social workers to undertake Enabling Others[4] links to taking students on placements; and

- a close relationship between HEIs and employers, including involvement in the planning of placements.

Looking forward

Since the publication of the Social Work Task Force's final report in December 2009, considerable work has taken place to deliver on its recommendation "that new arrangements be put in place to provide sufficient high quality practice placements, which are properly supervised and assessed, for all social work students".[5] Amongst the key reforms being implemented to meet this objective are:

- the development and use of a set of principles for partnerships between HEIs and employers;

- linking assessment of progression and outcomes on placements to the newly developed Professional Capabilities Framework;

- the introduction of a framework for practice educators, which identifies requirements that practice educators must meet in order to be involved in practice placements;

- adherence to criteria identifying that students should have access to different experiences in the first and last placements, across a range that includes settings, service user groups, ages and methods;

- adherence to criteria identifying how the student's final placement must prepare students for the statutory aspects of a social worker's role.

These reforms can be read about in more detail on the Social Work Reform Board's website.[6] The College of Social Work is currently playing a central role in taking these reforms forward.[7] Further a social work supply-and-demand model has now been developed and is hosted by the Centre for Workforce Intelligence.[8]

The research suggests that the current model for ensuring the supply of practice placements is under considerable strain. Increased planning would appear to have a central role to play in strengthening this model. The full implementation of the Social Work Reform Board's reforms and utilisation of the social worker supply-and-demand model would ensure considerable progress in this respect. The consistent involvement of employers in the planning of placement provision would seem crucial to ensuring a greater match between supply and demand.

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4. A module within the GSCC's post-qualifying framework, focused on preparing social workers to enable the learning of others. Social workers studying this are expected to supervise and contribute to student assessment as part of this.
5. Available at: **www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/01114-2009DOM-EN.pdf**
6. The Social Work Reform Board's website can be accessed at: **www.education.gov.uk/swrb**
7. The College of Social Work's website can be accessed at: **www.collegeofsocialwork.org**
8. See: **www.cfwi.org.uk/workforce-planning-news-and-review/workforce-planning-for-social-workers-2013-a-supply-and-demand-model**

Section one: Research findings

1 A. Number of placements (statutory and non-statutory) provided

The rest of this report sets out in detail the findings from the research. The structure broadly follows that of the questionnaire for the survey, with the case studies being placed in amongst this text.

Summary: Four hundred and sixty six responses to the survey were received. The respondents to the survey were collectively responsible for providing a total of 4,672 placements in 2010-2011.
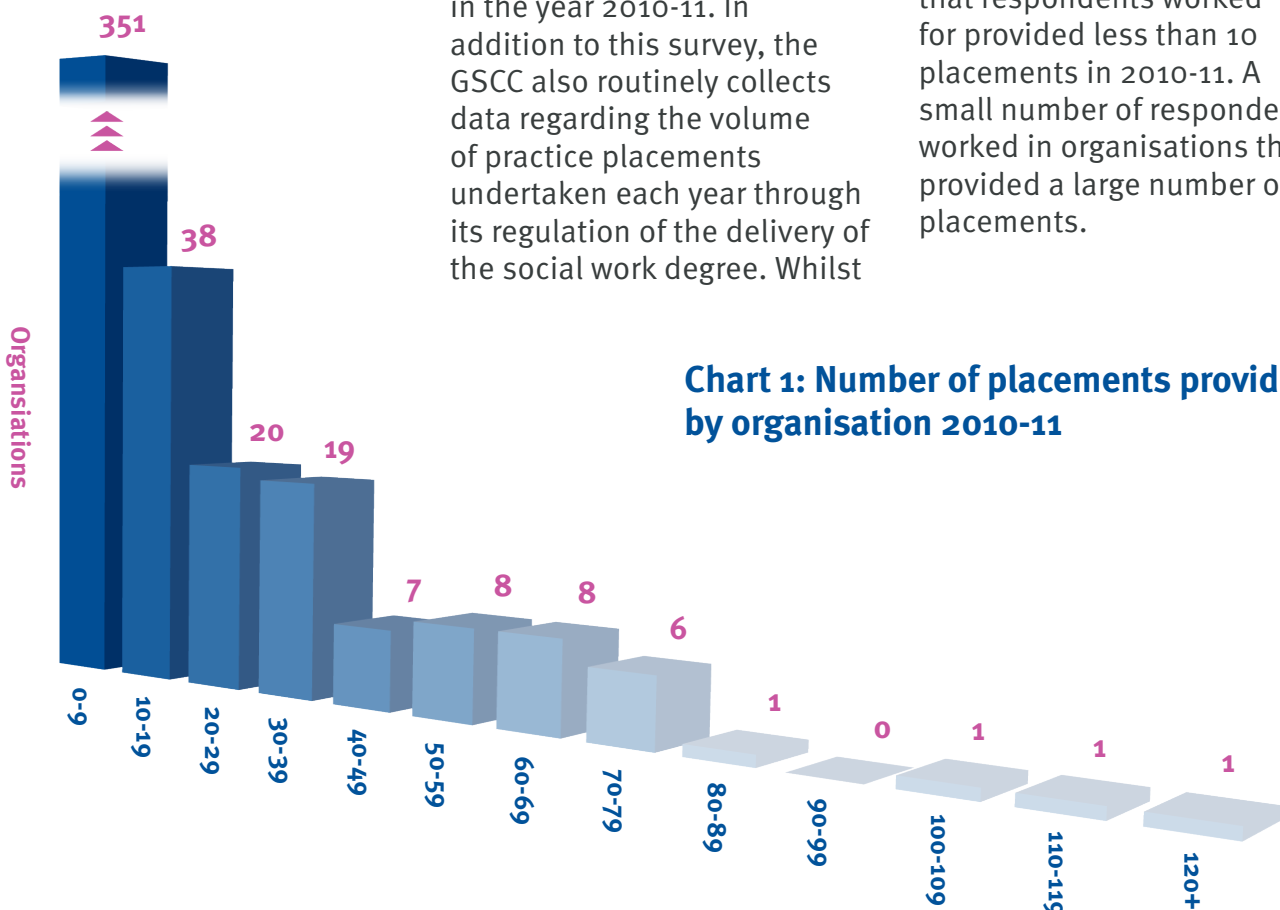
Placements provided in 2010-11

We asked how many practice placements (statutory and non-statutory) the organisation the respondent worked for had provided in the most recent completed academic year 2010-11.

