

Social work education and training in England in 2020-21

For Social Work England

April 2021



UNIVERSITY of
GREENWICH

Social work education and training in England in 2020-21

**Attitudes, perceptions and experiences about the
specialist regulator, COVID-19 experiences and
responses, and equality, diversity and
inclusion**

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Target audience

Qualified social workers, social work course providers, social work placement providers and employers, social work students, social work graduates, newly qualified social workers, those completing the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment, local authorities, NHS social care services, voluntary and independent sector (CAFCAS; Together 4 Children; PACT; etc.), Social Work England, Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care, British Association for Social Workers.

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About

The University of Greenwich has a proud 130-year history of providing high-quality education that empowers students to pursue their interests and discover their true potential. Each of its three campuses across south-east London and Kent has its own distinct personality and community feel. As well as being the number one modern London university for graduate prospects, according to The Times Good University Guide 2021, the university was awarded a Silver rating in the 2017 Teaching Excellence Framework.

The university's vibrant research community runs award-winning research programmes that make valuable contributions to business, industry and the community in the UK and overseas. The university has been recognised many times for the quality of its research. Awards include a fifth Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher & Further Education in 2019.

The social work teaching staff at the university are active in research and experts in their fields, including thanatology (death, dying and bereavement), children and families, adults, adoption and fostering, gerontological social work, anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice, human rights, social justice, and family law. The group's work and contribution are supported by the Institute for Lifecourse Development¹ and its seven research centres that examine areas like inequalities, children and families, chronic illnesses and ageing, exercise and wellbeing, as well as workforce development.

The university's social work degrees provide students with the skills, knowledge and practical experience they need to succeed in their future careers. Its social work degrees for undergraduates were ranked third in London for student satisfaction with teaching in the Guardian League Table 2021. Students benefit from the university's partnerships with health and social care providers, including the NHS, as well as a range of community and voluntary sector organisations. These strong links enable students to undertake placements that provide them with the skills they will need to practise as social workers. Part-time degree options allow students to fit their studies around work and family commitments.

¹For more information, please visit <https://www.gre.ac.uk/institute-lifecourse-development>

How to read this report

The Social Work Education and Training in England in 2020-21 report is structured around three thematic priorities: specialist regulator; COVID-19 experiences and responses; and equality, diversity and inclusion. It also draws on the views, perceptions and experience of four distinct stakeholder groups: students; graduates, newly qualified social workers and those completing ASYE programmes; academics; and practice educators. Thus, it presents results according to the programme set out by Social Work England and consists of nine chapters, as well as an introduction and an executive summary.

The executive summary provides a synopsis of both the research design and the results from this study, listing all key findings. The summary can be read as a one-off piece and gives the reader a full but succinct account of the work. The full report, on the other hand, offers an all-inclusive presentation of the findings, a thorough discussion, and additional inferences from the study.

Chapters for each thematic priority (chapters four-six) present results and themes as those emerged from quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was analysed with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Statistics (SPSS) version 26 software and statistical formulae have been used. However, this report has been written in layperson's terms for inclusivity and approachability purposes. The main statistical analyses that will still feature in SPSS forms are a chi-square post-hoc test and a non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test. The chi-square was used to examine the relationship between the questions asked of the social work students, social work graduates/newly qualified social workers (NQSWS)/those completing their assessed and supported year of employment (ASYE), social work academics and course providers, as well as practice educators and placement providers, during the questionnaire in the quantitative data. The results from these analyses are in Appendix A, but the text provides a clear narrative away from mathematical jargon. The formula used to report on a chi-square result is $\chi^2(16, N = 166) = 53.71, p < 0.01$ (example), which is necessary when reading the table in Appendix A. χ^2 is the symbol for chi-square and measures the difference between the observed and expected frequencies of the outcomes of the chosen study variables. This depends on the degrees of freedom (i.e. 16 in the example) and the sample size (i.e. 166 in the example). The interpretation of the example above is as follows: Let us say for example that the analysis was exploring the relationship between being challenged to maintain personal and professional or study life and being challenged by the use of technology during COVID-19. The relation between the two variables was significant at a p value less than 0.01, thus where one increased the other did, too.

The non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test explored the differences among the varied protected characteristics and perceptions and experiences of the stakeholder groups. The results from these analyses are available in Appendix B. To enable the reader to interpret those results, an example is offered here, following the formula: *Kruskal–Wallis H = 9.736, p < 0.05, df = 4*. The larger the H value, the larger the differences between the groups under comparison, while the p value shows the likelihood that the results are transferable and replicable. In this result, the p value is less than 0.05, thus less than 5% chance that the results would not be obtained again if the study was repeated.

The three chapters that report on the findings of this study are complemented by chapter seven which discusses the main concepts emerging from the findings. Thus, we would encourage the reader to engage with all those sections of the report for a fuller understanding of the outcomes of the study. Chapter eight lists various recommendations put forward, which draw on the findings.

When perusing this report, we invite readers to consider the unique circumstances which we all have been experiencing during 2020 and into 2021 amid the coronavirus pandemic. Unavoidably, participants' perceptions and experiences may have been shaped by COVID-19 and associated measures. Therefore, any intention to generalise in the future should be approached with caution.

Lastly, this report includes four vignettes which present the most pertinent findings across each of the stakeholder groups with the use of a case study. These vignettes are used as a further and creative method of reporting on the data, while simultaneously they are offered as a tool for education, training, supervision, and continuing professional development. These vignettes can be used as a tool to inform and develop conversations pertinent to advancements and challenges in social work education and training in 2020-21, many of which will follow given the long-term effects from the coronavirus pandemic. All four vignettes are offered as part of this report and separately for ease of use.

Acknowledgments

A wide range of people have contributed their views and expertise without whom this research and report would not had been possible.

First and foremost, we would like to thank wholeheartedly all the students, graduates, newly qualified social workers, academics and practice educators who kindly offered their time to share their views, insights and experience with us. Particularly, we thank all who despite the difficulties they have been facing during COVID-19, worked so exceptionally well with the research team for the purposes of the study. Their input is invaluable and certainly adds to our learning and helps devise appropriate ways to move forward. Alongside the research participants, we would like to thank all agencies, organisations, associations and professional groups that kindly shared the study nationally and assisted in it reaching out to as wide an audience as possible, during the recruitment stages.

Second, we would like to thank Social Work England for the confidence and trust shown to the University and the research team to complete this task. The ongoing support from and collaboration with the regulator cannot be recognised enough. We are grateful for all the insights, motivation and guidance received, all of which contributed to the successful completion of this project.

Third, we would like to extend our thanks to the University of Greenwich for coordinating the needs of this study and enabling the research team to complete the task successfully.

Special thanks go to all our advisers for the purposes of this research, who offered insights about the study design, implementation, and delivery of the project. Specifically, we thank the students, newly qualified social workers, academics, and practice educators who reviewed the vignettes attached at the end of this report and worked with us to generate vignettes that are representative of people's experiences and suitable for the needs of education, training and organisational learning. We also want to thank the University advisers on matters related to equality, diversity and inclusion, and particularly gender and sexuality, who kindly offered their time and contributed to the ethically sound design of the study. In addition, extended thanks go to the legal and ethical advisers of the University who also added value to the design with their input.

Executive summary

Background and aims

On 2 December 2019, a new regulatory body – Social Work England – with an ambition to deliver radically different regulation and to raise confidence in the profession and to improve the standards of social work education and training through collaboration was introduced. Social Work England seeks to provide specialist support to professionals and to monitor and evaluate the quality of education and practice, while it remains committed to research and evidence-based practices.

Simultaneously, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) spread across the world rapidly since December 2019, and by March 2020 was declared a global pandemic, while serious measures were taken to ensure the public's safety and minimise spread. The ripple effect is felt through all aspects of social work. For social work education and training this meant adjustments in the delivery of approved programmes, delayed, paused or virtual placements for students, as well as new and creative methods of collaboration and provision of support. It is worth noting that COVID-19 exacerbated inequalities, or introduced new, which have had an impact on the varied stakeholder groups involved with social work education and training, and for varied reasons such as lack of resources to support oneself.

Lastly, the ever-recognised importance of equality, diversity and inclusion matters was emphasised in light of the recent rise of social activist movements like Black Lives Matter. This gave room for further focus on such matters and an exploration of both how such events impact on social work education and training, as well as the experiences of those with protected characteristics.

That said, this project was commissioned by Social Work England and its purpose was to undertake a study into social work education and training, with three main areas of priority: specialist regulation; COVID-19 experiences and responses; and equality, diversity and inclusion. Specifically, this study explored the views, attitudes, perceptions and experiences of social work students, graduates or newly qualified social workers and in their ASYE programme, academics, and practice educators or other representatives of placement providers.

The project particularly focused on the following:

1. Specialist regulation:
 - a. The experience, attitudes, and perception of social work England as the new regulator.
 - b. The faults and opinions on the future of social work education and training provisions in England.
2. COVID-19:
 - a. The impact of course adjustments on the effectiveness of student learning during COVID-19.

- b. The impact of COVID-19 on new graduates in the post qualifying framework.
- c. The experiences, attitudes, and perception of social work students and new graduates during COVID-19.

3. Equality, diversity and inclusion:

- a. The experiences, attitudes, and perceptions and barriers in social work education (including ASYE) for student/new graduates who identify with protected characteristics.
- b. The students experience of anti-discriminatory practice in their training and its impact on their practice.

Methodology

This was a mixed-methods study that comprised of an online survey and online focus groups.

Quantitative approach

An online survey was shared with networks of social work students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE social workers, academics, and practice educators, from January to February 2021. There were 407 surveys returned, 301 of which were included in the study. The remainder were missing information, thus excluded. There were four key categories of participants:

- Social work students (55.1% of total participants, $n=166$).
- Graduates/NQSW/ASYE (18.6% of total participants, $n=56$).
- Academics (13% of total participants, $n=39$).
- Practice educators (13.3% of total participants, $n=40$).

An analysis, synthesis and interpretation of the survey data was conducted utilising the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences version 26.

Qualitative approach

Between January and February 2021 nine focus groups were completed: two groups with social work students; three groups with graduates/NQSW/ASYE; two groups with academics; and two groups with practice educators. Each focus group comprised of a minimum of four and a maximum of six participants, amounting to 36 focus group participants. The focus group transcripts were analysed and synthesised utilising NVivo².

Sample

The majority of participants in the student sample were full-time students who were not employed³ (84.9%, $n=141$); 90.7% ($n=49$) of those from the graduate/NQSW/ASYE stakeholder group were employed by the public sector and worked in either children and family services (53.1%, $n=26$) or adult services (46.9%, $n=24$).

² A qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International.

³ No part- or full-time employment to support themselves, their families or their studies.

Most of the academics were employed on a full-time basis (69.2%, $n=27$), had 20 or more years of registration (82.1%, $n=32$) and had an average of 10 years of experience in an academic position. Finally, most of the placement provider representatives occupied full-time posts (67.4%, $n=26$), had been registered for more than 20 years (75.3%, $n=26$) and had more than 11 years of experience as a practice educator (63.6%, $n=20$).

Key findings

Specialist regulator

The study revealed the following:

- 25.7% of social work academics reported having received regular support and guidance from the regulator, while a significant 48.7% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment.
- 39.4% of the academics reported that support and guidance had been accessible, while 30.3% suggested otherwise.
- While Social Work England does not regulate practice educators, neither are the standards set out by the regulator, the following surfaced further misconceptions among those carrying out this role. A small proportion (20%) of practice educators agreed that they had received regular support and guidance from the new regulator, while more than half (52.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Participants from all groups are concerned that as a government body the specialist regulator is not run by social workers, which can in turn negatively affect its ability to independently represent the professional interests of social work. This, among other findings, suggests that there may be misconceptions about the role and functions of Social Work England.
- Participants from across all stakeholder groups (78% of students; 57% of newly qualified social workers; 67% of academics; and 60% of practice educators) expressed the view that there should be a student register with Social Work England.
- Participants expressed the view that a student register should consider financial implications for students, as well as the benefit of adding to the students' progression in developing a professional identity.
- It was recognised that the broader role and function of Social Work England was to set professional standards, hold social workers to account through fitness to practise procedures and to ensure that an up-to-date record of continuing professional development was maintained.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of Social Work England was primarily informed by the requirements of their studies, while there appears to be a misunderstanding of the functions of Social Work England and the professional body for social workers (i.e. BASW), leading to false expectations.
- Participants have found the website of Social Work England useful, at large, wherein information about registration and recording of continuing professional development are clearly presented.

Students expressed that they have not necessarily explored the website as it does not affect them or their role.

- The expectations of the regulator's website, beyond its usefulness, mirrored the misunderstandings emerging from other findings, too.
- Overall, participants shared concerns about the regulator being experienced as more bureaucratic and distant when the expectation is a relationship-based model between the regulator and other stakeholders in social work education and training. Currently, the experience is mixed with a larger number having shared the view that such a model is lacking.
- There was an acknowledgement that Social Work England as a new organisation came into being in the midst of a pandemic and that it had not had the time to establish and consolidate expectations

COVID-19 experiences and responses to social work education and training

The study revealed the following:

- The findings showed that 59% of academics compared to 26% of practice educators agreed that the course adjustments due to COVID-19 have been beneficial and adhere to the new education and training standards.
- Academics (53%) and practice educators (76%) agreed that COVID-19 disrupted programme delivery and assessments.
- Participants felt challenged with balancing personal and professional or student life during the same period.
- 45% of students reported that it was difficult to access employment and other resources to support themselves or their families during COVID-19.
- 50% of students reported that they experienced flexibility in their programmes which allowed the accommodation of their unique circumstances of COVID-19.
- 68.4% of academics reported that assessments were not disrupted during COVID-19 and 31.6% reported the opposite.
- Regarding online teaching, academics and practice educators expressed concerns around lack of engagement in activities, exacerbating feelings of unease about whether students meet standards, both academically and in practice.
- A large number of students (60.6%) shared that their placement was disrupted, paused or delayed due to COVID-19 related restrictions.
- 80% of practice educators expressed the view that practice assessment was highly disrupted during COVID-19 and 72% found it challenging to support students on placement during the same period.
- Practice educators considered the lack of contact to be an issue when working online, suggesting that students cannot connect with people with lived experience when completing their assessments

in practice.

- Course providers have experienced a dramatic drop of placement offers since March 2020, while agencies and services are developing adequate methods to enable staff and students alike to carry out their tasks fully and well.
- 81% of the students had access to electronic devices and the internet during COVID-19.
- Participants have found the use of technology in this period challenging (39.4% of students; 42.9% of graduates and newly qualified social workers; 48.7% of academics; and 37.5% of practice educators), unethical (40.9% of students; 58.9% of graduates and newly qualified social workers; 29% of academics; and 50% of practice educators) or difficult to exercise social work values (57.6% of students; 64.3% of graduates and newly qualified social workers; 38.5% of academics; and 53.8% of practice educators).
- 53.8% of academics reported that they did not receive clear guidance from the regulator regarding necessary course adjustments in response to COVID-19
- Participants suggested that new ways of working and engaging during COVID-19 have led to new skills and benefits, as follows: appreciation of life; increased resilience; problem-solving skills; appreciation of supervision; digital literacy; no travel time.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The study revealed the following:

- The largest majority of students and graduates or newly qualified social workers reported that their programmes prepared them for culturally sensitive, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, while the percentage of those disagreeing that they had received knowledge about anti-racist practice were 16.6% for students and 17.6% for graduates.
- 61.3% of the students and 78.2% of the graduates claimed that cultural sensitivity was adhered to in their practice or placement. They also reported feeling confident applying this knowledge in their own practice. In addition, they stated they were confident that the organisation where they were placed, or practising could achieve cultural sensitivity and anti-discriminatory practice.
- The largest number of students (76.3%) reported that they had never felt oppressed or discriminated against due to any protected characteristic during their course and/or placement.
- 35.7% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE reported that they had felt oppressed or discriminated against in their practice, due to either ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or another protected characteristic.
- 29.7% of the students and 37.5% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE agreed that social activism and social activist movements like Black Lives Matter impacted their learning and practicum experiences. It is worth noting, however, that 29.4% and 30.4% of the students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE, respectively, neither agreed nor disagreed with this sentiment.
- Participants recognised the impact of indirect discrimination and the need for further investigation of how organisations, policies and procedures can increase inclusivity.

Recommendations

Based on the present study, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation 1: Social Work England should continue to engage with local stakeholders and develop close relationships with course and placement providers to support their efforts in social work education and training. Further, in collaboration with the regulator, students, social workers, educators and placement providers to develop improved understanding of Social Work England's role and responsibilities.

Recommendation 2: The introduction of a social work student register to add to the education and growth of social work students.

Recommendation 3: Additional training, CPD or strengthened ASYE programmes to ensure that no recent graduate has any gaps in their knowledge base and skills.

Recommendation 4: Course and placement providers should develop further strategies and content that will prepare students and future practitioners to respond to adversities, however small or big, by developing emotional resilience.

Recommendation 5: Course and placement providers should increase the time dedicated to examining matters related to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation 6: Course and placement providers should emphasise the significance of supervision, particularly in the early stages of education, training and practice, to empower individuals, and by use of psychoeducation help them develop skills and strategies to challenge discrimination not only affecting others but themselves, too.

Recommendation 7: We recommend equality, diversity and inclusion leads to be recognised in the structures of placement providers, or Social Work Academies, whose role will focus on scrutinising organisational policies, practices, rules and regulations with social work students in mind, and identify risks of indirect discrimination.

Recommendation 8: Social Work England and the education sector should engage in consultations and further the dialogue about the blended approaches used in social work education and training. Where any approaches are to be maintained (e.g. online teaching), the regulator should provide clear guidance for the sector about expectations and risks that could affect meeting the professional standards.

Introduction

In the year 2020, the world, England and social work in England all encountered their share of complex circumstances. First, 2020 presented us with an unprecedented global health crisis. COVID-19 spread rapidly around the globe, impacting the lives of millions, irrespective of social status, ethnicity, gender, or other demographic characteristics. Since the World Health Organization recognised it as a global pandemic, COVID-19 and its associated guidelines and restrictions have had a tremendous impact on people's lives. Of specific concern to this report is the impact that these circumstances have had on those regulating, delivering and receiving social work education and training in England.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the death of George Floyd in the USA sparked Black Lives Matter, a global social activist movement that seeks to uncover existing oppressive and racist structural concerns. This movement spread quickly across the world, reinvigorating public debates, raising further awareness among the general public of structural oppression and putting pressure for active policy and political responses. This movement, and others of a smaller scale, have had an influence on the experiences recorded in social work education and training.

On 2 December 2019, Social Work England launched with an ambition to deliver radically different regulation and to raise confidence in the profession and to improve the standards of social work education and training through collaboration was introduced. Social Work England seeks to provide specialist support to professionals and to monitor and evaluate the quality of education and practice. However, as Social Work England worked to assume its new role and responsibilities, COVID-19 was spreading across the world, which led to a highly complicated situation wherein robust guidance and support was required at a time during which the world was struggling to adjust.

This report seeks to understand the influence of such social phenomena, as well as the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of particular stakeholder groups, including social work students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work course providers and placement providers. We collected data regarding three main focus areas: current perceptions of Social Work England as a specialist regulator; views on existing COVID-19 responses in relation to social work; and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Chapter 1

Background

A specialist regulator

A recent study undertaken for Social Work England during the first quarter of 2020 (YouGov, 2020) showed that a majority of social work students have a strong level of understanding of the role of the social work regulator, with a high percentage of students reporting that they value the role the regulator plays for the profession. Overall, students and academics felt positive about having ‘their own regulator’, a regulator for social workers.

