Bournemouth University | The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work

NQSW Programme Evaluation

Hampshire County Council

Bournemouth University
The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work

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Executive Summary

The newly qualified social worker pilot programme was launched in September 2008 by the Department for Children Schools and Families and extended to all children's social workers in their first year of practice. The intention of the programme was to end of variations in competence and experience among NQSWs in children's social care by setting national outcome standards. From September 2012, employers and NQSWs have moved to a single Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme covering both the children and families and adults' sectors. Therefore, an evaluation of the impact of the NQSW programme was required to ensure that gains made from the NQSW programme were identified, as are specific areas of develop, in order to inform the development of new ASYE programmes.

The NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Worker) programme was designed to integrate newly qualified childcare social workers into a practice environment. Hampshire County Council adopted the programme in its pilot stages and has developed the programme further via the use of feedback. The programme underwent development during this period, in reaction to internal evaluation and feedback obtained from both those undertaking the programme and individuals supporting it in a wider sense.

Information regarding the development of the programme was obtained from an informal interview and supporting documentation with a key learning and development officer who were involved with the programme throughout this period. A request to participate was distributed to all NQSW's who participated in the programme through Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton, and Isle of Wight Local Authorities. Response rates for participation were low, therefore, a confidential online questionnaire was created to reflect the content of the telephone interview. Online questionnaires were distributed to the sample by Hampshire county council and these elicited four additional responses. The response rate was lower than that observed from comparable studies in the sector; the sample was also heavily clustered around a single authority involved in the programme, namely the Isle of Wight

The strengths of the programme were as follows:

- Supported integration and development in the workplace
- Applied theoretical/academic learning to practice
- Peer support and group learning
- Development of a professional skill set
- Affectively managed workloads and protective case allocation

The greatest challenge of the programme, as identified by CWDC, was engagement with the portfolio element of the programme. Whilst in general the portfolios were considered helpful in developing and reflecting on practice. The NQ's found portfolios exhaustive and time consuming, suggesting that they did not have enough protected time to adequately complete this element. There is also some debate as to the necessity of some aspects of the portfolio and whether these could be streamlined whilst achieving the same learning outcomes. There is strong evidence that the ability to be

critically reflective of one's own practice, either within supervision or by means of a reflective assignment/log is a key area of the programme, which allowed NQ's to integrate their learning into practice. The evidence suggests that there is a strong argument for key elements of the portfolio to be retained but reduced, with a renewed focus on the NQ's ability to reflect on, analyse and make critical judgements about practice, as emphasised by Monroe.

There is strong evidence that the NQSW period was a positive experience for Newly Qualified social workers. Particular strengths were noted within the taught programme and in regards to reflective supervision. Evidence also suggests that some of the recognised challenges of the programme were overcome through internal development. Although areas for improvement have been highlighted, overall practitioners reflected a strong developmental process that aided them in integrating their academic learning into practice in a safe and supportive environment.

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1. Aim

1.1. Research Aim

To evaluate the impact of the NQSW programme to ensure that any gains made from the NQSW programme are isolated and retained in order to inform the development of new ASYE programmes. This research project has been designed in order to gather information assessing the strength and weaknesses of the programme, and will also look to assess the development of the programme from the initial pilot to the final year before the transition to ASYE. The methodology has been designed to seek evidence of the long term impact on practice of Hampshire County Council's in-house NQSW development programme.

Research question: How has the NQSW programme prepared students for practice?

1.2. Overview

1.2.1. The newly qualified social worker pilot programme was launched in September 2008 and was rolled out in May 2009 by the Department for Children Schools and Families as the approved scheme and extended to all children's social workers in their first year of practice. The intention of the programme was to aid the end of variations in competence and experience among NQSWs in children's social care by setting national outcome standards.

1.2.2. Local authorities participating in the programme were asked to set aside 10% of NQSW time for training, provide fortnightly supervision and a programme of induction, support and development.

1.2.3. The NQSW programme has been available to all statutory and voluntary and community sector (VCS) employers within England. During its lifetime, over 97 per cent of local authorities and 17 VCS organisations have engaged with the programme and it has supported approximately 6,600 social workers.

1.2.4. From September 2012, employers and NQSWs have been able to benefit from a funded single Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme covering both the children and families and adults' sectors. (DfE, 2013)

1.2.5. Therefore a timely evaluation of the impact of the NQSW programme is required to ensure that any gains made from the NQSW programme are isolated and retained in order to inform the development of new ASYE programmes.

2. Background

2.1. Newly Qualified Social Workers

In 2008, the Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) identified a need to improve support for newly qualified social workers as they make the transition from student to practitioner. Research has identified both the importance of the Newly Qualified period in preparing for practice (Bates et al.,2009) and that greater investment was required in the form of a structured introduction package (Brown et al., 2007). The DCSF initially launched their strategy for newly qualified children social workers in September 2008, shortly followed early 2009 with the Department of Health's strategy to support newly qualified social workers working with adults. Therefore the NQSW programme was designed to overcome the challenges highlighted by the Social Work Task Force.

