The Higher Education Academy

Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)

Selection and admission of students for social work education: key issues and debates in relation to practice and policy in England

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This project set out to examine the recruitment and selection of students for social work degree programmes in England. Existing publicly available data were drawn from Higher Education Institution (HEI) websites, online prospectuses, UCAS[1] databases and GSCC[2] statistical records. In addition, a web-based survey tool was used to gather from admissions tutors the details of their selection processes, and to identify examples of good practice. Programmes providing initial qualifications in social work at Masters-level were not included. The research was funded by SWAP[3].

2. Key findings from the research project

2.1 **Entry standards and academic entry requirements**. Whilst publicly available data regarding entry requirements do not correlate precisely to offer-making practices, minimum entry requirements for the degree range from 120 to 320 tariff points, the mean being 228 (equivalent to CCD-CCC at A-level). 76% of all programmes require at least 200 tariff points or equivalent of CDD at A-level. Only 10% require the equivalent of BBB (300 points) or more.

2.2 **Social work degree entry requirements compared to those for other professions**. Despite concerns regarding the lower average entry requirements of social work programmes compared to those of other professions, this project found limited evidence to support these concerns. However the discussion about minimum requirements and comparisons with other professional programmes should not be confused with an observable difference in relation to the average tariff points obtained by all applicants; an above-average proportion of social work degree students enter with no tariff points (e.g. through Access programmes or unqualified routes), reflecting success in widening participation initiatives.

2.3 **Experience requirements**. Although 60% of undergraduate social work degree programmes list 'experience' as a requirement or a preference, relatively few specify the amount or nature of the experience required. Concerns regarding a lack of relevant experience are rarely made in relation to the significant proportion of older applicants seeking career change where 'life experience' is often accepted as an alternative to social care work. If it is motivation and commitment that is required, there may be other means of assessing this.

2.4 **Selection processes and tools (see section 6.7)**. Information on HEI websites and in prospectuses rarely describes selection processes in detail. Although many refer to interviews, it is not always clear whether these are individual or group processes (both are equally 'allowable' within current regulations). Many programmes use additional stages in the selection process in between receipt of application forms and selection for interview. This helps to manage the increased levels of applications since the introduction of the degree, as well as ensuring equity and applicability of the selection process to the requirements of social work practice and education. Examples are given.

2.5 **Stakeholder involvement (employers and service users and carers)**. Practice in relation to the required stakeholder involvement in selection (Dept. of Health regulations, 2002), ranges from involvement in identifying interview questions to taking part in all elements of the selection process. Whilst some admissions tutors have reported little difficulty in facilitating stakeholder participation, many identify significant challenges, particularly responding to rising numbers of applicants, and planning difficulties given the lack of secure funding for service user and carer participation (currently agreed on a year-to-year basis).

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1   UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
2   GSCC – General Social Care Council
3   SWAP - Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work, www.swap.ac.uk

2.6 **Curriculum development**. Whilst crucial, the assessment of suitability at the point of admission is not an activity undertaken in isolation from other elements of social work education. Questionnaire respondents commented that robust selection needs to be backed up by robust assessment and also identified changes made to curricula to support the induction, orientation and/or progression of different groups. These illustrate the resource intensive nature of social work education, as well as a commitment to develop and provide high quality educational experiences whilst supporting entry from diverse groups to reflect the communities with whom social workers engage.

3. Social Work Task Force recommendations

The final report of the Social Work Task Force was published shortly before this project ended. Key issues in the light of findings emerging from this research project in relation to some of the recommendations are summarised below (see section 8 of the full report).

3.1 The current recommendation from the Task Force suggests that a threshold of 250 tariff points may be identified as that below which programmes will be subject to additional scrutiny/monitoring. This may cause some confusion because of the way in which tariff points are assigned in steps of 20 for A-levels (only in steps of less than this for AS or non-academic awards). CCC at A-level is equivalent to 240 points, the current national average according to UCAS.

3.2 However, account should be taken of the fact that many applicants offer qualifications other than A-levels, and that there is a wide range of practice in relation to the expression of offers and any limits to what may or may not be included in the required tariff score. Moreover some HEIs do not use the tariff point system when making offers.

3.3 The Task Force report refers to a small proportion of students struggling with use of English, especially in written work. There is variation in IELTS scores[4] required, sometimes in line with host HEI regulation. It may be important to examine whether social work programmes may benefit from setting their own higher requirements in recognition of the advanced communication skills required within professional work.

3.4 The Task Force report refers to a lack of longitudinal research examining how the profile of students entering social work programmes is reflected in their progression through the programme and into employment, and the extent to which programme curriculum and design may impact on this. This would help to identify essential personal qualities as to what makes a good social worker, for which HEIs can then work to develop and assess.

The Task Force report recognises the existence of examples of good practice, and some examples are appended to the full project report.

4. Key recommendations (see section 10)

4.1 Strengthen the role of regulation and guidance given at the point of programme approval and during annual monitoring activities in relation to admissions and selection issues;

4.2 Consider the development of an information/resource pack for all involved in social work admissions work – to be contributed to by those undertaking this work, annually reviewed and widely disseminated;

4.3 Recognise the complexity of 'written test' criteria/requirements and the need to operationalise any such requirement in a way that allows for disability and other needs to be addressed fairly and in a way that does not restrict the creative and innovative work carried out in many HEIs;

4.4 Recognise the complexity and need for fairness of any requirement for 'experience';

4.5 Consider mechanisms for securing the longer term funding to HEIs for service user and carer participation,in place of current annual basis;

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4   IELTS: International English Language Testing System www.ielts.org

4.6 Consider recognising or rewarding the time given to selection by employers and practitioners as part of their CPD, and encourage HEIs to explore recognising training for service user and carer stakeholders/participants in HEI selection (and other processes) in relation to Higher Education Academy Associate Fellowship[5] status;

4.7 Continue to promote the image of social work and disseminate knowledge about the profession and promotion of the degree to able school and college leavers, as well as to those applicants more 'traditional' for social work programmes (mature students);

4.8 Prioritise funding of larger scale and possibly longitudinal research exploring the links between intake characteristics, selection processes, experiences on programmes and effectiveness as practitioners.

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5   The Higher Education Academy has a Professional Recognition Scheme, with Associate Fellow status.
     www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingindividuals/professionalrecognition

1. Introduction

1.1 This report details findings from a project funded by SWAP[1], and examines these findings in the context of current debates about future policy and practice in relation to the selection of students for qualifying social work degree programmes within England. The report also identifies current gaps in knowledge and areas requiring further exploration and debate.

1.2 The introduction of the social work degree in 2003 was accompanied by major changes to social work education. The Department of Health (DH) (2002) and General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2002) requirements, in relation to selection and entry requirements and those applying more generally to HE admissions activities, in relation to widening participation (WP), transparency and fairness, all required consideration and amendments to previous practices. The complexity of the often competing demands and requirements, plus the focus upon increased levels of stakeholder participation have required time and resources in order to devise and implement selection processes that are 'fit for purpose'. This project report examines the main factors contributing to this complexity and identifies examples of good practice, as well as barriers to such practice.

1.3 The way in which the DH and GSCC requirements have been interpreted varies greatly across the country with different selection mechanisms and rationale for these in evidence as well as significantly different entry requirements for each programme. Whilst entry requirements are relatively easy to interpret for many school leavers in relation to A-level grades and equivalent qualifications, such students make up a relatively small proportion of the student group. For mature students 'equivalence' must be assessed which is much harder. This project identifies some of the key issues regarding academic and other entry requirements as well as exploring how students are selected in a context in which applications have almost doubled between 2004 and 2008.

2. Aims

2.1 This project aims to contribute data and highlight areas for discussion within relevant decision making processes, as well as identifying areas about which more needs to be known through further research, in order to further develop best practice in relation to the selection of students for qualifying social work programmes. More specifically, the project was designed in order to:

- Summarise data and intelligence on admissions practices to social work degrees programmes in England;

- Increase knowledge of the ways in which DH and GSCC requirements are interpreted and operationalised

- Increase understanding of the difficulties encountered in implementing the current requirements in line with 'best practice'

- Identify and share good practice

3. Methods

3.1 The project began during August 2009 and ran until January 2010 with interim reports produced at key points in this process in order to ensure preliminary findings were able to be included in Task Force review processes. The project consisted of three main phases:

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1   SWAP is the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work www.swap.ac.uk

3.2 The first phase of this project involved the collation and in-depth examination of publicly available data concerning admissions and selection criteria in relation to all social work degrees approved by GSCC. Data was collated from relevant UCAS databases as well as from each Higher Education Institution's (HEI's) prospectus and course or departmental web-pages. Information about academic and non-academic requirements was gathered. The main focus of the research has been upon undergraduate (UG) programmes for pragmatic reasons, although clearly many of the issues identified here are also relevant for postgraduate (PG) selection processes. The types of data collected during the first phase of the project included the following:

- Date of programme approval

- Minimum requirements for academic qualifications (across a range of qualifications)

- Standard offers

- Selection processes used

- Non-academic (e.g. personal qualities required/experience required) requirements

- Whether the programme recruits in Clearing[2] or not

- What the standard offer at that HEI for allied professions (nursing and/or teaching) was at Sept 2009.

3.3 Data were obtained from publicly available sources such as the UCAS database of course information, HEI websites and GSCC lists of programme providers. As such, data obtained from this phase of the project is not anonymised. However, the author recognises that the data drawn upon may be inaccurate if such records are not kept up to date and that some programme information may therefore be unintentionally inaccurate. All details included here were those drawn from the sources mentioned above during the summer and autumn of 2009. Where programmes were also represented by those completing the questionnaire phase of the project, data regarding entry requirements from those participants has been cross-checked with that available from UCAS and HEI websites and found to be largely accurate in these instances.

It is important to recognise some of the limitations to the available statistics. In particular, GSCC data regarding progression patterns are complicated by the fact that 'referral' is defined (see Hussein et al, 2006 and guidance accompanying annual monitoring reports for 2009) as applying to students who need to resubmit work and who have not passed at the time of the 'usual' Examination Board. In many institutions students have the opportunity of resubmitting prior to the main Board and in most others, resubmission (rather than repeating an element of a course) takes place in the summer vacation thus enabling progression to the next level of study as long as the submitted work is marked as a 'pass'.

3.4 The second phase involved systematic searches of bibliographic databases such as ERIC and SCOPUS using a range of search strings in order to compile a comprehensive bibliography of relevant peer reviewed research papers. These were scrutinized in order to identify shared findings, shared concerns and to identify areas requiring further research.

3.5 The third phase of the research project involved the analysis of responses to a web-based survey, for which invitations to participate were sent to all programme providers as well as being advertised on relevant discussion lists. This phase provided additional information regarding how formal requirements are operationalised as well as any difficulties experienced by admissions tutors and others in this process. Crucially, this phase also served to highlight areas of innovative or particularly effective practices. A total of 25 admissions tutors or their colleagues took part in this survey with 8 of these also taking part in follow-up contact intended to gather further information in relation to specific issues.

3.6 Although those participating in this phase of the project did not form a representative sample of all social work admissions tutors, with an unintended over-representation of Russell and '94 Group institutions, all modes of provision and all types of F/HE institutions were represented in the study.

2   Clearing refers to a particular period towards to end of each annual UCAS application cycle. Clearing takes place at the same time as the results for most qualifications become known each summer and allows applicants who have not already secured a place (or who have not met the conditions of offers made) to apply to those courses with existing vacancies.

Respondents came from geographically diverse areas and average intakes ranged from 30 to 95. Although respondents described very different selection processes, all shared the experience of working in a context in which application levels have risen significantly since the introduction of the degree and where complex and often competing priorities and demands meet.

4. Key issues emerging from published research

4.1 The growing interest in selection, suitability and retention issues within social work and other areas of professional education (in the UK but also internationally) is evidenced by the growing body of published research in this field. With few exceptions, this expansion of the research base results from an increase in the number of small-scale research projects often having a particular area of focus (such as criminal convictions, mental health or examining modes of student selection). These provide an interesting and useful backdrop to discussions here and illustrate the level of commitment to explore and understand such issues more thoroughly. The majority of the research stems from unfunded projects.

4.2 It is not the role of this project report to provide a detailed review of all published research in this area. Instead, listed below are some of the key themes emerging from recent literature, many of which are referred to later in this report, and will be examined elsewhere in more depth:

- The complex and multi-dimensional nature of social work selection (multiple requirements from professional body, government, own HEI and good practice as described in policy and guidance documents). The complexity is examined in many recent publications including Holmström and Taylor (2008a and b, and Taylor and Balen 1995);

- The need to ensure accessibility by diverse groups of the wider population and the possible tension between this and attempts to increase academic entry requirements. Indeed, the recent calls for more experienced applicants are themselves potentially at odds with the desire to increase entry standards in relation to academic qualifications, given the data available in relation to experience and qualifications. This 'conundrum' is explored in Dillon (2007) in some depth;

- 'Non-traditional' (although this term is highly problematic) entry as the most common for social work programmes, unlike the rest of degrees run in most HEIs; this necessitates the use of multifaceted selection processes and the careful articulation of entrance requirements;

- The need for applicants to have more than just good academic qualifications and the difficulties with specifying what the required characteristics, abilities and experiences are, before then being able to design ways of observing, assessing and evaluating these in a reliable and valid way (Dillon 2007, Manktelow and Lewis, 2005);

- Previous experience has *not* been conclusively shown to be correlate with positive outcomes or course completion and in two studies, a slight negative correlation between length of prior experience and success on social work programme was found[3]. (Holmström and Taylor 2008b and Pelech et al, 1999);

- The correlation between prior academic achievement and success on social work programmes seems to be significant, but this does not tell us anything about their practice once qualified. In addition, much of this research relates to PG study. For fuller discussion of these issues, see Holmström and Taylor (2008a p 525-6), Pelech et al, 1999, Dunlap etc al, 1998, Munro, 1995;

- The recognition of the importance of considering suitability and progression throughout the programme, not just at entry point. Indeed, Gibbs and Blakely (2000) argue that all qualifying programmes should build in regular points of assessment of suitability throughout the entire programme. This is important given the impossibility of always making the 'right' decisions at the initial selection point, but also because of the possibility that some previously 'suitable' students can become 'unsuitable' at a later time for a range of reasons;

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3   The reasons for the observed correlation between those students with a substantial amount of previous experience and their subsequent difficulties on their social work courses remain unclear. However, the literature (see Pelech 1999) identifies the possibility that this may be a result of either difficulties in reflecting upon and learning from new experiences and/or may be related to a greater period of time since they last studied.