That said, it would be wise to consider the recent history of Social Work England and the short amount of time varied stakeholders have had to build and reflect on their experiences with the new regulator. An unfortunate reality is that during the same month the new regulator came into effect (December 2019), the COVID-19 outbreak began in Wuhan, China, and started to spread across the world; within three months of the new regulator’s operations England found itself restricted with quarantining measures in the context of a global pandemic. This sparked a demand for rapid responses to various queries in social work education and training, such as practice placements and how students and NQSWs can meet the professional standards in their assessed work. Consequently, we can hypothesise that the stakeholders’ experiences with, perceptions of and attitudes toward the new regulator are currently informed by the ongoing and tireless attempts of course and placement providers to respond to the newly defined needs of education and training in this area.

COVID-19 responses to social work education and training

COVID-19 continues to have a significant impact on all areas of the social work profession, including education, training, research, policy and direct practice; it also affects those who receive social work services. Ongoing surveys by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) (BASW survey) show that social work students report that COVID-19 has had a considerable impact on their studies. For some, this meant that placements were suspended or cancelled. For others, the circumstances related to COVID-19 and the high demands for remote studying and practising meant a recognition of vulnerabilities that were not previously evident, such as digital poverty and digital illiteracy (Pentaris, Hanna and North, 2021). Another challenge that students attempting to complete placements in this period was the closure of schools and caring responsibilities on a full-time capacity. There is no doubt that this ongoing global health crisis has put pressure on all stakeholders involved with social work education and training in England, including course and placement providers, independent consultants and new graduates who find themselves negotiating the transition to practise in an environment hitherto without precedent. The uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has raised both academic and financial concerns with regard to whether social work students will be able to complete their courses and placements in time to progress to the next academic year, or, if completing, to register with Social Work England by September 2021.

Social work students have also spoken of the impact that the isolation and lack of connection with their usual support networks due to COVID-19 restrictions has had on their mental wellbeing (Bruce, 2020). Furthermore,

⁴<https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/BASW%20England%20Student%20%20NQSW%20group%20COVID-19%20position%20statement%20-%20May%202020%20v9.pdf>

NQSWs reported feeling anxious and concerned that they were not a priority when it came to access to personal protective equipment (PPE), which left them feeling devalued (BASW, 2020⁴).

The circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have raised concerns with regard to the ability to carry out relationship-based social work (Roberts, 2020). Furthermore, social work students voiced concerns that they were not being recognised as keyworkers at the start of the pandemic (Mcguiness, 2020). This impacted the learning experience, leaving course providers in a grey area, forced to decide whether to suspend or cancel placements or later negotiate virtual placements; meanwhile, students faced the risk of having to prolong their studies by an entire academic year.

Despite these challenges, the circumstances have also provided some opportunities in education and training, as well as in other areas. Students reported, for example, the benefit of pre-recorded lectures. Some also mentioned that the COVID-19 situation resulted in evolving power dynamics in student and course provider relationships, which ensured a more equalised approach to learning (Bruce, 2020).

Social Work England recognised the turbulence social work students and social workers completing an ASYE programme, albeit not regulated by Social Work England, were experiencing due to the pandemic. The regulator supported the wider Higher Education Institution sector commitment to implementing no-detriment policies and acknowledged the frustration caused by placement disruptions and attempted to combat this by allowing some flexibility for course providers to reduce placement days (with the proviso that students can still meet professional requirements at the point of registration). Most importantly, Social Work England delayed the introduction of the new education and training standards. The specialist regulator has reaffirmed that it values the new generation of social workers and will continue to provide support to students during this difficult time (Social Work England, 2020).

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The social work profession is concerned directly with EDI-related matters, and so is the education and training of social workers. With that said, it is vital to gain clear insight regarding the experiences of social work students with protected characteristics. Recognising that lived experience varies and that it is often informed by, among other things, one's protected characteristics and one's social class and financial status, is of paramount importance for two reasons. First, it helps us appreciate how current socio-political events, such as social activist movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter) can impact one's personal and professional life. Second, insights such as these contribute to our knowledge about professionals' perceptiveness in working with people from different characteristics and backgrounds. The diversity of the social work environment is undeniable⁵, and course and placement providers are responsible for equipping students with the right knowledge and skills to effectively demonstrate anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and culturally- and religiously-sensitive practices. These priorities are evident in both the professional standards set out by Social Work England, as well as the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which inform and shape the social work curriculum.

⁵ Both the workforce: see the Department for Education children and families social work workforce in England here https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868384/CSWW_2018-19_Text.pdf

⁶ We are using this term to include any individual who is self-identifying as lesbian, gay man, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, non-binary, non-conforming, or any other sex, gender or sexual identity that does not fall into the heteronormative categories.

A recent BASW report emphasised the need for improved training around those in the LGBTQIA+⁶ community following the findings of one Stonewall survey that showed that those reaching out to services expressed experiencing discrimination when working or liaising with professionals (Bachmann and Gooch, 2020). This sentiment was echoed by a social work student from the LGBTQIA+ community who disclosed having felt discriminated against during her social work programme (Community Care, 2020). This information emphasises the need for social work training to adequately equip social workers to better support people through their practice in relation to matters of discrimination.

The need to improve social work education also extends to the experiences of students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Existing research (Thomas et al., 2020; Hillary and Levy, 2015) has revealed that students from BAME backgrounds have lower retention and completion rates, which can be linked to a number of structural issues. There has been a call by researchers and theorists in social work for a strength-based approach in supporting BAME students in social work education and placements, as well as a need to develop anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices (Hillen and Levy, 2015; Thomas, Howe and Keen, 2010). A statement of intent released by Social Work England outlined a 3-year plan to address EDI, placing these issues at the centre of all its work. Social Work England also reported that it meets with students and academics to explore how improvements can be made in this area, with the hope that the present study will contribute to the required research and knowledge base for any future suggestions.

Chapter 2

Research aims and objectives

Social Work England, established under the UK's Children and Social Work Act 2017, is the new specialist regulator for social workers in England. Social Work England is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) operating at arm's length from government; it became the regulator on 2 December 2019. As an organisation, Social Work England is committed to learning about social work and gathering data and intelligence regarding the profession and people's experiences. Its intent is to make a unique contribution to the evolution of regulation and provide a detailed picture of social work in England. To achieve this goal, research is crucial.

The goal of this project was to undertake a study into social work education and training, with particular focus on specialist regulation, COVID-19 experiences and responses, and EDI. The aim of this research was to understand:

1. Specialist regulation:
 - a. The experiences, attitudes and perceptions of Social Work England as the new regulator.
 - b. The thoughts and opinions on the future of social work education and training provision in England.
2. COVID-19 responses:
 - a. The impact of course adjustments on the effectiveness of student learning during COVID-19.
 - b. The impact of COVID-19 on new graduates in the post qualifying framework.
 - c. The experiences, attitudes and perceptions of social work students and new graduates during COVID-19.
3. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI):
 - a. The experiences, attitudes, perceptions and barriers in social work education (including ASYE) for students/new graduates who identify with protected characteristics.
 - b. The student experience of anti-discriminatory practice in their training and its impact on their practice.

Workstreams

The study is divided into two smaller studies across two workstreams:

1. Workstream one: student and graduate/NQSW/ASYE experiences.
2. Workstream two: course providers' and placement providers' experiences.

Both workstreams were carried out simultaneously and the methods were complemented, as was the analysis of the data. The aim of each workstream was to explore thoughts, views, perceptions and experiences across the three previously mentioned main areas of concern.

Chapter 3

Methodology

We conducted a mixed methods study with the aim of exploring social work education and training, with a particular focus on specialist regulation, COVID-19 experiences and responses, and equality, diversity and inclusion. The study was composed of five phases, which intertwined; at times, the process was reiterative. The study was carried out between January and March 2021.

Phase 1

The first phase of the study involved a thorough review of current knowledge and understanding around our three main areas of concern: (1) experiences with a specialist regulator, (2) social work education during COVID-19 and associated responses from Social Work England, and (3) equality, diversity and inclusion. This review helped identify certain gaps and areas that could inductively inform the study overall. It was completed in January 2021.

Phase 2

During this phase, a Qualtrics-based, self-administered survey was disseminated across networks of social work students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work academics and education providers, as well as practice educators and placement providers. The survey design was based on the list of questions respective to each of the workstreams indicated by Social Work England and was aimed at exploring the three main areas of concern mentioned in Phase 1 (above). The survey opened in the third week of January 2021 and remained available until the last week of February 2021.

The sample comprised 407 respondents (106 were removed due to unanswered questions). The remaining participants were from the following stakeholder groups:

- 166 (55.1% of total sample) social work students (mix routes of study)
- 56 (18.6% of total sample) social work graduates/Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs)/those in the Assisted and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE) framework/programme
- 39 (13% of total sample) social work academics and education providers
- 40 (13.3% of total sample) practice educators and placement providers

The survey followed a branch logic; in other words, it evolved into four separate surveys based on the stakeholder group to which the participant belonged. Each survey was populated with questions across the three main areas of concern which had been adopted for the purposes of the two workstreams.

We used demographic information such as age, ethnicity, religion/non-religion, sexual orientation, sex, gender, disability, pregnancy during COVID-19, partnership/relationship status and years of experience and registration to explore the data from the survey.

Table 3.1 shows the demographics of the survey sample. The majority of participants in the student sample were full-time students who were not employed⁷ (84.9%, $n=141$); 90.7% ($n=49$) of those from the graduate/NQSW/ASYE stakeholder group were employed by the public sector and worked in either children and family services (53.1%, $n=26$) or adult services (46.9%, $n=24$). Most of the academics were employed on a full-time basis (69.2%, $n=27$), had 20 or more years of registration (82.1%, $n=32$) and had an average of 10 years of

⁷ No part- or full-time employment to support themselves, their families or their studies.

experience in an academic position. Finally, most of the placement provider representatives occupied full-time posts (67.4%, $n=26$), had been registered for more than 20 years (75.3%, $n=26$) and had more than 11 years of experience as a practice educator (63.6%, $n=20$).

Table 3.1. Demographics of participants

	Factor	Total Sample	% total sample	Student	% Student	NQSW	% NQSW	Academic	% Academic	PracEd	% PracEd
Participant Type	n	301	100	166	55.1	56	18.6	39	13	40	13.3
Gender Identity	n	299	99.3	165	99.4	56	100	39	100	39	97.5
	Male	37	12.3	11	6.6	9	16.1	9	23.1	8	20.0
	Female	250	83.1	149	89.8	45	80.4	28	71.8	28	70.0
	Non-Binary/Third Gender	8	2.7	4	2.4	0	0.0	2	5.1	2	5.0
	Prefer not to say	4	1.3	1	.6	2	3.6	0	0.0	1	2.5
Sex	n	301	100	166	100	56	100	39	100	40	100
	Male	36	12.0	11	6.6	9	16.1	8	20.5	8	20.0
	Female	257	85.4	153	92.2	45	80.4	29	74.4	30	75.0
	Intersex	6	2.0	1	.6	1	1.8	2	5.1	2	5.0
	Prefer not to say	2	.7	1	.6	1	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Age	n	301	100	166	100	56	100	39	100	40	100
	18–24 years old	57	18.9	48	28.9	9	16.1	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	25–34 years old	80	26.6	57	34.3	15	26.8	2	5.1	6	15.0
	35–44 years old	70	23.3	37	22.3	22	39.3	7	17.9	4	10.0
	45–54 years old	61	20.3	22	13.3	9	16.1	18	46.2	12	30.0
	55–64 years old	23	7.6	2	1.2	1	1.8	9	23.1	11	27.5
Sexual Orientation	n	301	100	166	100	56	100	39	100	40	100
	Heterosexual	249	82.7	142	85.5	45	80.4	30	76.9	32	80.0
	LGBTQ*	33	11.0	18	10.8	4	7.1	7	17.9	4	10.0
	Other	5	1.7	1	.6	1	1.8	1	2.6	2	5.0
	Prefer not to say	14	4.7	5	3.0	6	10.7	1	2.6	2	5.0
Disability	n	73	24.3	42	25.6	14	25.0	10	25.6	33	82.5
	Sensory Impairment	2	.7	1	.6	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
	Learning Disability	12	4.0	10	6.0	1	1.8	0	0	1	2.5
	Physical Disability	10	3.3	6	3.6	1	1.8	2	5.1	1	2.5
	Mental Health Condition										
	Controlled by Medicines	8	2.7	7	4.2	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
	Learning Difficulty	9	3.0	3	1.8	4	7.1	1	2.6	1	2.5
	Severe Disfigurement										
		11	3.7	7	4.2	3	5.4	1	2.6	0	0
	Prefer not to say	1	.3	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0
Multiple Disabilities	11	3.7	4	2.4	3	5.4	3	7.7	1	2.5	
	9	3.0	4	2.4	2	3.6	2	5.1	1	2.5	
Ethnicity	n	301	100	166	100	56	100	39	100	40	100
	White	173	57.5	98	59.0	23	41.1	29	74.4	23	57.5
	Black/African/Caribbean	79	26.2	47	28.3	22	39.3	3	7.7	7	17.5
	Gypsy/Traveller	2	.7	0	0	1	1.8	1	2.6	0	0
	Asian	15	5.0	5	3.0	2	3.6	2	5.1	6	15.0
	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group	14	4.7	6	3.6	4	7.1	2	5.1	2	5.0
	Other										
	Prefer not to say	15	5.0	8	4.8	3	5.4	2	5.1	2	5.0
	3	1.0	2	1.2	1	1.8	0	0	0	0	
Religion	n	300	99.7	165	99.4	56	100	39	100	40	100
	No religion	105	34.9	60	36.1	18	32.1	16	41.0	11	27.5
	Christian	133	44.2	71	42.8	27	48.2	14	35.9	21	52.5
	Buddhist	5	1.7	1	.6	0	0	2	5.1	2	5.0
	Hindu	2	.7	1	.6	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
	Jewish	3	1.0	0	0	2	3.6	0	0	1	2.5
	Muslim	19	6.3	15	9.0	3	5.4	0	0	1	2.5
	Sikh	1	.3	0	0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0
	Atheist	13	4.3	9	5.4	0	0	3	7.7	1	2.5
	Secular views	8	2.7	1	.6	3	5.4	2	5.1	2	5.0
	Others	7	2.3	4	2.4	2	3.6	1	2.6	0	0
	Prefer not to say	4	1.3	3	1.8	1	1.8	0	0	0	0
	Relationship/Partnership Status	n	296	98.3	163	98.2	55	98.2	39	100	39
Married		110	36.5	50	30.1	21	37.5	21	53.8	18	45.0
Civil partnership		5	1.7	3	1.8	2	3.6	0	0	0	0
Co-habitation		48	15.9	27	16.3	8	14.3	6	15.4	7	17.5
Widowed		5	1.7	1	.6	0	0	1	2.6	3	7.5
Divorced		15	5.0	5	3.0	6	10.7	1	2.6	3	7.5
Separated		13	4.3	5	3.0	2	3.6	3	7.7	3	7.5
Never married		84	27.9	64	38.6	12	21.4	6	15.4	2	5.0
Prefer not to say		16	5.3	8	4.8	4	7.1	1	2.6	3	7.5
Pregnancy Status		n	279	92.7	166	100	52	92.9	39	100	33
	Yes	12	4.0	7	4.2	3	5.4	1	2.6	1	2.5
	No	260	86.4	150	90.4	47	83.9	33	84.6	30	75.0
	Prefer not to say	7	2.3	8	.6	2	3.6	2	5.1	2	5.0

* We are using the internationally renowned and used acronym LGBTQ to include all individuals identifying with minority identities pertinent to sexuality, sex or gender reassignment. This is done for the purposes of privacy of information; ensuring that all potential identifiers of research participants are removed from the present report.

Phase 3

The third phase was initiated shortly after the first dissemination of the survey. In this phase, we invited candidates to participate in focus group discussions. These discussions provided a better understanding of people's views, thoughts and experiences and helped in confirming findings that derived from the survey. In other words, the focus group discussions and the survey complemented each other and added value and reliability to the findings.

Three focus groups of graduates/NQSW/ASYE and two focus groups from each of the other participant categories, of four to six members each, were completed between the last week of January 2021 and last week of February 2021. The size of each of these groups was determined based on research methodology literature (O'Leary, 2021; Flick, 2018; Bryman, 2016) that suggests that to allow for participation and commitment, groups should comprise no more than six members, but to enable a dialogue with varied perspectives, they should contain no fewer than four.

A total of nine focus groups were completed with a total of 36 participants from across the four categories. These took place online via Microsoft Teams, and they were facilitated by one of the members of the research team and supported by an additional member in case of technological or other barriers. Each group discussion lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; they were recorded and transcribed with all identifiers removed. Each focus group used the first five to ten minutes of the session to reiterate the aims of the study and housekeeping rules, while the last five to ten minutes were offered as a debrief to ensure that participants had space to reflect and to offer access to support if they required it. These two periods (the beginning and the end) were not recorded.

To minimise the risks of identifiers in research reports, we only collected information regarding gender, age and ethnicity to depict the overall diversity of the focus groups. We purposefully invited participants from diverse backgrounds to each focus group so as to avoid homogenisation of the findings. Table 3.2 shows the demographics of the focus group participants.

Phase 4

This phase included thorough analysis, synthesis and interpretation of the data. Data from the survey were exported from Qualtrics and imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics version 26 software, which is commonly used for statistical analysis of research data.

We transcribed the data from the focus group discussions verbatim and imported them into NVivo 2020, a qualitative data analysis software that we used to assist with information management and analysis. This phase concluded with a thematic analysis that we used to identify certain themes and sub-themes that helped to answer the research questions as they emerged from the data as well as to identify future trends in research and social work education and training.

Table 3.2: Demographics of focus group participants

	Factor	Total Sample	% total sample
Participant Type	n	36	100
Gender Identity	n	36	100
	Male	10	27.7
	Female	26	72.3
	Non-Binary/Third Gender	0	0
	Prefer not to say	0	0
Age	n	36	100
	18–24 years old	7	19.5
	25–34 years old	6	16.8
	35–44 years old	6	16.8
	45–54 years old	11	30.8
	55–64 years old	5	14.1
	65 or older	0	0
Ethnicity*	n	36	100
	White British	8	22.2
	Black African	8	22.2
	Black British	6	16.7
	Asian British	2	5.6
	Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group	4	11.1
	White Other	5	13.8
	British Bangladeshi	1	2.8
	Asian: Afghanistan	1	2.8
	Nepalese	1	2.8

* Participants were given the chance to state their ethnicity, rather than select it from a list of options.

Phase 5

In this phase, the final research report and associated tools (i.e. vignettes) were produced.

Methodological frameworks

For the purposes of this study, we applied a phenomenological approach (i.e. an exploration of the viewpoints of the individuals from the two workstreams) with variations across the two workstreams. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of how findings interact, which led to an in-depth understanding of the views, thoughts and experiences of all of the participants.

This study also applied a mix of inductive (i.e. generating new knowledge or theory emerging from the data) and deductive (i.e. testing already existing knowledge) approaches to meet the objectives across both workstreams. Drawing on Social Work England's previously completed study, Research into the Public Perception of Social Work⁸, this study contrasted the participants' attitudes and views towards a specialist regulator with public perceptions (i.e. a deductive approach). The additional inductive approach that we used enabled us to develop a theory-base that can inform future trends in education, training and practice or identify patterns of meaning, based on the findings, across the different participant categories (i.e. students, graduates, course providers and placement providers). We then explored the patterns revealed through the inductive examination against the varied protected characteristics of participants.