> The Task Force has also heard from many sources that initial education and training is not yet reliable enough in meeting its primary objective, which must be to prepare students for the demands of frontline practice. Some employers are telling us that they are unable to appoint newly qualified social workers (NQSW) because of a lack of suitable applicants. Some NQSW cannot find jobs. Others who do enter the workforce are often expected to take on unrealistically complex tasks because of the acute recruitment and retention problem in many authorities. Equally, employers need to be realistic about the time people need to progress from achieving a professional qualification to operating as a full professional, and what therefore a newly qualified social worker should be asked to do.
>
> Social Work Task Force, Building a safe, confident future (2009).

Galpin, Bigmore and Parker (2012) argue that this transition period is key for the individual development of the practitioner, impacting their professional and organisation knowledge "Understanding, developing and using knowledge is central to enabling you to make some progressive changes to support this transition period and way you develop as a practitioner in your new role and meet the responsibilities and duties required of you by your employer and the professions regulating body" (Galpin et al., 2012, p33).

The NQSW period also aims to support practitioner in their construction of their own professional identity, allowing newly qualified social workers to adapt and develop professional resilience. "Transition involves adapting the internal you, the way you respond to and cope with the cut-and-trust of professional practice, and ultimately your cognitive and emotional response to professional life" (Galpin et al., 2012, p33).

Donnellan and Jack (2010) suggest NQSW frameworks provide an apprenticeship model which allows an introduction to the workplace ensuring that the organisation procedural needs are met using a "clearly defined set of knowledge and skills" (Donnellan and Jack, 2010, p.30). There are however, limitations to the apprenticeship model, and that to affectively implement a transitional programme preparing NQSW's for real life multifarious professional practice.

We see engagement as having three core facets:

- Intellectual engagement - thinking hard about the job and how to do it better
- Affective engagement - feeling positively about doing a good job
- Social engagement - actively taking opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work.

(CIPD, 2010)

2.2. The Pilot Programme – Children's Workforce Development Council.

The pilot programme was launched in September 2008 and was rolled out in May 2009. The programme was supported by resources developed and distributed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC). The Newly Qualified Social Worker Pilot Programme – Supervision guide for Social workers, was developed to support newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) in their first year of employment. The programme was designed to give structured support to allow NQSWs to integrate their learning into practice by a programme of supervision, development and training.

CWDC works to:

- Improve the lives of children and young people, their families and carers by ensuring that all people working with them have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice.
- Help the children and young people's workforce to work together better so that the child is at the centre of all services.
- Be the influential voice of employers and the workforce which is recognised by national and local government and key partners.

(CWDC, 2011)

The Children's workforce and development council was established in 2005 to support the implementation of Every Child Matters (ECM), following the review into the death of Victoria Climbie. During this time, 6,600 newly qualified social workers joined the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programme during the three year period, with over 3,000 progressing onto the Early Professional Development (EPD) programme to support their second or third year of employment, (CWDC, 2012). It aimed to contribute to increasing the number of social workers who continue their long-term career within social work with children and families (CWDC, 2008).

2.3. Hampshire County Council NQSW Programme

2.3.1. Development of the in-house programme

The NQSW (Newly Qualified Social Worker) programme was designed to integrate newly qualified childcare social workers into a practice environment. Hampshire County Council adopted the programme in its pilot stages and has developed the programme further via the use of feedback.

Key aspects of the programme included;

- A taught programme
- Supervision
- Managed workloads
- Reflective portfolio.

Their learning objectives were to:

- Identify the role of social workers and promote reflective practice using the values and frameworks set out in the GSCC code of practice

- Develop a personal toolkit of knowledge, skills and behaviour to make safe and appropriate interventions with children, young people and their families linked with the Common Core requirements for the Children's workforce

- Ask questions of themselves and others as well as know how and where, to look for answers

- Understand the relevant legal, procedural and evidence-based frameworks in order to underpin practice

- Have the capability and resources required to support and empower children, young people and families to achieve positive outcomes through assessment and care planning to review and case closure

- Acquire the ability and capacity to work together with others, including children and young people and their families to identify and achieve better outcomes

- Meet national and local induction and NQSW requirements for NQSWs and work towards Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) and the Consolidation Unit of the PQ Children and Families Award.

The programme undertook substantial development during this period, in reaction to internal evaluation and feedback obtained from both those undertaking the programme and supporting it in a wider sense. The following section will look at Hampshire's Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme in detail and its development. Information regarding the development of the programme was obtained from informal interviews and supporting documentation with key learning and development officers who were involved with the programme throughout this period.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

To provide a complete overview of the NQSW experience a face-to-face interview was undertaken in the first instance with Learning and Development manager to create an overview as to the specific implementation of the programme and the intended outcomes and rationale of programme as a whole.

To build on the knowledge telephone interviews have been conducted with a selection of candidates who undertook the programme and who would have therefore been NQSWs themselves. The qualitative nature of the interviews will allow rich, detailed information to be obtained in order to distil the salient points of the NQSW experience for the individual.