- The use of evidence from other disciplines and fields of enquiry (such as occupational psychology) to improve the efficacy of potentially flawed selection tools such as interviews (Holmström and Taylor, 2008a; Furnham, 1992; Taylor and Small, 2002) may be valuable within social work selection debates;

- All recent publications mirror the acknowledgment within the recent Task Force report regarding the need for longitudinal and larger scale studies of the relationship between admissions data and other variables and outcomes on social work programmes given the complex array of factors influencing these outcomes;

- The assessment of applicants' value bases and the extent to which we are assessing potential and recognising that individuals can and do change during professional training is an important issue identified by many of the above-mentioned authors, and arguably has even greater significance within social work education than in many other disciplines given the nature of our work and the relationship-based nature of social work practice;

- Assessment of suitability and support in relation to students with mental health difficulties is acknowledged to be complex within many of the publications mentioned, but is given particular attention in Collins (2006). The legal, ethical and pragmatic dilemmas and tensions are far from straightforward and survey participants highlighted this as an area of particular concern and anxiety in decision making in relation to admissions decision and in relation to assessing support needs;

- Suitability issues in relation to convictions are also an area of heated debate and uncertainty, particularly as this is an aspect of suitability assessment that is carried out both by HEIs and by the GSCC when considering applications to join the student section of the social care register. The need to consult with placement providers and to only offer places on programmes to those likely to obtain GSCC registration, whilst recognising the potential contribution of many applicants with criminal convictions or cautions, requires careful assessment of risk. This is one of the areas in which assessment of capacity to change and identification of monitoring and support mechanisms to prevent 'relapse' require a sensitive and skilled approach to this work. (See Cowburn and Nelson, 2008 for full discussion of pertinent issues);

- Service user and carer participation in selection of social work students, although mandated in the DH regulations (2002) has received scant attention in published literature. Indeed, as Matka et al (2009) note, no published research has formally evaluated this important area of work. They identify the importance of both value and outcome based arguments (2009 p9) for the involvement of service users and carers in selection process and examine this in their evaluation of practices in their own HEI and importantly argue that the rationale and impact of participation needs to be articulated in order that participation remains meaningful and not simply mechanistic and tokenistic.

5. Existing requirements for social work selection and key recommendations from the Task Force final report.

5.1 Existing requirements (England) are those detailed in the DH and GSCC documents published in 2002. These are summarised in the table below.

	GSCC requirement	DH requirement	Comments
Target applicants; Policies regarding access	Flexible access routes Broad access and policies that ensure programmes 'select students from all sections of the community' (2002)[1]		
Literacy	Select candidates who are literate	Key skills level 2; Applicants must be able to understand and use written material and express themselves 'accurately' in written and spoken English[2]	Mentions that this will normally be equivalent to GCSE grade C or above
Numeracy	Select candidates who are numerate	Key skills level 2	
Suitability	Carry out criminal conviction and health checks on all applicants		This initial 2002 requirement is supported by the later guidance document 'Suitability for Social Work' (2007) that further details processes by which applicants' suitability will be assessed and clarifying roles and responsibilities
Personal qualities	Commitment to SW values	Appropriate personal qualities	Values or personal qualities? Attitudes or behaviour?
Intellectual qualities	'Have the potential to develop….' Knowledge and skills needed to practise (2002)	Appropriate intellectual qualities and potential to reach required standard by end of training	
Selection mechanisms		Applicants must take part in individual OR group interview; Stakeholder representatives must be involved in the selection process	Note the option to select via group interviews only here. No reference to minimum age requirements No reference to experience requirement

Table 1: Current requirements for social work training, in addition to HEIs' own requirements

5.2 The final Task Force report (2009) makes 15 recommendations; the most relevant here are as follows:

>   "**Calibre of Entrants**: that criteria governing the calibre of entrants to social work education and training be strengthened. "Crucially, this is to take place alongside recommendation 12: **Public Understanding**: a new programme of action on public understanding of social work.""

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1   www.gscc.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F889F154-ADD1-4A14-9D3B-4771D5ECC576/0/Accreditation.pdf
2   www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4007803

5.3 The Task Force report identifies the crucial role of selection processes for professionally qualifying programmes and recognises the complexity of this task. The report also acknowledges the challenges associated with assessing the relationship between current data sets on admissions and those relating to qualifying stages in the student life-cycle. Importantly, the report also recognises the existence of a range of innovative and high quality selection processes currently in use as well as the need to disseminate information relating to 'good practice' in this arena.

5.4 Additional points raised in the Task Force report include:

- The mix of skills and attributes needed for social work can be difficult to test, but include analytical skills, empathy, resilience and ability to use authority (all issues identified as critical in published research);

- Despite great demand for places, there is a concern that some programmes have admitted students who may not be fully suitable in order to boost numbers on the programme (possibly at the insistence of their HEI);

- In particular, a concern is expressed that a minority of students have literacy difficulties and/or have difficulty employing higher order analysis and critical thinking skills;

- Concern about lack of maturity or life experience (though this is not clearly linked to age);

- A need for more comprehensive and effective involvement of service users/carers and employers in selection processes (alongside a recognition that there is already some good practice);

- A renewed focus upon selecting those most likely to succeed on the programme;

- A need for further research into the attributes of applicants and students that lead to them become effective practitioners.

5.5 The Task Force report was published shortly before the project reported upon here was completed. I will return to the recommendations and a more detailed discussion of these in later sections of this report. Firstly, however, I will report on the research conducted during phase one and three of the project, referring to Task Force findings as appropriate.

6. Exploration of key themes emerging from this project

6.1 Entry standards and academic requirements

6.1.1 It is no surprise that the entrance requirements for degree programmes in social work vary greatly from one institution to another given the variety of FE/HEIs running social work degrees. However, the extent of variation is striking. Published entrance requirements range from 120 UCAS tariff points (from 2 A-levels) to 320 points (from 3 A-levels). Where HEIs do not use the tariff point system (often the older universities due to concerns about other qualifications, such as music exams, being counted towards total points) grades required from A-levels (or equivalent qualifications) vary from CE to ABB/ BBB. Only a small number of programmes were requiring for BBC or higher in A-levels (equivalent to 280 points from 3 A-levels) at the time this research was conducted. Predictably, these differences are generally in line with what each HEI requires for the study of other subjects. In some cases, social work entrance requirements are lower than those required for education or nursing programmes, although this is not the case everywhere; requirements in some HEIs are higher for social work than for allied professional programmes. This variation of tariff point or grade offer levels is also reflected in the way in which offers are framed for qualifications other than A-levels such as the IB, new Diplomas and BTEC awards. More details are provided in the tables below.

6.1.2 The data reported here are drawn from published sources, but do not tell us anything about how these are put into practice. In some cases the offer level used most frequently may be markedly different to that minimum requirement published. In addition, the fact that not all HEIs frame offer levels or minimum entrance requirements in terms of tariff points (using grades instead) makes absolute

comparisons somewhat challenging. Although many HEIs using tariff points to express offer levels refer to the minimum points that must come from A-levels or equivalent, in many cases there remains the potential for the rest of the points (sometimes as many as 100 points) to be made up from other qualifications. This could result in applicants gaining entry to degree level social work training with only one A-level and multiple AS qualifications and/or qualifications such as key skills (accepted by some degree providers as contributors to total tariff), music qualifications after grade 5 or similar qualifications (see http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/tarifftables/ for information about tariff points assigned to each qualification). Many programme providers now specify minimum grades for one or two A-levels to be included in the tariff 'pot' whilst others may refer to preferred subjects and excluded subjects.

The careful expression of requirements in the future by HEIs in order to clarify depth as well as breadth when using tariff points to more clearly demarcate the thresholds required for qualifying social work programmes would seem to be a priority.

6.1.3 A further complication arises from the fact that a surprising number of social work programmes have very sparse information about their entry requirements on their websites, whether on departmental pages or in their online prospectus or in their UCAS entry profile. This may mean that the average tariff requirements mentioned below are a little skewed (most likely an upward direction) but also highlights an area for future development in relation to the marketing of our programmes and the transparency of requirements and decision making processes, as required to comply with the recommendations of the 'Schwarz report' (Admissions to Higher Education Review, 2004). Improving the quality and accuracy of information available would also go some way to enhancing the public image of the profession.

6.1.4 Despite the cautionary notes mentioned above regarding the complex nature of tariff-based entrance requirements, for the purposes of this report they remain the most appropriate measure for comparative purposes, despite the fact that A-level or equivalent qualifications accounted for the educational background of only 32% of applicants[4] for the 2007-8 intake (GSCC data, 2009b). As is evident from Chart 1 below, whilst 76% of all programmes require at least 200 tariff points or equivalent to CDD at A-level (where a grade A at A-level equals 120 points, B equals 100 points, C equals 80 points and D equals 60 points whilst at AS level each grade is worth half of these tariff points), only 10% require the equivalent of BBB (300 points) or more.
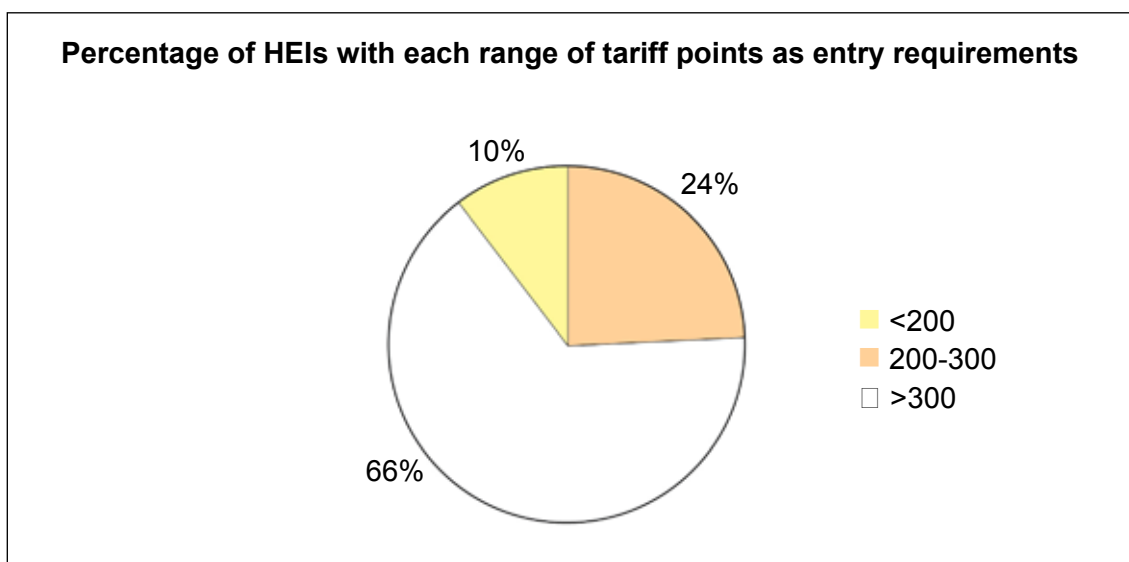

Percentage of HEIs with each range of tariff points as entry requirements

10% 24%

66%

- <200
- 200-300
- >300

Chart 1: HEIs and tariff points required for entry

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4   NB: This is a percentage of all social work entrants in that year and so refer to 32% of all incoming students (PG and UG) as this is how the existing data is structured. This would suggest that less than 50% of all UG students are offering A-levels as their highest academic qualification.
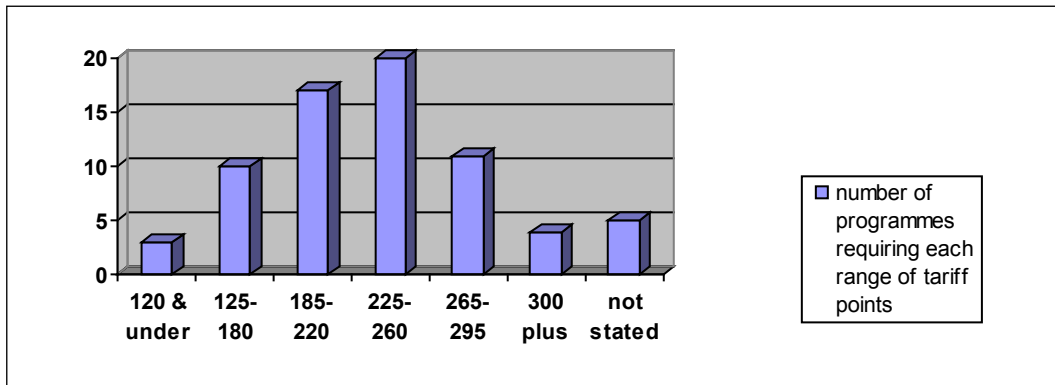
Chart 2: Number of programmes requiring each range of tariff requirements

6.1.5 One concerning issue that arises from the data examined is the relatively recent approval or re-approval date of many programmes with seemingly low entrance requirements and what this means in terms of internal and external mechanisms for monitoring and understanding trends and changes. Table 2 (see p.13) shows some of the clusters of offer levels and the initial approval date for that programme. All programmes with 2003 approval would have been re-approved during 2008 and those initially approved in 2004 re-approved in 2009. This means that a large proportion of programmes have either been re-approved recently or granted approval for the first time within the last 3 years. This may suggest a potentially missed opportunity to examine in some depth selection processes and the link between the characteristics of incoming students and their progression through the programme and into employment, and for programmes to receive feedback in relation to these analyses.

6.1.6 Tariff points required are not static of course and HEIs and programmes within HEIs will amend these up or down according to demand or perceived need. UCAS data for 2009 and 2010 entry shows that six HEIs have increased the points required to enter their programmes in 2010, whilst others have reduced their published minimum requirements. The questionnaire phase of the project asked participants to detail any tariff or other entrance requirement changes since the introduction of their programme. Those identifying recent changes (40%) all replied that the grades required had increased. Another respondent stated that it was now their intention to increase requirements following the publication of the Task Force report at the end of 2009.

6.1.7 However, as UCAS and GSCC data show, many applicants gain admission to social work programmes without prior academic qualifications. In many HEIs, this is managed through the 'unqualified' application route whereby such applicants must complete additional written work to evidence their academic abilities. Whilst this is compliant with the widening participation (WP) agenda and in line with the GSCC requirements regarding flexible access routes, this requires careful management given the current emphasis upon assessment of analytical and critical thinking skills.

The assessment of those without formal academic qualifications takes place in a range of ways. Most HEIs have mechanisms for assessing the academic potential of such applicants. Many apply to social work programmes with a range of attractive life or work experiences (and often include people seeking a career change) and may assert their suitability for social work training, drawing attention to their substantial life experience. Although a small number of questionnaire respondents stated that they do not take any academically unqualified applicants, the majority described a range of approaches, such as requiring such applicants to complete essays prior to considering selection and completing additional written tasks requiring research and planning. This group of applicants may be seen as potentially 'risky' and despite the WP 'credentials' it seems that social work selectors are increasingly requiring such applicants to obtain Level 3 qualifications, or at the very least key skills (level 2) in mathematics and English in addition to providing written work. One respondent noted that:

"Occasionally we take applicants with NVQ3. They are required to submit an essay and if it is felt they are at the right level academically and meet the other criteria they are called to interview."

HEI	Academic entrance requirements in tariff points	Grades	Comments
Sussex/Brighton	n/a	ABB-BBB at A-level	Approved in 2003
Brunel University	320 points (increased this year by 50 points and Access qualifications no longer accepted according to website)		Approved in 2004
Universities of Bath, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield and York		BBC from 3 A-levels	Approved 2003
Royal Holloway University	300 points from 3 A-levels min	BBB	Approved in 2004
Huddersfield University	220 points with C in one subject		Approved 2004
University of Lincoln	220 points with min of 1 preferably 2 A-levels		Approved 2004
University of Hertfordshire	160-200 from min of 2 preferably 3.5 A-levels including at least grade C		Approved 2004
Greenwich University	180 points from at least 2 A-levels		Approved 2003
University of Central Lancashire and London South Bank University	160 points from min 2 preferably 3 A-levels		Approved 2004
University of Derby	80-200 points with at least 80 in one subject (grade C)		Approved 2003
Birmingham City University	160 points from 2 A-levels		Approved 2003
Bradford College	120 points with 100 from A-level		Approved 2005
City College Norwich	120 points with 80 (=C) from A-level		Approved 2006
Stockport College of FE and HE	2 A-levels		Approved 2004

Table 2: HEIs at 'top' and 'bottom' of entry requirement list
(using A-level as standard offer and based on HEI website information available August 2009)

Summary of tariff points and minimum entrance requirements for England's social work programmes: [excluding those not listing grades/points but simply stating 2 A-levels (7% of programmes)

Range of tariff points required as minimum: 120-320
Mean average tariff points: 228, equivalent to CCD-CCC (calculated taking the highest grade when a range is used).
Modal points required: 240
Median points required: 240

This places pressure upon HEI staff to assess what is level three work, in a way that we do not for applicants offering A-level or equivalent qualifications. In many cases, where admissions tutors have any doubts about the academic level at which an applicant is working, the final decision frequently rests upon the degree of prior experience they have (Note: this may not be a predictor of success on the degree - see discussion regarding experience in paragraph 4.2). As one respondent noted:

"Admissions team discussion of applicants who may fall slightly short of academic criteria: (they) must have substantial relevant experience"

Whilst some excellent practitioners have come through this route onto degree programmes, as with other demographic groups, careful monitoring may be beneficial.