Ethics

This study's ethics were approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Greenwich [UREC/Pentaris – 18 January 2021]. The study maintained high levels of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation in the survey was fully anonymised and private, while the focus group discussions were followed by a thorough removal of any identifiers in the transcripts. All of the participants signed an informed consent form (either virtually, at the beginning of the survey, or in a document given to the focus group participants) and were given an opportunity to ask further questions (in addition to the participant information sheet).

All data was managed and stored based on the University of Greenwich's data storage strategy and regulations.

⁸ See report here <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/about/what-we-do/publications/research-reports/perceptions-of-social-work/>

Chapter 4

Specialist regulator

One of this research project’s three principal goals was to investigate the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions held by various stakeholders of Social Work England as a new regulator in its first year of operation. The following sections report on the findings, starting from survey data and then moving to the focus group discussions.

Initially, we asked course and placement providers about their perceptions of how the new regulator relates to advancements in social work education and training (figures 4.1 and 4.2), as well as the levels of accessibility and flexibility they experienced with the new regulator since its launch. There is general agreement that the new regulator’s input has helped with the standardisation and design of new curricula, while having a specialist regulator in social work has been viewed positively.

Figure 4.1: Academics’ perceptions regarding the influence of the new regulator on social work education, training and curriculum

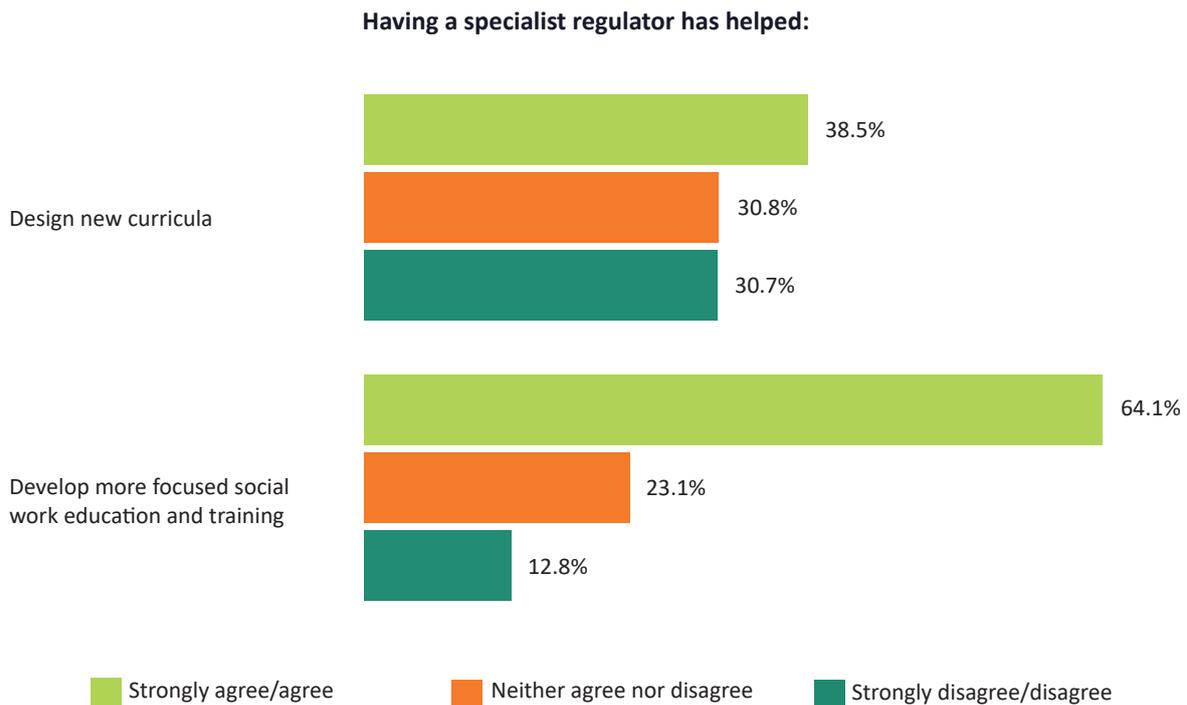
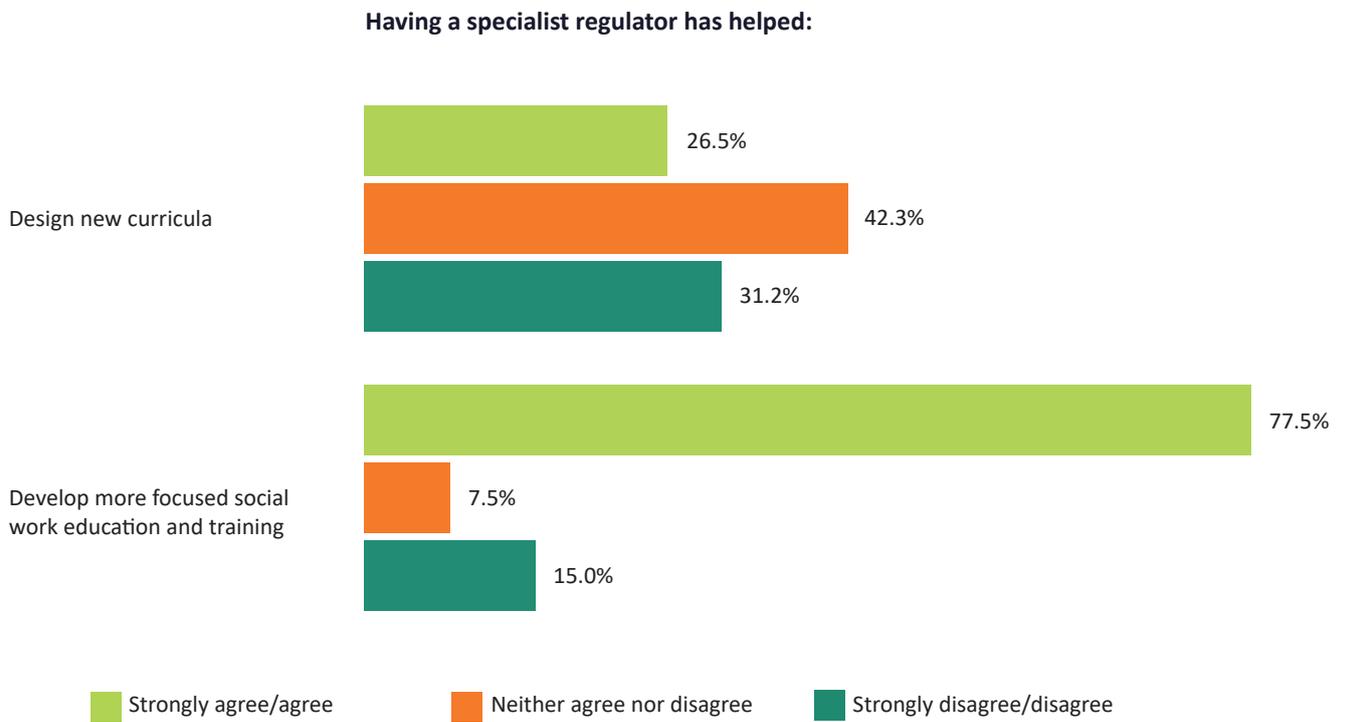
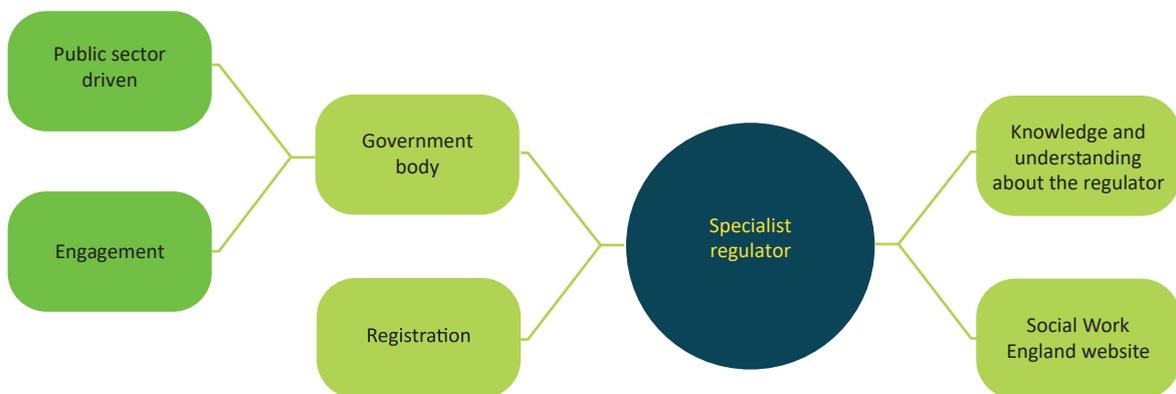


Figure 4.2: Practice educators' perceptions regarding the influence of the new regulator on social work education, training and curriculum



Separate focus groups were conducted with each participant group (i.e. social work students, graduates/ NQSW/ASYE, academics and practice educators). A total of four themes emerged from the data, all of which related to the views, perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the specialist regulator. Figure 4.3 depicts the themes and sub-themes as they are organised thematically in the sections that follow.

Figure 4.3: Main areas of discussion in relation to the specialist regulator



Government body

One clear organisational theme that emerged from the data concerned Social Work England's perceived role as a government body. The predominant view expressed by social work academics and practice educators was a concern that, as a government body, the specialist regulator was not run by social workers. Those who held this view worried that this would negatively affect the organisation's ability to independently represent the professional interests of social work. From those participating in the focus groups, 55.5% of the academics and 50.1% of the practice educators expressed the concern that the above would be detrimental for social work.

There is a very high number of people who are not social workers in Social Work England. That is something that needs to be addressed, because this is for social workers by social workers. (Academic)

I think part of my disappointment with Social Work England is actually...it's a government body rather than independent regulator. (Practice educator)

Our findings from the student and graduate/NQSW/ASYE focus groups showed that only 13% of the students and 9.7% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE were concerned whether Social Work England is a government body, however within this percentage, participants did express concern about the representativeness of this establishment. Specifically, and even though the Departments for Education and of Health & Social Care had invited consultation from all members of the profession in 2017-18⁹, those involved in the discussions questioned whether social work was represented in the beginning phases and consultation.

Public sector driven

The concern regarding Social Work England being driven by the public sector related to concerns about how social work might be perceived and whether a government body would have an appreciation of the wide range of practice contexts that social work can encompass. An example of this is the belief that because of its status as a non-departmental public body, at arm's length from Government, Social Work England's predominant focus would be directed towards social work practice in local authorities and that there was a risk of a lack of feedback with other sectors.

Social Work England is very isolated from the voluntary sector and from the independent sector, and I think that what happens then is that social work becomes local authority work. (Practice educator)

⁹To view the full report, please follow this link https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713240/SWE_Secondary_Legislative_Framework_Consultation_Response.pdf

Engagement

In relation to the specialist regulator being a government body, participants shared views that were part of a broader conversation emerging from the focus groups with regard to their feelings of engagement with and the responsiveness of Social Work England. Many of the participants were positive about the prospect of a specialist regulator and what it could achieve, as discussed earlier. However, and by contrast, a clear concern that emerged from focus group discussions construed Social Work England as bureaucratic and distant, representing more of the same, rather than a break from previous regulators. This was particularly evident among the practice educators, although this view was also represented in other focus group discussions, particularly those in which the participants had a greater connection with the BASW (e.g. the student participants).

Social Work England has become very bureaucratic. They are very distanced from the people they are serving. (Practice educator)

I felt a lot more connected, like BASW was more to do with what was more useful to us as a student and Social Work England seemed like a bit of a sort of – not something that I needed. (Student)

Following on from the quotes above, it is worth highlighting that the two stakeholder groups that are not registered or regulated (by role) by Social Work England are also those that present the view of non-responsiveness with more emphasis than others (i.e. academics and graduates/NQSW/ASYE). The latter groups, by comparison, shared more positive views about the regulator's engagement, and specifically when they had direct interactions with a representative.

We really have a good relationship with our contact person, which makes it easier if you are trying to do something, because at least you know you have a named person to contact. (Academic)

I had to contact them, and someone replied and helped me with my question quickly. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Finally, the data revealed that the participants acknowledged that Social Work England is a new organisation that came into being just prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, it faced exceptional circumstances since its inception. The organisation experienced somewhat of a baptism by fire, lacking the advantage of the typical adjustment period that a new organisation could reasonably expect.

I think it was unfortunate that Social Work England was set up and COVID almost immediately hit this country and we went into lockdown. I entirely accept that they have had a very difficult situation to deal with. Which a fledgling organisation – many fledgling organisations would have a sort of running period in which they would be able to establish themselves. (Academic)

Knowledge and understanding about the regulator

Of the conversations that took place in the focus groups, this theme was representative of 11.1% of students, 42.1% of graduates/NQSW/ASYE, 69% of academics, and 20% of practice educators, who shared their knowledge and understanding of the regulator and its functions. This was expressed via preconceptions about what the regulator should be doing, and in relation to the professional body of social work (i.e. BASW). First, the regulatory function of Social Work England was clearly recognised in the focus group discussions, with an inferred view that this ‘regrouping’ to a specialist regulator was necessary and a welcome development.

Where, previously, social work did have its own body that was disbanded, the social work went on the HCPC with other professionals, and eventually they’ve regrouped back again and so rebranded as a governing body. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

The participants recognised Social Work England’s broader role and function in setting professional standards, holding social workers to account through fitness to practise procedures, and ensuring registrants maintained an up-to-date record of their continuing professional development. These views and expectations of the specialist regulator are in line with its core regulatory functions including annotations of fitness to practise sanctions, as well as annotations of specialisms and qualifications where this supports the main goal of the regulatory body¹⁰. These views were predominantly expressed by newly qualified professionals and academics.

Social Work England is about standards. It’s about certain benchmarks for a social worker, whether it’s a course, or a practice or anything. (Academic)

Yet the students’ understanding of Social Work England was primarily informed by the requirements of their course of study and the requirement that they benchmark against Social Work England’s professional standards in both their academic work and their practice assessment documents. This, of course, is expected and indeed in line with the regulator’s functions vis-à-vis the approval of education and training courses. Specifically, the regulator is responsible for setting the standards which graduates have to demonstrate they met in order to be eligible for registration. At large, students expressed the view that the Social Work England professional standards are key to their coursework, which seems to motivate them to engage with them.

¹⁰Also see the Social Work England Secondary Legislative Framework https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713240/SWE_Secondary_Legislative_Framework_Consultation_Response.pdf

I used the professional standards in one of my essays, so I've read through them, we just don't know anything else. (Student)

There was, however, some confusion among the students and NQSWs who participated regarding the difference between the roles of the BASW and Social Work England. This may well be because student registration with Social Work England is not currently required, so students have not had the opportunity to realise the distinction between the two bodies, while membership with BASW is an option that many pursue. The role of the two bodies remains distinct, with the professional body's (i.e. BASW) aim focusing on serving the interests of its members, while it remains accountable to them. To the contrary, the specialist regulator (i.e. Social Work England) serves the public and is accountable to the government, abiding by its legislative framework. One of the main areas of concern which appears to be causing much of the misunderstanding emerging from the data among students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE is the need to comply with the PCF and the Code of Ethics, both of which are catered for by the BASW, as well as the professional standards, which are the responsibility of the regulator.

It's quite confusing to have two bodies that are nationally recognised as the people that set the standards for professional practice. I find it quite bizarre that we have BASW setting down the PCF and then we have a regulator setting down standards. (Student)

Knowledge of the new regulator and familiarity with the new professional standards were also informed through active engagement with processes that primarily affected participants in their roles, such as course providers with applying the new standards to education courses. The professional standards themselves are relatively new, and members' awareness with them is still developing. It is interesting to hear, particularly from the graduate/NQSW/ASYE focus groups, that workplace exercises such as group supervision are being used to support them with the application of the standards in their direct practice.

I work in the complex care team and I support adults – we have regular group-reflective supervision, and you have to show how whatever case you're reflecting on meets the standards of Social Work England. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

The importance of and need for professional standards were not disputed. However, some of the focus group discussions raised concerns among academics regarding the lack of rigour associated with the new regulator's standards, as compared with other professions, or professional standards of social work in other countries. An example that was offered pertained to the education and training standards and the regulator's function to ensure that social workers have the necessary knowledge of English language to enter the profession, yet fast track routes of education and training do not guarantee so.

If we want to present ourselves as akin to medics or nurses, then I think we need to accept that the training and qualification process is going to be at least

as robust, and that in comparison to most of the rest of, certainly, the English-speaking world, our standards for social work education are not as robust.
(Academic)

Both academics and practice educators seemed underwhelmed by the new standards, which they suggested were ‘more of the same’; some even expressed that they represent a trend towards increasing bureaucracy. ‘A little bit dumbed down’ was the phrase used by a respondent in their evaluation of the professional standards. Worth noting is the experience divide, evident across the findings, between participants from the two workstreams – students and graduates/NQSW/ASWE in the first, and course and placement providers in the second. As we discussed further in chapter seven of this report, expectations of the professional standards appear to differ ostensibly between those with less exposure to regulatory bodies and professional standards (workstream one) and those with experience from other regulators and the lack of one in the previous years, both in practice and education (workstream two). While those with more experience view the simplification of professional standards as a negative or indifferent outcome, those with less experience in the profession and with professional standards found this simplicity useful and easy to approach as a new professional.