3.2. Sample

It was originally anticipated that the total sample size for the telephone interview stage would be about 13-14; including a sample of 10 NQSW across the three years. This research does not require any access to service users and respondents shall be approached by Hampshire County Council, with details relayed to Bournemouth University only once consent is given.

Telephone interviews were digitally audio recorded and securely stored for a period of 4 weeks during which time they were transcribed.

These transcriptions were held on a secure server; all interview data was assigned a pseudonym and held anonymously.

The request to participate was distributed to all NQSW's who participated in the programme, covering the four local authorities who participated in the programme, namely Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council, Portsmouth County Council and Isle of Wight Council. This amounted to approximately 70 staff. Respondents were approached by means of an information sheet requesting their participation. This was distributed to the four local authorities who participated in the programme by Hampshire County Council who acted as gatekeepers. Response rates for participation were low, with four respondents completing consent forms, two of which later declined to participate upon reflection. Therefore, a confidential online questionnaire was created to reflect the content of the telephone interview. The online questionnaire was distributed to the sample by Hampshire County Council and elicited four additional responses. The response rate was lower than that observed from comparable studies in the sector; the sample was also heavily clustered around a single authority involved in the programme, namely the Isle of Wight

4. Analysis

4.1. Programme Overview

NQSW's were asked to evaluate their experience of the NQSW programme as a whole. A range of responses was obtained which allowed focus to be draw to particular strengths of the programme.

All respondents reflected on their experience of undertaking the NQSW programme positively. The general strengths of the programme cited were as follows:

- Supported integration and development in the workplace
- Applied theoretical/academic learning to practice
- Peer support and group learning
- Development of a professional skill set

4.1.1. Supported integration and development in the workplace

Respondents reported that the design of the NQSW programme allowed them to develop as individuals within their role and supported their integration into the wider workforce. Respondents emphasised the importance of the practical experience obtained whilst undertaking the taught programme, thus allowing the opportunity and time to develop confidently into a professional role. The combined elements of the programme supported a variety of learning styles and educational background.

"I believe [this programme] supported my role as a social worker as I was seconded through my employer to become a social worker so my unqualified role also played a significant part in my training."

"I think my practical experiences in the role gave me the most insight; again, this is likely because this is how I learn best."

"I think that the programme supported my development in practice rather than prepared me for practice, as I was learning faster in the job than in the classroom."

"I'm better at doing analysis and other things now rather than just being pressured to get on and do them. I have the time to learn how I should do it properly so in the long run I would imagine that it would make me a better social worker!"

"I have the time to learn how I should do it properly so in the long run I would imagine that it would make me a better social worker!"

4.1.2. Applied theoretical/academic learning to practice

Respondents noted that the programme supported them in applying pre-learnt theory to practice, allowing undergraduate learning to embed more effectively. The learning undertaken during the programme also proved to address any pre-existing gaps in theory resulting for optional modules within undergraduate programmes and the varying level of experience and pre-existing knowledgebase that an individual NQ may possess.

"The NQSW programme helped me with some underpinned theory, which I had learnt at university but forgotten. "

"There can be gaps in the learning from university as you choose the assignment topics (such as what theory you examine). I did not ever write an assignment on attachment theory so my understanding and application is basic in comparison to others. It is always assumed that all social workers know about attachment theory, yet this may not be the case, the programme however allowed me to address this."

> ***"I think the fact that it goes over the things you have learnt that you haven't been able to practice necessarily so it refreshes things and it was also adding the skill and analysis and things. And it gave you the time out to actually learn about these things. "***

4.1.3. Peer support and group learning

The group learning undertaken during the programme also provided an opportunity for NQ's to interact with their peers. This offered an additional level of support and allowed NQ's to gain an additional perspective on their own professional development. It was suggested by respondents that this particular type of peer networking positively impacted on their confidence within their role and an on-going programme allowing such contact would be beneficial in the extended development period past the NQSW programme.

"I miss being on the NQSW because you felt that you were being more supported it is strange not having the extra days of training and talking to your peers".

> ***"Being able to meet with a group of people in the same position was an effective experience"***

"Being able to meet with a group of people in the same position was an effective experience. Even though our first year is done, our second, third, fourth year, I think you probably still go through phases of thinking and doubting yourself and what you're doing or being confident so it would be good to know that other people go through those ups and downs"

4.1.4. Additional Skill Sets

NQs reflected on addition skills they have acquired because of the NQSW programme. These included an increased ability to critically analyse and reflect on their practice as well as a greater service user focus, specifically in relation to child centred practice.

"In comparison to other people in my team I think I have learnt to critically analyse and reflect my practice and I don't think other people have necessarily learnt that or have gone past wanting to do that. So I think getting into the habit of reflecting on things has been helpful and I still do it."

"I think while we were on the NQSW we were taught a lot about involving service users and making sure that we had the child at the centre of all our work and I think that is something that I have taken from the programme, which differs from some other people that I work with."