It is important to note that the average tariff score for applicants to UG social work programmes will be lower than to other professions due to the high proportion of applicants with non-tariff bearing qualifications. The table below illustrates the numbers of applicants and those accepted for 2008 entry into social work programmes with different tariff points.

Tariff score	Applicants	Accepted applicants
0	9553	6321
1-79	527	322
80-119	199	108
120-179	515	268
180-239	572	343
240-299	525	362
300-359	342	266
360-419	152	108
420-479	44	44
480-539	14	11
540+	7	7
TOTAL	12450	8160

Table 3 Applicants and tariff scores.

Data obtained from: www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online [accessed 04/01/10]

Further relevant historical data regarding entry qualifications and progression through social work programmes is described in the 'Raising Standards' publication (GSCC, 2009)

6.1.8 *Use of Clearing:* Table 4 (below) shows the distribution of programmes' academic entry requirements. In addition, the table also shows how many programmes from each cluster of tariff point requirements were advertised as formally taking part in clearing during the summer of 2009 (this does not include those taking part only in the 'adjustment period', nor those informally using clearing to 'top up' remaining vacancies, but only those advertising in the newspapers and/or on the UCAS website as still having vacancies during mid-late August 2009). Although this may be subject to annual variation and may possibly result from cautious early-cycle offer making, this data suggests that some courses may be struggling to recruit the number of students they wish to enrol, and this in turn may have implications for entry standards (although this is not entirely straight forward as some exceptionally strong applicants appear at clearing stage too). Indeed, it would seem to suggest that demand does not match supply of places in these programmes if this is a consistent pattern each year. Clearing is used by a minority of social work programmes, but relied upon in some cases to reach a pre-set target (not reaching this can have resourcing/staffing implications, as can 'over-shooting' when financial penalties can follow). The quotations below from questionnaire respondents express the range of views regarding the use of clearing and highlight some of the challenges and possible risks:

"(It is..) Difficult to process and interview candidates during clearing"

"I feel late applications indicate poor planning or preparation, although this is not always the case"

"It can be useful for 'topping up' to make sure we get to target"

"I would prefer to eat tree bark than go to clearing"

"It is hard to get to know the applicants and for them to get to know us during this period."

6.1.9 The challenges of clearing were exacerbated this year by the introduction of the 'adjustment period' in which applicants could attempt to 'trade up' to a different course or institution, whilst the course making their original offer is obliged to keep their place open to them, causing further uncertainty regarding enrolments in relation to targets, and difficulties in responding to those made offers who narrowly miss their required grades.

None of the four institutions with the highest range of entry requirements entered clearing this year, although this may be a reflection of their HEI's overall recruitment strategies and attitudes to registering for clearing and/or may correlate to their relatively small intake levels when compared with the size of some of the programmes advertised in clearing.

Tariff points min	Number of institutions	Institutions include	How many of these were in clearing?
300 and above	4	Brunel University; Royal Holloway; University of East Anglia; Universities of Sussex/Brighton	0
265-295	11	Coventry University; Goldsmiths; Keele University; Lancaster University; University of Bath; University of Birmingham; University of Leeds; University of Nottingham; University of Sheffield; University of Southampton; University of York	1
225-260	20	Anglia Ruskin; Liverpool Hope University; London Met University; Nottingham Trent University; University campus, Suffolk; University of Chester; Gloucestershire University; University of Teesside; University of Sunderland; University of Winchester; Bournemouth University; Middlesex University; Edge Hill University; University of Bradford; University of Northampton; University of Portsmouth; Wiltshire College; University of Northumbria; University of Hull	2 (but one was just for their joint nursing/ sw courses)
185-220	17	Canterbury Christchurch University; Leeds Metropolitan University; Manchester Metropolitan University; Oxford Brookes University; Sheffield Hallam University; Southampton Solent University; Thames Valley University; University of Cumbria; University of East London; University of Kent; University of Plymouth; Demontford University; Kingston University; Staffordshire University; University of Huddersfield; University of Lincoln; University of the West of England	1
125-180	10	Birmingham City University, London South Bank; University of Central Lancashire; Buckinghamshire New University; Liverpool John-Moore; Universities of Salford and Manchester; University of Greenwich; University of Hertfordshire; University of Salford; University of Wolverhampton	2
120 and under	3	University of Derby; Bradford College; City College Norwich	1
Not stated	5	Havering College of FE and HE; OU; Liverpool Community College; University of Bedfordshire; Ruskin College	1

Table 4: Groupings of social work degree providers according to offer levels based upon tariff points

6.2   Social work academic entry requirements compared to those of other professions

6.2.1   One concern raised by respondents to Task Force and to the Select Committee[5] consultations related to the perceived difference between social work entrance requirements (indicated by average tariff points) and entrance requirements for other professions. This is clearly a complex area of debate as some professions have a long history of high status and have experienced sustained demand for places on programmes of study. For social work, the new degrees only began 6 years ago, so it may take a while longer for the appeal and demand for places to peak amongst some groups of potential applicants. In addition, as numerous studies have shown (including Eborall and Garmeson, 2001) public understanding (and therefore knowledge of some teachers/careers advisors, parents and potential applicants) may be more limited than that relating to other professions, so additional time and clear information-sharing strategies may be needed for accurate information about social work education and social work as a profession to be more widely disseminated. Finally, although the majority of applicants for medical degrees, for example, are recent school or college leavers offering A-levels as their entrance qualifications, this is not the case in social work, so direct comparisons are challenging.

6.2.2   The table below illustrates the differing average tariff points offered by applicants accepted onto a range of different degree programmes in England during the last 7 years. Given the comments above regarding the numbers of entrants to the social work degree with no, or minimal, tariff compliant qualifications, it is not surprising that the average points achieved by social work entrants are lower than those for many other subjects. This is not in itself a reflection of low grade requirements.

Accepted applicants - Average tariff scores by subject							
Subject	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Group A Medicine & Dentistry	430.33	427.67	440.78	441.82	377.90	378.79	379.24
A1 - Pre-clinical Medicine	433.38	429.00	441.91	443.75	375.27	381.84	382.32
A2 - Pre-clinical Dentistry	408.31	417.11	431.79	429.54	396.24	362.07	365.77
Group B Subjects allied to Medicine	202.24	202.02	209.89	219.67	188.69	184.25	127.44
B1 - Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology	287.71	280.87	301.63	299.14	265.58	265.00	259.87
B2 - Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy	283.85	284.73	298.94	303.04	283.24	288.28	282.79
B7 - Nursing	134.20	134.16	141.26	157.93	132.24	120.83	60.94
L1 - Economics	324.26	332.18	340.35	344.63	331.21	334.88	343.01
L2 - Politics	282.47	286.86	301.22	301.40	286.42	279.68	277.40
L3 - Sociology	199.99	211.84	222.44	231.22	221.93	214.40	203.67
L4 - Social Policy	112.69	120.56	127.53	132.00	118.62	96.52	99.22
L5 - Social Work	67.51	77.14	91.33	105.87	64.30	61.09	53.70
Group M Law	277.53	284.88	294.14	284.77	274.34	262.49	257.39

Table 5: Comparison of average tariff points of entrants to different degree programmes in England (2002-8).
Data from: www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online

6.2.3   When examining entry requirements for each social work programme during phase one of this project, the entry requirements for an allied profession (where such programmes are offered) at the same institution (not medicine for reasons mentioned above, but including nursing/midwifery/teaching) was also noted. Chart 3 (below) shows the proportion of HEIs in which the qualifications for social work and allied professional degrees are either the same or different.

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5   Children and Families Select Committee, 2009

Percentages of Social Work programmes with higher and lower entry requirements than allied professional programmes at the same HEI

- 30% sw<allied prof
- 48% same
- 22% sw>allied prof

Legend:
- sw>allied prof
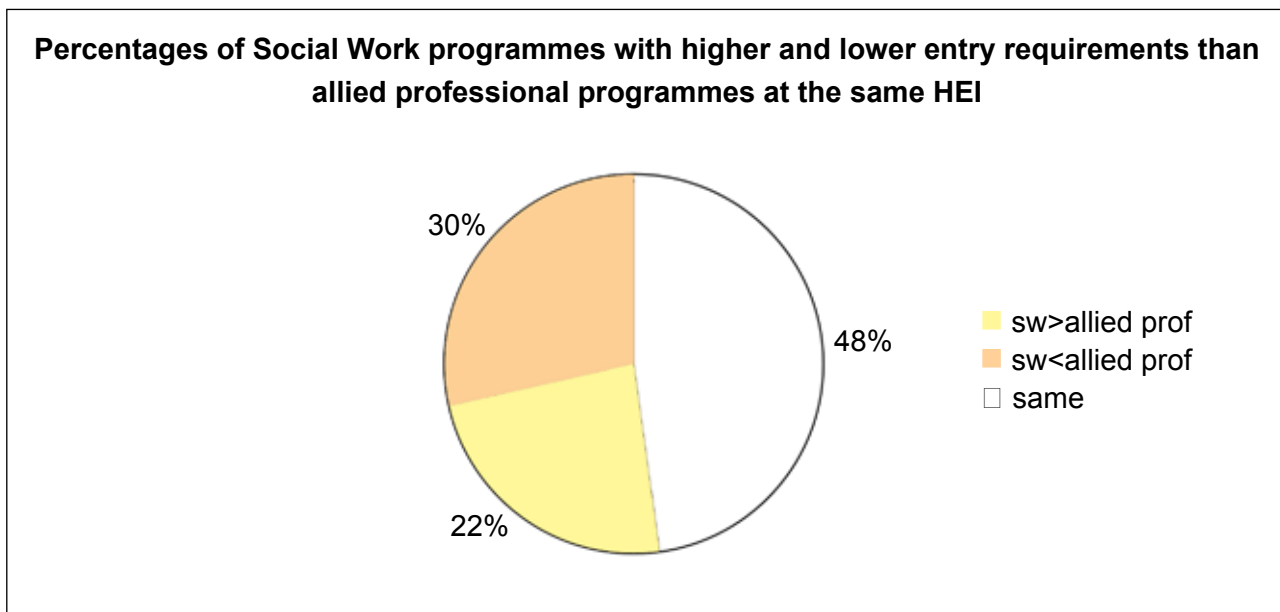- sw<allied prof
- same

Chart 3: Social work entrance requirements in comparison to allied professional

6.2.4   In the majority of cases, therefore, the entry requirements for social work are higher or the same as those required to gain entry to other professional programmes in the same HEI. At Keele University for example, the nursing degree requires 100 fewer points to gain entry than the social work degree requires. In most cases, where entry requirements are lower in social work than for the comparator programme, that comparator programme is teaching, and this seems to be particularly true for primary age teaching courses. In such cases, the difference in points required ranges from 20 points to 160 points.

6.3   Discussion regarding age and qualifications and progression

6.3.1 One important consideration is that A-levels (or equivalent tariff-bearing qualifications) are generally offered by those who are recent school/college leavers, although not exclusively so, as a small number of older applicants also gain entry based on previously obtained A-level or equivalent qualifications, often at a lower level than that required for recent school leavers. Students under 20 years of age account for only 13% (GSCC data, 2009b) nationally of all social work students on degrees, although there are significant local variations. Indeed, questionnaire respondents stated that the proportion of students in this age bracket on their programme ranged from less than 10% in two cases to 60% in two other programmes. We must, therefore, to be careful not to focus exclusively upon A-level standards and requirements and to assume a direct correlation between A-level requirements and the quality of students coming to each HEI through alternative qualification routes. Indeed, doing so could be regarded as discriminatory in respect of younger applicants who are, on the whole, relative newcomers to social work qualifying programmes and this limited approach would also mask the variation that exists within the 14-19 curriculum.

6.3.2 Older students often offer Access courses/diplomas as their main academic qualification and yet GSCC progression data (2009b) in relation to these qualifications is far from positive. At the moment such courses are not graded other than as pass/fail and so it is feasible that even in HEIs where the A-level entrance requirement is very high, applicants offering Access diplomas could arrive with the equivalent of anything from AA-EE. This should be helped somewhat by the introduction of grading this coming year (2009-10), but at the moment the exclusive focus upon A-level grades as indicators of entrance requirements would seem somewhat naïve, despite being the most easily available and most commonly understood data.

6.3.3   The academic research base underpinning social work admissions is relatively thin in the UK. Indeed, two of the author's own published papers identify significant gaps in knowledge regarding admissions and progression. (Holmström and Taylor, 2008a and 2008b). GSCC data (2009b) suggests

that younger students, including those offering A-levels as their highest qualification, have relatively poor progression rates (although whether the differences are statistically significant is unclear), but that those with Access diplomas are even less likely to complete their degree in the usual timeframe. Interestingly, questionnaire respondents were divided equally in terms of groups of students most likely to struggle on their programmes with almost 50% identifying those with Access qualifications as being vulnerable to progression difficulties and 40% identifying younger students as those more likely to struggle. It may be significant that those programmes not identifying younger students as those more at risk of non-completion were those with the higher entrance requirements, so there may be a 'double jeopardy' in terms of progression for students with lower academic qualifications and lower age at entry.

6.3.4 There have also been concerns expressed regarding the 'readiness for practice' of younger applicants (during Task Force and Select Committee consultations), but again this has yet to be thoroughly researched and evaluated. It may well be that concerns have been expressed either due to practitioners' own feelings about what they (or their children) could/not have done at 'their age' (see Holmström 2008c) but could also be more of a difficulty where 'lack' of age/'life experience' is combined with poor educational track record (which is identified in published research as one of the key indicators of possible difficulties experienced by social work students on qualifying programmes). It is noticeable that the concerns regarding lack of relevant experience are *not* generally made of the many older students who may be seeking a career change into social work away from a diverse range of previous employment. Indeed, published research in UK and US (see Regehr et al, 1999 and Pelech et al, 1999 and a summary of both in Holmström and Taylor, 2008a) has indicated that there may in fact be a slight negative correlation (although this is not necessarily inferring a direct causal relationship) between high levels of previous relevant experience and performance upon social work programmes. Concerns expressed publicly regarding the readiness of younger applicants to enter professional training fail to discern between those with high levels of ability and resilience (demonstrated through academic achievement and/or life experiences as well as personal skills and characteristics), and those who may be in a less strong position to achieve on an academically and professionally/personally demanding programme at this time in their lives. It may also fail to take account of the impact of programmes' failure to adapt to meet this newer group of students' potentially differing transition and learning needs.