I can see that Social Work England has tried to make things user-friendly, and I would agree with that, but the degree that it makes it user-friendly doesn't look like a professional standard. It does seem very – it's difficult to say – but a little bit dumbed down. (Academic)

I've been a practice educator for 26 years, it doesn't change the way that I practise my role with students, we still look at all the different aspects, so it's good to have professional standards, [but] I don't think they're any better or any worse than the ones we've had before. (Practice educator)

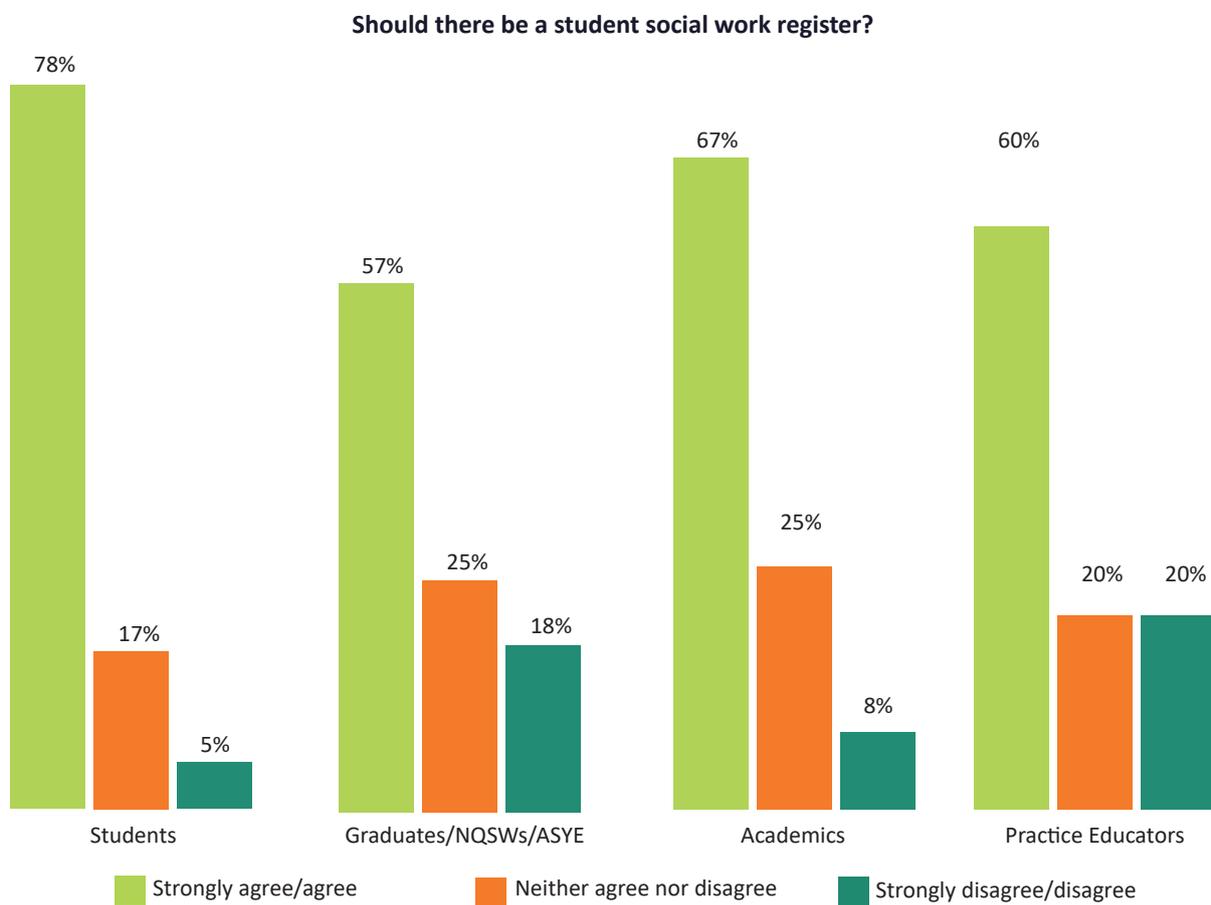
One of the things I liked about Social Work England was it felt a lot simpler, like less entangled with everything, and it was more specific to what it was trying to achieve and what it represented. (Graduate/NQSW/ASWE)

Registration

The topic of registration was represented across all focus group discussions but predominantly in those of graduates/NQSW/ASWE (represented by 61.3% in the discussions) and academics (represented by 59.1% in the discussions), as compared to only 21.5% representation in those of the practice educators. It is likely that the students only minimally addressed this topic because they are not currently required to register with Social Work England, and therefore they lacked familiarity with the process, although more of them had views regarding the possibility of a student register. In fact, participants across all stakeholder groups agreed that

social work students should have the option to register with Social Work England. Drawing from the survey data, 78% of the students reported that they would support the introduction of a register for students, while 53.8% reported that if they had the option, they would apply to register as a student. Similarly, 62.5% of graduates/NQSW/ASYE stated that they would apply to register if it were an option when they were enrolled with a course. Others, however, reported concerns about fees – an area that was also explored in the focus group discussions.

Figure 4.4: Views about the establishment of a student social work register, according to stakeholder group



Clearly emerging from the data in this study is the view that student registration fosters professional development and accountability from the beginning of one’s studies. Drawing on the legislative framework of Social Work England and the intention to provide provisional registration to ensure accountability and

professional integrity as those are key elements for a regulatory body that serves the public. Students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE shared the view that provisional registration for students until they qualify would only benefit them and justify their need to abide by the professional standards, too. In addition, while the potential of a student register is received well, albeit the caveat for a provisional status, financial concerns are not uncommon among students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE. Specifically, the data surface the view that in the chance of a student register, fees should be considered carefully in light of the already high tuition fees

From the day you walk in the door at Level 4, you register with Social Work England, because I think that registration makes people realise, 'I have this registration, it's something that can go if I do not meet the standard', and so it suddenly makes this a professional programme. (Academic)

Providing that you pass all your exams, your assignments, then you can officially join the register as a qualified social worker. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

It is also a matter of the fees because they are students with already large university fees to pay off. I think that needs to be considered, as well. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

As shown in figure 4.4, students themselves were in favour of a student register, although at times it appeared that they misunderstood the purpose of a specialist regulator; to ensure compliance with professional standards, annotate specialisms and qualifications, and monitor professional accreditation in its work to serve the public. Yet, student perceptions differed, and data shows that registration with the regulatory body would provide protection to students in a way that is similar to that of a trade union (i.e. providing assistance and advocacy to its members, especially in relation to better working conditions, while involving industrial action and political campaigning). In addition and linking the query of student registration with EDI matters, one student expressed that a student register could give them protection from the racial discrimination they felt from other social work students. This view, also shown in the extract from a focus group discussion below, appears to be missing key information about fitness to practise procedures undertaken by course providers when such issues arise among students; almost vicariously as Social Work England approves courses at University which comply with the education and training standards.

Trying to challenge racism from students becomes very difficult because they're not registered, they don't have to adhere to professional standards as a registered social worker does. And then there's the actual fitness process panels that they can be taken to because they are registered as social workers. (Student)

Regarding the process of registration itself, social work academics and graduates/NQSW/ASYE reported in their focus groups that it was relatively smooth, with only a few surprises – though if something went wrong, it could become intimidating. They also reported that it was difficult to access help, which was stressful as registration deadlines loomed.

It wasn't difficult – however, I was surprised to pay again after registration. I qualified in July, and I got registered. In November, they were asking me for another registration fee – I didn't know that. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Social Work England website

The topic of the Social Work England website received coverage in 9.2% of student, 50.7% of graduate/NQSW/ASYE, 19.5% of academic and 28.4% of practice educator focus group discussions. The students may have had limited motivation to use the website because student registration is not required and registration is an important function of the body, although it was clear that some of the participants had accessed the website for information on professional standards. Overall, graduates/NQSW/ASYE and academics in particular, among all groups, shared positive feedback about the information and user-friendliness of the site.

Definitely, regarding the professional standards of proficiency, they have guided my learning regarding my university work and my placement work. Regarding other things, I haven't used the website for anything else. (Student)

The website is quite okay. There are quite a lot of information that will guide you through the completion of the CPD and also the other information that you need to know. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I think the website is really user-friendly. You can navigate really easily. I've been able to download the education and training standards. I lead on placements in our institution, so I think the practice placement guidance is clear and easy to access. (Academic)

The following quote from a graduate/NQSW/ASYE illustrates the areas in which they would like to see the website content expanded. Specifically, newly qualified social workers, by a small portion of 7.6%, shared views about the Social Work England's website, which highlighted some of the misunderstanding about the role and functions of the regulator and those of the professional body for social work, as discussed earlier. The expectation that the website should include information about training and CPD opportunities, for example, shows a misconstrued perception that is further discussed in chapter seven of this report.

I think things like talking about the training and where to go for, I guess, accredited course and things like that, I think that could be somewhat improved. It does mention it, it does speak to it, but it doesn't clarify, I guess, where you can obtain, say, refresher courses, or how you go about that contact, or CPD.
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

A modest percentage (20%) of the practice educators agreed that the new regulator offers regular support and guidance, while more than half (52.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. The focus group discussions expanded on this and surfaced the following: practice educators' experience about uneven guidance and support received in their role is valid, albeit based on an apparent misconception. The comment below suggests that the Social Work England website, and especially during lockdown periods, was not providing adequate or any support and guidance to practice educators. This is an interesting finding as the specialist regulator does not oversee practice educators and/or placement providers. The Practice Educator Professional Standards, to the contrary, are set out by BASW, the professional body for social workers. To the contrary, it is worth noting that practice educators are qualified social workers, registered and regulated by Social Work England. This study does not show that practice educators in their role as regulated professional social workers felt that the website was inadequate, but in their capacity as practice educators they anticipated support from the regulator which was expectedly offered by course providers and BASW instead.

I have a particular gripe about the Social Work England website in relation to the situation that I was in as a long-arm practice educator at the beginning of lockdown, [it] was that the guidance there was completely – well, it was non-existent. (Practice educator)

The experience of practice educators was shared by academics as well, with 25.7% who reported having received regular support and guidance from the regulator, while 48.7% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this sentiment. 39.4% of the academics reported that support and guidance were accessible, while 30.3% suggested the opposite. When this is further explored in focus group discussions, it is clear that there is a disconnect between information and guidance being available on the regulator's website, and that information being directly sent to course providers; a tension between directly and indirectly communicated guidance and support.

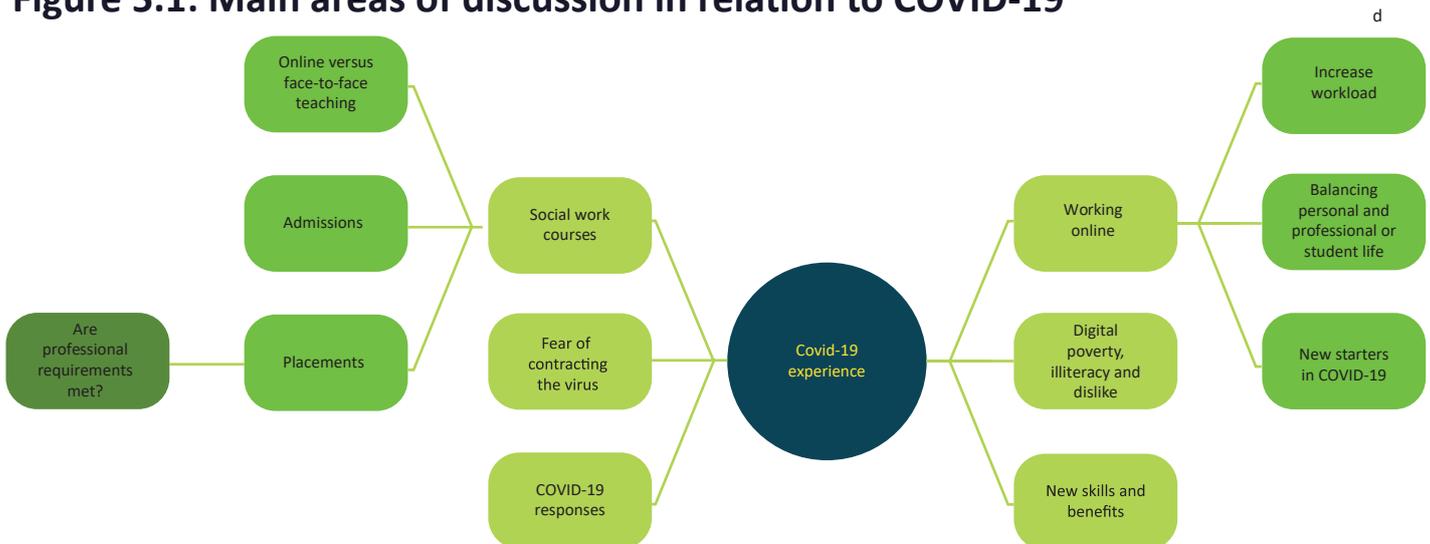
Chapter 5

COVID-19 experiences and responses to social work education and training

Participants from each of the categories (i.e. social work students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work academics and practice educators) were invited to discuss their experiences of continuing to engage with their social work education and training during COVID-19. We initially conducted a chi-square post-hoc test to examine the relationship between the questions asked of the social work students, social work graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work academics and course providers, as well as practice educators and placement providers, during the questionnaire. Those included questions regarding their views of COVID-19, their use of technology during this time, their opinions on Social Work England, and EDI and discrimination in the context (see table 5.1 in Appendix A). The focus group discussions further explored the key points deriving from the quantitative data, and all are thematically organised below. Before presenting those, however, it is important to recognise that over 45% of the students who took part in this study reported that it was difficult to access employment and other resources to support themselves or their families during COVID-19. Another 33.9% of the students claimed that they struggled to access adequate resources or other financial benefits to support themselves and their families. These figures should be considered when reading through the themes below and recognising the varied challenges that students have faced.

This area of concern (i.e. COVID-29 experiences and responses) occupied 82.1% of the academics' discussion, 57.9% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE discussion, 36.9% of the practice educators', and 62.3% of the students' conversations. Regardless of whether the conversation was focused on COVID-19, this experience appears to have shaped all of the other aspects of the focus group discussions. Figure 5.1 shows the six main areas of focus, and the sub-themes accompanying them.

Figure 5.1: Main areas of discussion in relation to COVID-19



Social work courses

Discussions about social work courses were predominant in each of the participant groups, for different reasons. In general, all of the groups concluded that their experience has been mixed, and they recognised both the challenges and opportunities presented by the situation. Specifically, participants indicated appreciation of spending more time with their families but recognised the loss of connecting with people. The majority of the students (55.4%) found communication and building rapport with academic tutors, practice educators and/or practice supervisors to be highly challenging, for example. Participants from other groups felt similarly.

This is a mixed experience. For example, you are working from home...having the pleasure of having time with your family. But what you are losing is the practical face-to-face experience. (Practice educator)

In addition, academics and practice educators considered course adjustments; they discussed the advantages and disadvantages altogether. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 show the extent to which course and placement providers felt that course adjustments due to COVID-19 have been beneficial and adhere to Social Work England's new education and training standards¹¹. They also reveal the academics' and practice educators' views regarding whether COVID-19 disrupted learning, teaching and assessment. These two figures highlight a discrepancy in the perceptions of course and placement providers, with the former considering course adjustments to be beneficial but not always disruptive due to COVID-19. Contrarily, the practice educators mainly reported that the course adjustments did not adhere to the new education and training standards and that major disruptions have blocked learning and teaching activities. Generally, a large number of practice educators (72.5%) agreed that the courses had to be heavily adjusted to minimise disruptions in learning, teaching and assessment. However, the inference here, and in relation to figure 5.3, may be that even though there was an agreement that adjustments were necessary, those applied did not seem to satisfy practice educators' expectations of meeting education and training standards. Drawing on Social Work England's guidance that suggested flexibility and localised decision-making to satisfy those involved on a needs-based approach, we can hypothesise that the lack of consistency in the responses to student and placement needs of different course providers, which affect practice educators, was not favoured. Yet, students in this study, by 50%, reported that they experienced flexibility in their programmes which allowed the accommodation of their unique circumstances of COVID-19 and was met positively.

Lastly, 47% of academics disagreed that programme delivery and assessment were disrupted. Even though this may seem odd, considering the context and assessment is important to make better sense of the finding. Specifically, when the pandemic was announced and restrictions were put in place, most teaching in social work courses was coming to an end with the end of term two in the academic year – this excludes placements. Thus, there was little disruption where there was no delivery, and from September 2020 courses may have developed robust strategies for teaching that minimised disruptions altogether. In addition, 68.4% of academics reported that assessments were not disrupted during COVID-19 and 31.6% reported the opposite. Linking this

¹¹ Qualifying education and training standards available at <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/education-and-training-standards/>

to the overall percentage shown in figure 5.3, it is clear that where assessment (majority) is online and via virtual learning environments, no disruptions were experienced, but the challenges were more evident with placements and practice assessments.

Our data highlights three main areas in which participants found their engagement with social work courses to be a mixed experience: learning and teaching; admissions; placements. Each is discussed in turn below.

Figure 5.2: Academics' and practice educators' views regarding course adjustments and positive outcomes to education and training

Course adjustments made due to COVID-19 have been beneficial and adhere to the new Education and Training Standards:

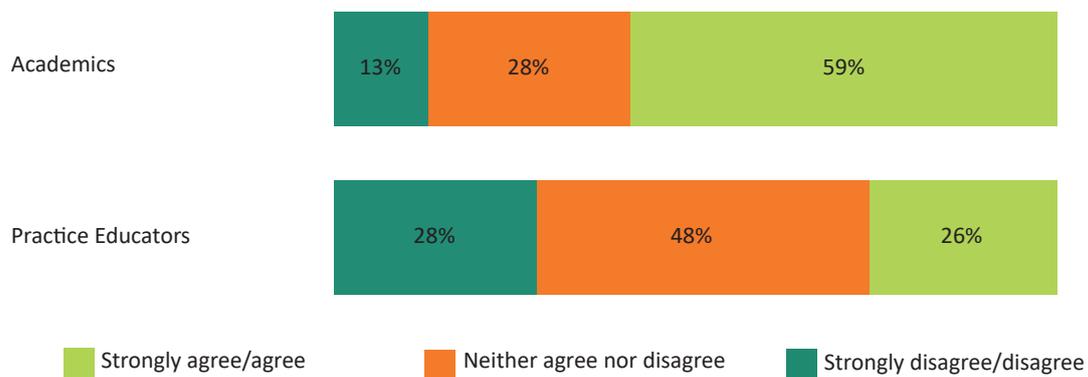
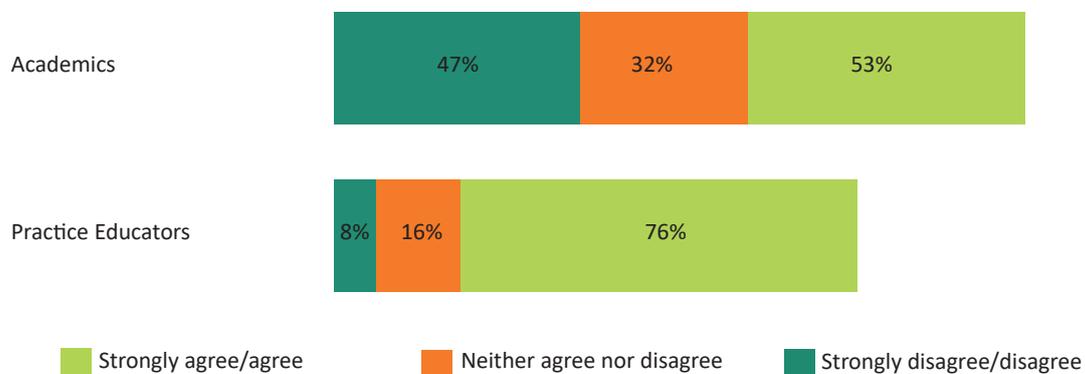


Figure 5.3: Have course adjustments during COVID-19 disrupted programme delivery and assessment

Did COVID-19 disrupt programme delivery and assessment?



Online versus face-to-face teaching

The participants' discussions regarding learning and teaching during the pandemic focused primarily on online versus face-to-face teaching. Their reflections highlighted their concerns around lack of engagement in activities, exacerbating feelings of unease about whether students meet standards, both academically and in practice. The social work academics expressed stronger views regarding the benefits of teaching social work online. The following quote reflects the views expressed in both focus groups that involved academics and underpins the disadvantages of teaching practice skills for social work via online platforms. Particularly, academics argue that online teaching is neither practical for professions like social work, nor preferred by students.

[With online teaching], we have been muddling through to find something that works. The university was talking about delivering programmes 50/50 [online/face-to-face], and the students say, 'no, we hate it. If we wanted to do an online course, we would apply to one. We want it face-to-face.'...And social work has got something in the title that says 'social'. There is something about it that says, 'you need to see people, you use all of your senses, the skill base is in the classroom where you learn'. (Academic)

The challenges that the participants identified were heightened or eased based on the circumstances; for example, course providers found teaching online to be more challenging when the cohort was larger, which limited the options for interaction and engagement. This set-up made it easier for students to become disengaged from the learning activities and 'hide behind the camera' as one student put it. Similarly, poor connectivity and no cameras made it all the more difficult for academics to support and engage with students; something considered 'disconcerting and scary' by an academic. There were also issues around confidentiality and the recording of sessions, which added to the challenges. Of course, we ought to negotiate such findings with caution, being mindful of the Institution-specific regulations where practices and procedures may differ, which either facilitate or hinder programme delivery and compliance to the education and training standards.