The task in itself is always helpful no matter what stage of development in your career you are at. It gave me the chance to think about my work, and look at how I could improve my practice whilst considering what approaches I used that work well.

"We were taught a lot about involving service users and making sure that we had the child at the centre of all our work"

4.2. Analysis of Programme Elements

To analyse the programme in more detail, each section of the course will now be analysed individually and verified by responses from Newly Qualified Social Workers who undertook the programme.

- The taught programme
- Supervision
- Managed workloads
- Reflective portfolio.

All NQSW materials were made available to The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work by Hampshire County Council. These materials included; PowerPoint presentations, supporting materials such as handouts and internal evaluations.

The materials collected have been assessed regarding their presentation, clarity and applicability and this analysis has been supported by evidence supplied from respondents.

This section will seek to evidence the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its stated aims and highlight any areas of development which could be employed in future newly qualified social worker programmes.

What is the framework?

The framework recognises that NQSWs need a range of support at different stages of their careers, including:

- Good-quality induction to the profession and to their organisation
- Supervision that focuses on their professional needs as an NQSW
- Professional development support in their the first year in practice to
- Meet registration and post-registration training and learning requirements.

The NQSW framework is based on the expectation that NQSWs will have:

- An appropriate caseload
- Regular supervision
- Protected professional development time.

(Skills for Care, 2009, updated April 2010)

4.2.1. The taught programme

The taught aspect of the NQSW programme intended to provide 'a pathway between qualifying degree programmes and future PQ awards'.

Background

In 2008, a working party (chaired by Angela Mukhopadhyay) developed a programme consisting of 16 taught modules. This party consisted of operational managers and workforce development officers representing each of the 4 LA's (Hants, IOW, Southampton and Portsmouth Children Services).

The overarching outcome for this modular programme was to "build the practice competence and confidence of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) through appropriate support and development and challenge of our own practice and that of others".

Overview

The programme was attended by a diverse range of students with different levels of skill and experience in practice.

4.2.1.1. Delivery

Learning on the taught programme takes places through interactive workshops (with case studies, scenarios, action learning, skill development and knowledge input) and work-based tasks to undertake between workshops (linking directly to practice and guidance reading).

4.2.1.2. The Programme

The taught programme consists of 16 modules:

	Module
1	Managing Self and Programme
2	Service delivery Framework
3	Social Work Frameworks
4	Dealing with Information
5	Child Development, Attachment & Transitions
6	Communicating with Children, Young People and Families
7	Safeguarding and Child Protection
8	Referral
9	Assessment and Analysis
10	Care Planning
11	Reviewing
12	Partnership working
13	Working with complexity and challenge
14	Case study challenge and next steps
15	Working with complexity and challenge
16	Pulling it all together

4.2.1.3. Evaluation of Taught Programme

The evaluation of the taught programme was undertaken through a full review of all taught materials, including PowerPoint presentations, supporting handouts, course evaluations untaken through the programme and information obtained from Learning and Development managers involved throughout the programme

4.2.1.4. Programme development

It is important to note that the programme did not remain static, being reviewed on a yearly basis. Therefore, some of the challenges or issues raised by NQ's who undertook the programme during this period were identified and addressed throughout the development period.

In support of the taught programme for NQ's a taught session was delivered to managers under the following rationale:

> "In order to increase the understanding of the role and commitment to the programme, managers were invited to attend an introduction day….which was developed for each region so as to….develop the understanding of each Local Authority, as well as expectations in terms of support for the programme, e.g. supervision, portfolio building requirements, etc."
>
> Newly Qualified Social Work Development Programme – Taught Programme Development Review Year 2 (2011, Hampshire County Council.)

In addition, the taught programme was supported by means of work-based tasks between workshops, which directly linked to practice and guided reading.

Key Issues:

- The practical nature of the course was well-received as was the supportive environment
- Feedback led to the development of a 'case clinic' at the end of each session when participants discussed real cases, both of their own and the programme leader.
- To continue to link the programme with existing core calendar training to avoid duplication, to reduce spending and minimalise time for NQSW's to spend out of the workplace
- Suggestion that front line managers/guest speakers should deliver specialist areas
- Concern regarding the programme not being delivered or designed for post-graduates

4.2.1.5. Strengths of the taught programme

Respondents noted that staff were all very competent and friendly, especially the lecturer practitioners, who were very well received as they provided useful insight into practical experience. In additional there was strong cohesion between handouts and power point presentations. The information provided within the handouts is conducive to discussion and group work. This was deemed strength of this programme design. However, analysis of the course materials suggests that the quality of some of the handouts could be improved, as some are confusing or difficult to read e.g. module 4 PDF handouts. The programme material provided many clear pointers to useful resources and guidance.

The hand-outs were helpful; it is always good to have resources to refer to.