6.3.5 Whilst the response to concerns expressed regarding progression for minority ethnic and disabled students is usually to argue that this should be monitored more closely and to examine programme adaptation/accessibility to secure equality of progression (see GSCC, 2009), this tends not to be the argument used in respect of younger students when this may be equally important. Social work education providers previously became adept at working with groups of students frequently referred to as non-traditional ('mature', often relatively under-qualified entrants in academic terms) and yet younger students have entered this terrain often without any explicit attention to their potentially different transitional needs. Indeed, it is important to note that WP refers to more than widening *access*. Participation and progression is crucial and may require mechanisms for supporting transition and progression in addition to those utilised during application and admission stages (see TLRP, 2008).

6.3.6 Given differential progression rates (see chart 4 below), this issue requires further examination; one of the areas explored in the survey stage of the project was the extent to which programme staff have noticed any changing demographic trends in relation to their degree entrants since the introduction of the degree, and allied with this, the extent to which adjustments to programmes/pedagogy have been made to take account of this change. This approach necessitates examining the student life-cycle as a whole rather than just at admissions stage, and also helps to identify areas for further exploration as well as examples of good practice.
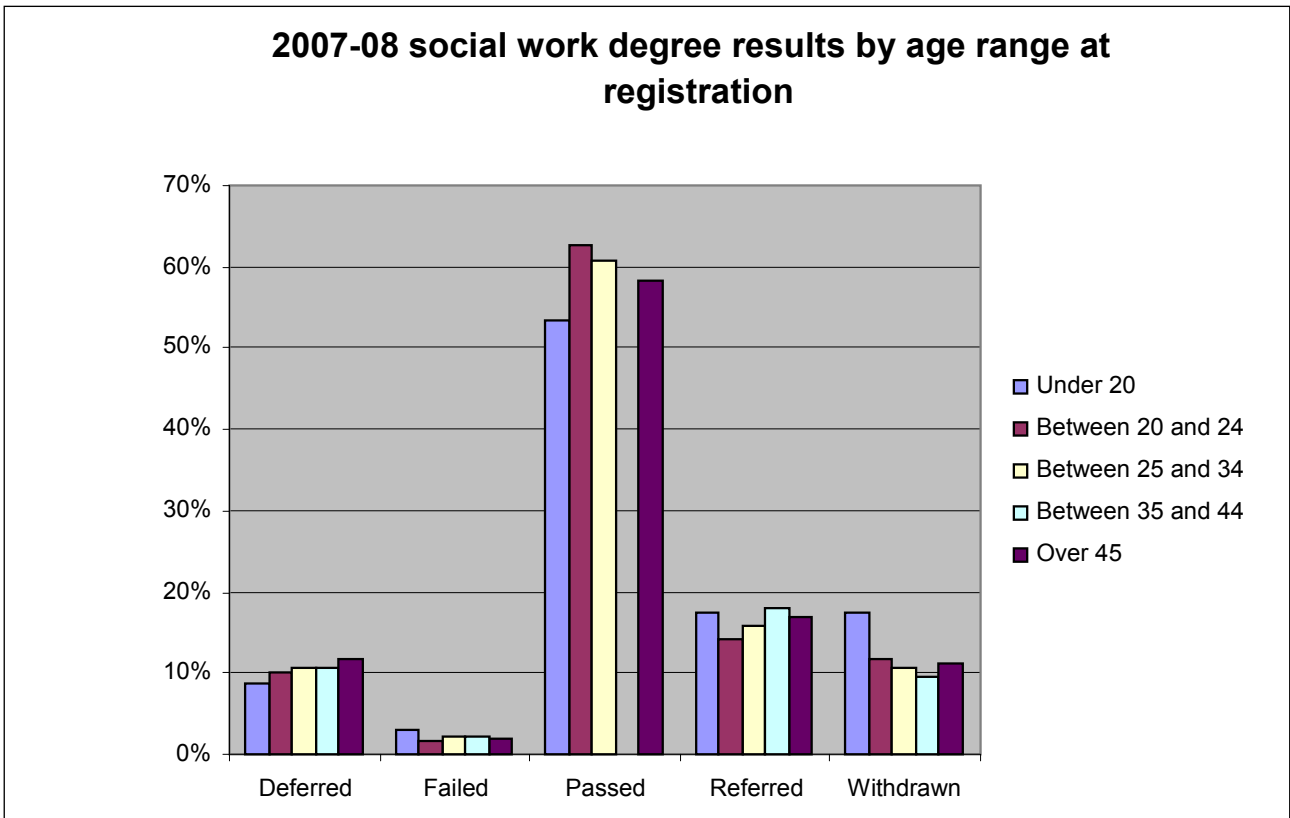
Chart 4: Age and progression data taken from GSCC data (2009b)

6.4 Experience requirements

6.4.1   On the whole, more PG courses specify the need for pre-course relevant experience and detail the nature and amount of this than do UG programmes. For UG programmes, although many (60%) list 'experience' as a requirement or a preference (see chart 5 below), relatively few specify the amount or nature of the experience required. In another context, some involved in the admissions processes have acknowledged that this can be used as a way of excluding younger applicants, whilst others have expressed concern about this being an unintended outcome of such requirements. Requiring extensive experience in particular settings is of course challenging for those studying intensive Level-three courses, and applicants who may have difficulty securing paid or voluntary work due to other responsibilities (such as caring for younger siblings or parents with additional needs) or because of the complexities of this associated with where they live (especially the case for Channel Island and other small community based applicants). In very few cases are references made to more naturally occurring and accessible opportunities to which younger applicants may have been exposed such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, peer mentoring schemes etc. Arguably such opportunities test similar skills and attributes to those identified as being important for social work and could usefully be highlighted as appropriate evidence of key abilities and interests in guidance provided for applicants.
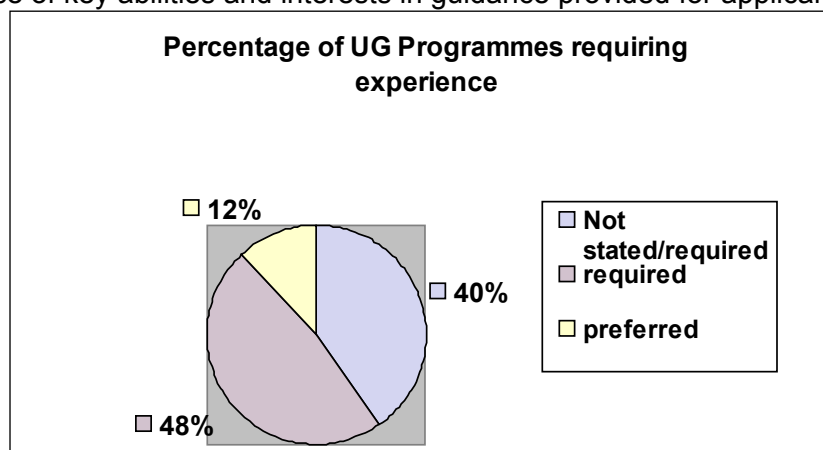

Chart 5: experience required?

6.4.2 Further details of the experience requirements clearly stated on websites and on UCAS entry profiles are listed below:

Amount of experience required	Number of Programmes
None/not specified as requirement	25
0-3 months/equiv	2
4-6 months	2
7-9 months	0
10-12 months	0
Over 12 months	0
Required/preferred but amount not specified on UCAS/HEI website	37

Table 6: specified amount of experience required

6.4.3   Quite apart from the concerns regarding the possible discrimination against younger applicants 'via the back door' in relation to requiring experience, the evident lack of clarity (or transparency) regarding what is required together with the lack of evidence from research that this is a significant factor, is concerning. In a way, prior experience has been the 'gold standard' of social work entry requirements. However, this is not borne out by research findings (see above) and ignores the slightly negative correlation found in some research studies between length of prior experience and success on professional social work programme. Should experience continue to be a 'gold standard' (rather than higher grades or other measures) and this becomes mandatory for selection onto a programme, we will need to consider the risks as well as the benefits, and will need to consider not only a broad range of what may be considered 'relevant' experience but also to examine what it is that we are really attempting to measure by requiring this. If it is motivation and commitment we require, there may well be other means of assessing this.

6.4.4   Interestingly, the Task Force report does not recommend a requirement for prior experience in order to access social work training. In a context in which experience is often cited as being 'helpful', but in which it remains largely undefined and its relevance under-researched, this seems to be helpful. Indeed, the conflation of 'experience' with ability or evidence of future ability is not at all helpful in admissions practices, and anecdotal evidence suggests that termination of training processes are employed more often with those who have varying amounts of prior experience compared to those with none. Similarly, research regarding the experiences of younger students suggests that whilst experience may be reflected in increased confidence in the applicant, and by practice assessors' willingness to take students on placement, there is little to support the previous assumptions that experience directly leads to success.

Indeed, whilst many questionnaire respondents confirmed that their programme requires evidence of previous experience (anything from 15 days to 6 months) this is largely in order to test motivation and commitment as well as demonstrating an understanding of the social work role. Arguably, six months experience as a support worker or volunteer in day centre may allow an applicant to draw upon this in terms of understanding the helping relationship, but does not *necessarily* give further insight into the nature of the social work role or task. It may serve to discriminate against those offering high degrees of conceptual abilities and the potential to become excellent practitioners, than if a broader assessment of motivation and commitment was employed. For example, many programmes not requiring social care experience accept evidence of participation in peer support or mentoring schemes or even informal support experience as evidence of personal skills and abilities and deem these relevant. Indeed, many questionnaire respondents highlighted the fact that although many of them do have a stated experience requirement, it is in fact the reflections upon this and the understanding of the social work role that is actually the most significant.

6.5 Mathematics and English qualifications

6.5.1   Although all social work programmes are required to have an entry requirement of GCSE Mathematics and English grade C or above or equivalent, this is not clear in all UCAS/HEI web pages. Although most do mention this requirement (and two seem to require this to be at level three rather than level two), many admissions tutors highlight the determination of 'equivalency' as a challenging task. Some recognised level 2 mathematics qualifications can be obtained purely by taking multiple choice tests, so some HEIs have chosen not to recognize these as equivalents, resulting in a varied national picture. Mathematics tests to assess equivalency are provided by six HEIs often with a focus upon the numeracy element of mathematics rather than other elements of the standard GCSE curriculum, although the details of these and how they are validated are currently unknown.

6.5.2   Written tests are used by 14 programmes (possibly more as data was often not available); sometimes just for those with no formal qualifications, but some are offered routinely to all applicants to assess literacy. Some admissions tutors have raised concerns about the time taken to assess these tests. Importantly, many have stated that they have stopped using these due to difficulties in assessing the impact of someone's disability or possible disability upon the work they produce. Some have now moved to setting an essay to be submitted prior to attendance at interview and then discussing this during the interview to ensure authenticity of authorship, which is obviously a critical issue.

6.5.3   Written and spoken English is an important issue for the many English-as-a-second-language (ESL) applicants for social work programmes. In such situations it is crucial that HEIs require and assess abilities using IELTS[6] or similar rather than just the grade C English or above (since this is a different qualification when taken overseas). In cases where the IELTS score achieved by applicants is low or on the low end of the required overall score, consideration should be given requiring pre-sessional and/or in-sessional language tuition to be provided to the student, which in turn requires the wider HEI to be able to provide such support. This is particularly important on a professional degree in which ability to listen and communicate sensitively and appropriately requires an appreciation of the subtleties of communication as well as the more commonly tested components. Indeed, programme providers may find it helpful to compare their own IELTS requirement with those required by local medical schools given the similar communication requirements. Anecdotal evidence suggests that even students who enter social work programmes with IELTS overall scores of 7 are likely to struggle with the subtleties and nature of communication required if not properly supported. This may necessitate social work programme providers adopting a higher requirement than is the norm in their HEI and this may require careful negotiation in institutions where the drive to recruit larger numbers of overseas students is a priority (and in some cases has resulted in the standard IELTS requirement being higher for SW than in the rest of that HEI).

6.5.4   IELTS and similar English language entry requirements are specified by many of the HEIs and the overall scores required are summarised below:
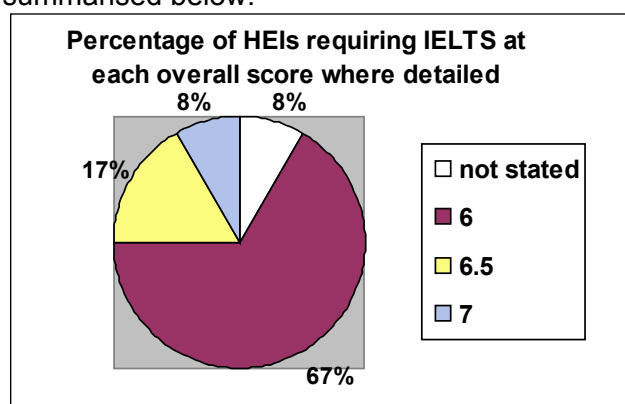

Chart 6: IELTS scores required

Generally those requiring an overall score of 7 also had higher academic entry requirements; those requiring 6.5 sometimes specified a higher grade for the listening or speaking component (the overall score is an amalgamation of separate speaking, listening, reading and writing tests).

6   IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is one of the most commonly used tools for assessing the ability of an applicant's ability to read, write, speak and listen in English. The qualification is recognized by universities in most counties. Candidates receive a score out of 9 for each part of the assessment (reading, writing etc) plus an overall score. See: www.ielts.org

6.6 Requirements relating to specific subjects

6.6.1   Excluded subjects most often identified are General Studies A-level and performance-based courses. Interestingly, the HEIs most likely to be specific about such exclusions are generally those with lower entrance requirements, whilst those with higher entry requirements tend to specify high grades and breadth of study but do not on the whole exclude general studies or other subjects and the majority of these do not specify required or preferred A-level subjects. This may have the effect on some HEIs of narrowing their potential pool of applicants so that able applicants who offer subjects differently to those required are denied access despite high levels of attainment. Indeed, we have yet to see research that identifies the link between particular subjects of previous study and 'better' progress on the social work degrees. Arguably, a requirement for previous study that incorporates an element of extended writing may be seen as being logically helpful preparation for professional training; however details about which subjects and qualifications provide this is not readily available, although the new Extended Project[7] does seem to offer potential, especially when it becomes available to a wider range of pupils (not all schools currently offer this option).

6.7   Selection processes and mechanisms

6.7.1   Social workers routinely carry out assessments of risk and potential to change. Arguably then, social work educators alongside other stakeholders are well placed to design and operate selection processes for the social work degree and to have confidence in these. However, the pressures upon time and resources are particularly extreme and the role (in terms of decision making processes) relatively under-researched.

It is noticeable from the data obtained from UCAS and HEI web pages/prospectus details, that few programmes make detailed and explicit references to the selection processes and tools they employ. In addition to this being contrary to the Schwartz recommendations regarding transparency (Admissions to Higher Education Review, 2004), this may give the impression that this process is less clear and structured than it is. Although many refer to interviews, it is not always clear from the initial information provided whether these are individual or group processes and only 4 specify that they use both in their assessment of applicants (Keele, UEL, Universities of Sussex/Brighton, University of Teesside). Questionnaire respondents detailed a wide range of practices that exemplified the tendency to develop coherent and multi-dimensional assessment processes. Despite the fact that these are often not referred to in publicity materials available online, many respondents highlighted a trend towards developing additional guidance for applicants regarding what is assessed and how at various stages in the application process.

6.7.2   In terms of mechanisms for selecting students, the Task Force report makes welcome statements regarding the need for robust and clear selection procedures that rigorously test applicants in relation to key abilities and skills. This is clearly a complex activity, particularly given the recognition that we are testing for *potential* to develop, as well as existing, core skills. The Task Force report recognizes the existence of a range of excellent practices employed by some programmes in order to ensure that the best applicants are offered the available places and also recognises the need for these practices to be shared. An examination of questionnaire responses and data from HEI websites suggests that a range of tools are frequently used to increase the robustness of selection.