There are real challenges – particularly in a bigger cohort – to doing online learning, accessibility for students, poor connectivity, students with cameras off, and you just can't get a sense of what they are getting out of it. (Academic)

How to engage people. And in terms of social work, the whole issue of recording, confidentiality, what can and cannot be recorded, how to apply university regulations – all these are challenges. (Academic)

These views were reflected in the conversations from the student focus groups, as well; they specifically identified that lecturers were facing difficulties in adjusting to new technologies and methods for the purposes

of teaching. Worth noting is that levels of digital literacy vary, and it would be wise to approach this with caution. In other words, even though this study reveals that students perceived academics as struggling in this period to adopt new ways of teaching, learning and engagement generally, further examination of academics' digital literacy before and after COVID-19 is required to find out whether there are other, compounding factors to this.

I think when COVID first kicked in, we saw quite a drop in terms of the input [in learning and teaching] as lecturers struggled with new ways of teaching, which were very alien to some. (Student)

In addition, the current circumstances appear to have had a different effect on student cohorts who only entered their social work courses in September 2020. By that point, course providers had already implemented a 'blended approach' to teaching and learning, but in a short time this was changed to a purely online method. This led to little opportunity for new students to connect with each other and come together as a cohort. The views among stakeholder groups are similar, but with particularities. Specifically, all agreed that communication and connectedness suffered due to the above-mentioned reasons, but academics considered that the few weeks that had been available for face-to-face meetings with students at the start of the year (i.e. September 2020) facilitated a better start for the course.

I was very worried about the first-year students because they did not know each other. I felt it was going to be hard to start a whole course like this. I was glad because we had about six weeks of face-to-face teaching, so then when students went away, they knew somebody in class. (Academic)

Overall, the academics expressed concerns that online teaching might become the norm. There was a general unease around the idea that institutions might consider it to be a more efficient approach, and one that may be able to attract more international students. Further thoughts from students, however, reveal views of online teaching as a matter of convenience related to location and contribution in the classroom, facilitating confidence. Such view is mirrored in those of participants in the other stakeholder groups, as remote working and studying has been appreciated to save on travel time, especially when one has to commute for a long period.

I do not want us to be comfortable so much with this online teaching that we end up saying we are going to do social work teaching remotely. It is hard enough for our students and practitioners to do social work behind a screen. (Academic)

When the first lockdown happened, we very quickly went onto online learning, and I preferred this because I go to a university far from where I live. So that [lockdown] cut down my hour and a half commute every day. (Student)

Because everything is online, I do feel more comfortable to talk – no one can see me. In a way, I am hiding behind the computer and feeling more confident.
(Student)

Admissions

The social work courses' selection processes were also affected by the unforeseen circumstances of COVID-19. The academics who took part in this study focused specifically on the challenges associated with the admissions processes and the barriers they presented in selecting high-calibre students for the next academic year. Specifically, they suggested that the adjustment to completing admissions online left institutions and tutors unprepared; much of which was due to IT literacy skills, as well as confidence that candidates would be assessed adequately in a virtual environment. The new, virtual selection processes also made it difficult to engage people with lived experience and practitioners, and candidate assessments were more difficult to achieve as they were faced with technical issues or candidates who did not have the right equipment or the IT capacities to attend an interview. Despite the difficulties, course providers endured online and provided support to partners to facilitate their continuous engagement with the admissions processes. Yet, the losses were inevitable, especially due to digital poverty as reported later in the report.

We just had barriers for creating new systems for doing everything online. It felt very clunky and just hugely time consuming for staff, while we could not engage service users as we did before, or other partners. (Academic)

We had to learn to do online admissions, which meant we had to take away the aspect where they do group discussions. That was very important, because that's when you began to see people's character. (Academic)

Placements

All of the stakeholder groups engaged in conversations that highlighted the varied and complex concerns related to student placements. The groups mentioned the immense interruptions that students faced in their placements due to COVID-19 and its associated measures. There was a large number of students (60.6%) that reported that their placements had been disrupted, paused or delayed due to the restrictions. Practice educators (80%), focusing on the assessment of practice learning, agreed that assessments during this period were highly disrupted, while over 72% found it challenging to support students on placement, and 53.8% found it difficult to connect and build rapport with them. Practice educators put forward the view that with so many interruptions and delays, the students had almost been 'cheated' of their learning.

I felt like I had put all this effort in, as you do as a practice educator, and I felt – because of what was happening – cheated, and I felt they [the students] were cheated. (Practice educator)

Practice educators equally considered the lack of contact to be an issue when working online, suggesting that students cannot connect with people with lived experience of social work when completing their assessments in practice. This emphasised the great unease practice educators experienced with regard to the preparedness of students who had completed remote placements and concern as to whether they were ready to move on to registration and practice.

COVID is a disadvantage to many of them [students], because they cannot have the face-to-face contact [with people with lived experience] – they cannot have the rapport when they are writing [a] report for assessment. (Practice educator)

I think the biggest worry is, with all adjustments made, the students that have gone through their placements during COVID have lost their education. Will they be ready to practice? (Practice educator)

In addition, placement offers dropped dramatically during that period; either because placement providers required time to adjust to the new circumstances and develop practices compliant to the new, COVID-19 regulations, or because of the restrictions, staff members were preferred over students as increased workloads were looming. Besides the decreased offer, the quality of the placement settings that were available was questioned by the participants, who considered local authorities as the main setting through which students could receive sufficient training. This perspective ignores the many other settings across the public, private and voluntary sectors in which social work is practised – settings in which hundreds of students receive training in completing statutory tasks. To add to this, academics specifically reported that they expected guidance and support from Social Work England on this matter. The experience here is divided between 37.3% who disagreed that support was adequate and 39.4% who agreed that it was. Noteworthy is the fact that those who claimed a close and supportive relationship with regional representatives from the specialist regulator tended to agree that support was adequate. This emphasises the points made in chapter four about the impact of a relationship-based model when working with course and placement providers in the future.

I have been surprised by the number of employers who have just said, ‘instead of 14 placements we are going to give you two’. (Academic)

Universities, I feel, are struggling to find good placement...But they get environments like a job centre place. But...I question what number of students get a proper social work placement...like a local authority setting. (Practice educator)

A couple of our placements are small, and they said, 'If we can only have a couple of people in the building, those people are going to be qualified social workers. We cannot accommodate students as well.' (Academic)

Similarly, the students themselves expressed distress that placements have been delayed due to the second wave of COVID-19, which led to a second and third lockdown. This experience is drawn from the 2020/21 academic year and reflects the course and placement providers' concerns about availability and quality of placements. Students' distress, though, is not purely due to starting placement at a different time in the year, but the uncertainty about when different coursework items are to be completed, while courses moved assessment items back and forth to balance demand and student workload moving forward.

About 10 of us [in the cohort] are not on placement and having to either take a leave of absence or having to start placement at a later date and having to start the dissertation, which is next year now – and it is all a mess. (Student)

Furthermore, the academics faced the challenge of dividing placement days and following a non-traditional pattern that was far removed from the 70- and 100-day approach followed by most approved programmes. Another approach that social work courses followed was to negotiate the use of paid work pertinent to social work or in social work settings such as drug and alcohol services, for their students as a placement, on the proviso that following the assessment, professional standards would be met. These approaches are in line with the guidance from the specialist regulator, which enabled courses to be flexible and adjust to their local needs as necessary.

We had the greater majority of our 70 days [placement] stopped, and in the end, it was so fractured....This year, the people that would have been doing 70 days are now doing 130, and we have split it up where they are getting more observations [for example]. (Academic)

Are professional requirements met?

Practice educators and academics expressed concerns regarding the quick and technical processing of placements during this period. The highest concern was that professional standards may not be met; placements still progress remotely, but these circumstances may not allow for students to demonstrate that they are meeting the required standards. While it was clear from the data that feelings are mixed, they also revealed an 'experience divide' among the participants. Those with more than five years of experience in social work education and training, exclusive of practice, shared the view that professional standards are not necessarily met when students complete their placement at a distance and behind closed doors or when direct observations are only carried out via internet platforms such as Teams or Zoom. An interesting point raised in this study is that course and placement providers experienced student demands that mostly wanted the chance to complete placements without much empathy or insight about the difficulties that COVID-19 and associated measures have caused. In fact, and as mentioned by one of the academics, 'these are circumstances we

cannot control, as is a student having a life-threatening condition and unable to go in the field for their safety.' Further, course providers have experienced tensions with students because of misinterpreted messages from the guidance provided on the website of Social Work England. The suggestion for flexibility to the extent that the number of placement days to be completed could be negotiated and reduced, for example, was taken by students as a rule, which caused a restriction and shaped student and academic experiences more negatively.

They [the students] need that training....They are not going to do that if we run through the system just ticking off boxes. (Academic)

Where you can consider reduction in days you still got to have the measure in place that says, 'do you meet the standards?' We are now saying, 'no, you do not', and they say, 'But Social Work England have said this is what you had got to do.' (Academic)

If we look at what is happening now with COVID, I am afraid....I wonder what input the current students have to go out and practise. Are standards met even? (Practice educator)

Working online

The new norm of working online to practise social work, complete teaching and learning activities, undertake assessments or engage with supervision, to name a few areas, was heavily discussed in all of the focus groups. All of the groups engaged in conversations about the preparedness of organisations and institutions to quickly adapt to the challenging circumstances of COVID-19. Generally, newly qualified social workers (69.7%) reported numerous disruptions in their practice and assessed work in the ASYE programme, most of which derived due to the period necessary for organisations, agencies and services to adjust to the new circumstances, provide necessary equipment to staff members, and ensure training and support. Within a different context, academics (60.5%) reported that the challenges and disruptions in this period have influenced their abilities to support students adequately.

The groups also negotiated the effectiveness of the varied adaptations. What emerged from this data is that experience is split in a number of ways, with a predominant representation of both a positive side and a challenging side. The individuals' experience appeared to be informed by context and circumstances, as well as previous organisational or institutional investment in training and resources that was able to facilitate the needs of the current period. Specifically, those new to the profession reported a more positive view about their agencies' preparedness to respond to the new circumstances, which may be due to levelled expectations; yet, something that requires further exploration in the future.

The inappropriate expectations by educational establishments were surprising. To say, 'we are going to provide as good a service as we provided before'...that means that we had to work every hour that God sent. (Academic)

Well, we did not know as an organisation – should we work from home or in the office? There were a lot of policies and practices that needed to be changed, so that affected the way of working. (Practice educator)

Including PPE [for] when we go out and see the clients, we had all the computer... everything that we need actually. And we had a lot of training, a lot of support from the local authority. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I did not lack anything because before COVID, my council was promoting agile working. Most of us are well equipped to work from home, to work from clients' homes, from libraries...before COVID. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Practice educators and graduates/NQSW/ASYE felt strongly about the overall appropriateness of online working for social work services and education. Online working was regarded to be an unfit platform through which to effectively exercise social work or to adequately promote social work training. In fact, over 75% of the practice educators and 68% of graduates/NQSW/ASYE reported that working online was by default not compatible with what social work education and practice require.

They [students] are not getting the team experience – to be in a team and to listen and to go out with people, that is all part of the learning. (Practice educator)

When you are conducting an inquiry over the phone, you ask the standard questions...like, 'is there someone in the room who you would prefer not to be there?' But even then, you can never be truly sure who is there physically – and if they do not have Zoom capability – things like that. Safeguarding work in this climate is very difficult. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

One of the most common themes that emerged from the conversations that corroborates with the quantitative data was lack of direct contact with people: contact with supervisors, colleagues, peers, people with lived experience of social work, and so on. Over 48% of academics and 72% of newly qualified social workers reported that connecting with colleagues (externally and internally) and/or students while working online was highly challenging at most times. Each of the stakeholder groups identified this as one of the biggest challenges – one that left them feeling helpless at times.

Not seeing people's faces, not being in a social environment where human contact is more available, trying to contact the parents, not answering sometimes and not being able to knock on the door. All this is challenging.
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I think, as a student, you are disadvantaged because you do not have the people around you who can recognise that you are stuck. (Student)

Direct client contact. The students are at a disadvantage, and that was very difficult – and like, when you are doing a direct observation, it is not a real setting that we are used to, is it? (Practice educator)

I think working from home...has its advantages – and it does not, because you do not have that contact with your colleagues and students. (Academic)

The participants in this study unanimously expressed that working online increased their feelings of social isolation. Despite the convenience of working from home and becoming more independent, the lack of face-to-face contact with others – the lack of connection with them on a personal level – shook their professional and educational experiences. The participants reported that rapport-building became a challenge and new relationship-building skills were in demand if they were to develop supportive, meaningful and truthful connections. Of course, this is an example of how a challenge is equally an opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge, which has also emerged in this study and is discussed later.

[Students] were isolated when they were working. Where they would normally work in a library and talk to everyone, they could not do that. (Academic)

I felt isolated. I did not have any induction, and which means that all the workload that I am having, I have to sit at home trying to figure out how the system works – databases, who to contact. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

*You meet with service users online, but are you getting the real side of things?
It is all very isolating.* (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

When you are at home, you have got other people on the other end of the phone, but everybody is busy so you do not know who you can ring out of the blue, and it felt very isolating, really. (Student)

The graduate/NQSW/ASYE stakeholder group specifically discussed limitations and access to adequate supervision – both managerial and non. They noted that remote working, limited office hours or working on a restricted staff rota introduced new limitations. For example, due to increased workload, availability became an issue and supervision was not always accessible as it would otherwise have been. The graduate/NQSW/ASYE focus groups also stressed that online supervision may be beneficial or effective for some, but not for all. This finding is in line with person-centred approaches in social work education and training; methods that require disengagement from one-size-fits-all techniques and development of more individual-specific organisational policies and procedures. Similarly, working relationships between supervisors and supervisees were put to the test when they were carried out via online platforms, and some felt that the effectiveness was much lower than when supervision happened in the field.

I found that my levels of supervision...it was very informal. What I found was... it would be very difficult to get the availability when you have got a senior manager who is also operating different priorities. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Moreover, the academics, graduates/NQSW/ASYE and practice educators shared the view that working online revealed limited resources and/or support from the regulator – specifically with regard to COVID-19–related pressure. One academic shared an empathetic view which mirrored the thoughts expressed by many in the academic and graduate/NQSW/ASYE focus groups.

I think they have been as helpful as they can be. I mean, they have been blindsided as the rest of us. They out some statements....I do not know that they could have done anything else, but they were as helpful as they could be. (Academic)

However, many individuals also felt that the regulator could have taken a leadership role in promoting a more systematised response to social work education and training in order to avoid the risk of unmet professional standards and the potential that near-graduates may be lacking in expertise when they enter the field, leading to unsafe practices in the future. In other words, despite the guidance provided by Social Work England (i.e. flexible approach and localised decision-making), participants expressed the perception that a more standardised set of rules would have managed the risk of split experiences and extended uncertainty about outcomes.

I think they [Social Work England] could have been more declamatory. I think they could have taken more of a leadership role, as opposed to a responsive role. And I do get the point about the infancy of the regulator, but I also think... they need to be a bit more forthright and a little more engaging. (Academic)

Finally, the respondents expressed that Social Work England could have taken a more motivational role in the midst of the pandemic by recognising the challenges and identifying the hard work and commitment of all stakeholders across social work education and training. The participants reported that this tone and approach would have ignited a heightened sense of belonging and support which they considered to have been lacking and which links with the inferences about a relationship-based model in the regulation of the profession.

Social Work England...they could put out statements every so often...a bit kind of like...‘we know you are working online, but this is not a waste of your time while you wait to go back in – these are skills you are learning – and this is what our new world is going to look like, and we are here as regulator and we know what this is.’ (Academic)

Increased workload

Increased workload appeared as a common description of the participants’ experiences with working online since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of quarantining measures. Across the stakeholder groups, individuals recognised that the current circumstances increased the number of tasks to be completed and the demand that they be completed in haste, while working hours extended, which limited any opportunity for self-care.

Work starts when you open your eyes and finishes when you cannot stand up anymore, and that includes Saturdays and Sundays....There is no beginning and there is no end. (Academic)

There was not a lot of self-care going on, because it seems like 24 hours you are working. (Academic)

I have had to work unsocial hours to help my students, because I wanted my students to get the best out of placement. (Practice educator)

The participants also recognised the further complexities of COVID-19 and increased workloads; for example, colleagues who contracted COVID-19 had caseloads that would need reallocation, which impacted those who continued to work. This is an area that this study surfaces and which will require further exploration with organisations and agencies, to explore contingencies when staff members fall ill or become unavailable without warning.

There are people who feel sick, and they might have COVID, and they cannot attend work, which brings up more caseload to you. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Balancing personal and professional or student life

Part of the main challenges of working online and experiencing an increased workload has been the need to balance personal and professional or student life. 79.5% of the students reported difficulties in maintaining a balance between personal and student life, while 69.8% claimed that personal circumstances and difficulties interfered with their course progress. In addition, 51.8% of newly qualified social workers reported that their personal circumstances interfered with their abilities to continue practising effectively. Similarly, many students found it difficult to ensure privacy when attending and attempting to engage with lectures; meanwhile, others in the household may have needed to be online at the same time. This is not an uncommon experience across all sectors of employment life, as working from home took hold. In addition, participants from all the stakeholder groups reported that finding a good balance to separate their work or studies from their personal lives was an unattainable task at times, especially in light of their increased workloads, feelings of social isolation and lack of direct contact with people.

The thing that I was panicking about the most was having a space to be part of a lecture – and for the house to be quiet, because I live with a big family and I also care for my little sister. (Student)

[It was difficult] putting in boundaries to help myself to know when to step away from the computer and work and studies. (Student)

You do not want your work life to encroach your personal life, but obviously it has. And it was then dealing with that and trying to mentor and motivate my student. (Practice educator)

This experience was intensified for parents who were abruptly required to home-school during lockdown, complete their own work or study tasks, and find time and space for personal and family life. Despite the keyworker clause with regard to school attendance, not all were eligible and not all schools were available, especially for children living with learning disabilities. Our data shows that the participants not only found it difficult to fit everything required of them into each day, but they also expressed feelings of guilt about how well they were providing for their children's education. These parents reported that they were also required to take on a friend role with their children, as the children were also restricted from engaging with their friends as they normally would. While these reports from parents are notable, circumstances have differed for each individual, and those who had the responsibility of caring for an older family member or other dependent or who experienced bereavement in this period faced their own challenges.

I have to do home-schooling at the same time. Now [March 2021] I had no option than to take them to school, because I am a key worker. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I am a mother of three children, and obviously school was affected, so it was home-schooling. I had to try and balance those roles, juggle all those different things. (Practice educator)

Trying to home-school while doing university lectures and assignments was very difficult. (Student)

My son is also autistic, so it was so difficult to do it all while he is home because not all services were available. (Student)

New starters in COVID-19

It is worth noting the experiences of those who entered a new position in an ASYE programme during the COVID-19 period and the impact the current circumstances have had the beginning of their social work practice. The participants in these groups expressed views regarding the support they received from their employers and indeed those views allude to needs vis-à-vis connection and a sense of belonging, which would be best met face-to-face, but mostly unable to satisfy when working online.