"The presentation and style was mixed, the ones who were actually 'out there' doing the job were good, and other times it's was more sort of lecturers and theory stuff and that really wasn't as much help as we had already done it in university. All very friendly, but some of them became a little boring a tedious. The lecturer practitioners gave us a more helpful advice for practice."

"We were three (sic) authorities together so they didn't really going to detail about each one. So as a whole it's saying what social work is generally, but it wasn't exclusive to Hampshire. Everything is still applicable and I didn't learn anything that wasn't relevant. I think probably we got most of the same processes."

The Court training was identified as a strong aspect of the programme, which many respondents felt was highly effective, informative, and relevant to their role.

"Court reporting and training with practising legal was very effective and should be incorporated more within training."

"I would definitely make sure that it still has the competence in care proceedings module! That was my best part of the course. It was very practical and it gave you the experience that you wouldn't have got if you haven't done that course.

"Very effective - role playing and training was relevant. The Care proceedings was informative and practical - giving us first-hand experience of being in Court and being interrogated"

"I started working here in August and then I think the course started in September/ October so it happened quite quickly and I think this was useful. It is good to be able to start work very close to be start with the programme."

Respondents commented that the areas on child protections and service user feedback were beneficial to their development as practitioners, encouraging them to be more reflective on their own position and practice.

"The areas on child protection were actually very good and I think it depended on who was actually presenting. That linked very much to the dilemmas within Child Protection and how people position themselves. That was a useful one, which allowed you to reflect on what your own position on child protection was."

"Involving user feedback was useful to enable critical analysis of my own practice."

4.2.1.6. Areas of Development

Some respondents noted that the theoretical learning in the programme had largely been covered at undergraduate level. The Child Development Unit (5) was identified as a particular example as were assessments. Whilst some respondents, who indicated a lower level of experience, benefited from this knowledge recap, others said they would have benefited with a more advanced practice-based discussion, for example, how theories could be integrated into practice.

"I could understand why, as there was a big cohort of students and some of the students hadn't done IA's or core assessments but they are our bread and butter."

"They did some about child development and I felt that was very much regurgitating what we had been taught, there was supposed to be more practical stuff and actually it was very limited the practical advice they gave you, I feel that could have been expanded on much more. Because actually it was more 'ages and stages' that we went through and the theories we'd already covered."

"Assessments: I could understand why, as there was a big cohort of students and some of the students hadn't done IA's or core assessments but they are our bread and butter. So we had to sit through the regurgitation of the processes more than anything else, of a core assessment and IA, and it was kind of what we were doing all the time so I didn't feel I came out with any additional knowledge from that."

"Some of the course was a bit repetitive of what we had done at university, and maybe not as linked to practice as we would have liked, so we went over old ground."

4.2.1.7. Functional Focus

Respondents enjoyed the practical aspects of the taught programme but would have appreciate the course to be less process led, this is reflective of respondents reflections of the course tutors, reporting that they thought they had gained more from the practical insight that a lecture practitioner was able to give them over the information provided by academic lecturers.

"I think it would have been helpful if it had of been less process led and more about analysis, in regards to, that's the difficult thing when you come out of university, it's about bringing it all together, in some sort of analysis and not just regurgitating the information from the core assessments, which you learn over time. Maybe a bit more focus on something like that would have been more helpful over time."

"I would have liked to see more practice examples to work from although appreciate that the programme is generic for all roles and not tailored for particular teams."

"I felt like the hands on experience was helping me more than the teaching, this may be linked to my learning style. I would have liked to see more practice examples to work from although appreciate that the programme is generic for all roles and not tailored for particular teams."

4.2.1.8. Timing of the programme

"The programme started after I had been in post for a few months and the team I went to was under pressure with staffing so I was expected to 'run' with the job."

Respondents reported that there were some issues regarding the timing of the programme and that some aspects of the programme were not relevant to the in their current roles. One respondent did however raise the point that this had enable them to gain a broader understanding of other roles and teams, which could service to reinforce improved integrated working.

"Depending on what role you have the different teaching days can come a little too late. For example, when working in the Referral and Assessment Team and the teaching day on assessments is 6 months after your start date, it can be a little frustrating."

"I was working for YOT at the time and so some of the taught programme was not relevant for my role at that time but gave me an insight into other roles and teams for pursuing my career."

4.2.2. Reflective portfolio

The reflective portfolio gave NQSW's an opportunity to reflect on their practice development throughout the newly qualified period. Respondents reported that this was a positive opportunity to 'draw things together' and emphasised the importance of the reflective nature of the work.

Key issues

- In general the portfolios were helpful for the NQs in developing and reflecting on their practice
- There were some issues regarding the length of time required to complete the portfolio, with respondents suggesting that a streamline of the process may be preferable and more manageable.
- Further developments for the portfolio were suggested which include less time intensive activities and alternative forms of presentation.

"It helped me in the sense of drawing things together….Like with most portfolios it is helpful to reflect on what you have done, and link theory to practice, so in that sense it was useful. I don't like the tick box things, that you have in the portfolios that you have, such as in respect to the competencies which you have to say you have met, they were a bit tedious to do, but I got through it, I did it!"