Collectively the 466 respondents to the survey reported that the organisations they work for provided 4,672 placements in the year 2010-11. In addition to this survey, the GSCC also routinely collects data regarding the volume of practice placements undertaken each year through its regulation of the delivery of the social work degree. Whilst the figure for the total number of placements undertaken by all social work students in 2010-11 is not yet available, the data we hold is that the average number of placements per year between 2006-07 and 2009-10 was 13,513. This would suggest that respondents to this survey accounted for organisations providing more than one third of all placements undertaken in England in 2010-11 (35 per cent).[9]

The majority of organisations that respondents worked for provided less than 10 placements in 2010-11. A small number of respondents worked in organisations that provided a large number of placements.

Chart 1: Number of placements provided by organisation 2010-11

Organsiations

351
38
20
19
7
8
8
6
1
0
1
1
1

0-9
10-19
20-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60-69
70-79
80-89
90-99
100-109
110-119
120+

9. This figure is likely to be higher than the true figure due to the way in which the data was collected. Please see Appendix B for further information.

Looking back – comparing number of placements provided in 2010-11 with 2009-10

We asked whether there was any change in the number of practice placements provided by the organisation the respondent worked for between 2009-10, the next most recent completed academic year, and 2010-11.

Fifty-one per cent of respondents reported that the amount of placements they provided between 2009-10 and 2010-2011 had remained the same. Twenty-five per cent of respondents reported an increase in the provision of placements from 2009-10 to 2010-11 whilst twenty-four per cent reported that there had been a decline in this period.

However, it is noticeable that roughly half of respondents reported that in a one-year period the volume of placements their organisation was providing had changed. Further, the overall picture of stability can also be contrasted with the situation in different regions.

Looking at a regional level, a more complex picture emerges. Respondents from certain regions, particularly the East and West Midlands were the most likely to report a decline in their provision of placements between 2009-10 and 2010-11 than any other regions. For the East Midlands almost half of respondents, 46 per cented such a decline.

Summary: The majority of the 466 respondents to the survey reported that the number of placements their organisation provided between 2009-2010 and 2010-11 had remained the same. Amongst respondents to this survey, there is not support for reports of increased problems with the supply in the provision of practice placements for the period 2009-10 to 2010-11. However, respondents from certain regions were more likely to report a decline.

Table 1: Change in the volume of placements 2009-10 to 2010-11 by region[10]

Region (total)	Less	Same	More	Total
East Midlands	12 (46%)	7 (27%)	7 (27%)	26
East of England	7 (26%)	18 (67%)	2 (7%)	27
London	24 (30%)	36 (44%)	21 (26%)	81
North East	11 (27%)	16 (39%)	14 (34%)	41
North West	20 (24%)	38 (45%)	26 (31%)	84
South East	23 (23%)	58 (59%)	18 (18%)	99
South West	17 (25%)	37 (55%)	13 (19%)	67
West Midlands	15 (36%)	18 (43%)	9 (21%)	42
Yorkshire and Humberside	13 (29%)	23 (51%)	9 (20%)	45

10. Note that a number of respondents' answers cover more than one region and, because of this, will be counted more than once in these figures. Compared with the overall figures, this has moved the data towards 'less'.

Summary: The total number of placements that respondents collectively anticipated that their organisations would provide in 2011-12 was almost identical with 2010-11.

Looking forward - anticipating how many placements would be provided in 2011-12

Respondents were asked how many practice placements they anticipated their organisation would provide in the current academic year, 2011-12.

Respondents collectively anticipated that their organisations would provide 4,654 placements in the current (2011-12) academic year. This is almost identical with the number of placements provided in 2010-11 (a decrease of less than half of one per cent).

However, this overall stability conceals considerable change at the level of individual employers, 55 per cent of whom predicted a change in the level of provision compared with 2010-11.

Twenty-seven per cent of respondents (125 out of 466) anticipated an increase, forty-five per-cent anticipated that there would be the same number of placements (210 out of 466) and twenty-eight per-cent (129 out of 466) anticipated a decrease.

Regional differences are also noticeable. Respondents in the South East anticipated an overall 11 per cent increase in placement provision, whilst those in the East of England anticipated a 6.3 per cent increase. In contrast respondents from the South West anticipated a 5.5 per cent decrease, those from the West Midlands a 4.6 per cent decrease and those from Yorkshire a 4.1 per cent decrease.

11. Due to the way in which the data has been collected, employers that provide practice placements in more than one region will have been double counted in this table. This explains why the sum of the column figures is greater than would be expected.

Considering the results over the period as a whole (2009-10 to 2011-12), no decline in the volume of placements being provided has taken place. At a national level, placement provision has remained steady amongst respondents. However, this needs to be considered within a context where demand has increased in recent years. Rising demand against static supply will create problems, unless other sources of supply can be identified.

Chart 2/table 2: Comparison of regions provision of placements, 2010-11 verses 2011-12
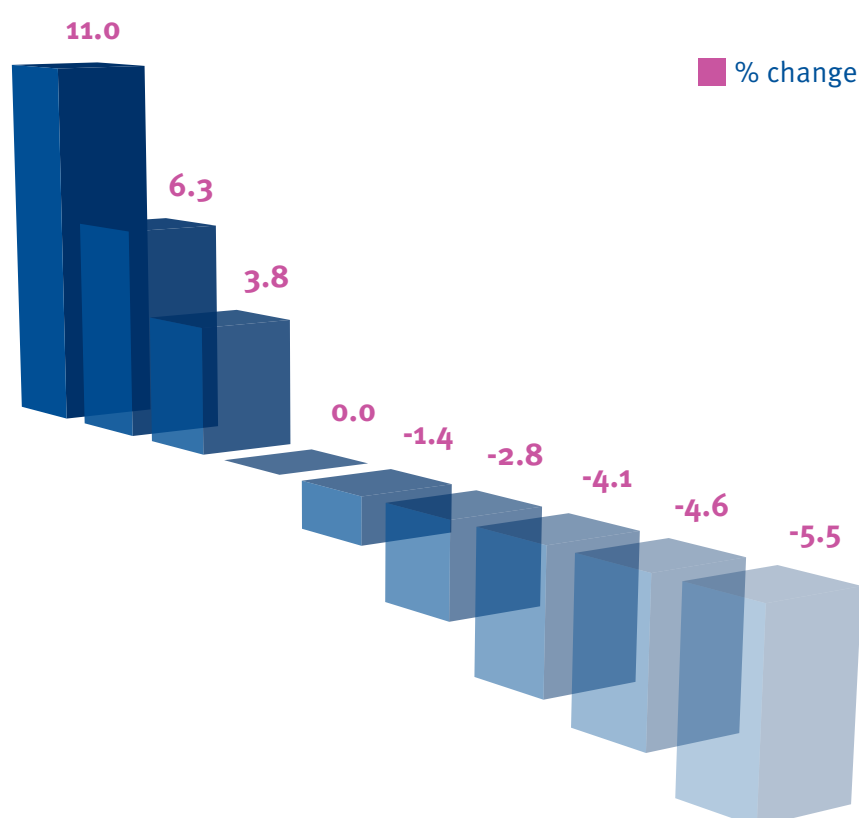
	2010-11		2011-12		
Region	placements	respondents	placements	respondents	% change
South East	753	97	836	94	11.0
East of England	334	27	355	27	6.3
London	940	79	976	79	3.8
East Midlands	656	26	656	25	0.0
North West	920	82	907	82	-1.4
North East	537	40	522	40	-2.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	436	45	418	45	-4.1
West Midlands	540	42	515	40	-4.6
South West	545	66	515	65	-5.5