Many programmes are now using an additional stage in the selection process; selectors highlight the importance of this in ensuring a greater degree of fairness and consistency (UCAS forms are completed with substantial college/school guidance for some and no help for others and the help given may not be specific to social work). This is particularly important in a context in which applications to social work courses have doubled since the introduction of the degrees (see UCAS data)[8].

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7   The Extended Project is a compulsory component of the new 14-19 Diplomas, in all lines of learning. It is, however, also available as an optional free-standing qualification for those taking A-levels an similar qualifications as long as their school offers this opportunity. It provides the student with the equivalent of an AS qualification and is designed to test extended writing abilities and independent study skills. The project is also a key feature of the International Baccalaureate

8

Total applications	Accepted applications	Ratio of applications to places	
56,786	10,174	5.6	2008
30,575	5,506	5.5	2004

NB – this relates to total applications not applicants. Many applicants make use of their multiple choices. From: www.ucas.com/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/   [accessed 5/1/09]

Examples of such selection tools used include:

- completion of an 'extended personal statement' with set questions that focus upon their tenacity, resilience and understanding of the helping role as well as themselves in relationships;

- completion of an essay to test conceptual and written skills, this is then discussed at interview to ensure authorship is authentic;

- completion of a biographical questionnaire.

6.7.4   Indeed, 60% of questionnaire respondents referred to recent changes to their selection processes including the introduction of additional tests to assess literacy. Although 75% of questionnaire respondents have retained written tests on selection days, others have moved away from this and focus instead on work written prior to interview, but then highlight how this is used as the basis for discussion at interview to ensure authenticity of authorship. In many cases, admissions tutors referred to having concerns about managing disability needs and issues arising from this in relation to 'on the day' testing. This may have implications for the operationalising of the Task Force recommendation regarding the use of written tests.

6.7.5   Four questionnaire respondents (and others when consulted directly for further clarification), refer to having introduced a 'multi-dimensional' approach to selecting students. These approaches involve listing the qualities required or sought and mapping these against elements of the selection process, often using published research as well as practice wisdom to identify desired characteristics.

Three examples are given below:

a) At one HEI, UCAS forms are screened initially for suitability on the basis of an agreed template: academic qualifications must reach the standard offer for the programme or have a good account of why that is not possible; the applicant must demonstrate that they have an initial understanding of what social work currently is and the skills needed for the role; and, they must give some account of why they feel they are a suitable applicant. Those passing that first stage of screening are invited to complete a second stage of the application process. This involves obtaining a second reference (if the one on the UCAS form is academic, then this one must be personal or professional), completion of suitability statement, submission of a piece of academic writing, PLUS completion of an extended personal statement. In this latter piece of work, applicants are required to give examples that evidence their motivation and interest in social work, their academic suitability and readiness for this level of study, their tenacity and resilience and their ability to manage stress as well as what they have learned about themselves and the helping relationship from their own personal relationships. This HEI reports using this tool to screen out about 30% of applicants and also to test motivation and commitment simply by completing it. The extended personal statements are read by a combination of service users, practitioners and academic colleagues, with the admissions tutor moderating all recommendations to ensure consistency. Those applicants successful at this stage are invited to attend a selection day at which they take part in i) an informal welcome session; ii) an assessed group task; iii) an individual interview. Each stage includes reflection back on other stages to assess applicants' reflective skills and levels of self-awareness. Although there is no longer a written test on the day, the admissions tutor at this university explains that a sample of written work from previous study (or a specially set task if no recent study has taken place) is also sent to the HEI with the extended personal statement. Written abilities can then be tested in a way that is possibly more fair for those with dyslexia and similar disabilities whilst linked questions at interview allow authenticity of authorship to be confirmed.

b) At another HEI, applicants who pass the initial UCAS form screening stage require all applicants to complete a 1000 word essay to test ability to form an argument, ability to think conceptually and their ability to express themselves. This is then discussed at interview to ensure authenticity as well as to explore reflective abilities and ability to form and present an argument or view.

c) One questionnaire respondent described their selection day as follows:

"We have run a three stage assessment process for all candidates. These three stages are set to measure a range of knowledge, skills and values relating to our academic and work experience criteria. Us lecturers and our stakeholders (clients, carers, social workers, etc) arrange to interview 54 candidates together in one day. They are subject to:

1. A written exercise that tests their academic abilities and theoretical understanding of social work.

2. A team exercise (this involves nine candidates undertaking an observed activity) to test critical understanding of social care issues, skills in dealing with group dynamics and values in fairness and diversity.

3. A 1:1 brief interview that assesses personal issues and motivation for social work.

4. Throughout the day, the candidates have opportunities to meet existing students, to get to know each other and undertake tours of the campus.

The advantage of this new interview process is that we can assess students on multiple knowledge, skills and values dimensions all in one day. Candidates have said how much they have enjoyed the day, and they get to meet other candidates, lecturers and students. It is also fairer because they can demonstrate their strengths as well as weaknesses through the different activities.

For us staff, this multi dimension approach, allows us to undertake a significantly enhanced and better informed and global assessment and decision making process. It is also less time consuming where we can see 200 candidates in only 6 days." (Questionnaire respondent)

6.7.6   A significant number of questionnaire respondents also referred to the fact that they now review and evaluate their process on an annual basis. Many now seek feedback from applicants in relation to their experiences, actively examine progression data and review admissions practices (approximately 75% of respondents).

6.7.7   In relation to the techniques used to select applicants on selection days themselves, a minority of questionnaire respondents (although this may not be representative of the national picture) indicated that they used group sessions as their only interview tool, stating that this was simply down to resource and time issues. Indeed, other respondents referred to being 'under pressure' to move away from individual interviews for resource reasons, with some admissions tutors arguing against this on the basis that short term cuts and reduction of time spent at this stage in the process will not help in the prevention of later difficulties. Interviews are not infallible as research demonstrates (see summary in Holmström and Taylor, 2008a, Watson, 2001, Munro, 1995, Bridges 1996, Furnham, 1992). However, this does not mean that all interviews are equally unreliable – indeed, the research from occupational psychology does provide pointers for improving reliability. Taylor and Small (2007, p277) emphasise the importance of 'descriptively anchored rating scales' and that greater interview response validity was obtained by asking for previous examples of how someone had behaved rather than more situational ('what if') questions are used.

In addition, the trend towards programmes adopting multi-dimensional assessment processes suggests that some degree of triangulation is employed in this process, as well as enabling applicants to demonstrate skills in different contexts. Indeed, many questionnaire respondents highlighted the importance of devising a coherent and holistic process with built-in opportunities for demonstrating reflective capacity.

Respondents highlighting the importance of retaining individual interviews argued that:

"We are being pushed to adopt group interviews, but are resisting. We will be reviewing admissions processes in the light of the Task Force Report and are likely, if anything, to make them more stringent."

"We have always been under time pressures but we make sure that we give proper time to the interviews (students are with us for around three hours in total) because we want to be confident in our decisions. Seeing groups of 6 - 8 (applicants) at a time is time-consuming but we both feel it is absolutely worth putting this time in."

6.7.8   In favour of group interviews, some respondents have argued that these are appropriate as the main selection tool:

"We have moved entirely to group interviews, mainly due to pressures of time and staffing available. However we have also felt that group interviews enable more social work focussed discussion to take place using an actual case study following candidate's preparation."

Many respondents to the questionnaires indicated that they use group exercises in addition to individual interviews as part of their selection days. Most doing so report that the additional information obtained regarding candidates' ability to work in teams, together with the applicants' reflections on this at interview, provide interviewers with valuable additional information about each applicant, particularly helpful in a context of increasingly high levels of applications. This is different, however, to using group interviews in place of individual interviews, although entirely acceptable within existing regulations.

6.7.9   None of the questionnaire respondents identified psychometric testing as a tool they used during selection processes. Although such tools are widely used within some areas of employment recruitment, these require careful training to administer and interpret appropriately and frequently require applicants to be with selectors for a long period of time, with selection events often taking place over multiple days given that it is the discussion with the applicant following the tests that is usually critical rather than the scores on the tests themselves. When dealing with the level of applications for the social work degree, this may be impractical. In addition, research regarding the utility of such tools in social work student selection is limited and findings contested (see Holmström and Taylor, 2008a, p530-1 and Manktelow and Lewis, 2005, for further discussion of this potential tool).

6.8 Stakeholder involvement

6.8.1   Stakeholder involvement in the selection process, although a requirement, is only mentioned on course information web-pages by 14 HEIs in respect of employer involvement and by 17 in respect of service user and carer involvement. All questionnaire respondents confirmed that stakeholder participation in selection processes took place, although the way in which, and degree to which, stakeholders are involved in selection processes varies greatly from being involved in discussing interview questions or setting one such question to being present through all elements of the selection process as an equal member of the decision making panel. Admissions tutors have commented upon the instability of funding for such involvement which is currently confirmed on a year by year basis as one of the obstacles to fuller and longer term participation of all stakeholders.

6.8.2 Obstacles to ensuring participation identified by respondents include:

- The need to involve increasing numbers of stakeholders following increased levels of application,

- Pressures of time to arrange systematic inclusion of a good range of stakeholders,

- Employers/practitioners being too busy to be able to commit time to interviewing for a whole day at a time,

- Time needed for training stakeholders in participating in selection processes, especially in relation to legal and procedural matters,

- Ensuring participation is meaningful/'real' and appropriate and that those taking part are able to meet the HEI obligations in respect of legislation and decision making processes.

6.8.3   However, not all admissions tutors have found this process equally challenging. In some cases for example, local employers have welcomed invitations to join interview panels and spend some time away from the pressures of their usual tasks, as well as welcoming the opportunity to influence the composition of the future workforce. In other cases, thriving service user and carer networks have developed and are able to meet the increased demands for participation throughout the degree experience. One shared challenge, however, as mentioned above, is in relation to the funding for service user and carer participation that is currently only funded on an annual basis. This prevents longer term planning, especially where monies are used to fund a project or network coordinator post or similar.

As noted above, the extent of participation varies from programme to programme, particularly in respect of service user and carer involvement in the selection process. A small minority of questionnaire respondents indicated that they do not have direct (in-person) participation by all stakeholders on selection days, mainly due to the impact of the challenges listed above. However, in at least one case, this has been addressed by the development of a service user and carer DVD which is used during the selection day, as the basis for a written exercise. Additional qualitative feedback from the questionnaire phase also highlights some of the challenges in ensuring the authenticity and meaningful nature of participation whilst being able to maintain accountability and responsibility for the actions or comments made by those who are not employed on any regular basis by the HEI. The chart below illustrates the range of involvement of different stakeholder groups as reported by questionnaire respondents (n=25):
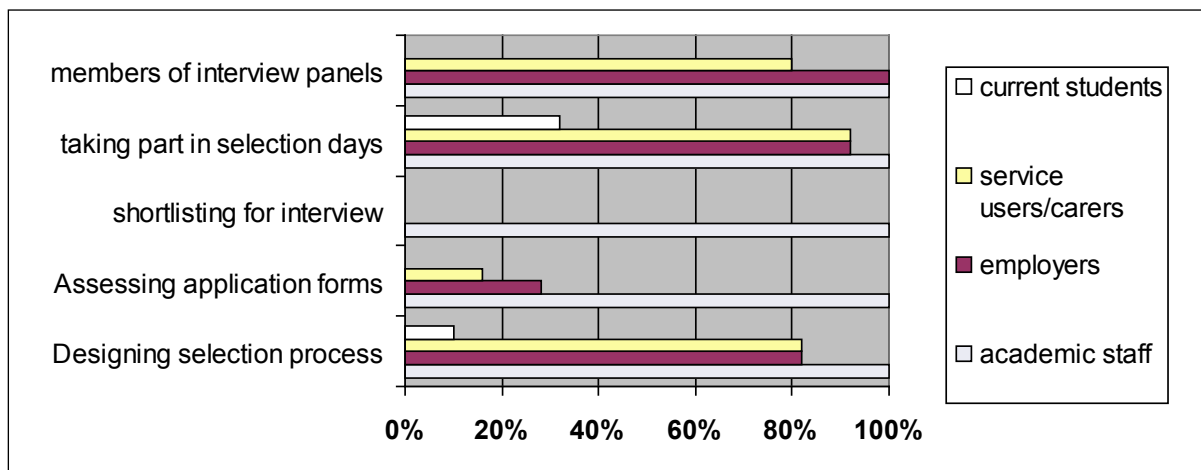

Chart 7: stakeholder participation in different elements of the selection process

In some cases, service users and carers lead on particular elements of the selection day (often a group exercise) rather than being participants throughout the whole process. Admissions tutors who coordinate both types of processes have commented positively upon how well these systems work.

6.8.5   Examples of good practice are evident when reviewing the materials several admissions tutors have supplied in addition to their questionnaire responses. Many refer to training schemes for stakeholders being provided to ensure meaningful participation in the processes, and some also refer to the eagerness they have experienced by either service user and carer representatives or employers in being involved in selection. Although the focus on this area of enquiry in the questionnaire may have dissuaded those less confident about their processes to take part, those who have provided details of the way in which they meet the requirement for stakeholder participation have done so in a way that indicates a great deal of investment of time, resources and commitment to this area of work. It is important that we recognise this and use information about such practices to support others working in this arena.

6.9 Links to programme, curriculum and curriculum development

6.9.1 Although the focus upon entry level and assessment of suitability at the point of selection for social work training is crucial, this is not an activity undertaken in isolation from other elements of social work education. Indeed, when asking questionnaire respondents to comment upon observed demographic changes in their student groups (fewer men, more BME students and more school leavers being identified by many), most were able to identify changes made to their curricula in order to support the induction, orientation and/or progression of different groups. This illustrates the resource intensive nature of social work education, as well as the commitment to develop and provide high quality educational experiences whilst remaining committed to maintaining a diverse student population, in order to best reflect the communities social workers represents and work with. Examples of curriculum developments taken from questionnaire responses include:

"(We provide) significantly more study skills input in year 1, including regular small group tutorials."

"A Black students' support group was introduced but did not continue due to poor attendance."

"Comprehensive learning support is offered to students with dyslexia/ English as second language by the college and is taken up by students."

"We made changes in teaching practices, changes in assessment practices, enhanced 1:1 tutorials."

"We set up a Diversity Support Group."

"We have increased placement liaison to deal with potential stereotyping of younger students."

"We have had to introduce more work on basic written English and grammar."

6.9.2 Indeed, responses generally referred to increased provision of learning support or basic literacy (either cross-HEI or within programme), even where entrance requirements are high. This may reflect a general HE sector experience in which literacy levels are identified as potentially problematic. Social work education is often regarded as being different (in terms of pedagogic style and the emphasis placed upon personal and professional development) to previous educational experiences for many entrants, regardless of their prior study or age. Increasingly then, social work degree providers are finding creative solutions to this by embedding professional and personal development courses within their curricula. When carefully designed and managed, these also seem to serve to 'bridge the gap' between FE and HE experiences and also to bridge divides between those students arriving with 'life experience' or 'work experience' (who tended to 'lack' academic confidence/experience) and others who may appear to 'lack' such experience but arrive with more evident academic ability and more readily evidenced conceptual abilities.