"I didn't find this overly useful. It seemed more like a task to do and I wouldn't say that I learned much from it. I guess the only positive thing from it was you actually sat down and thought where have I come from last year to this year.
Not much , I preferred the reflective discussions"

Respondents indicated that they did not have sufficient time to complete the work required for the portfolio, and would have appreciated additional protected space to support this programme, nonetheless they reflected on a portfolio design which suited their needs and allowed reflection on experience to aid future practice development.

"I think the content reflected my needs as an NQSW, we did have some protected space for it, but I don't think it was as much as we needed, and it wasn't as protected as it could have been due to the needs"

"Time is a massive restriction for an NQSW, finding the time to write the reflective sections is difficult when in a pressured team. The task in itself is always helpful no matter what stage of development in your career you are at.
It gave me the chance to think about my work, and look at how I could improve my practice whilst considering what approaches I used that work well."

Respondents suggested possible developments for the reflective portfolio to better suit their needs, these included employing less time intensive reflective logs and potentially the use of presentations.

"At the moment, I am doing a systemic practitioners course and we are doing our portfolio for that and it is much simpler, it's basically the assignments we have done for our course, our reflective logs on each period of the training, and some case studies, that I think, for me, is more simpler but still has the reflectivity that you need. And while I except that we had to meet certain competencies it's a bit more like an NVQ, not my favourite. I would have preferred something simpler."

"You could do presentations instead or something. To have to try that assignment in the job that we were doing was fairly difficult, I know a lot of people found this difficult, I know I did. I have not looked at it since. I just handed it in to be marked and that's it."

There is evidence to suggest that NQ's found the portfolios helpful in developing and reflecting on their own practice. Potential areas for development were identified by respondents who would have appreciated a more stream-lined, less time intensive approach.

4.2.3. Managed workloads

In their first year of practice, NQSWs are not normally allocated highly complex or high-risk work. However, as the year progresses, it is expected that there will be an increase in the level of complexity in their workload.
This includes instances where the NQSW is:

- Working alongside or carrying out specific areas of work to support
- More experienced workers
- Contributing as a member of a multi-agency or integrated team
- Working with social care workers or volunteers.
- It is good practice and it will be essential for the supervisor to discuss the allocation of work with the NQSW and how the work contributes to their professional development.

(Skills for Care, 2009, updated April 2010)

The open-ended responses below demonstrate the variability of the individual needs of an NQSW when considering the impact of workload management.

Respondents reported that their workloads were effectively managed and that this period allowed them to gain experience in order to carry a full workload within a 6-8 month period. Responses do however indicate that some individuals find this level of protection in excess of their requirements whilst others felt that the requirements of the workload in the team resulted in it being impractical for their workload to be affectively managed without a possible impact on service users. This highlights the delicate balance that needs to be applied when considering effective workload management to meet the needs of the individual NQSW, the demands on the team and to protect service users. No respondents reported that their workload was overwhelming during this period or they felt that service users had been put at risk. The result would suggest that NQSW workloads were affectively managed throughout the programme and the appropriate balance had been achieved within the design of the programme.

"I found this helpful. It was good to know that you were protected to some degree and you weren't expected to do that much. This is a big difference. When I first started I didn't come in to a full caseload okay so they were very aware that I didn't have a great deal of experience and I only had three to begin with and that went up to about 10 gradually and then up to 20 so it was a gradual increase in the first six months which was good."

4.2.4. Supervision

NQSW supervision will address:

- Professional practice, monitoring progress in achieving the outcome
- Statements, reviewing and reflecting on practice issues and planning on-going CPD (these functions are referred to as professional supervision and CPD in providing effective supervision)
- The quality of the NQSW's work in the organisation and compliance
- With its policies and procedures (or what providing effective supervision refers to as line management).

(Skills for Care, 2009, updated April 2010)

Respondents reflected positively on the supervision they received during the NQSW programme, despite facing some challenges regarding changes in manager, respondents indicated that this support was available to them.

Key Issues:

- Multi-level supervision was available to NQ's, this included supervision from team managers, practice educators and external supervisors
- Supervision aided NQs in reflecting on their practice
- NQs felt their supervision supported their professional development and their case management
- Some NQ's lacked consistency in regards to their team manager

4.2.4.1. Reflective Practice

Respondents reported that they were encouraged to critically reflect on their practice during supervision session and that this supported other areas of their professional development. For some respondents this was a key area in their development during this period and some respondents reported missing this level of support from their current role.

"In supervision I was able to learn more about analysis and reflection Reflective practice and observation by practice teachers enabled opportunity to explore my practice further."

"The supervision was very helpful, and the part of the programme that I enjoyed most. I was regular time to be reflective and I was able to discuss my cases and my reflective portfolio sections as I went along. It helped that I established a good working relationship with the person supervising me; I have missed this supervision since the programme ended."