Case Study 1:
East of England local authority A

Based in the East of England, the number of placements this local authority has provided over the last three years has remained steady. They hope that this will continue to be the case. With restructuring and redundancies, it has been challenging to keep placements at this level.

Senior management in the authority are, though, very committed to the provision of placements. The authority employs a dedicated practice learning coordinator, and has used social work development funding to develop practice educators. Students are recognised by senior management as bringing new skills and ideas to the organisation. Further, having students on placements in the authority is regarded as a recruitment strategy. Roughly a fifth of students who have placements in the local authority end up being recruited by the local authority.

In allocating placements, priority is given to the authorities' own employees who are undertaking social work training. They have strong partnerships with two local HEIs, who understand how many placements the local authority can provide. However other HEIs in the area recruit without identifying placements and then try to 'jump in' for placements without being willing to work at long-term relationships.

1 B. Number of statutory placements provided

Number of statutory placements provided 2010-11

Respondents were asked how many of the placements provided by the organisation they worked for in the most recent complete academic year, 2010-11, were statutory placements.

Due to the fact that there is a statutory requirement with respect to the placements that a student must undertake during their initial social work training, we were especially interested in the provision of statutory placements amongst survey respondents.[12] In this survey the definition of a statutory placement used was 'a placement that gives experience of social work tasks involving legal intervention'.

Out of all the survey respondents, 198 (42 per cent) provided statutory placements in 2010-11. These employers were responsible for providing 3,079 statutory placements in total, this amounting to 66 per cent of the overall number of practice placements provided by all respondents to this survey. The average number of the practice placements provided by each respondent was 19. This is higher than the average for all placements provided (statutory and non-statutory) reflecting the local authority provision of statutory placements.

Summary: One hundred and ninety-eight respondents provided 3,079 statutory placements between them in 2010-11, this being 66 per cent of all placements provided by respondents to the survey.

12. There is no agreed definition of what constitutes a statutory placement in the sector. The definition used in this survey was 'placements that give experience of social work tasks involving legal intervention'.

Summary: The majority of respondents providing statutory placements reported that the number of statutory placements their organisation provided between 2009-2010 and 2010-11 had remained the same.

Looking back - comparing the number of statutory placements provided in 2010-11 with 2009-10

We asked whether there was any change in the number of statutory placements provided by the organisation the respondent worked for between 2009-10, the next most recent complete academic year, and 2010-11, the most recent complete academic year.

Of the 198 respondents who provide statutory placements, 56 per cent reported that they provided the same number as the previous year, 23 per cent reported that this number was more than the previous year whilst 21 per cent reported that this was less than the previous year.

Summary: Respondents anticipated that the organisation they were working for would provide 3,194 statutory placements in 2011-12. This would be a slight increase from the figure they gave for the number of placements provided in 2010-11.

Looking forward - anticipating how many statutory placements would be provided in 2011-12

We also asked respondents how many statutory placements they were anticipating providing in the current academic year, 2011-12.

Collectively respondents to the survey anticipated providing 3,194 statutory placements in 2011-12. This is a small (4 per cent) increase from the number of such placements provided in 2010-11.

There were noticeable regional differences, though, with some respondents from some regions anticipating a decrease. Of all regions, respondents who covered Yorkshire and Humberside were most likely to anticipate an increase in statutory placements between 2010-11 and 2011-12. In contrast, respondents from the South East and South West were most likely to anticipate a decrease in statutory placements for this period.[13]

13. Due to the way in which data was collected, it is not possible to identify how many placements each respondent provided in each region, as some respondents provide placements in a number of regions. This explains the language used in this paragraph.

1 C.   Respondents explanations for changes

Respondents were asked to offer an explanation for the trends in placement provision that they had identified. Respondents were given space to give their explanation in their own words. The categories into which these explanations have been placed were developed during the analysis of this data, rather than the responses being placed into pre-determined categories.

Explanations given for changes in all placement (statutory and non-statutory) provision between 2009-10 and 2010-11

Respondents were asked to provide an explanation for why the volume of placements their organisation provided between 2009-10 and 2010-11 had increased, remained the same or decreased.

The 111 respondents who identified a decline in the number of placements that they provided between 2009-10 and 2010-11 offered explanations for why this decline had taken place. The category into which the greatest number (26 per cent) of explanations were placed during analysis was 'reduced/ no demand from universities'. Examples of such response include:

"We have not been approached to provide placements, we usually have to remind the universities that we have availability" and "no requests for placements from university".

It should be noted that in such instances we do not know the reason that the university has not approached these employers with a request for placements. It could be due to concerns regarding the quality or relevance of the placements these employers have provided in the past. However, these figures do suggest that there may be some capacity in the system - at least in some regions - that is not being utilised.

Summary: Amongst employers who reported that they had provided fewer placements in 2010-11 than in 2009-10, the most frequently stated explanation for this was a reduction in demand from universities. The second most common explanation, given by 25 per cent of respondents, was 'Restructuring/funding/ staffing issues'.