I felt isolated. So many hiccups. That a name would be given to you – ‘you can contact this person’ – and the person is not there. What next? (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

As a new started [employment], you do need that support from your colleagues and from your manager, which I have had, but that has been online, and I wish we were working in an office. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Fear of contracting the virus

One participant in this study, a newly qualified social worker completing an ASYE programme, shared their concerns about contracting the virus, which became a barrier for them to engaging in any face-to-face work. Yet, what is most important is the internal conflict between personal safety and duty of care in their role as a social worker. As this study only found one person who expressed such thoughts, it would be unwise to generalise, but it is important to recognise this minority view.

As a social worker, I have found that I now have to think [that] we can do the virtual assessment, because whether you say it or not, you are also worried about yourself, your own safety. You do not want to get COVID, pass it onto your family, but you also have a duty, a responsibility to your clients. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Digital poverty, illiteracy and dislike

The participants from the academic group discussed their concerns around digital poverty and digital illiteracy. They were keen to emphasise their concerns about student access to learning and teaching materials, and they recognised that both lack of equipment and lack of knowledge about how to use it was leading to unavoidable delays in student progress. The academics expressed that they felt exhausted; aside from their roles as educators and researchers, they also had to train their students to use the technology, much of which was new to the academics as well. These reports revealed a far more complicated picture that deserves further examination.

The internet poverty and whatever we call it, is an issue. Talking to my students just as they are about to go out for their final placement, looking at the backdrops they are sitting in....I spoke with somebody this morning – she was clearly in a bedroom with kids around and little access [to the internet]. (Academic)

Newly qualified social workers and those completing an ASYE programme emphasised the challenges they encountered when trying to connect with people with lived experience of social work. It is clear from the data that the participants in this category found it difficult to carry out their work- and placement-related tasks when those they have been working with did not have access to the right equipment or technology, nor knowledge of how to use it. The data also showed that access itself was not always the issue; at times, the barrier was the individuals' willingness to use new technologies: digital dislikes.

Communication was one of the challenges with my service users... they are a large demographic, 60–65 plus – and in terms of access to technology like Zoom, to things like Teams, or even email or internet capability or computer literacy. It is not always there for that individual or for that family. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Most of the clients...did not have to-date technology for me to communicate with them, and also, when I started, I was not having that training. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I work in adult mental health – a lot of patients are socially isolated, they do not have phones, they may have beliefs about using a phone or technology systems – they prefer face-to-face contact. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Similar to the academics' concerns about student access to learning and teaching, including placements, 13.5% of those in the graduate/NQSW/ASYE groups also experienced distress when faced with a lack of equipment or software while work-related demands remained.

In my team, in my computer, I do not have that [Zoom account], so when someone is saying, 'can you do Zoom?' I am unable to – so in that way, there is a disadvantage that comes immediately from that. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Yes, up till this point, I do not have a work mobile or a monitor. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

IT technical issues were identified across the participant groups, and their responses demonstrated their shared perspective that such issues often interfere with learning, teaching, training and practice as a newly qualified professional. These challenges, however, were not universal, and their seriousness fluctuated based on individual circumstances – mainly with regard to IT skills and access to proper equipment.

Students' access to electronic devices and the internet is reported in figure 5.3. Participants from all stakeholder groups were also asked to comment on their use of technology – specifically, whether they found it to be challenging, unethical or not an appropriate medium to exercise social work values. Figures 5.4-5.7 depict their answers, yet it is worth noting, as discussed in the next section, that benefits have also been recognised from the use of technology and new skills appreciated.

Figure 5.3: Did you have access to electronic devices and the internet during COVID-19 (students)?

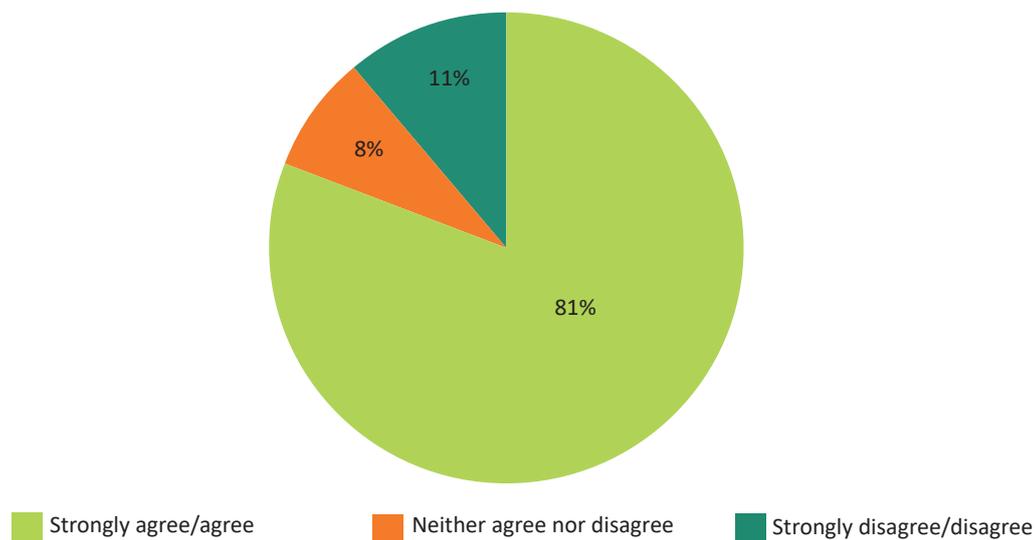


Figure 5.4: Students' experiences of technology use during COVID-19

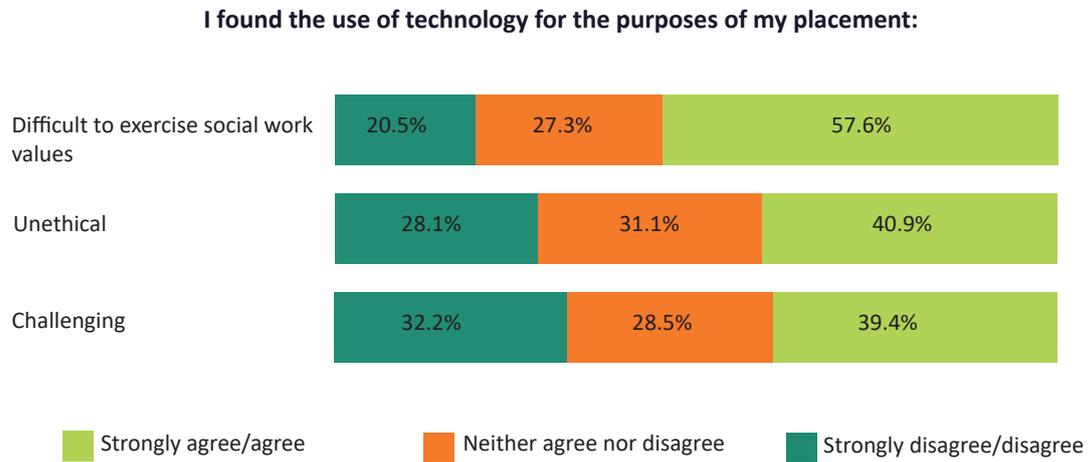


Figure 5.5: Graduate/NQSW/ASYE experiences of technology use during COVID-19

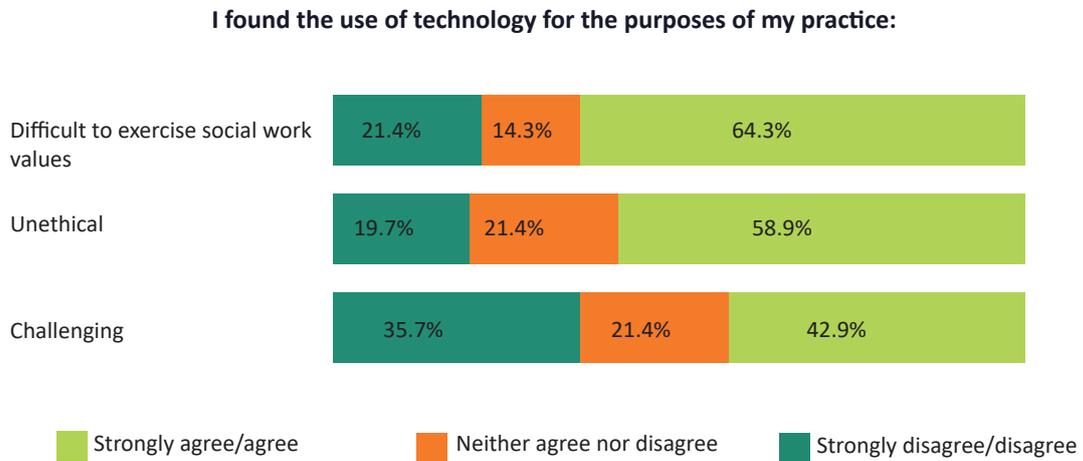


Figure 5.6: Academics' experiences of technology use during COVID-19

I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice:

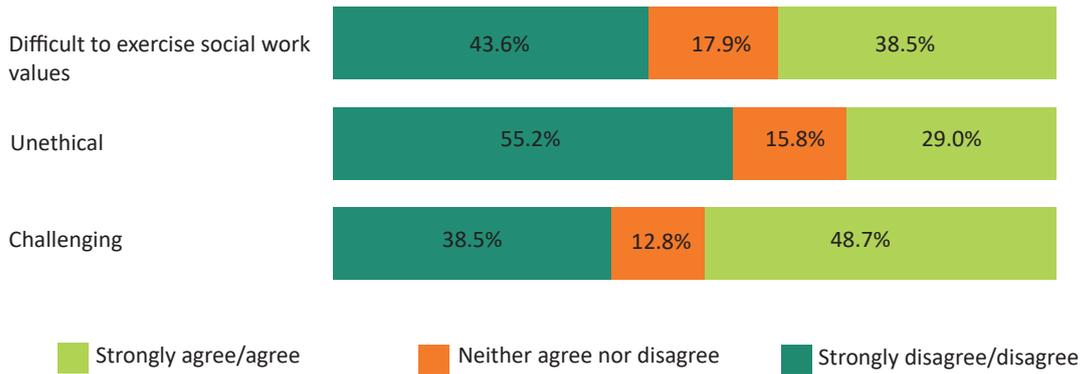
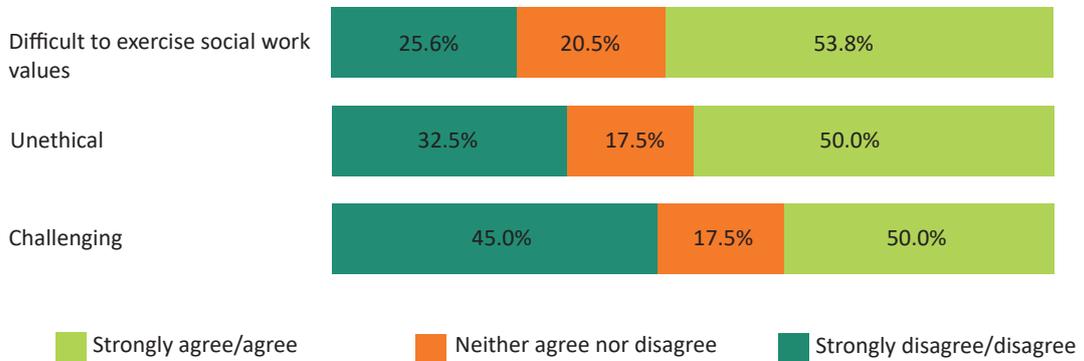


Figure 5.7: Practice educators' experiences of technology use during COVID-19

I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice:



COVID-19 responses: course providers and the specialist regulator

All of the stakeholder groups discussed their views and experiences regarding the support provided by the specialist regulator, and they explored whether they felt it was sufficient, given the circumstances, or whether they believed that more support was necessary. Academics were more concerned with this topic (65%) than those in the other groups; only 20% of the graduate/NQSW/ASYE discussions, 10% of the student discussions, and 25% of the practice educator discussions were focused on this area.

Specifically, the academics were more focused on the lack of guidance regarding placements and student progression; 53.8% of the participants (academics) reported that they did not receive clear guidance from the regulator regarding necessary course adjustments in response to COVID-19. In addition, 40% of the same group agreed that the regulator was flexible and understanding with student placements. Decisions about course adjustments and placements were left to be made locally, which increased ambiguity of student experience and divided social work education and training processes even further across the country, albeit the benefit of flexibility. This dispersal of education and training processes has the potential to result in new professionals possessing varied skills and questionable standards. While the academics emphasised the lack of systematic support, they were not the only ones who expressed this concern; other groups expressed similar apprehensions. Students, specifically, expressed dissatisfaction with the blurred roles and responsibilities between the specialist regulator and the professional body for social work. The perceptiveness, as discussed in chapter four of this report, alludes to a series of misunderstandings, or lack of understanding altogether, about the role and functions of Social Work England and BASW. What is of significance, knowing this, is to examine in the future the causes of such misunderstandings.

The focus shifted from 'how can I meet the standards?' to 'can I get 10 days off placement?' The regulator should have provided further support and guidance – consultancy with the educators. (Academic)

I think there are certain elements of the practice that they [specialist regulator] should have honed and sort of given a strong stance in, and not left it for practice educators, practitioners and educators. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I was in as a long-arm practice educator at the beginning of lockdown and...well, the guidance from Social Work England was non-existent. (Practice educator)

There is this dichotomy between various institutions and Social Work England. They keep pushing us – and you ask regarding COVID period – support for students and placements and all that...they should know who is actually responsible for what. (Student)

The practice educators' conversations also covered, by a considerable amount (40%), their experiences and views regarding responses from course providers to COVID-19–related needs, placements, student assessments and the practice educator role. Those who participated in these discussions highlighted that guidance was not always timely and that communication between course providers and practice educators remained poor. This may be expected when course providers anticipated guidance by the specialist regulator before providing any to placement providers and practice educators. Yet, the guidance from course providers was flexibility and assessing situations separately, as was indicated by Social Work England. This led to an additional gap with placement providers who expected from courses to tell them what actions to take in relation to placements. Practice educators shared their experience of poor communication from course providers, but without any specific examples offered in the discussions.

I struggled, because the directions...from the university were not quite coming on time as to what to do with the students who were on placement. (Practice educator)

This sort of struck me during the first lockdown. Communication was poor. And I was quite shocked to find that communication between the university tutors and the students and practice educators was so poor. (Practice educator)

New skills and benefits

The academics, practice educators and graduates/NQSW/ASYE identified new skills and benefits from the circumstances and difficulties resulting from COVID-19. It is clear that all of the participants in these groups recognised the growth, learning and benefits derived from recent adversities. The seven main areas participants recognised were increased appreciation for life, advanced resilience, problem-solving skills, improved approaches to supervision, IT literacy, and no need to commute to places (see Figure 5.8). Working from home has enabled all to put emphasis on their families and other personal circumstances, appreciating those and the time spent with them more, which eventually can lead to increased wellbeing. Similarly, the circumstances have been so challenging that participants considered this experience to have helped them develop their resilience even further and problem-solving skills required to respond to such adversities. Others expressed that their learning included a deepened appreciation of supervision; feelings of isolation during lockdowns and working from home have led to re-consideration of supervision and its use. Moreover,

IT skills were recognised by all; everyone was in agreement that this period has helped them develop IT skills that will be useful in their future practice. Lastly, individuals highlighted another benefit when working from home; there is no travel time, which allows for more committed work to specific tasks.

There is a wealth of skills just by teaching one of your modules entirely remotely. (Academic)

This situation gave you peace and quiet to catch up with things and maybe more complex write-ups and things like that. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I would like to say, first of all, that the use of technology – if you would have said to us even this time last year that we cannot support people in this way, we would had agreed. But you know what? We can. (Practice educator)

Figure 5.8: New skills and benefits from the lockdown and online/remote working

Appreciate life

- *"It helps people to know the value of life."*(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)
- *"It has given me a chance to be close to my family, to be close to my children."*(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Resilience

- *"In terms of my growth, I have learned a lot about my resilience; being able to cope under pressure."*(Practice Educator)

Problem-solving skills

- *"I developed my problem-solving skills. Before I would be a lot more reliant on my manager or someone to tell me what to do in that instant but now, I am more independent."*(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Appreciating supervision

- *"I can see the benefit of supervision. Even though the way it is now done is helpful, I would like to have in person."*(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)
- *"We have asked the remote students to keep a daily log of their activities and we ask them to map those against the domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework, so the students are actually much better at identifying those and using supervision."*(Practice educator)

IT literacy

- *"I think we have learned a lot about how we can deliver online"*(Academic)
- *"We have learned a great deal; we have really good IT services and we learned how to use them."*(Academic)

No travel time

- *"Certainly, the placement meetings, not to have to drive around North London, I just do not know how I did it."*(Academic)
- *"Obviously having meetings. You can book meetings close together because there is no traveling time; click goodbye and click into the next meeting."*(Practice Educator)
- *"You do not need to rush to work. You start work at 9:00 and you do not have to wake up at 5:30 to get ready and rush to work."*(Graduate/NQSW/QSYE)
- *"It is working well that I do not have to travel around so many places like I would. That is the main advantage from this situation."*(Student)

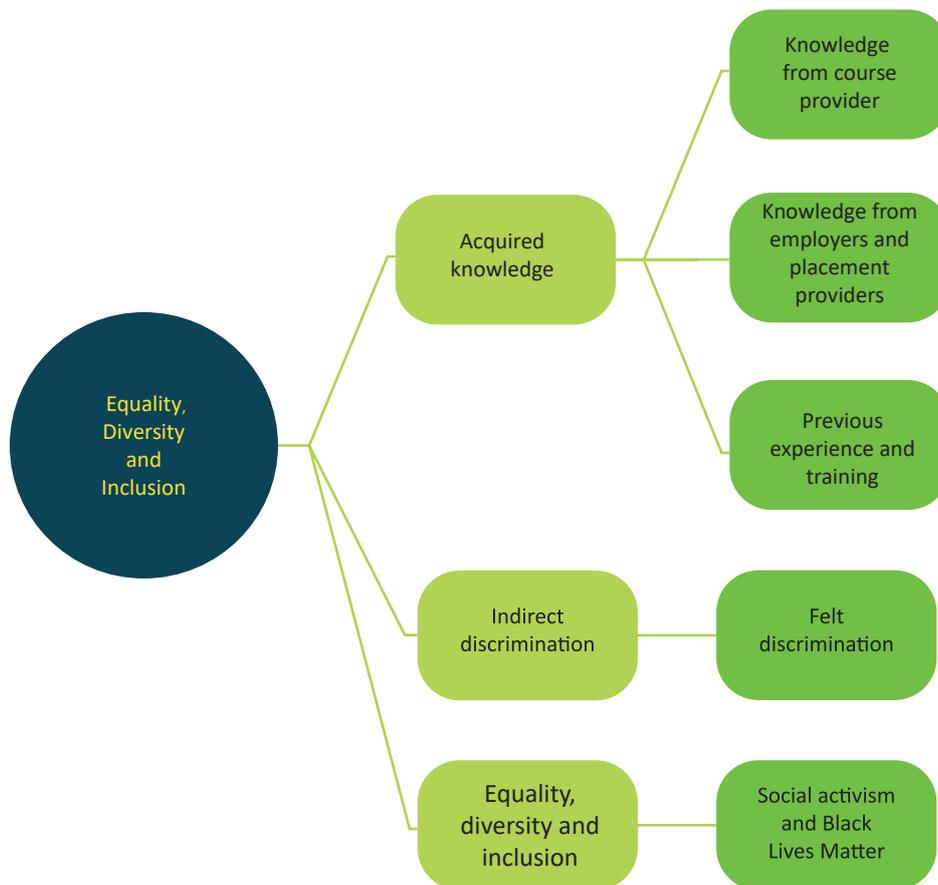
Chapter 6

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Participants from each of the categories (i.e. social work students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work academics and practice educators) were invited to discuss their experiences of EDI. EDI-related matters occupied 7.9% of the academic, 84.4% of the graduate/NQSW/ASYE, 7.7% of the practice educator, and 23.1% of the student discussions; therefore, our findings revealed that the graduates/NQSW/ASYE had an especially heightened interest in this subject area.