"I was enabled to critically analyse and reflect on your practice, I could do this when talking to other people on the NQSW, the co-ordinators of the programme and in my workplace"

4.2.4.2. Professional Support

There is strong evidence that the supervision offered throughout the programme positively impact on respondents confidence in their own practice. In addition to aiding the development of reflective practice, it served as a robust source of advice and guidance.

"It was just very helpful just to be able to sit and talk about things without it having to be just add this to your list and you got to do this and you got to do this. It was good just for someone to sit down and reflect with you rather than just give you a load of things to do."

"And if I had had a problem, I didn't really have a great deal of issues, I feel I would have been helped by her as well."

"Excellent always good to get second opinions and extra advice"

"I had a very good external supervisor who was very good at drawing in our learning to our practice and who was very reflective."

Regular supervision helped me address any potential issues that could impact on my practice and reflect on my caseload.

Respondents reflected a need for consistency in supervision, respondents clearly reported that they always felt there was at least one source from which they could gain support, however where managers changed respondents reported disruption to this relationship which can be challenging when entering practice.

I had several changes of Manager throughout my NQSW training this did have some adversity in being consistent but I was supported through practice teacher, who did remain consistent.

"I had supervision from my manager anyway that then we had the NQSW and practice educators that came in and she met with me once a month and at first because my managers were all changing when I first started, she was the only continuity that I had. Which was really helpful because I felt that someone was actually still there for you even though the managers were changing a lot, so this was all very helpful."

"During the reflective supervision sessions with the work force development officer. My own manager did not focus on my learning in the programme too often other than asking if the programme was going ok."

5. Conclusion

Research has highlighted the importance of Newly Qualified status (Bates et al., 2009) and the need for investment during this early stage of practice (Brown et al., 2007) .The CWDC introduced the NQSW pilot programme address these issues, when the programme was evaluated by the CWDC in 2010, two specific barriers were identified within the programme to achieving these aims, namely; difficulties in achieving an appropriately managed workload due to organisation restrains and the lack of engagement by newly qualified social workers with certain elements of the programme, specifically the portfolio (Carpenter et al, 2012).

There is strong evidence that Hampshire County Council has addressed and to some degree been able to overcome these challenges. There is strong evidence that key objectives have been met, reinforcing the development of the NQ's undertaking the process, encouraging reflective practice and meeting their supervision needs, resulting a supportive, professionally protective and critically reflective first year in practice.

There is clear evidence of the promotion of reflective practice within both supervision and the reflective portfolio. Supervision was reflected as a key strength for the programme within Hampshire with respondents reporting that this support aided their professional development and case management and was a resource that respondents reported they could draw on when appropriate. Although issues were raised regarding the impact on changes in management throughout the process, respondents reported that they had a constant form for support available by means of practice educators or external supervisors. Respondents also reflected that the opportunity for peer learning offered them a greater understanding of the pressures that others were experiences and positively influenced individual confidence within the role.

Evidence suggests that the taught programme supported NQ's in understanding relevant legal, procedural and evidence based frameworks for practice. The challenges faced within the taught programme are not ones that can be easily addressed, as acknowledged by NQ's themselves. Respondents reported some repetition of material from their undergraduate programmes, respondents were however aware that some members of the group had not covered the subject and could understand why the topic would be included in the programme. Particularly strong elements of the taught programme were identified, these included the involvement of lecture practitioners who could reflect 'real-life' practice in an engaging and current manner, in addition the module on court reporting and training was cited as one of the strongest elements of the training.

Despite the challenges of the framework respondents reported that they experienced affectively managed workloads and protective case allocation. Evidence suggests that workload were managed to the individual needs and capabilities of each NQ. This supported both professional and personal development within practice, and increasing their confidence within their role. This was achieved to the degree that one respondent reported their workload being too well managed; however, the remained of the sample reported that their workload was managed affectively and positively.

The greatest challenge of the programme, as identified by CWDC, was engagement with the portfolio element of the programme. Whilst in general the portfolios were considered helpful in developing and reflecting on practice. The NQ's found portfolios exhaustive and time consuming, suggesting that they did not have enough protected time to adequately complete this element. There is also some debate as to the necessity of some aspects of the portfolio and whether these could be streamlined whilst achieving the same learning outcomes.

There is strong evidence that the ability to be critically reflective of one's own practice, either within supervision or by means of a reflective assignment/log is a key area of the programme, which allowed NQ's to integrate their learning into practice. The evidence suggests that there is a strong argument for key elements of the portfolio to be retained but reduced, with a renewed focus on the NQ's ability to reflect on, analyse and make critical judgements about practice.

There is strong evidence that the NQSW period was a positive experience for Newly Qualified social workers. Particular strengths were noted within the taught programme and in regards to reflective supervision. Evidence also suggests that some of the recognised challenges of the programme were overcome through internal development. Although areas for improvement have been highlighted, on the whole practitioners reflected a strong developmental process that aided them in integrating their academic learning into practice in a safe and supportive environment.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: Information for Respondents

Hampshire County Council

Bournemouth University | The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work

Dear[Recipient Name]:

Hampshire County Council and The Centre of Post Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University are working in partnership to evaluate the Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme that you would have undertaken as part of your professional development.