Chart 3: Categorisation of explanations for decline in the provision of practice placements, 2009-10 to 2010-2011

Reduced/no demand from universities	**26%**
Miscellaneous/unclear	**25%**
Restructuring/funding/staffing issues	**25%**
Other workplace changes	**8%**
Practice assessors not available	**6%**
Previous year untypical	**5%**
Time restraints	**3%**
Previous negative experience	**2%**
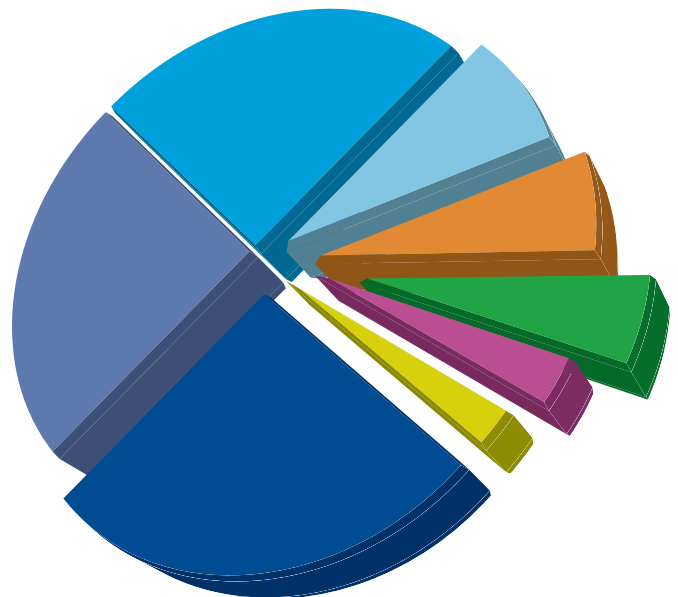
The joint second most common category (25 per cent) was 'Restructuring/funding/staffing issues'. Responses which referred to the restructuring of the organisation, to a reduction or removal of funding or increased workload/reduction in the number of staff were put into this category. These were responses were such issues were explicitly mentioned, such as:

"We didn't take placements because we were in a funding crisis with possible redundancies and I did not think that this was an ideal situation for a student".

It is likely that some of the other categories include responses which may be attributable to similar issues. For instance eight per cent of responses were categorised as 'other workplace changes'. For instance such responses included:

"Due to changes taking place in my organisation" and

"Change in management of organisation has made me choose not to have students anymore".

These issues could be due to restructuring or funding, however this is not explicitly stated. The situation is similar with some of the answers which identified a lack of practice assessors and with those that identified time restraints. The category 'Previous year untypical' mainly includes respondents reporting that the number of placements they had provided in the previous year (2009-10) had been exceptionally high, and that the last year (2010-11) had been more typical. Finally, two respondents reported previous negative experiences with students which had led them to decide not to offer any further placements.

In terms of those who had reported that their organisation

had offered the same number of placements in 2009-10 as 2010-11, the vast majority stated that this was the capacity available within their organisation.

Of those respondents who reported that there had been an increase in the number of placements they were providing between 2009-10 and 2010-11, there was considerable variation in the explanations offered. The most frequently cited reason was an increase in demand from universities. However, although this was the most frequently given explanation, this only covered 14 of these respondents (13 per cent). Other explanations included increase capacity (with the cause of this often being unspecified), and increased organisational commitment to offering placements.

Explanations given for anticipated change all placement (statutory and non-statutory) provision 2010-11 to 2011-12

We were interested in knowing why certain employers were anticipating a change in the number of practice placements that they were likely to provide.

In terms of the 28 per cent of respondents who were anticipating a decrease in the provision of practice placements between 2010-11 and 2011-12, 44 per cent linked this anticipated decrease to issues of restructuring, funding or staffing issues. This was the single most cited factor. Examples of such explanations include:

"We are in process of total re-organisation of mental health services; no-one knows where they will be working or even if they will have a job till the New Year. Placements for January students are therefore unlikely to be offered this year." And "Due to funding issues, we may be losing some staff and therefore might not have the staff to provide the placement support".

In 16 per cent of cases changes to the workplace were cited – for example staff members being off sick – and in 11 per cent of cases the reason given for the likely reduction in the provision of statutory placements was the fact that there was a reduction in, or no demand from universities for placements.

The 27 per cent of respondents who were anticipating an increase between 2010-11 and 2011-12 gave a wide range of explanations for this anticipated increase. The two most frequently cited reasons were 'responding to university demand', in other words existing capacity is being expanded to meet an increase in demand from universities for placements, and 'organisational commitment to taking students', in other words the organisation in question was taking active steps to increase the number of placements it could offer.

Summary: For respondents anticipating an increase in placements between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the two most frequently cited reasons are 'responding to university demand' and 'organisational commitment to taking students'. Amongst those anticipating a decrease, 44 per cent attributed this to issues of restructuring, funding or staffing issues.

Case study 2:
South East local authority

This local authority reported that whilst the volume of placements they provide in children's services has remained the same since 2009-10, the volume of placements in adults' services has declined. Adult services which were previously run directly are now commissioned, meaning fewer local authority locations where placements can take place. This trend is expected to continue.

The proportion of placements that the local authority provides that are statutory is also declining, with more placements being located in schools or health settings. The local authority believes that mixed placements - part statutory part non statutory - are likely to become increasingly prominent in future. In both adults' and children's services the preference is for more experienced students. It is believed by staff that they do not currently have the time and resources to offer the levels of support required by less experienced students.

The daily placement fee is regarded as essential to the continued provision of placements. It helps the local authority to pay for workforce development officers who play a key role in organising and supporting placements in liaison with HEIs. Having these roles in the local authority has helped to ensure that this local authority has strong relationships with the local HEIs running social work degree programmes.

The reasons given for changes in the provision of statutory placements 2009-12

The explanations given by respondents who had stated that their organisation provided statutory placements were looked at separately, to see if there was any distinctive pattern.

Amongst those providing statutory placements who reported a decline in the volume of placements, the most frequently referred to issue was 'Restructuring/funding/staffing issues'. Thirteen explanations made explicit reference to this issue. Examples included:

"Restructures within departments leading to uncertainty and increased workloads have resulted in fewer placements being offered" and "Due to restructuring and new ways of working, a number of teams have relocated or closed which has meant that are pool of practice educators has decreased'.

However, two thirds of explanations did not identify such issues, but rather gave a wide range of different explanations.

Of those reporting an increase in the number of statutory placements, their explanations for this increase were very mixed. Categories that responses frequently fell into included 'an increase in demand from universities' and their 'organisations commitment to providing placements'. There was also indications that in some cases the increase in the provision of statutory placements was linked to the Step up to Social Work Programme - a programme that provides an accelerated paid path into social work through MSc level study and extensive workplace training[14] and to the provision of a module within the post-qualifying award known as 'enabling others'[15]. Examples of the last two responses include:

"Previous year was nine placements. Additional capacity generated with the start of the first cohort of the Step Up to Social Work programme 2010-12" and "Additional students taken due to workers undertaking Enabling Others Module of PQ training"

Summary: Respondents who reported a decrease in the number of statutory placements most frequently identified the reason for this decrease as 'Restructuring/funding/staffing issues', and this accounted for roughly a third of explanations offered. Amongst respondents reporting an increase, no single explanation stood out, with respondents giving a wide range of different explanations.