6.9.3 Whilst a focus upon admissions and selection is crucial, this must also be mirrored by ongoing assessment of suitability and the inclusion of clear mechanisms for removal of students from professional courses where their suitability is not maintained or where additional information calls into question the previous assessment of their suitability. At the moment, whilst all courses are required to have such mechanisms and GSCC issued guidance (2007) pertaining to these processes, legislation and case law experiences during recent years suggest that such guidance could usefully be updated. Strengthening the existing requirement to assess readiness for direct practice may offer one opportunity to assist the transfer out of social work training for the small numbers of students deemed not suitable for professional training at a relatively early stage in the programme. Indeed, many programmes have adopted innovative and creative assessments of this 'readiness'.

7. Examples of good practice or rigorous screening

As noted, there is already some excellent practice embedded within the selection strategies employed by many programme providers and a few examples are summarized here. Eight institutions list on their website additional stages or processes they have added to their selection strategy (as well as interviews and UCAS form screening). These are currently: Keele, Southampton Solent, University of Bath, University of Birmingham, University of East Anglia, University of Plymouth, Universities of Sussex and Brighton, University of Teesside. In addition, others summarise additional aspects to phases of the selection process as shown in the table below. Indeed, some of these may form the basis of useful tools for other providers of SW degrees to use in order to improve the information available to selectors in relation to each applicant. Further examples of such processes and selection tools were obtained from questionnaire respondent and a small selection of these are located in the appendices of this report.

Institution	Additional/details of assessment	Comments
Lancaster	Recent coursework brought to interview	Mechanisms for checking validity; mechanisms for dealing with those not in current study/recent study
Bath	Admissions selection test	
Birmingham	Applicants sit a written test that is in two parts. Part one explorer: what has been learned from personal and practice experience; resilience and coping and, understanding and ability to complete SW degree. The second part assesses candidate ability to read, interpret and respond to questions on a set text.	
East Anglia	Emphasis on importance of assessment throughout whole process	
University of Hertfordshire	Applicants screened prior to selection for interview by submitting an essay	
University of the West of England	Shortlisted applicants are required to complete a biographical questionnaire prior to interview	
Wiltshire College	Applicants submit a short reflective account demonstrating their commitment to studying the degree, prior to interview	
Universities of Sussex/Brighton	Applicants who are considered suitable following screening via UCAS forms are invited to complete an extended personal statement plus confirmation of suitability prior to selection for interview.	Evidence-based extended personal statement with set questions for all draw from research regarding safe/effective recruitment (e.g. re tenacity, coping under pressure, self in relationships with others)

Table 7: Details of additional selection mechanisms

8. Discussion of Task Force recommendations

8.1 The proposals contained in the Task Force report seek to improve the rigour of selection processes, and confidence in these processes. Importantly, the report also acknowledges the existence of models of good practice already utilized by some programmes and identifies the need to extend those practices. Recommendations one and twelve, taken together, will go a long way in achieving this. The increased public understanding regarding the nature of social work will in turn improve the understanding of applicants who may not have had experience of social work directly and may have been dependent upon second hand and sometimes out of date sources of information (inevitably so in a rapidly changing profession).

8.2 Although the admissions tutors responding to the questionnaire do not form an entirely representative sample, all comment positively upon the recommendations contained in the Task Force report. They stated either that the recommendations supported their current activity or that they were using the report and recommendations to further amend their selection and recruitment strategies.

8.3 The Task Force report also recognizes the complexity of the issues and the context in which social work selection and recruitment occurs. In particular, the recognition that an exclusive focus upon A-level grades or upon tariff points targets a small proportion of all applicants is crucial as already mentioned in earlier sections of this report. It is also important to recognise the changing nature of 14-19 qualifications with many recent developments in this field.

8.4 Certainly increased monitoring and evaluation of admissions practices (as recommended by the Task Force, and as currently required in the annual monitoring processes) seems to be a positive development. This will allow (and require) HEIs to examine their own intake and progression data in a way that allows for variation to be explored. Information from UCAS and HEI websites regarding minimum entry requirements only gives a partial picture given the increasing array of new qualifications as well as individually based decisions to raise or lower the 'standard offer' in the light of WP or other factors. Whilst needing somehow to balance regulation with ensuring the availability and accessibility of guidance and support is crucial to further developing good practice in this area of practice, it is clear from questionnaire respondents that very little feedback is currently offered during regular monitoring processes. Indeed, 25% of respondents reported receiving no feedback in relation to their selection processes and reporting of this during annual monitoring and re-validation/approval processes whilst 60% reported receiving 'a little' feedback on such issues.

8.5 The current recommendation from the Task Force suggests that a threshold of 250 tariff points may be identified as that below which programmes will be subject to additional scrutiny or monitoring. It is worth noting that this may cause some confusion because of the way in which tariff points work in steps of 20 for A-level grades and only in steps of less than this for AS or non-academic awards (practical music exams etc). Thus CCC at A-level is equivalent to 240 points, the current national average according to UCAS data in terms of what HEIs set as the standard for those entering with tariff bearing qualifications (A-levels, BTEC, IB, etc). 250 points would require an AS or other qualification to be added to the A-levels in order to make the total score add up to 250, and yet this would arguably not improve the academic level of the qualifications obtained. However, a minimum of 260 would be the equivalent of BCC and would mark, possibly positively, a small increase from the current national average. Those responsible for implementing and detailing reforms may wish to examine this further and consider a move to 260 points. Indeed, those questionnaire respondents stating that it is school and college leavers who struggle not just with adapting to placement work and expectations, but also to academic expectations, were invariably those asking for lower academic entrance qualifications than those who responded that their younger students achieved very well on the programmes. Whatever threshold is set as the recommended national minimum, programmes may benefit from being encouraged to make more careful use of tariff points in the framing of their offers by clarifying breadth and depth and exclusions more clearly here, even if this is at odds with their wider HEI position. This would enable social work programmes to frame offers more clearly, ensuring that applicants were able to demonstrate their academic suitability for professional training.

One factor not explicitly acknowledged in the report that may benefit from consideration during the next phase of consultation and planning for implementation, relates to the fact that no other profession in

the country has entry requirements set in this way. Possibly simply due to a longer period of historical demand and a better (e.g. more universal services) understanding of what the profession (such as medicine and teaching) entails, medical degrees set their own entrance standards with no national minimum being set. Whilst many involved in the selection of students and the delivery of social work programmes would support the setting of a minimum level, careful consideration of the effect of this action upon public perception is advisable. It is unclear at this time whether this proposed action would increase public confidence or could have any more negative unintended consequences.

8.6 The Task Force report refers to a small proportion of students struggling with use of English, especially in written work. English language qualifications are of course required for all applicants, at the equivalent of grade C GCSE or higher. In addition to a degree of variation in how 'equivalence' is measured for UK qualifications (or assessed for those without such qualifications, with some programmes assessing this level themselves whilst others have moved towards requiring a full level two qualification), there is even more variation in what is required for overseas applicants. Clearly GCSE English when taken as a second language subject in an applicant's country of origin does not test language at the same level as a UK-based GCSE English course. Whilst most HEIs have additional requirements (IELTS and similar) for such applicants, this was not mentioned by all questionnaire respondents (nor on all course entry information) and when it was mentioned, the requirements varied from one HEI to another. It may be important to examine whether even in HEIs where lower IELTS scores are required for other programmes of study, social work programmes may benefit from setting their own higher requirements in recognition of the advanced communication skills required within our professional work. This, along with the discussion above regarding tariff points or required grades for entry to social work degrees may well be areas in which social work programmes have higher entrance levels than the wider HEI in which they are based. HEIs should be encouraged to see this as positive rather than problematic.

8.7 Although the GSCC has requested a change in legislation so that health checks will not required in the future, greater clarity regarding ill-heath and the assessment of suitability would be appreciated by many admissions tutors. Many reported that whilst assessments of health (especially mental health and addiction) can provide useful information regarding the applicant, these can also cause complications in respect of disability discrimination. In part this is due to a lack of clarity regarding conditions that might exclude someone from social work training due to safety/well-being concerns (unlike the Training and Development Agency for schools[9]). Whilst this is a highly sensitive issue and those expressing concern are not wishing to exclude all applicants with mental ill-health or addiction difficulties, greater guidance is desirable in this arena if only to ensure effective support arrangements are in place following assessment of suitability. In one example given, clearance was given to one applicant to start a course when those assessing her 'fitness' were aware of her very recent and long term self-harming behaviour resulting in frequent hospital admissions. Due to a desire not to discriminate against her disclosed mental health condition, the health service assessing her 'fitness' required a full psychiatric assessment costing the HEI concerned almost £2000 for one assessment. This applicant may indeed one day become an effective practitioner, but her ability to cope with stressful situations is currently compromised. TDA guidance would apparently have been clear about her suitability in such situations.

8.8 Clearly there remains a need for longitudinal and large scale research that examines the links between admissions data and progression on social work programmes and the factors influencing this, including programme and curriculum factors. This would help in the identification of essential personal qualities for which HEIs can then design or use appropriate assessment tools and techniques.

8.9 Throughout all of this, it is crucial (as recognised in the Task Force report) to be mindful of examples of good practice – where local employers and other stakeholders are complimentary about the quality of graduates from programmes and where programmes/HEIs have invested fully in selection and admission strategies and have higher than average progression rates. Often those satisfied with outcomes have been less vocal than those dissatisfied for obvious reasons.

In order to progress the sharing of innovative and creative practices, anonymised examples of documents illustrating 'good practice' that were obtained from selectors during phase three of this project have been appended to this report. In many cases, the time, motivation and commitment to devising a robust and research informed selection process in which applicants are assessed in different ways is striking.

9   http://www.tda.gov.uk/

9. Additional points

9.1 Whilst it is clear from HEFCE and UCAS statistics that places on social work courses have increased in number markedly over recent years, so too have applications. This larger pool of applicants from which to select is possibly more diverse than for any other degree programme in the country, and therefore it is no surprise that selection processes and mechanisms for professional training involve complexity, time and resources. It appears from information provided to the Task Force that some programmes have come under pressure to increase places by their HEI over recent years (and possibly a desire on the part of social work programmes to be valued by their HEI). All questionnaire respondents stated that despite some recent increases, numbers are now largely 'capped' (by themselves) due to restricted availability of high quality placements, and in one case, due to the programme team recognising a need to prioritise quality of student intake over student numbers. However, we should recognise that this is a highly complex activity, with pressures to meet targets in relation to student numbers, as mentioned elsewhere in this report.

9.2 One issue that may warrant further exploration and advice is the apparent confusion for some regarding the minimum age of entry onto a social work programme. Although GSCC have stated (response to personal enquiry) that there is no minimum age for registration and cannot be due to age discrimination legislation, most admissions tutors responding to the questionnaire state that either they have a publicised policy of not taking under 18s, or that they have an unwritten policy regarding this. This issue raises questions regarding the vulnerability of individual HEIs or programmes that refuse to admit someone to their programme on the basis of their age. Although this applies to a very small number of applicants each year, largely those who have been fast-tracked through their academic qualifications, some national guidance regarding this issue may be beneficial.

10. Recommendations arising from all phases of this project

10.1 Strengthen the role of regulation and guidance given at the point of programme approval and during annual monitoring activities in relation to admissions and selection issues, including reviewing and updating the guidance issued by GSCC regarding suitability throughout the student life-cycle;

10.2 Consider the need for an information or resource pack to be developed and kept up to date for all involved in social work admissions work – to be contributed to by those involved in this area of work and disseminated widely recognizing the emerging expertise, creativity and knowledge but also the difficulties in 'handing over' to new colleagues;

10.3 Recognise the complexity of 'written test' criteria/requirements and the need to operationalise any such requirement in a way that allows for disability and other needs to be addressed fairly and in a way that does not restrict the creative and innovative work already being carried out in many HEIs. Indeed, as Taylor and Balen (1995) noted, a significant number of applicants each year seem to pass existing written tests but later go on to fail elements of the degree;

10.4 Continue to consider the complexity and fairness of any 'experience' requirement were this to be introduced in the future;

10.5 Encourage the development of local links with existing pre-degree level courses in order to better support those preparing for degree level study;

10.6 Consider mechanisms for securing the longer term funding available to HEIs for service user and carer participation, rather than the current year-by-year basis upon which funding is agreed;

10.7 Consider recognising or rewarding the time given to involvement in selection processes by employers and practitioners as part of their CPD, and encourage HEIs to explore the feasibility of linking training for service user and carer stakeholders/participants in the selection (and other) processes to HEI Associate member accreditation or similar recognition;

10.8 Continue to promote the image of social work and to ensure dissemination of knowledge regarding the profession and ensuring the promotion of the degree to able school and college leavers as well as to those applicants more 'traditional' for social work programmes;

10.9 Prioritise funding of larger scale and possibly longitudinal research exploring the links between intake characteristics, selection processes, experiences on programmes and effectiveness as practitioners. All of those taking part in the questionnaire indicated their willingness to take part, time and ethical clearance permitting, in such studies.

11. Acknowledgments

This project could not have been completed without the support and access to data provided by colleagues at SWAP and GSCC. In addition, I would like to thank those questionnaire respondents who took the time to complete the online questions and for those who willingly responded to my requests for additional data. The level of commitment, creativity and energy invested in this crucial area of work by many of those involved is striking and hope that this report identifies elements of existing good practice as well as areas of possible concern. I would like to acknowledge here the valuable work undertaken during the first phase of the project by Marie Bliss, a former student on my own BA SW programme who worked as a research assistant during the summer after graduating in 2009 with a first class degree.

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13. List of appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire used in phase three of project

Appendix 2a: Example of pre-interview stage additional screening document

Appendix 2b: Further example of pre-interview stage additional screening document

Appendix 3: Use of DVD to support written exercise

Appendix 4: Assessment of group activity score sheet (1)

Appendix 5: Example of group exercise score sheet (2)

Appendix 6: Example of interview questions and score sheet

Appendix 7: Practice Scenarios used as basis for discussion and exploration of values and attitudes in individual interviews

Appendix 8: Example of an initial application form screening tool

Appendix 9: Example of written examination, guidance and scoring sheet

Appendix 1: Questionnaire used in phase 3 of project

Online Surveys
Develop, launch and analyse Web-based surveys

US University of Sussex

About You:

Please note that all questions here are option and you can choose whether or not to give your name. If at all possible, it would help me if you were willing to give that information so I know who I do not need to remind about to survey. If you do give your name it will be removed from any analysis and will not feature in any reporting of the results. HEIs will not be named in the reporting stage

1. Your name:

2. Role/s (e.g. Admissions Tutor, Head of Department etc)

3. Name of HEI/college

4. Which of the following best describes the nature of the HEI/college in which you work?

☐ Russell Group   ☐ '94 Group   ☐ Millenium Group   ☐ FE college   ☐ Not sure

☐ Other

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

5. Are you:

☐ An academic member of staff   ☐ A member of professional support or administrative staff

☐ Other *(please specify)*:

6. Does your HEI/college operate a centralised admissions process for degree programmes on the whole?

☐ YES

☐ NO

If 'YES' above, to what extent does this apply to your social work programmes?

7. Are you willing to be contacted for clarification of specific points if necessary?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If 'YES', please enter your preferred email address here:

[   ]

About your programmes and your students

8. Which of the following programmes do you run? (please tick all applicable)
(select all that apply)

☐ UG FT ☐ UG PT ☐ PG FT ☐ PG PT ☐ UG EBR ☐ PG EBR ☐ PQ

For the rest of this questionnaire, the focus will mostly be upon undergraduate degree programmes, however, please do comment upon any significant differences or similarities with your PG programmes when completing your responses.

9. For your FT UG degree, what is your average intake size?

[   ]

Has this changed over recent years? If so, in what way?