The NQSW programme has been available to all statutory and voluntary and community sector (VCS) employers within England. During its lifetime, over 97 per cent of local authorities have engaged with the programme and it has supported approximately 5000 social workers. From September 2012, employers and NQSWs have employed a single Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme covering both the children and families and adults' sectors.

Therefore a timely evaluation of the impact of the NQSW program is required to ensure that any gains made from the NQSW programme are isolated and retained in order to inform the development of new ASYE programmes. This research project has been designed in order to gather information assessing your experience.

The research team at Bournemouth University would like to contact you to participate in a short telephone interview about your experience. Hampshire County Council will not pass your contact details onto a third party without your consent and we therefore ask you to complete the attached consent form to indicate your willingness to participate in this research. The information you supply will be used solely for this purpose. Your responses will be kept completely confidential.

Thank you in advance.

7.2. Appendix 2: Consent Form

If you would like to participate in this research please read the following information and complete the form below.

Will my taking part be kept confidential?
All information that is collected about you during the evaluation will be kept strictly confidential. The information will be stored on password-protected computers and in locked cupboards and will be disposed of after 5 years. The Evaluation Team at Bournemouth University has been asked to produce a report for your Council. You will not be able to be identified by your employer in any report.

What if there is a problem or I have any questions?
Please be assured that any query or complaint about the evaluation will be addressed. If you have any concerns about this evaluation please contact Emily Lanng in the first instance. (*elanng@bournemouth.ac.uk*)

Telephone Interview Information:

- The interview will last approximately 30 minutes.
- The questions are designed to help us understand the effectiveness and experience of the NQSW programme.
- The interview will be digitally recorded, with your permission.
- Recordings will be deleted after 4 weeks.
- Recordings will be transcribed and the transcript will be kept on a secure server before being destroyed after 5 years
- Information obtained from the interview will then be collated to provide an evaluation report.
- If we choose to use anything you say during the course of the interview in the report then it will be ensured you cannot be identified.
- To protect individual's identities we can confirm that we will commit to not using people's real names.

Evaluation Consent Form
I confirm that I have read and understand the above information, that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation and have had these answered satisfactorily, and therefore I agree to take part in this evaluation.

Name
Email Address
Contact Number
Best times/days to be contacted
Year NQSW undertaken

Please return the consent form by email to: elanng@bournemouth.ac.uk
Or by post to:
The Research Team
The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work, Bournemouth University
R401, Royal London House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 3LT

7.3. Appendix 3: NQSW Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this telephone interview. I will be asking questions about your experience of the NQSW programme and the impact of the programme in preparing you for practice.

Confidentiality statement to protect individuals' identities

I can confirm that we are committed to not using people's real names. However, if you should disclose any information that indicates that someone may have been harmed, then I would need to act outside the confidentiality rules and inform the appropriate individuals.

- All recordings will be deleted after 4 weeks. We will then be collating the information to provide a course evaluation report.
- If we choose to use anything you say in the course of the interview then I will ensure you cannot be identified within any report.

Question 1	On reflection, what do you think were the strengths and weakness of the NQSW programme?
I am going to ask you to provide me with a series of examples of how the programme may have impacted on you, both whilst undertaking the programme and since you have been in practice. This research has been designed to look at the strength and weakness of the programme, so please feel free to reflect on both positive and negative aspects of the experience and comment on what you think prepared you for practice or what may have further enhanced you preparation for practice.	
Section 1 – Programme Elements	
Question 2	How effective was the taught programme in preparing you for practice?
Question 3	How effective was the reflective portfolio in preparing you for practice?
Question 4	How effectively was your workload managed in preparing you for practice?
Question5	How effective was the supervision you experienced in preparing you for practice?
Section 2 – Programme Impact	
Moving on, we are going to ask you a series of questions looking at the long term impact of the NQSW programme on yourself, both as an individual and as a social worker. These questions will look at what you perceive as the long term impact of the programme. Of course there may be areas which you may feel could have been improved; if you perceive this do be the case, please do not hesitate to let us know, as this feedback is invaluable in ensuring that programmes for Newly Qualified Social Workers are as effective as possible.	
Question 6	On reflection, how do you think the NQSW programme prepared you for your role as a social worker?
Question 7	Did the programme make clear and accessible what is expected of social workers by users and authorities?
Question 8	When entering practice, did you have an appropriate and sufficient level of knowledge of the following required for the role?
Question 9	When entering practice, did you feel that you had been enabled to critically analyse and reflect on your practice during the programme? If so, in what ways were you supported to do this?
Question 10	Can you think of any further examples of the impact of the programme on yourself, your team/organisation or users of service?
Programme Summary	
Question 11	Moving towards the end of the interview now. Do you think the NQSW programme, as a whole, prepared you for practice?