14. A Children's Workforce Development Council programme that provides an accelerated paid path into social work through MSc level study and extensive workplace training.
15. A module within the GSCC's post-qualifying framework, focused on preparing social workers to enable the learning of others. Social workers studying this are expected to supervise and contribute to student assessment as part of this.

1 D.   Regional variation

Summary: Regional variation was a noticeable feature of the results. Respondents from certain regions, particularly the East and West Midlands and Yorkshire, were far more likely to report a decline in provision over the period covered by the research.

Regional change in number of placements provided 2009-10 to 2011-12

One recurrent theme in this report has been the regional variations in what respondents told us about the provision of practice placements. In order to explore this further, the data for the whole period covered by the survey were considered to identify in which regions respondents were most likely to report an increase or decrease in placements.

Looking together at responses for the period 2009-10 to 2010-11 and those for 2010-11 to 2011-12, respondents from the East and West Midlands and Yorkshire were most likely to report a decline in the volume of placements their organisation was providing for both periods. In contrast the South East and the East of England were least likely to report such a decline in provision.

Case study 3:
West Midlands local authority
(children's services only)

Due to a large scale re-organisation, this local authority was unable to provide any placements that could begin in the autumn of 2011-2012. However, it was able to provide the normal volume of placements it had previously provided that began in January 2012. For these placements, priority was given to Step-Up to Social Work students. The local authority would like to increase the volume of placements it provides but identified three main issues as preventing this:

• the general impact of reductions in funding and reorganisation;

• its belief that local Enabling Others courses are of poor quality, leading to under prepared practice assessors;

• that some students lack preparation when they come on placements, for instance having under-developed analytical skills. This means they require significant support.

The local authority is developing its links with the voluntary sector to enable the development of mixed placements, building a statutory element into what is primarily a non-statutory placement.

Whilst providing placements is difficult, the local authority is hopeful that it will be able to increase the volume of placements it provides implementing a strategy to establish a corporate learning culture. This includes:

• identifying dedicated practice educators without caseloads who can support teams across the local authority to undertake Enabling Others training, and can also support staff who have students on placements or NQSWs; and

• developing its own in-house Enabling Others course, accredited by a more distant HEI.

The daily placement fee was identified as being very important, allowing the local authority to support these activities. As noted, the local authority had some difficulties with local HEIs and was instigating interviews for placements because the student profiles given to them were not always reliable. The local authority stressed the importance of high-quality relevant placements in ensuring that students are employable.

Section two: Respondents' comments on the provision of practice placements to students

In the free text question at the end of the survey respondents were given the opportunity to make any further comments they wanted regarding the provision of practice placements for social work students. Respondents took this opportunity to raise and discuss a number of different issues. These are discussed thematically in this section.

2 A. Evaluation of the experience of being involved in the provision of practice placements

The issue most frequently commented upon by respondents was how positive they, and their organisations, found the experience of having students on placement to be. Respondents described this as being a symbiotic relationship between the organisation and the student. Through undertaking the placement, students were given the opportunity to experience social work practice, hence deepening their knowledge and understanding. At the same time, the students brought a different perspective and new ideas to the organisation. Working with students was described as a 'learning experience' for the organisation, with staff becoming more reflective about their own practice as they had to explain this to their students on placements.

Students were also described as making a positive contribution to the work of the organisation. Further, a number of respondents emphasised that they, and their organisation, were committed to the principle of being involved in training the next generation of social workers. A good example of such comments is the following:

"Students are a great asset to my team, they bring new ideas and allow us the opportunity to re-evaluate what we are doing and how we are doing it. It is great for the whole team to be involved in the overall process and enables staff development. Selfishly, it gives me an opportunity to test before I recruit and also to shape how I want social workers to be in the future".

This respondent, then, also regarded the provision of placements as an opportunity to have individuals working within their organisation who may subsequently be recruited by them.

Only one respondent described the overall experience of having students on placement as negative. However some respondents did comment that the knowledge and ability of students coming on to placements could be quite variable.

One example of such a negative comment follows:

"The level of ability of students coming to our attention is variable. The range of ability is not located to the type of degree they are doing. This year we have said no to some first placement MA and MSc students, whilst offering placements to strong second placement BA students. Some candidates, whilst making very good social care workers, are unlikely to make the grade as competent and able social workers".

" Students are a great asset to my team, they bring new ideas and allow us the opportunity to re-evaluate what we are doing and how we are doing it "

Case study 4: London local authority

This London-based local authority has been able to keep the volume of placements that it provides stable. The local authority is very committed to providing placements, but is finding it difficult to balance competing pressures within a context of a significant reduction in public spending. All the placements it provides are statutory. From their experience, pressures regarding statutory practice placements are more about an increase in demand, with more students studying social work, than a reduction in supply.

They expect that the number of placements they provide in the future is likely to remain the same or decrease. Factors that may lead to a decrease include restructuring in children's or mental health services. Supporting NQSWs, in addition to providing placements, is a challenge. Further, a desire to recruit more experienced staff is also guiding the local authority's use of resources.

Practice placement funding is crucial to their placement provision. Without this incentive they would loose all placements.

Being in London means that they have to manage relationships with a wide range of different HEIs. Trying to maintain these is resource intensive.

2 B. Current pressures

As has been discussed previously, whilst the actual number of placements, either statutory or non-statutory, provided by the respondents has not changed considerably during the period covered by the survey (2009-10 to 2011-12) the second most commonly made comment related to the pressures that organisations are currently under and how difficult this is making it to continue to provide the same volume of practice placements:

"It is becoming increasingly difficult to place students with qualified practice teachers. This is partly due to the continuing job uncertainty in local authorities, and partly due to the increasing workload pressure on experienced social workers - they are becoming less and less able to make the commitment that supervision requires, and still maintain their caseload and other supervisory obligations".

"If workload pressure and stress regarding cutbacks continues it will become increasingly difficult to provide placements yet alone quality placements where sufficient time can be allocated to students".