[   ]

What do you think have been the main reasons for this change (if applicable)?

[   ]

10. Thinking about your UG degree intake, roughly what percentage of your student group in each year are:

Percentage

	(please select)	Other *(please specify)*
a. Applying with substantial life experience already	Select an answer ▼	
b. Applying with relevant work experience	Select an answer ▼	
c. School or college leavers (with or without gap year)	Select an answer ▼	
d. Known to have a disability including SLDs	Select an answer ▼	
e. Male	Select an answer ▼	
f. Members of BME groups	Select an answer ▼	

11. Have you 'noticed' any changes in the nature (demographic/ability) of the student groups since the introduction of the degrees?

☐ YES   ☐ NO   ☐ NOT SURE

If 'YES' above, what sorts of changes have you noticed?

12. Have you or your colleagues identified any patterns in relation to progression and retention of any of the groups mentioned above? If YES, please describe in brief.

13. Have you experienced any increase in the use of 'suitability' or termination of training processes since the introduction of the degrees?

☐ YES   ☐ NO   ☐ NOT SURE

14. Has the programme been adapted in any way to suit the needs of the changing student group?

☐ N/A   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

If 'YES' above, please give some details of changes here

15. What are your stated entry requirements regarding the following:

a. AGE (MIN/MAX)

[ ]

b. EXPERIENCE

[ ]

c. ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-UK APPLICANTS

[ ]

d. OTHER (PLEASE DETAIL)

[ ]

16. Please tell me a little here about how applicants without formal academic qualifications can enter your programme and how you assess their intellectual capabilities and potential:

[ ]

Selection processes

17. Which processes do you use to select your applicants?
   (select all that apply)

[ ] PERSONAL STATEMENT ON UCAS FORM   [ ] REFERENCE ON UCAS FORM

[ ] ADDITIONAL REFERENCE OBTAINED BY HEI   [ ] ADDITIONAL WRITTEN TASKS
PRIOR TO DECISION TO INVITE TO INTERVIEW   [ ] GROUP ACTIVITY/INTERVIEW

[ ] INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW   [ ] ADDITIONAL WRITTEN TASK/TEST ON THE DAY

[ ] MATHS/NUMERACY TEST ON THE DAY   [ ] IT TEST ON SELECTION DAY   [ ]
PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

[ ] Other *(please specify)*:

[ ]

18. Which elements of your selection process are different stakeholders involved in?

	Academic Staff		Service users/carers		Employers		Current students	
	YES	**NO**	**YES**	**NO**	**YES**	**NO**	**YES**	**NO**
a. Designing and monitoring selection processes including designing or commenting upon questions for use at interview	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Reading application forms	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Short listing for interview	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Taking part in selection days	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Members of interview panels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Other involvement on selection days	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Deciding nature of offer levels to individual applicants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. What have been the biggest challenges for you in implementing the requirement to involve stakeholders? Please list up to three

20. What are the most common reasons for rejecting an applicant prior to interview stage (please list up to three reasons)?

21. What would you say are the most common reasons for you rejecting an applicant at the interview stage? (Please list up to three)

22. Thinking about your interview stage, what are the 5 most important things you are testing for would you say?

23. Thinking about your selection processes as a whole, how do you test for the DH requirements? Please tick all that apply

	Personal Statement on UCAS form	Qualifications listed on UCAS form	Reference/s	Individual interview	Group task	Additional test/task
	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
a. Maths and English Key skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Written English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Spoken English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Appropriate personal qualities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Appropriate intellectual qualities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Other involvement on selection days	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Deciding nature of offer levels to individual applicants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

24. I am keen to enable the sharing of 'good' or effective practice and also to add in anonymously to the public domain examples of innovative practice in selection processes. If you feel that you and your colleagues have developed an element of your selection process that is innovative or 'works' particularly well, please describe it in brief here and if possible, email me any examples of related documents (c.j.holmstrom@sussex.ac.uk)

25. Please describe briefly any changes you have made to your selection processes over recent years and explain why these changes took place (e.g. pressures of time/resources/ growth in application levels)

26. To what extent do you feel that applicants are aware of what you are assessing and how?

☐ FULLY AWARE ☐ MOSTLY AWARE ☐ PARTIALLY AWARE ☐ NOT VERY AWARE

☐ Other *(please specify)*: [_____]

Offers and offer making

27. What is the standard offer (as publicised) in either tariff points or grades for your undergraduate degree?

[_____]

28. To what extent does this standard offer reflect your offer making practice? (i.e. are most offers around this level or much higher or lower)

[_____]

29. How have your entry requirements changed over recent years overall?

☐ NO CHANGE ☐ THEY HAVE DROPPED ☐ THEY HAVE INCREASED

☐ Other *(please specify)*: [_____]

In brief, what have been the main reasons for this change (if applicable?)

[_____]

30. Generally, thinking about the last 5-6 years, which statement best applies to your courses?

☐ WE FILL ALL AVAILABLE PLACES BUT ONLY BECAUSE WE MAKE USE OF 'CLEARING' ☐ WE FILL ALL PLACES WITHOUT ENTERING CLEARING PROCESS

☐ WE STRUGGLE TO FILL PLACES ON THE COURSE EVEN WHEN USING CLEARING

☐ Other *(please specify)*: [_____]

What changes, if any, have you noticed in relation to demand for places on your course/s over recent years

[_____]

If you recruit during clearing, do you have any comments in relation to the advantages and/or challenges this poses for providers of social work degrees?

[_____]

31. Which of the following factors would you say have influenced your selection process design and practices? Please tick all applicable and then in the right hand column rank these in numerical order.

	Important? YES	Ranking
a. PUBLISHED ACADEMIC RESEARCH	☐	
b. PUBLISHED GOVERNMENT OR OTHER REPORTS	☐	
c. EXTERNAL REGULATIONS	☐	
d. HEI REGULATIONS	☐	
e. EXPERIENCE	☐	
f. PRACTICE WISDOM REGARDING OUTCOMES	☐	
g. INTERNAL EVALUATION OF 'INPUT-OUTPUT' MEASURES	☐	
h. TIME	☐	
i. STAFFING	☐	
j. RESOURCES FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT	☐	
k. AVAILABILITY OF STAKEHOLDERS	☐	
l. NUMBERS OF APPLICATIONS	☐	
m. PRESSURE FROM WITHIN OWN HEI	☐	
n. PRESSURE FROM WITHIN OWN SCHOOL/SEPARTMENT/FACULTY	☐	

32. Have you monitored or evaluated your admissions and outcome data in a systematic way over recent years?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

☐ Other *(please specify)*: [   ]

Would you be willing (subject to funding, ethical approval and consent from your HEI) to participate in a multi-site longitudinal study of such factors in the future?

☐ YES   ☐ NO

☐ Other *(please specify)*: [   ]

If you answered 'YES' above, please include your contact details here:

[text box]

Managing admissions and selection processes for social work programmes

33. For how long (roughly) have you had your current responsibilities for social work admissions processes?

34. What are the major rewards or enjoyable elements to this aspect of your work? (Please list up to three)

35. What, for you, have been the major challenges of this process?(These could be internally or externally located)Please list up to 5

36. What are your views, if any, regarding the Task Force recommendations relating to admissions and selection? Can you foresee any particular challenges or benefits arising form these generally or in relation to your specific context?

37. How would you describe the support (within HEI) you have received in your role in relation to the admissions process?

◻ Plenty of relevant support has been given

◻ Support and information given has not been relevant to social work requirements

◻ Little or no support received

◻ Other *(please specify)*:

[   ]

How does this compare with support/guidance from elsewhere?

[text area]

What support or guidance (if any) would you have liked to help with managing this role?

[text area]

38. What degree of feedback have you obtained regarding your selection and recruitment processes at re/approval and re/validation points from within your HEI and from external panel members and GSCC?

◻ NONE   ◻ A LITTLE   ◻ A GREAT DEAL

◻ Other *(please specify)*: [   ]

39. Please note here anything else relating to social work recruitment, selection and admissions processes that you would like to comment upon

[text area]

Appendix 2a: Example of pre-interview stage additional screening document

BA (Hons) Social Work

Supplementary Application Form

All applications to the BA (Hons) Social Work must be made via UCAS initially. However, the UCAS form does not give us enough information to assess your suitability as a candidate for the course. This Supplementary Application Form is designed to give you the opportunity to tell us a bit more about yourself and your reasons for wanting to embark on a social work career. Please note, however, that completion of this form is not a guarantee you will be offered an interview. If you have any questions about this form please feel free to contact ….

1. **Name (please use block capitals)**

   Surname …………...……………..   **Forenames** …………………………

   Date of Birth …………………………

2. **UCAS Number:** ……………………………………….

3. **Short Courses or other training/academic achievements not mentioned on your UCAS form**

Course Title	Organised by	Date

4. Fitness for Practice

The BA (Hons) Social Work course entails a professional qualification. In addition to your academic abilities, we are also concerned about your ability to undertake the practice element of the course. In order to make a judgement about this, we require further information about your thoughts and experiences. **It is important that you answer all of the following questions as honestly and as fully as you can.** Your answers should also help you decide whether social work is the correct profession for you.

a) Please tell us what you have learnt from your experiences e.g. a work place, placements, volunteering or other personal experiences that may help you in your desire to practice as a social worker. Please include full details of any additional experience not included on your UCAS form.

b) What is your understanding of discrimination?

c) What experiences of discrimination have you witnessed? What have you learnt from this?

5. Preparation for Interview

We expect all candidates to prepare for interview.

Please research **one** topic only from the following list; this will form the basis of a **discussion at interview.**

1. Individual Budgets
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Issues Facing Older People
4. Asylum and Immigration
5. Disability
6. Mental Health Issues
7. 'Looked After' Children
8. Carers
9. Substance Abuse

6. There may be supplementary questions asked at interview to provide the opportunity for you to demonstrate your readiness for the programme

7. Convictions

(THIS SECTION MUST BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ANY CONVICTIONS, ETC)

The degree programme includes periods of placement. As such all students must agree to undergo enhanced criminal records bureau checks and health checks to ensure their suitability. The terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 do not permit you to withhold information about past offences. **You must disclose all convictions, bindovers and cautions, and any judgements or investigations pending on this form.** Any information that you provide will not automatically lead to a rejection of your application; however withholding relevant information will. All information will be treated in the strictest confidence, and if you are called for interview you will have a chance to discuss any information that you give here. **If in doubt, please include it.**

DECLARATION (delete as appropriate)

* I **DO NOT** have any Court convictions/bindovers/cautions nor any judgements or investigations pending

* I **HAVE** Court convictions/bindovers/cautions or judgements or investigations pending. (Please give a complete list below and continue on a separate sheet if necessary). Failing to provide a complete list at this stage will result in any application or offer being withdrawn. All applications providing complete information will be considered.

Signed …………………………………………………………… Date …………..……………

8. References

We require both a **professional** and an **academic** reference. In each case the referee should, as far as possible, comment on your suitability for social work. Normally the referee given on your UCAS form provides an **academic** reference. If so, the referee given below must, therefore, be someone who can comment on your **professional** aptitude and/or ability. Alternatively, if your UCAS reference is employment based, this referee must be someone who can comment on your **academic** ability. If you have any queries about this please contact the Admissions Office in the first instance.

Name: Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Dr……………………………………………

Position …………………………………………..

Organisation/Company …………………………………………………………………….

Address ……………………………….………………………………………………………

……………………………………………… Postcode …………………………………………...

Telephone Number ……………………………

9. Equal Opportunities

You are asked to complete the enclosed Equal Opportunities monitoring form. No name is requested on this form.

10. Declaration

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information given by me in this application is true.

Signed …………………………………………………………...   Date ………………………….

Please return this Application Form by the requested date to:

Appendix 2b : Intermediate stage work for use following screening from UCAS forms but prior to selection to attend interview day.

Attached here is covering letter, checklist showing range of documents used at this stage plus actual proforma to be completed

a) Covering letter:

Dear

We are writing to confirm receipt of your recent application for our social work degree. We are pleased to be able to tell you that we are interested in your application and would like to invite you to take part in the next stage of our selection process.

As a result of very high demand for places last year and research about effective selection techniques for social work students, we have introduced an additional stage in between selection from UCAS forms and the interview stage. This 'intermediate' stage will involve you writing a little more about yourself under specific headings unlike the personal statement on the application form. From this we will then select who to invite to attend for interview.

Enclosed with this letter are several documents as detailed below:

1) Explanation of what we are looking for in our applicants and how this may be assessed

2) Details regarding the completion of the intermediate stage proforma and the proforma itself.

3) A second reference request form with instructions

4) A self declaration form regarding criminal convictions and related information

5) A Checklist for completion when returning various documents to us

Please complete the additional written information about yourself and return that plus the other documents detailed above and on the checklist to xxxxxxxx by .... Please note that prompt return is essential to ensure that proper consideration can be given to your materials and so that we can reserve interview slots for those successfully completing this stage.

Due to the high numbers of applicants, it will not be possible for xxxx or any other staff to enter into discussions regarding the giving of feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Where feedback is required, a simple form may be supplied upon receipt of a written request to the Undergraduate Office at the University.

We appreciate that this is a demanding process, but hope that you agree that entry into one of the most demanding professions in which contact with vulnerable service users is a major part of the work of social workers requires this kind of careful selection.

The interview dates for those successfully completing this stage will be allocated within two weeks of receiving your written work. The selection process on those days will be detailed in further correspondence but will involve attendance for most of the day. this is to enable staff here

to present information about our course to you and then for you to take part in a group task, an individual interview and a written exercise (requiring no preparation).

If you have any queries during this process please contact ………., the Admissions Co-ordinator on : ……...

I look forward to meeting you soon,

Admissions Tutor

****

b) Checklist for intermediate stage process:

BA Social work

Name:

Checklist for return of intermediate stage documents

Please confirm that you have enclosed the following required documents:

- ❑ Completed proforma/extended personal statement - blue document

- ❑ Second reference or note of when we may expect to receive this - white document (no interviews will be offered without this having been received)

- ❑ Completed self declaration form regarding criminal convictions etc - pink document

- ❑ A sample of recent written work (eg an essay you have had marked etc, where you have not been in education for many years, you may like to send in an anonymised report or something similar written for work purposes)

- ❑ Confirmation that this is your own work (yellow form)

· ·

c) The proforma completed by applicants and assessed by panel of stakeholders prior to deciding which applicants to invite to interview

Stage two: extended personal statement proforma

GUIDANCE NOTES:

This part of the selection process requires you to provide us with some additional written information about yourself in relation to social work. We recognise that some of the questions ask for personal information, but we feel that within social work, we must be aware of the impact we have on others and that we must be willing within social work training to think about the impact of our own experiences.

Please complete each section as carefully as you can making sure that you base your response on specific examples rather than just general statements. Please note that you are asked to respond to each question in UP TO 150 words.

This information will be used to decide whether to invite you for the final stage in the selection process - the interview day and may be referred to during your interview.

If you require this proforma in a different format or electronically because of any disability related needs, please do contact xxxxxxxxxxx on the number given in the covering letter and she will be happy to facilitate this.

1. **Motivation and commitment to social work training and studying on demanding professional course**

   Please write about an aspect of social work that particularly interests you and tell us how you have explored this?

   What have you read that has helped you in this?

2. **Demonstrating tenacity and ability to deal with the unexpected.**

   Social work does not always happen in the way in which it was planned and sometimes unexpected difficulties and barriers can affect the progress of your work. Please tell us about times in your life when you have demonstrated 'staying power' or determination to see something through.