This area of concern was divided into three elements of focus. The first involved the participants' views of their knowledge and understanding of EDI-related matters, inclusive of anti-discriminatory practices and anti-oppressive practices, including a discussion of anti-racist practices. The participants were invited to discuss how they had acquired their knowledge around EDI, as well as their experiences in practice with service providers and people with lived experience. The second element explored the participants' personal experiences of EDI based on their own protected characteristics. Finally, the participants addressed social activism and its impact on social work practice relating to EDI; this topic also opened discussions around the personal impact of social activism on the participants, especially in relation to their practice. Figure 6.1 shows the different themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis and which are discussed in this chapter.

Figure 6.1: Main areas of discussion in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion



Acquired knowledge

There is a strong belief among those in the graduate/NQSW/ASYE stakeholder group that EDI principles are embedded in the values, ethics and standards of the profession. Those in this group, therefore, viewed EDI as an element that is incorporated into the role of a social worker and that it sits, by virtue, at the centre of the profession. In other words, findings show an anticipation that if one is a social worker, then sensitivity and practices with humility are a given. Yet, professional integrity in the context of EDI is not always an absolute feature of professionals, nor of the profession as both continuously grow and adjust to new situations.

The fact that we have chosen this degree and we are working as professionals, I think we always have that in us, that we want to fight for the rights of the people. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

We cannot know whether this view is supported by others, but no other group made such inferences in this study. However, findings generally surface the extent to which practices close to EDI, namely anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices, are part of the learning experience in social work education and training. Our findings highlight the participants' overall knowledge. First, we explored the participants' understanding of what EDI means, with a focus on how this looks in anti-discriminatory practice in social work. Our data showed that for all four participant categories, adhering to EDI promotion was often enacted through anti-discriminatory social work practices. Anti-discriminatory practice was described as a form of practice in which the diversity of values, beliefs and lifestyle of people with lived experience are endorsed, addressed and supported. In addition, participants expressed the professional obligation to anti-discriminatory practice – almost an embedded feature in the profession. This is a similar view with social work being practice with a value-base; yet, what is not considered here is that professionals have to act out social work, hence the many ways in which social work is practised alludes to many ways in which values or anti-discriminatory practice manifest or do not in practice.

So, promoting anti-discriminatory practice is when you work with the clients and you don't discriminate against them in any form, regardless of whatever they are. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Our focus then turned to how this knowledge was acquired, and our data revealed a consensus that their knowledge had been acquired from three main spheres: course providers, employment and practice, and finally, the participants' existing knowledge prior to entering social work education and training. Moreover, participants from all of the groups emphasised that EDI is an area that requires continuous learning and development; they also recognised that lifelong learning is an essential component of growth.

Knowledge from course provider

We asked the student and graduate/NQSW/ASYE participants whether they felt they had been taught about anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices, as well as cultural sensitivity, in their courses. The majority of the participants reported that they had, while 16.6% of the students and 17.6% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE disagreed that they had received knowledge about anti-racist practice. With regard to cultural sensitivity, 14.7% and 16%, respectively, disagreed that they had been taught about this topic. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 show the results for both groups.

Figure 6.2: Student reports regarding knowledge received from their social work course that promoted equality, diversity and inclusion

In my social work course, I have been taught about:

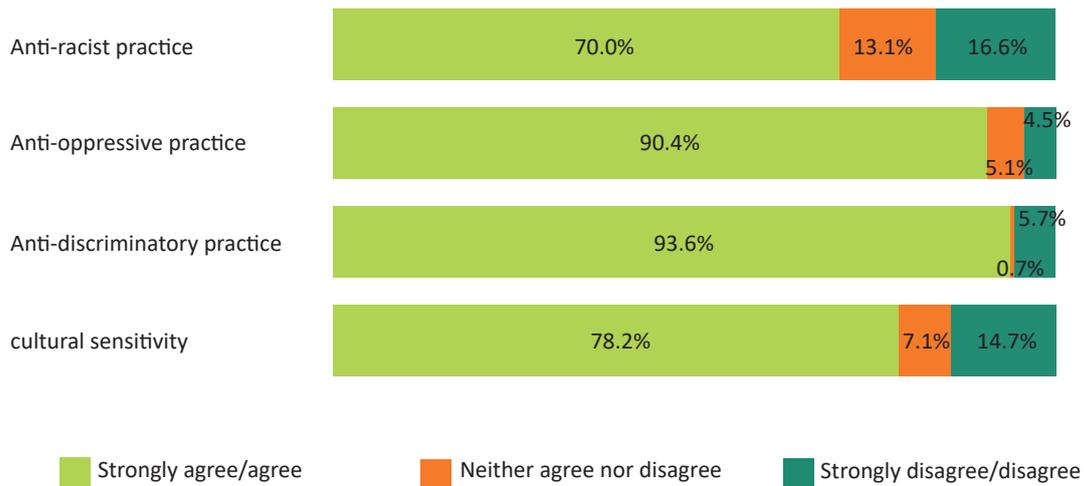
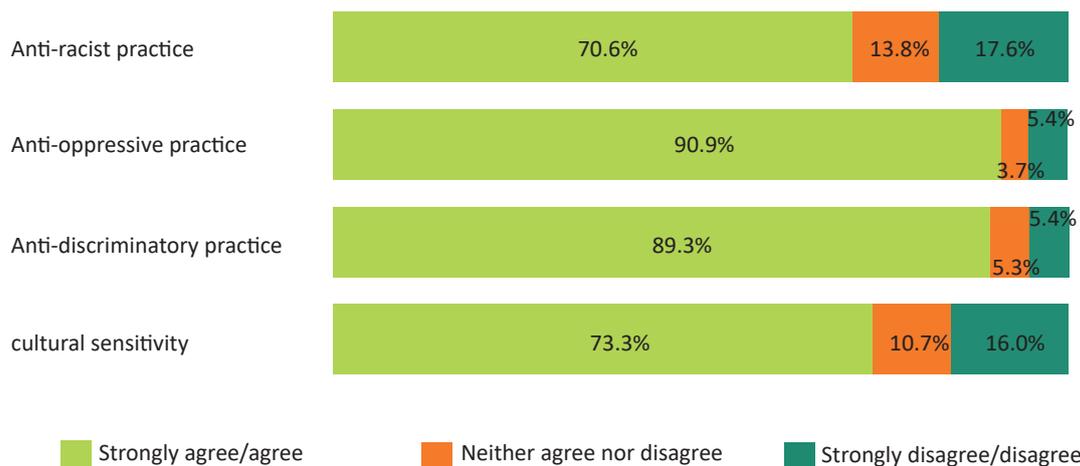


Figure 6.3: Graduate/NQSW/ASYE reports regarding knowledge received from their social work course that promoted equality, diversity and inclusion

In my social work course, I have been taught about:



The findings iterate that many participants felt that anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice had been heavily incorporated into their social work training programme. They reported that they had encountered requirements to evidence both anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in their coursework and placements and that course providers present examples to students, which over the years of the course complement experiential learning. This is an important finding as it solidifies that coursework and placement are in sync in order to ensure the best training for students.

I have definitely – through my course, I have to mention it [anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice] in every essay and every presentation. And going into third year, into placement, I think it’s really helped me to identify it a lot more, because you’ve been looking at it for three years, almost, and you’ve been given examples. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

It is worth noting that while these discussions concentrated on anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, they lacked a dialogue around anti-racist practice – despite the fact that the majority of the discussion centred around race and ethnicity, along with some inferences related to age, gender and sexuality.

Other respondents in this study felt that anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice were not sufficiently addressed in social work training and that this impacted how adequately social workers were equipped to deal with these issues in practice. Teaching anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice does not mandate social workers to know everything there is to know about different cultures,

traditions, religions, beliefs, and so on. Yet, what is of significance is to prepare professionals who are open and prepared to learn from others; a key component of cultural humility, as well as cultural sensitivity, and anti-discriminatory practice. People with lived experience are the experts of their own identities, for example, and focusing on learning more about more we inevitably increase the risk of generalisability in practice, which is a leading factor to stereotypical thinking. That said, participants in this study leaned more towards the idea of a social worker knowing more about more, while each would refer to areas concerning their own identities – e.g. BAME for BAME.

I think social work practice does not touch on BAME. I don't think within the social work education we actually quite realise just how much a difference it makes to practice, knowing how someone's culture works, how some cultures' family structures work, how their households are run. Social workers don't realise that until they see it in practice. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I don't think there is much of a constant dialogue [about BAME and women], or I don't know, just a constant awareness of how this intervention, or how this thought process, or how this legislation or something does impact certain people from particular communities. (Student)

Conclusively, knowledge about anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice from course providers has three very important pillars: coursework, placement, and input from people with lived experience. This study reveals gaps that future research design can potentially explore focusing on course structure and delivery by geography or other variables to identify when and how EDI-related matters are best covered in education and training.

Knowledge from employers and placement providers

We found that 61.3% of the students and 78.2% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE claimed that cultural sensitivity was adhered to in their practice or placement. They also reported that they felt confident applying this knowledge in their own practices (62.1% of students and 76.8% of graduates/NQSW/ASYE). The participants from these groups were also confident that the organisation wherein they were placed, or practising could achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice (65.4% of students and 62.3% of graduates/NQSW/ASYE). Even though these findings show the views of two separate groups, those coincided at large, especially when discussing the transition from education to practice as a NQSW.

Further, participants reported that their learning around EDI continued from their education into their employment. The majority of the participants suggested that this CPD was achieved through on-the-job training programmes, as well as the ASYE framework.

We've been taught – and even with our job, with our local authority – so we do the training. Even with our ASYE, we've done all this training, so we have the skill to be able to put all these things in place. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

[EDI] training was given during the actual formal training on the course, and even when then going into placement and ASYE going forward, that was there, that was given. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Previous experience and training

To conclude with participants views and experiences about how their knowledge about how EDI-related matters is acquired, the study participants drew attention to the acquisition of EDI knowledge from outside of the programme, placements, ASYE or employment. They expressed that they had an understanding of EDI based on personal life experience when they entered the profession. Others, however, felt that it was hard to differentiate what came from life learning and what came from academia. The majority of those who expressed this idea came from a BAME background. Moreover, some participants also had experience in social care prior to training, and they considered this to be their primary source of knowledge.

I think it was mainly due to my own learning, as well. And with being a part of the minority ethnic community, there have been certain things that I would have experienced which will have educated my learning and helped me as a soon-to-be social worker. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Hard to separate whether that's because of previous experience and knowledge gained through other work and other moments in life where it's been a chance to learn. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Given the entry requirements to social work education, previous experience is key. Thus, it is expected that when candidates go through the selection processes, they ought to demonstrate a level of understanding of and/or appreciation in this area. Yet, the view that one's knowledge pre-existed the completion of a course also suggests that the course neither added new knowledge nor helped the candidate shape their pre-existed knowledge – facilitate their maturity in this area. This suggestion needs attention in the future, from both course providers and those studying social work, to ensure that the former facilitates learning for all, and the latter engages with that learning to leave the course with advanced knowledge and skills.

Indirect discrimination

Graduates/NQSW/ASYE who took part in this study shared their views and experiences of EDI in practice. A recurring theme in the data was experiences of indirect discrimination in workplace or course environments, covered in 67% of the focus group discussions in this area. Two domains clearly captured the participants' perceptions in this area. First, the participants discussed insensitivity and indirect discrimination portrayed on structural and organisational levels, wherein policies, rules, procedures and practices create barriers for practitioners to adhere to EDI values and apply anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist practice. Second, they referred to the lack of professionals' understanding of one's culture and varied identities. As shown in the quotes below, the two interconnect and lead to a similar conclusion: lack of understanding and/or appreciation of not only diversity but the meaning of such diversity can be better suited for achieving and maintaining equity in policy and practice both.

Black women's hair is very much part of their identity, and how this is taught within family dynamics – how mothers look after their children's hair, how they teach them to learn to love their hair in its natural form – is very much a culture, is very much their identity. And practitioners don't recognise that, and they don't know where to go to gain more knowledge around it... Most local authorities, I believe, only pay about £5 a month towards Black children's hair, and that's not even – I don't know...that doesn't do anything. They might as well have not recognised the fact that there is a need for that.
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I work in a borough that is hugely diverse, and I find it shocking at times when the social workers and the managers and the workers just don't understand the cultures of the people that we're working with. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Felt discrimination

Our findings revealed evidence that participants felt discriminated against, on the grounds of their own protected characteristics, on their social work course, or during their placement, but not at large. The largest number of students with protected characteristics (76.3%), for example, reported that they had never felt oppressed or discriminated against due to any protected characteristics during their course and/or placement. On the other hand, 35.7% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE reported that they had felt oppressed or discriminated against in their practice, due to either ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or another protected characteristic.

The data from the focus groups demonstrated the difficulties the participants encountered when they attempted to address the discrimination they faced, as well as a general lack of support from the wider structure of the profession. They also highlighted a need for accountability standards for social work students, which points towards registration processes as being key; a point highly recognised in chapter four of this report, as was the point that accountability of student social workers lies with course providers as fitness to practise procedures are coordinated and led by course providers, in line with national standards.

[I] have been a victim of racism from fellow social work students...and trying to challenge racism from students becomes very difficult. Because they're not registered, they don't have to adhere to professional standards as a registered social worker does. (Student)

When I had my second placement, it was a different experience. I was never that frustrated in my life...My practice educator, who was meant to empower me, actually did not. She did the opposite of that, and we are from two different cultural backgrounds – she's white, I'm Black. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Discrimination was also felt by some when they went out into the field to practice in organisations and other professional settings. Evidently from the data, it is clear that these feelings derived, as previous did, from the set perception of professionals and organisations lacking adequate understanding and appreciation of one's identities and the meaning those hold for that individual, whether historical, psycho-emotional, familial, or other.

I'm dyslexic, and there are some things she [the practice supervisor] never could understand why. And it's very hard that you are in this profession long before I am in, you still don't know what my learning needs are. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

I wear a hijab, I wear a baya, and what I found was from my managers, when we have personal communication...they say to me, 'You wouldn't know because you grew up in a family where...it might have been the men controlled your family'. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

These quotes demonstrate the participants' frustration at the lack of adherence to EDI values and the lack of understanding of individual specific needs that they encountered. It highlights a practice that can be deemed oppressive to those with a disability and those of certain cultural and religious backgrounds who do not fit into the predominant groups. Such experiences have been informed by others' preconceived ideas and tendencies for generalisation, which as mentioned earlier, lead primarily toward stereotypical thinking and biases, which increase the risk of causing harm.

Lastly, those in the graduate/NQSW/ASYE groups called attention to their experiences of discrimination by people with lived experience of social work. This is an area often dismissed or overlooked, nonetheless an important one. It is not uncommon that social work professionals or students may face prejudice, biases or even discrimination by those at the receiving end of social work services. The most common references are those of age and ethnicity. The first alludes to people with lived experience feeling more comfortable when the social worker supporting them has more work and life experience than a younger individual. Of course, this is an assumption when measured by chronological age, as many individuals enter the profession at a mature age, while young age does not necessitate lack of experience or maturity. The second (i.e. ethnicity) refers more directly to discrimination which is not always apparent but also covert, in the forms of microaggression and microinsults.

Sometimes it can be even the age, the fact that you are so many years old – they [people with lived experience] think, ‘so what’s your expertise as opposed to someone who’s a little bit more developed in their craft?’
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Apparently, she [a person with lived experience] does not want a Black lady – she’s asked me before, ‘Where are you originally from?’
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Equality, diversity and inclusion

To evaluate the differences across age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, religion, relationship/partnership status and pregnancy status for social work students, social work graduates/NQSW/ASYE, social work academics and course providers, as well as practice educators and placement providers regarding views of COVID-19, the use of technology during this time, opinions on Social Work England, and EDI and discrimination, we performed a non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis H test¹². Little significance was found across the stakeholder groups on the basis of their protected characteristics (see tables 6.1–6.4 in Appendix B). Specifically, we noted a significant difference for the academic participants related to age and questions about the new regulator¹³, creating not only an experience divide as discussed in chapter four, but an age divide in those views as well. Similarly, we noted a significant difference for the social work students in relation to relationship/partnership status and questions about the new regulator – especially with regard to the social work student register¹⁴.

When we explored further the impact peoples’ identities have had on their experiences, the responses were mixed; our findings reflected both positive and negative views. A number of the participants reported no issues in relation to EDI and their own protected characteristics, and they felt they had been well supported throughout their social work education and in their careers.

¹² A test to determine statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable.

¹³ Kruskal–Wallis H = 9.736, p < .05, df = 4

¹⁴ Kruskal–Wallis H = 12.850, p = .025, df = 5

*No, I don't ever feel like my protected characteristics have ever been used against me or seen as something that someone can use in any way.
(Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)*

I think I've been supported wherever I've been – even at school or on my placements. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Others, however, did report that they felt that their protected characteristics had impacted the treatment they received from others in the field. Our data uncovered feelings of marginalisation and discrimination – for some, this was a reoccurring issue – and how self-advocacy is important in those situations.

When you know how this happens on a daily [basis], you know how to protect yourself, and so when you know how to protect yourself, even when people do try and cross that boundary or cross that line with you...just reminding that person of the environment that they're working in – regardless of how you do it, people recognise when you're able to do that for yourself, and then people back off. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Social activism and Black Lives Matter

We invited the participants to explore their experiences and perceptions following social activist events, as well as the impact they felt this had on the social work profession and practice. The subject brought up a range of experiences, thoughts and emotions that highlighted positive outcomes and personal impact on individual social workers. 29.7% of the students and 37.5% of the graduates/NQSW/ASYE agreed that social activism and social activist movements like BLM impacted their learning and practicum experiences. It is worth noting, however, that 29.4% and 30.4% of the students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE, respectively, neither agreed nor disagreed with this sentiment.

The groups discussed their perceptions of the impact BLM had on the social work field. The participants generally felt that the movement opened up discussions around race that were not being had previously or that had previously been lacking in substance or focus. The movement spurred an urgent socio-political need to engage with the matter, which has been a positive outcome of BLM. Some also reflected that the heightened awareness around race helped them develop a better understanding in relation to service delivery and the experiences of those with lived experience of social work.

*We're having more conversations around racism than ever before.
(Practice educator)*

[There] was a lot of tension as well, and yeah, it just helped me understand, especially in relation of mental health. Like there were recent findings that found that Black and minority ethnicities are more likely – there's a disproportionate number of them being detained under the Mental Health Act – and also, there's been reforms to the Mental Health Act. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Our data also showed that a few of the NQSWs in the field felt that the large amount of focus on one particular branch of social activism in social work meant that other areas and EDI issues were, however, being neglected. They believed that a more holistic discussion around these social issues was necessary.