Linked to this, one respondent stated that the provision of practice placements was not currently a priority in their organisation, and again indicated that the possibility of recruitment is one motivation for the provision of such placements:

"In our agency we do not have recruitment/retention problems (no current vacancies) so participating in the training of new social workers isn't seen as a priority as we wouldn't need to recruit the students. We have a 'grow your own' scheme and prioritise our students for placements but again don't have qualified jobs for them to apply for".

66 **If workload pressure and stress regarding cutbacks continues it will become increasingly difficult to provide placements yet alone quality placements** 99

Case study 5:
English local authority*

This local authority has 'massively' reduced the number of practice placements it is providing, with these decreasing by two-thirds. There has been re-organisation of services, and adult services have lost a number of staff. At the same time demand for placements has decreased as local HEIs have cut courses.

Senior management in the authority do not have a social work background, and there is a perception among staff that social work is not regarded as a priority. This feeds into the resources and focus that is given by the local authority to the provision of placements.

The expectation is that in future the number of placements the authority is providing will decrease further. Further restructuring and rationalisation of services is anticipated. Trying to get staff trained up to meet new practice educator requirements is also regarded as a considerable challenge.

Despite these challenges, their relationship with local HEIs is strong. However, because they are unlikely to be recruiting in the near future, the incentive of being involved in student training for recruitment purposes is absent.

* The region for this local authority has been withheld to prevent identification

2 C. The role of universities

Another frequently commented upon area was the role of universities. A number of respondents felt that universities were recruiting students without consideration of whether placements would be available for these students:

"The increasing numbers of social work students on degree courses does not take into account that the number of placements (per teams in statutory settings) can not increase to meet the demand".

Similar comments were made with respect to whether job opportunities would be available for these students at the end of their training. However in this respect one respondent noted the difficulty of identifying what actual employer demand is:

"Statutory placements remain at a premium in order to meet aspirations of qualifying students. However, demand constantly exceeds supply. Difficulties [exist] in measuring [the] correlation between the numbers of qualifying students (and correspondingly the number of placements required), and local/ regional supply and demand requirements for NQSWs".

Conversely, however, a small number of respondents commented that they had available placement capacity that was not being used:

"We would be happy to support students but we are not getting any requests from the local universities."

"The university said last year that they had more than enough placements and so turned down our offer of an additional placement".

This links to another issue raised by respondents regarding universities. A number of individuals emphasised the strong relationship they had with the university they were working with:

"The relationship with the universities is very supportive and a genuine partnership. We as an organisation learn a lot from the students and off-site practice tutors".

However, some respondents felt that the universities they were working with were not particularly good at communicating with them, particularly when their placements were not going to be used:

"You do seem to get picked up by the uni when needed and no communication as a courtesy otherwise."

Similarly, a lack of sufficient notification in advance of a placement beginning was also identified as being an issue by some respondents:

"We are happy to offer placements, however we feel that there should be better planning to allow for planning when the students will start, not given one to two weeks' notice".

A small number of respondents made comments to the effect that the timing and length of some placements made these difficult to support:

"The timing of placements has created overlap of dates so that makes it difficult for teams to take more than one student per year i.e. student now on placement October/ November to March/May means that new students coming out in January cannot be placed easily".

"I could double the number of students I could place if the academic year was somehow split - and I could take a student in January and then one in July".

66 The increasing numbers of social work students on degree courses does not take into account that the number of placements (per teams in statutory settings) can not increase to meet the demand 99

Case study 6:
East of England local authority B

Based in the East of England, this local authority has managed to ensure that the number of placements it has been providing has remained stable. This has been achieved through embedding a strong learning culture throughout the organisation. All the placements that they provide are statutory placements.

Each team in the local authority contributes to social work education – for instance one will have a student whilst one will offer shadowing opportunities. This is built into social worker appraisals and it is a requirement that before a member of staff can become a senior practitioner they must have completed the Enabling Others module. The local authority operates an 'academy' for NQSWs.

Supporting students and NQSWs is seen by the local authority as part of a long-term recruitment strategy.

They expect that the number of placements they provide will remain stable, due to strong management commitment. A number of senior managers were previously practice educators, and they remain committed to the importance of the organisation providing placements. They put a lot of effort into the recruitment and induction process for students. Success requires such commitment, and they believe that strong partnerships are crucial.

2 D. The role of practice educators

Another topic which received a considerable number of respondents' comments was the role of practice educators. For a number of respondents, this role is not sufficiently valued in the sector:

"It remains difficult in current climate and should be valued more".

Forthcoming changes in requirements around practice educators were regarded with concern by some respondents:

"I am very concerned that as a practice educator without a social work qualification I will no longer be able to carry out this role. I have years of experience and understanding and feel that many skills will be lost if this goes ahead from 2013."

"Implementation of the Social Work Reform Board's proposals for enhanced requirements of practice teachers/assessors/educators would worsen an already difficult situation".

One employer noted that it was often the same person who was being called upon with respect to practice placements and to supervise NQSWs:

"Pressure on practice educators is also a factor as the same people are approached to supervise NQSWs."

In a linked issue, one respondent made a strong argument that there needs to be a cultural change around how practice placements are viewed in the sector:

"The provision of practice placements is very much reliant on organisations employing practice learning coordinators who are able to develop effective internal and external relationships/ partnerships with managers, teams and HEIs to provide good quality practice learning opportunities in which both students and practice assessors are fully supported.

It is unfortunate that in coordinating placements they are provided as a 'favour' to the placement coordinator. There needs to be a shift in culture within social work so that placements are not seen as an extra but as part of the role of experienced and advanced practitioners - after all every qualified social worker was once a student. Senior management also play a critical role in helping to create a culture of learning and development that includes social work students. It is not a mandatory requirement for organisations or teams to provide practice placements and as KPIs [key performance indicators] are no longer attached to placements, we need a cultural shift. Practice learning needs to be firmly embedded into organisational system".

> **There needs to be a shift in culture within social work so that placements are not seen as an extra but as part of the role of experienced and advanced practitioners - after all every qualified social worker was once a student**

2 E. The funding of placements

A further area that respondents commented upon was the issue of funding of placements. The placement fee was identified by a number of respondents as being crucial to maintaining the current provision of placements:

"With staff numbers decreasing, workloads increasing and the extra work needed to meet the new framework I anticipate that numbers will decline further. The only light is that the daily placement fee is still in place as if that goes, so does my post and then placements will drop entirely from team's priorities".

"All staff receive honorariums for taking students. If the daily placement fee stops or is reduced this will have a profound impact on number of placements".