3. **Stress**

   Social work can be demanding and stressful. Tell us about a time when you have felt stressed – how did you know you were experiencing stress and what did you do to manage it?

4. **Impact of relationships**

   Social work practice is about relationships that we have with others. Our experience of relationships affects how we relate to others now and in the future. Then tell us about a relationship that has given you strength, and one in which you have struggled. What have you learned about **yourself** from thinking about these relationships?

5. **The helping relationship**

   Tell us as openly as you can what you think you have gained from helping people (friends/ family/ in work setting) and also what you have found difficult or frustrating about being in a helping role:

6. **Preparedness for study at this level**

   Embarking upon this course will require a 'step up' in terms of level of study. Please tell us how you have managed this transition before and what strategies you have in place for managing this if you obtain a place on this course.

B.A. (Hons) in Social Work.   Written test

Name : ....

Answer the following question:

What are the benefits from involving service users? How can social workers do this?

BA (Hons) Social Work

Team Exercise Score Sheet

Date:	Candidate:					Candidate:					Candidate:				
	Not enough evidence	Excellent	Good	OK	NO	Not enough evidence	Excellent	Good	OK	NO	Not enough evidence	Excellent	Good	OK	NO
1. Verbal communication skills	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
2. Non-verbal communication skills	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
3. Respect for and appropriate interaction with others	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
4. Understanding of and attention to task	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
5. Political/Social Awareness	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
6. Clarity of, and ability to use evidence rather than opinion to inform argument	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
7. Appropriate value base	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
8. Appropriate group facilitation	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
9. Understanding of social work	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
10. Overall presentation of self	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
Overall suitability	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹	◇?	☐	☺	😐	☹
Comments: (if any)															
Observer:															

Appendix 5: Example of group exercise score sheet (2)

Applicant name	Spoken English	Ability to express own views	Openness to views of others and ability to respond appropriately to views of others.	General ability to work cooperatively with others	Demonstrates appropriate intellectual/academic ability/curiosity in discussions	Total score /25
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	
	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:	

Any comments about significant whole group factors: (such as diversity issues/composition of group/practical issues affecting session)

Appendix 6: Example of interview questions and score sheet from one HEI

BA (Hons) SOCIAL WORK

Date: .... Interviewers: ....

Candidate's Name: .... Total score: ....

Please score the candidate's performance on the following scale; adding comments (as explicit as possible) below any of the items where you think these might be helpful.

High		Average		Low	Very poor
5	4	3	2	1	0

1. Awareness of motivation and commitment

                                                          5   4   3   2   1   0

Can you tell us something about how you've come to the decision to apply for a place on the social work course now?

(Note to interviewers - prompt re timing and subject choice if needed)

2. Teamwork   5   4   3   2   1   0

a) What do you contribute to a team/group? Also, what do you find difficult about working in teams or groups?

b) How does that compare with your experience earlier this morning in the group exercise?

[i.e. tests reflection on the morning process observed by the interviewers]

3. Understanding of , and Commitment to, AOP/ADP   5   4   3   2   1   0

Social workers work with people who are discriminated against and experience prejudice. Can you identify a group in society who you are most likely to discriminate against yourself? Why do you think this is and what strategies can you use to guard against the impact of your own prejudices?

[i.e. tests appreciation of the significance of discrimination but also tests how they see themselves in relation to wider movements in society]

4. Academic ability and potential   5   4   3   2   1   0

Think about some reading you have done – this may relate to the written work you submitted with your Extended Personal Statement or be something different. Tell us a little about what you found interesting, why and what questions this reading (and writing) raised.

[NB – although the reading will ideally be relevant for social work and ideally will correspond to the example of work they had submitted, this will not always be possible as some will be studying for other exams at the moment – main focus here is assessing academic potential and intellectual curiosity.]

5. Communicator – articulate speaker and good listener

5   4   3   2   1   0

(Based on your overall impression during the interview of communication skills)

****CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS:
This must be asked of all applicants:

'I notice from the self declaration form that you have completed that you have/have not (as appropriate) declared that you have previous convictions, cautions or formal warnings or disciplinary issues. We need to use this time at the end of your interview to check that you have declared everything (including spent convictions and cautions/reprimands and warnings and even very old disciplinary issues) as any offer of a place is likely to be withdrawn should further information come to light later on. Is there anything else you'd like to add to your earlier declaration at all?'

Where applicants have declared something, please ask them to explain the circumstances around their offence/disciplinary background and record significant points and your reactions to their reflections upon it below or on the reverse of this form.

Interviewers comments
Please explain your rating – especially important if you have recommended the candidate as highly rec-ommended or unsuitable. Reasons for unsuitability must be fully explained to give the Admissions Tutor grounds for an informed decision. Please remember when writing comments that these notes may be shown to applicants if they request access to their files.

NB - Candidates scoring less than 15 would usually not be offered a place on the course.

Taking all factors into account, do you assess the candidate overall to be: (please circle)

A   **Highly recommended:**   Strong candidate and should definitely be offered a place

B   **Recommended:**   Suitable candidate for a place

C   **Acceptable:**   Marginal, but acceptable if place is available

D   **Unsuitable:**   Not suitable for social work training
         (please give reasons and any suggestions to guide applicant with possible future
         applications below)

Appendix 7: Practice Scenarios used as basis for discussion and exploration of values and attitudes in individual interviews

PRACTICE SCENARIO A

Mrs Yagamuchi has lived alone in a terraced property since her husband died 3 months ago. The property is fairly run down and she is dependent on income support. Her son and daughter have been concerned about her since that time. They claim she has become increasingly more forgetful, has been neglecting her personal hygiene, and has lost weight due to a poor diet. They have also mentioned that she talks about her husband if he was still alive. Following a fall at home, Mrs Yagamuchi was admitted to hospital with a fractured femur. This has caused mobility problems and she can now only walk with the aid of a frame and finds it difficult to negotiate stairs.

The family are concerned about Mrs Yagamuchi's future care and health and welfare, and feel now is the time she should go into residential care. Mrs Yagamuchi is adamant she wants to return home and will not discuss any alternatives. She is unrealistic about her capabilities, however she is also unaware of what moving to residential care might mean. Mrs Yagamuchi has been referred to the social work team at this hospital. The medical professionals are pressing for discharge and want this arranged as soon as possible.

PRACTICE SCENARIO B

Carol Mitchell is finding it increasingly difficult to care for her 15 year old son, Adam, following the death of her long term partner, Anne. Anne died in a road traffic accident 6 months ago. Adam has a learning difficulty and challenging behaviour. Anne was Adam's main carer and was able to manage his behaviour. Carol claims she now feels increasingly physically intimidated by Adam, as does her 9 year old daughter, Emma.

Carol's ex husband, Brian, separated from her approximately 8 years ago, claiming he found it too difficult to deal with Adam's needs and the new baby. He has since re-married and had 2 other children with his new wife. He refuses to have any planned contact with his children but appears sporadically and unannounced a couple of times a year. Carole claims this appears to confuse and upset both Adam and Emma, as they do not know where they are with him or when they are going to see him again.

Carole admits to finding it very difficult to cope since her partner's death and feels both she and Emma would benefit for a holiday. She is enquiring about respite care for Adam.

Name of applicant:

Item	Response
Screened by central admissions as meeting, or predicted to meet, the academic criteria	Yes ☐ Borderline ☐ (red B marked on form)
Level of entry BA / MA (please circle)	
Related (work-based or personal) experience or working towards level of experience required (12mths MA / 3mths BA)	Yes ☐ Borderline ☐ No ☐
Personal statement	
• Demonstrates an understanding of, motivation for and commitment to social work	Yes ☐ Borderline ☐ No ☐
•	
• Demonstrates an ability to write in a clear, coherent and accessible style	Yes ☐ Borderline ☐ No ☐
Reference	
• Free of concerns?	Yes ☐ Borderline ☐ No ☐
• Where the referee is unable to **evidence** academic ability or professional experience then tick appropriate box over page ☐	
UCAS section 9: Criminal convictions. Has the applicant disclosed any previous relevant criminal convictions? Yes ☐ No ☐	Completed self declaration form to be returned prior to interview for further screening.
Where borderline in one category is this compensated for by other elements?	Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐

Screening Decision

☐ Yes	☐ PNA *(Applicant to proceed if numbers allow)
☐ Excellent	☐ No * If no in any of above categories.
	☐ Undecided ** Refer to AT

*If PNA or No state reasons why not a Yes:

If NO, now go straight to Disability Section.

**If undecided state reasons and refer to Admissions Tutor ☐ or Programme Director PD ☐

□ A' level(s): □ 2:1 (minimum) in Social Science degree:

BA YES or PNA or Undecided

MA

- tick box relating to any outstanding conditions to be met   or evidence to be provided and give details (e.g. A' Levels BBC, Maths/English L2)

□ Alternative qualifications:

□ 2:1 degree plus social science/social work related other study:

□ Maths (GCSE/O' level grade C or above or L2)

□ English (GCSE/O' level grade C or above or L2)

□ □Academic Reference

□ □Professional Reference to **evidence** social care experience

(not required for MA applicants with evidence of 2:1 degree or above)

(If appropriate, state organisation required to provide reference.

Personal reference acceptable re: evidence of personal experience.)

□Placement form   □ Criminal record self-declaration form

[Forms sent by SW admin with invite to interview – to be returned by deadline and prior to interview to SW Admin]

□ Health Questionnaire   □ Suitability Form

□ CRB

[Forms sent by CA with offer letter – to be returned by deadline and prior to registration. HQ and SF to SW admin, CRB to CA]

Disability Section   State appropriate code:

- **A**. No disability **B**. Social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder

- **C**. Blind or have a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses **D**. Deaf or have a serious hearing impairment **E**. A long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy **F**. Mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder **G**. Specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D **H**. Physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches **I**. Disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above **J**. Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical conditions

- Following offer
  - details of applicant with possible support needs should be forwarded xxxxx by SW admin;
  - applicant should make self-referral to Student Support.

UCAS section 2: Residential category of applicant   Home (H) □   Overseas (OS)

(check central admissions advice marked in RED on UCAS form, marked either H or O/S or 0+FQ)   □

Being queried (O+FQ) □

Entrance Exam

Instructions to candidates

Do not turn over the question paper until the invigilator instructs you to do so.

- Welcome and congratulations on getting through to this next stage of the selection process;

- Please switch off mobile phones and put away bags etc;

- You have 90 minutes (plus an extra 25 minutes for applicants with specific needs) to complete this exam. It is suggested you take about 45 minutes for each part. You will be given a 30 minute, then 5 minute, warning before the end;

- We suggest you take some time to read the questions and plan and structure your responses before writing up your answers;

- You will see that the criteria we use to assess your answers is printed in the left hand column, the questions are in bold in the right hand column of your exam paper;

- You should write your name at the top of the first page of your answer and on any subsequent page. Write on only one side of the paper and raise your hand if and when you need extra paper;

- At the end of the exam, tag your answer sheets together. All papers, including rough notes, should be left in the exam room.

- If you wish to exit before the end of the exam, raise your hand and the invigilator will allow you to leave;

- Please feel free to explore the campus once the exam is over.

- Your written test will be marked by a panel of academics and you will be informed in due course (within a few weeks) whether or not you are to be invited back for the third stage of the selection process - the group interview.

- If you have any further queries after completing the test, you should address them to the administrator here today or preferably by 'phone or email (see contact details on your letter of invitation).

- Does anyone have any questions at this point?

- You may now turn over your papers and begin the exam.

SOCIAL WORK ENTRANCE EXAM

PART 1 (suggested time: 45 minutes)	
Criteria	Question
1. An ability to reflect on and learn from personal and/or practice experience. 2. An understanding of how this may inform the social work role and task.	A. i) Outline three key areas of learning and development arising from your personal or practice experience. ii) State how each of these areas may be relevant to your role as a social worker.
3. An ability to draw on strategies, skills and resources to support self and/or others. 4. An ability to make use of own experience, but without making assumptions or judgments about others.	B i) What strategies, skills and/or resources have you found useful when dealing with difficulties in your own life or when supporting others? ii) In what ways do you think these might help you in your role as a social worker?
5. An understanding of the demands of academic study and professional practice. 6. The ability to devise a strategy to meet these demands.	C i) What do you see as the key challenges facing you if you were to undertake a degree in social work? ii) How do you plan to meet these challenges?
PART 2 (suggested time: 45 minutes) Read edited extract from Guru, S. (2008) Social Work and the 'War on Terror' British Journal of Social Work and answer the following two questions:	
7. An ability to read and understand an academic source within a limited time. 8. An ability to identify key issues explored within the article and to respond appropriately to set questions.	D. Q1: Why does Guru argue that it is important for social workers to consider issues of 'war on terror' and what are these issues? Q2: What possible solutions does the paper suggest in overcoming the potential problems that the "war on terror" may present to social workers and service users?
COMMON CRITIERA ACROSS PARTS 1 & 2	
9. An ability to produce answers that are well-structured, clearly expressed and accurately presented.	

Written Test Assessment
Guidelines and Screening Form

Name of Applicant:

Score each element and calculate the total score. In order to 'proceed' to interview, the applicant must score a minimum of **32** points in total, including a **minimum of 7 points for the 9th element**, and must **not have been marked as unsatisfactory** in any of the categories. Borderline candidates can be marked as "proceed if numbers allow" (PNA).
To what extent has the applicant demonstrated the following?

1.   An ability to reflect upon and learn from personal or practice based experience.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

2.   An understanding of how this may inform their understanding of the social work role and task.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

3.   An ability to write about the strategies, skills and resources they have drawn on to support self and/or others.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

4.   An ability to reflect upon own experiences without making assumptions or inappropriate judgements about others.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

5.   An understanding of the demands of academic study and professional practice.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

6.   The ability to devise a strategy to meet these demands.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

7.   The ability to read and understand an academic source within a limited time.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

8.   An ability to identify key issues within the text and respond appropriately to set questions.

Unsatisfactory (0)   Adequate (2)   Good (4)   Excellent (6) Score ....

9.   **The ability to write in a well structured, clear, coherent and accessible style with attention to punctuation and grammar.**

- **Structure**

Capital letters, full stops, appropriate number of clauses in a sensible order, sentences appropriately located within paragraphs, paragraphs appropriately located within text.
Unsatisfactory (0) Inconsistently (1) Most of the time (2) Consistently (3)
Score ....

- **Punctuation**

Commas separating clauses and stops separating sentences.
Unsatisfactory(0) Inconsistently(1) Most of the time(2) Consistently(3)
Score ....

- **Grammar**

Complete sentences
Unsatisfactory(0)   Inconsistently(1)   Most of the time(2)   Consistently(3)
Score ....

- **Clear, coherent, accessible style**

Unsatisfactory(0)   Inconsistently(1)   Most of the time(2)   Consistently(3)
Score ....

Total Score	Score for no.9	Pass to AT for 2nd opinion	Do not proceed	Proceed if numbers allow	Proceed
Needs to be minimum of 32 to 'proceed' and minimum of 28 to 'PNA' (inc. score for no. 9)	Needs to be minimum of 7 to 'proceed' and minimum of 6 to 'PNA'	*	*	*	

*If applicant is not proceeding, proceeding if numbers allow, or a second opinion is being sought from AT, please write additional comments explaining this decision:

Name of Screener: Date:

Marker to complete this box:

Proceed   ☐

Proceed if numbers allow   ☐

 Refer to AT   ☐

Do **not** proceed   ☐

Initials of Marker:

Do not proceed ☐