One respondent noted that the value of the placement fee had remained static for a number of years:

"The placement fees we receive have not increased in over eight years. This represents a significant decline in value and makes it highly likely that we will not be able to sustain this level of placements in the future".

Further, some local authorities pay practice educators for taking students. This funding was also seen as being under threat under current conditions:

"Due to increased pressures within teams we can see that placements are reducing. If we decide as a local authority to stop paying practice teachers then I can see that we will not get any placements unless this can be implemented in job descriptions etc".

> **The only light is that the daily placement fee is still in place as if that goes, so does my post and then placements will drop entirely from team's priorities**

2 F.   Statutory and non-statutory placements

A different issue that attracted considerable comment was the relative value placed on statutory and non-statutory placements. A number of respondents objected to what they saw as the current low value attached to non-statutory placements, arguing that such placements have a lot to offer students:

"Placements should be graded on their ability to meet all key roles and present the student with the widest experience possible. Therefore the current dividing line between statutory and third sector placements is a nonsense".

"Students learn as much about child protection, child welfare and care planning here as they would in a statutory placement."

"I think it is an invaluable experience for statutory workers to do a placement in the voluntary sector."

However, a number of respondents took the opposite view, expressing their surprise that students coming to them had not previously had statutory placements, or emphasising how essential they viewed statutory placements as being:

"I think all social work students should have one placement in statutory placement" and "there needs to be more placements in the statutory sector, we have students who have done both work placements in voluntary sector".

> **I think it is an invaluable experience for statutory workers to do a placement in the voluntary sector**

Conclusion

Undertaking practice placements is a crucial component of social work education. Having the experience of undertaking social work tasks in a workplace environment, and being assessed on performance of such tasks, is an essential aspect of preparing a social work student for practice. The results from this research provide an important insight into employers' views on placement provision. In terms of the overall picture, the research identified:

- a general commitment from employers to provide practice placements;

- that employers were finding the present situation, with reductions in public spending, particularly challenging;

- a stable supply of placements being reported by respondents during the period in question. However, in certain regions respondents were more likely to report a decrease. Further, the stable supply needs to be considered in relation to an increase in demand for placements as enrolment to the degree has increased;

- where the supply of placements had decreased, the most commonly given reason was organisational restructuring; and

- involvement in placement provision was linked by employers to the recruitment of social workers. Where employers are not recruiting, this can reduce motivation to be involved.

Certain factors were identified by respondents as being particularly important in ensuring practice placement provision. These included:

- practice placement funding. Many respondents identified this as crucial to continued supply;

- senior leadership commitment to placement provision. A number of respondents identified the importance of having senior management in place who considered involvement in practice placement provision positively;

- the embedding of a learning culture in an organisation. For instance supporting social workers to undertake Enabling Others links to taking students on placements; and

- a close relationship between HEIs and employers, including involvement in the planning of placements.

The limitations of this research are discussed fully in the methodology section. However, it should be noted that whilst a 33 per cent response rate is good for this kind of research, it may be the case that those who did not respond would have given a different - perhaps more negative - picture of supply.

Looking forward

Since the publication of the Social Work Task Force's final report in December 2009, considerable work has taken place to deliver on its recommendation "that new arrangements be put in place to provide sufficient high quality practice placements, which are properly supervised and assessed, for all social work students".[16] Amongst the key reforms being implemented to meet this objective are:

- the development and use of a set of principles for partnerships between HEIs and employers;

- linking assessment of progression and outcomes on placements to the newly developed Professional Capabilities Framework;

- the introduction of a framework for practice educators, which identifies requirements that practice educators must meet in order to be involved in practice placements;

- adherence to criteria identifying that students should have access to different experiences in the first and last placements, across a range that includes settings, service user groups, ages and methods;

- adherence to criteria identifying how the student's final placement must prepare them for the statutory aspects of a social worker's role.

These reforms can be read about in more detail on the Social Work Reform Board's website.[17] A social work supply-and-demand model has also now been developed and is hosted by the Centre for Workforce Intelligence.[18] Further, the requirement that the sector uses the QAPL standards is ensuring that consistent data regarding the quality of placements undertaken is being gathered.[19]

The research suggests that the current model for ensuring the supply of practice placements is under considerable strain. Increased planning would appear to have a central role to play in strengthening this model. The full implementation of the Social Work Reform Board's reforms and utilisation of the social worker supply-and-demand model would ensure considerable progress in this respect. The consistent involvement of employers in the planning of placement provision would appear crucial to ensuring a greater match between supply and demand.

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16. Available at: www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/01114-2009DOM-EN.pdf
17. The Social Work Reform Board's website can be accessed at: www.education.gov.uk/swrb
18. See: www.cfwi.org.uk/workforce-planning-news-and-review/workforce-planning-for-social-workers-2013-a-supply-and-demand-model
19. Further information about QAPL, which was developed by GSCC and Skills for Care, can be found on the GSCC's website: www.gscc.org.uk/page/129/Quality+Assurance+for+Practice+Learning+(QAPL).html

Annex A - Practice placements survey

In the following survey 'last academic year' means September 2010-June/July 2011; 'previous academic year' means September 2009-June/July 2010; 'current academic year' means September 2011-June/July 2012. If relevant, please include Open University placement data in answers.

1. How many placements for social work students did your organisation provide in the last academic year?

2. How does the overall number of placements your organisation provided for social work students in the last academic year compare with the previous academic year:

    a) more than previous year
    b) the same
    c) less than previous year

3. Please could you briefly explain your answer to the previous question?

4. How many of the placements provided were statutory (i.e. placements that give experience of social work tasks involving legal intervention)?

5. If applicable, how does the number of statutory placements your organisation provided in the last academic year compare with the previous academic year

    a) more than previous year
    b) the same
    c) less than previous year

6. Please could you briefly explain your answer to the previous question?

7. How many placements for social work students do you anticipate your organisation will provide in the current academic year?

8. Please could you briefly explain your answer to the previous question?

9. If applicable, how many of these do you anticipate will be statutory placements?

10. Please could you briefly explain your answer to the previous question?

11. Do you have any further comments that you would like to make regarding the provision of practice placements for social work students?

12. Please indicate which of these geographical areas(s) your answers refer to:

    a) East Midlands
    b) East of England
    c) London
    d) North East
    e) North West
    f) South East
    g) South West
    h) West Midlands
    i) Yorkshire and the Humber

Annex B - Research methodology

Survey

The GSCC distributes funding for practice placements to HEIs. Through the administrative process connected to the distribution of this funding, the GSCC gathers an employer contact name and means of contact (email address or telephone number) for each practice placement. This information is collected in relation to each practice placement undertaken by a student.

This list of practice placements, together with employer contact names and means of contact for the 2009-10 academic year, is the most recently available data at the time, was used as the sampling frame for this survey.

The relevant spreadsheet has details for 13,802 placements undertaken in this year. It was decided that this was potentially small enough to undertake a census rather than a sample, especially given that further refining of this number would be undertaken, as will be discussed.

An initial decision was taken to exclude details for employers where a telephone number rather than an email address had been provided as the means of contact. As only one individual was working on the survey, the resources available would not have enabled potentially thousands of phone calls to be undertaken in a realistic timescale. This reduced the number of entries to 5,858.

Duplicate employer details were then removed, to attempt to ensure that each employer contact would only be contacted once. A considerable number of duplicates were present, as would be expected as one individual might be the contact for an employer providing a number of placements. This left 2,199 entrants. A small number of the 2,199 were duplicates which were retained where more than one email address, or versions of an email address, were given for the same employer and it was not clear which was correct.

The survey (see Annex A) was uploaded to the Survey Monkey website. An invitation email to complete the survey was sent to all 2,199 email addresses obtained from the sample frame on the 8 November 2011.

On the basis of the automatic email responses the sample frame was further reduced to 1,634 emails. On the 15 November, a follow up email was sent to these 1,634, again requesting completion of the survey. Emails were resent to addresses which had initially resulted in an 'unknown error' message, and attempts were made to correct addresses where 'email not recognised' responses appeared to have resulted from a mistake in the entry of the email address, such as replacing '.ogr' with '.org'. Roughly 200 hundred further automatic responses were received, indicating that a response would not be forthcoming. This would suggest that the number of 'actual' employers contacted was roughly 1,400.

The survey was closed on 26 November. In total 466 responses were received, 1 in 3 of the estimated actual addresses emailed. Respondents to the survey reported their organisations as being responsible for the provision of 4,672 placements in 2010-11. Considering this number in relation to the total number of placements provided in previous years would suggest that responses were received from employers covering roughly a third of placements provided. This is likely to slightly overstate the volume of placements, as there will be some overlap between responses from individuals working at different levels and different regions in the same employer who were both contacted for the survey. In other words, one placement might be included in more than one respondent's response. This was one limitation of the sample frame, which did not allow for the removal of such overlap.

Of these placements provided by respondents in 2010-11, 3,079 were statutory placements, 66 per cent of all placements provided by respondents for this year. This is higher than the normal average proportion of statutory placements per year, suggesting that statutory placement providers are over overrepresented in responses.

Reflecting on the sampling frame and the response rate, it is likely that the survey may not fully capture the problems relating to the supply of placements in the sector. Those who have left their positions since the 2009-10 data was gathered, and whose email addresses therefore bounced, may have provided a more negative picture. Further, it may also be suggested that those under the most pressure would be the least likely to have time to respond to such a survey. These are recognised limitations resulting from the nature of the sampling frame and the email self-completion method used.

Open comment responses from respondents were placed in categories using a 'grounded theory' approach i.e. instead of beginning with categories and placing responses into these, the categories were developed from the data.

Table 3 records the geographical distribution of respondents.

Table 3: Geographical distribution of survey respondents

Region	number	%
North West (1)	84	17
North East (2)	40	8
Yorkshire and the Humber (3)	45	9
West Midlands (4)	42	8
East Midlands (5)	26	5
East of England (6)	27	5
South West (7)	66	13
South East (8)	97	19
London (9)	80	16
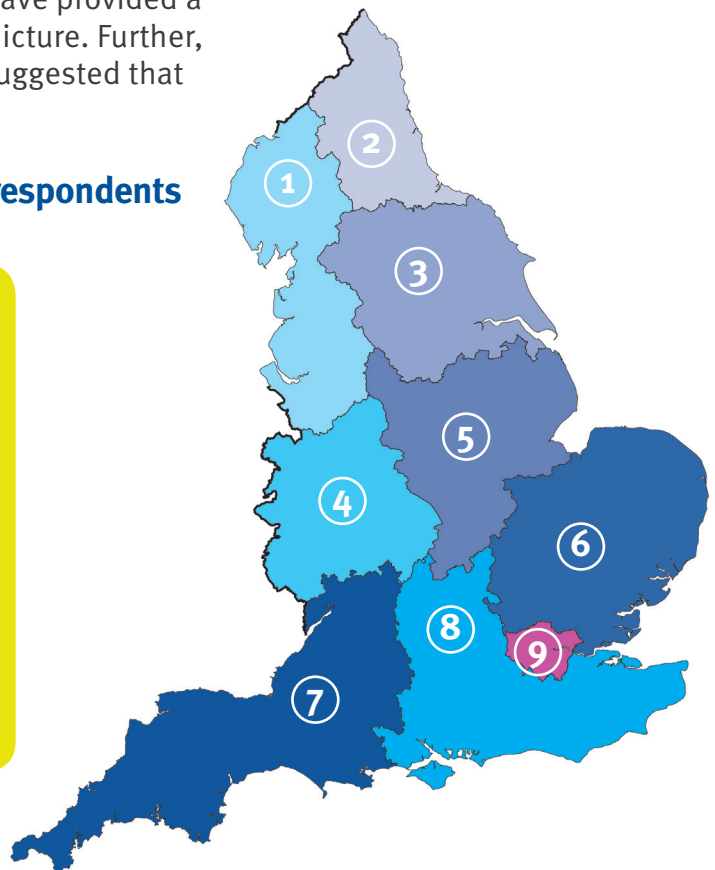
Some respondents covered more than one region, and are doubled counted in the regional analysis of results due to the way the data was collected. It can be seen, though, that respondents who cover the South East were the most numerous respondents to the survey, followed by the North West. In contrast the least number of responses were received from the East Midlands and the East of England.

Case studies

The case studies are a 'convenience sample' – in other words, they are in depth discussions arranged through contacts and are not probability sample of the employer population. An attempt has been made, though, to achieve a geographical spread with these, with only two case studies being undertaken with employers from the same geographical region of England. The case studies were conducted using a slightly modified version of the survey questions. Questions were asked regarding issues which had been raised by employers in the free-text questions in the survey.

These questions were used to conduct an interview with a member of staff from the local authority either face-to-face or by telephone and contemporaneous notes were taken. These were then re-written to produce a narrative presentation of the results. All case studies conducted have been included in this report.

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