There are other things out there as well, like LGBTQ+ rights, which I think also needs to be highlighted and discussed – especially in social work practice. Even where I work now, there's been derogatory comments. I think everything should be looked at holistically. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

For some participants (i.e. those identifying as Black), the BLM movement had a personal impact. These individuals discussed the emotional distress caused by the movement and the impact it had on their wellbeing; they also speculated on how it could have a possible impact on their practice.

These things affect us as human beings. Even though we're putting a hat on as a social worker, my wellbeing needs to be taken care of as well, so I think that does affect our practice. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

The findings also revealed that those who were personally impacted by BLM felt disappointed by the lack of understanding and support they experienced from their employers. Yet, this view was different among those who may not had been personally influenced. This was an issue of identity; those of Black ethnicities viewed organisations and groups less supportive, versus those of non-Black backgrounds, who approached things differently. This split between two major ethnicities is neither new nor uncommon in human history and debates about human rights and social justice. However, what is worth exploring in the future is the gap between the two, inclusive of levels of cultural sensitivity and emotional resilience among professionals.

I guess people that were non-white didn't quite get it – why I might have felt emotive, or some of my Black colleagues felt emotive about it – and that was quite disheartening....I was expecting more, I guess, support around that, and that was quite worrying. (Practice educator)

We're just talking specifically about Black Lives Matter and George Floyd. When that happened, we had groups – wellbeing groups here – that were joined with both Black and white workers to just discuss how people felt about it, and it was very open. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

This highlights some of the support and initiatives that were put in place by organisations following BLM; it also underlines the need for organisations to create safe spaces in which matters relating to EDI can be discussed. Other participants stated that more needed to be done to support those impacted by EDI issues across the different protected characteristics. They felt that this is key for ensuring that practitioners are in the best place to practise. Further explorations can advance this knowledge from an organisational point of view as such measures may be seen as a continuation of one's training.

And for those of us who are Black, or who are LGBTQ or who are from different sectors of the community, [we] need to be able to say...there is support to be drawn from...so that you can build your resilience and continue to practise as a social worker. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

The importance of supervision in ensuring EDI matters and any support around them be identified and addressed was also stressed – again with the goal of promoting the wellbeing and effective practice of those who are personally impacted. This emphasises the need for wise use of supervision and potentially further integration of training in how to do so while students are still in their courses and on placement.

The kind of supervision you might get from that, or the kind of the group supervision, or what kind of support you get there – all that feeds into your wellbeing so that you can go out there and practice to the best of your ability. (Graduate/NQSW/ASYE)

Chapter 7

Discussion

The following chapter addresses key issues from the analysis of data that warrant further discussion and elaboration.

Misconceptions and lack of understanding of the regulator's role and responsibilities

The qualitative data from all of the focus groups revealed that the expectations around the regulator's role varied; the academics had the least amount of variance among them. The main functions of the regulator that we identified in this study included registration and recording CPD. The participants also spoke about training and other functions that would fall under the role of a professional association (i.e. BASW), which supports the idea that many of the participants misunderstood the responsibilities of a regulatory body versus those that are held by a professional association. Our research reveals that students, NQSWs and those in their ASYE programme, in particular, as well as practice educators in general, saw the regulator as the body responsible for developing and offering CPD opportunities. They also felt that it should be an advocate for individual professionals and that it should have a more relationship-based supportive approach that extends beyond its role as regulator. This perception may be more related to the functions of a trade union, which should be an area to be further discussed in the future.

The report titled Perception of Social Work (Cragg Ross Dawson, 2020, p. 24), which was conducted for Social Work England, showed that focus group participants (i.e. members of the public) generally felt that social workers was a profession 'in the sense that they have formal training and qualifications'. However, some were unaware that social work is a regulated profession and had not heard of Social Work England or any previous regulator. It was only when those in the focus group and the omnibus survey 'were shown information outlining the role of Social Work England' that the purpose of the regulator was viewed in a positive light. The same report reads (on p. 25) that Social Work England is a body responsible for monitoring social work by:

- Keeping track of the way it is carried out.
- Registering social workers.
- Ensuring that social workers keep up with new learning.
- Making social workers aware of the standards they must meet in their work.

Following the development of this positive perspective, the authors of the report recorded 'that social work is conducted in a systemic way, that there are checks on the quality of the service, to the benefit of people who need it' (Cragg Ross Dawson, 2020).

Cragg Ross Dawson's (2020) work gathered insights about the perceptions of social work from members of the public and people with lived experience of social work. The present study, however, focused on stakeholder groups directly linked with social work education, training and practice. This study found that misconceptions,

misunderstandings and lack of clarity are not only pertinent to those who have had little interaction with the profession, or who have had some personal experience (be it positive or negative) at one point in their lives. The fact that we found that the role and functionalities of the regulator were construed by the participants as the same as those of a professional body or a trade union, is worthy of further examination in research. This conception between the specialist regulator and professional body widens the gap between education, practice and their regulation. The main gap presented here is an important one given that accountability – one of the main features of every regulator – rarely featured in the data, if at all. The participants expressed expectations of advocacy and support regarding grievances with the regulator, but they did not generally express instances of the regulator having enforced accountability. One participant from a focus group discussion with academics did mention the importance of accountability in relation to the regulator, while another mentioned it at the end of a comment. Discussions concerning fitness to practise were also raised, but not with the same certainty or from the perspective that it related to the issue of accountability.

The regulator's relationship-based approach

Social Work England came into force on 2 December 2019. Due to how recently this regulator was established, the experience among this study's participants was divided between those who were aware of it but not really knowing its purpose, those who were aware of it but had a misconceived idea of its purpose, and those who were aware of it and were fully aware of its purpose. Overall, the participants expressed that the regulator lacked a relationship-based approach and that instead, the relationship felt distant and was characterised by control of elite technical experts and bureaucracy.

The participants' overall perception of Social Work England was that it is not there to support social workers, with the exception of an occasional positive outcome. Within our participant groups, the students, largely, expressed that they felt let down by the regulator, as they did not feel supported during the ongoing pandemic and lockdown. This is a reminder of the unprecedented times during which this study was conducted. Even though this is one of the first studies to record COVID-19-related experiences in social work education and training, as well as views regarding the regulator's support and interventions where and when they were necessary, it is also the first study to explore social work education and training from the perspective of various stakeholders' views and experiences of the regulator in its first year of running. As the latter was unavoidably influenced by the participants' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two are inextricable, and hence, the data and knowledge acquired from this study cannot be seen separately and must be approached with caution.

Our results revealed that the participants felt that the regulator must make its presence and purpose more clearly felt and defined; this would assist those who the regulator oversees and provide insight so it (i.e. the regulator) can better speak on behalf of the social work profession. It is worth noting that following a small series of regulators for social work in England, the current and most recent – Social Work England – is the first

to have included in its structure an engagement team in order to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Our data demonstrates that practice educators who are independent or who are not employed by a local authority are at a disadvantage when it comes to communication with Social Work England. This is due to a lack of guidance and literature on how these individuals could be supported by the regulator. As this report has already highlighted, practice education is not a role regulated by Social Work England; neither are practice educators. This is certainly the main factor influencing these experiences and creating gaps, which can potentially be bridged in the future with further input by the regulator to support all aspects of social work education and training.

Finally, the communication channels between Social Work England and this group of stakeholders are experienced as being in their preliminary stages or as being non-existent, and this raises various issues, such as the need to explore alternative methods of communication that will better reach all of those who are involved in social work and are concerned with the regulator and its functions. This would also allow the regulator to break free from the perception that local authorities and the public sector are the only parties of interest in this collaboration. This may present a unique opportunity whereby the specialist regulator can support efforts to reclaim social work in other sectors and generally recognise its capacities, where the full length of social work skills and knowledge is evident.

Student register

Our research found that participants from all stakeholder groups (i.e. social work students, graduates/NQSW/ ASYE, social work academics and practice educators) are in favour of a student register for various reasons. The most important reason stated by the participants is that if student registration becomes part of social work training, it will help them develop a professional identity and learn about accountability and responsibility in their professional behaviour. Other benefits of student registration expressed by the participants included the opportunity for the regulator to act as a safety net (along with course and placement providers) for students, particularly in relation to safe practice requirements. Finally, this study demonstrates that a student register has the potential to motivate students to engage with Social Work England's professional standards, which they have to demonstrate both in their coursework and placement practice. In other words, student registration, at a provisional level, will ensure a sense of pride, accountability and professional engagement, all of which add value to the students' education and training and will enrich the calibre of future practitioners.

Benefits such as these have been discussed in other disciplinary areas in the health sector, including nurses, teachers and social work students in Scotland and the General Optical Council (Warren, 2018). Hallahan and Wendt (2020) emphasised a series of concerns related to the absence of a student social work register in Australia, which supports the idea that these concerns are applicable to England's context. Hallahan and Wendt (2020) specifically mentioned the need for methodical and impenetrable approaches for assessing student social workers' competencies when in the field or on placement; a student register could provide

a unifying approach to such concerns, which is currently missing. Further to this, the same authors argued that accountability to a regulatory body can also safeguard students from experiences of discrimination or oppression. The present study uncovered that students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE have felt discriminated against or oppressed in their placements or during their study programmes. A professional regulator would enable them to advocate for themselves and challenge concerning behaviours in accordance with the regulator's requirements.

It is worth noting that the participants in the current study did not recall the 2012 removal of social work students from the register, which was enacted by the Health and Care Professions Council in England (the previous regulator for social workers in England). This move was justified at the time by the intent to increase quality assurance processes connected to social work education, which would provide a more effective method of regulating students. This, however, has been challenged by all of the stakeholder groups involved in this study; overall, the stakeholder groups expressed that student motivation and commitment deviate due to non-compliance to the regulator.

Wiles (2013, p. 854) argued that 'one aim of social work education is to facilitate the development of professional identity'. Wiles holds that it is essential that educators and placement providers have a robust understanding of the meaning of professional identity in order to ensure that they provide thorough and beneficial training that will contribute to students' transformation into professionals once they have completed their training. In other words, the current study supports Wiles' argument through the participants' views that a student register would enable students to identify professional traits associated with their future role as a social worker, and it would also support the development of a sense of shared identity with those fully registered.

This research confirms that Social Work England is in the process of exploring the prospect of a student social work register that would promote professional identity and add to the growth and transition of students towards their professional capacity (also see Samuel, 2020)

Equality, diversity and inclusion

We encountered an 'experience divide' when we explored people's EDI-related experiences. We found that those with more professional social work experience may be more resilient in receiving and responding to discrimination, while those with less experience may lack the necessary self-advocacy skills to address instances of discrimination. This binary corroborates with previous findings regarding the development of emotional resilience in social work students (Rajan-Rankin, 2014). Experiences of discrimination reflect the adversities faced by students and professionals with less experience in social work in their study or work environments. According to the work of Luthar and Cicchetti (2000), however, resilience is the process individuals go through to adapt to adversity or trauma. In other words, this experience divide is one that exposes the different levels of resilience in students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE, academics and practice educators.

Of course, this study does not go so far as to explore what is required or missing from social work education and training that might facilitate resilience development in students and graduates. It does, however, highlight the gaps that exist and illuminate the need for further action; this supports Munro's (2011) position; she recommended that front line workers show 'professional confidence' and resilience in their work.

Buzzanell (2010) linked resilience with effective communication skills to indicate the best way to approach and respond to adversity; perhaps this is of relevance here. We would argue, however, that interpersonal skills are an essential element in the development of resilience and self-advocacy skills, and these appeared to be missing from the skill sets of those completing their courses and qualifying. Another important factor to consider in this argument is the close link between experiential learning and an enhanced sense of resilience among students and NQSWs (also see Rajan-Rankin, 2014). This may be an indicator of lower resilience among new professionals following the highly disrupted and segmented education and training they experienced during COVID-19. This disruption continues in the face of remote and online placements, which could result in social work professionals who have not had the necessary experience to effectively meet the professional standards set out by Social Work England, the BASW Code of Ethics, the PCF domains, and the Knowledge and Skills Statements¹⁵. Further to this, the current research contributes to our understanding of an additional binary – one that is neither new nor lacking in political underpinnings. Social activist movements have largely influenced people's experiences, which makes it essential that social workers are educated and trained to address and respond to needs that are caused or exacerbated by the socio-political tensions and inequalities that drive such movements. This study's results demonstrate the unsurprising divide between those who personally identify with a cause and those who do not feel personally connected or affected. It is, in other words, personal investment rather than professional standard that drives one's motivation.

Specifically, BLM is a social and political movement that condemns police brutality and hate crimes motivated by race against Black people. The movement began in 2013 via social media (as #BlackLivesMatter); since then, it has periodically seen upsurges in the face of racially-driven violence against Black people around the world – in the context of police brutality, in particular. The death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis, 25 May 2020, led to worldwide protests condemning police brutality. This took place while the world remained under quarantine for the first time – at a time when just exiting one's home had become a challenge and governments and scientists raced to uncover the cause, treatment, and preventative measures for COVID-19. Many of the respondents in this study identified as Black individuals; these events, combined with the already-heavy pressures of social work education and training, had a strong personal influence on many of the participants, as well as an impact on their general learning experience.

The current study clearly demonstrated that even though non-Black educators, practitioners and students often acted as allies to the cause, they lacked a true understanding of the impact this has on people of colour. In addition, this latter group are not generally confident that support may be available from their colleagues, and they risk being seen as overly political if they speak out. This idea is generally in line with previous critical discourses on the matter. For example, Powell and Kelly (2017) critically examined opposing views regarding

¹⁵ For adult services: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411957/KSS.pdf
For child and family practitioners: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708704/Post-qualifying_standard-KSS_for_child_and_family_practitioners.pdf

BLM. On the one hand, some white social work educators and practitioners identify as allies to the cause, and their colleagues are influenced by this. On the other hand, however, allyship is often highly criticised, as it does not necessarily involve any risk for the ally. The counter-suggestion that has been put forward is that white people should act as accomplices instead, making use of their privilege and power to contribute to social activism and enacting change.

Moreover, as Powell and Kelly (2017, p. 45) put it, 'the ally paradigm ideologically positions whites as those who assist and people of colour as those who need assistance, thereby maintaining oppressive hierarchies.' One of social work education's imperatives relates closely with this idea. As an ethical enterprise, the responsibility of social work education is to not only teach what something currently is, but also what something must become (Ayers, 2010). Therefore, if the experiences of students, graduates/NQSW/ASYE, academics and practice educators reveal a distinct divide between ethnicities that is informed by socio-political tensions and inequalities, logic suggests that education is not currently interpreted the same way by all involved. It follows, then, that professional standards are also neither understood nor exercised in the same way by all. This results in a non-unifying approach to when, why and how one meets professional standards, which leads to an area that is worthy of further exploration in the future.

BLM is a topical example, but it is not the only one. For instance, our results also showed that those who belonged to sexual minority groups experienced discrimination in their course or practice environments. The implications of this in the context of allyship versus accomplices would be similar, if not the same, and these represent areas that are worthy of a study of their own.

To conclude, this study asserts that students and graduates/NQSW/ASYE agree that they have gained much knowledge from their courses and placements about anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice. However, and despite the quantitative data showing that anti-racist practice was covered in student education, the data from the focus groups support that there is little to no mention of anti-racist practice in student learning, and nor is there any particular focus or examples on identities other than race. Age, sex, gender reassignment, disability, partnership status, and pregnancy and maternity are not areas that participants of this study identified when discussing EDI. There were also very few mentions of sexual orientation or religion, and based on the data, those that were raised came from those who had been personally impacted.

Indirect discrimination

This study's participants expressed having felt discriminated against on the grounds of their protected characteristics; they shared that this discrimination was indirect and due to structural and organisational policies, procedures, rules and practices. This is a highly concerning area that also deserves further discussion.

The Equality Act 2020 states in paragraph 19(1) that ‘a person (A) discriminates against another (B) if A applies to B a provision, criterion or practice which is discriminatory in relation to a relevant protected characteristic of B’s’. From this explanation, A and B could be individuals or entities – such as an organisation. In this case, when an organisational policy fails to consider the diversity of identities and the associated needs of those who are practising or are trained in its environment, it equally fails to protect that person from indirect discrimination. Some of the structural differences that place individuals in a disadvantageous position include the distributing funds among varied services based on organisational demand rather than individual need (also see Rogowski, 2020).

Indirect discrimination has not been largely explored in social work in England, and this dearth of data deprives us from evidence-based and research-informed practices that could mitigate the risks associated with experiencing indirect discrimination in one’s educational or work environment. Nonetheless, there is some research available that does highlight concerns related to indirect discrimination. Booth, McConnell and Booth (2006) explored Children Act proceedings that indirectly discriminated against parents with learning difficulties. Bernard et al. (2014) added to the dialogue concerning the voices of marginalised social work students and their educational and learning experiences. Indirect discrimination was found to be a common experience among marginalised groups – particularly among those who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Meanwhile, Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield (2010) argued that social work still struggles to promote equality among lesbian- and gay-identified individuals.

COVID-19 and practice learning

Personal circumstances interfered with social work practice and the participants’ ability to perform well in their practice (i.e. education and training), irrespective of participant characteristics or to which stakeholder group they belonged. Similarly, many participants – predominantly the graduates/NQSW/ASYE and practice educators – talked about a lack of access to the resources necessary for them to sufficiently carry out their roles. Both of these experiences led to discussions regarding the quality of education and training during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated measures, as well as the preparedness of future practitioners which may need strengthening in ASYE programmes. The participants raised concerns regarding whether those who graduated at the end of the 2019–2020 academic session will meet professional standards and be able to perform accordingly in practice.

COVID-19 has certainly brought unprecedented disruption worldwide, and the learning and assessment of millions of students has also been disrupted. Professional curricula like social work, however, have encountered an exceptionally challenging situation. Attempting to assess students’ capabilities in practice in order to qualify and later register to practise social work in a time of digital and remote work and learning has presented many barriers (Azman et al., 2020). In a website update on 23 July 2020, Social Work England¹⁶ shared the responses of 45 course providers in England, relaying the ways in which programmes had adjusted their practices to

¹⁶ <https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/education-training/information-for-providers/education-providers-response-to-COVID-19/>

accommodate learning, teaching and assessment during the global pandemic. The course providers expressed major concerns regarding placement provisions and students' ability to achieve professional standards, and their adjustments included two main approaches. First, they could reduce placement days where possible. This approach could be carried out in one of two ways. They could implement shorter placements leading up to the completion of the programme, which would leave the graduates without the full extent of experiential learning they could have gained. Alternatively, they could redistribute placement days, keeping the first placement shorter and adding the shortfall to the next year's placement (for those completing in 2020–2021). The latter option would result, however, in 40- or 50-day placements, which, according to this study's results, raises concerns of whether a student would be able to demonstrate the high demands of the professional standards in such a short space of time before progressing to a final placement during which the requirements are even more advanced.

The second approach was recognising student work experience in an area pertinent to health and social care as a substitute for a placement. In other words, students who were also working as key workers during that period could apply their working hours towards their placement hours to allow them to meet the standards and progress to the next level. However, this approach blurred the boundaries between training and employment, and raises the issue of how (and by whom) the professional standards and social work requirements are assessed when the student's work environment recognises them as an employee who needs to meet work-related objectives, rather than facilitating their education.

Finally, practice placements during COVID-19, whether online, blended or at an agency with strict regulations, raises concerns for the students' capacity to learn, receive, process and reflect on information before applying their new knowledge in practice. Learning is an iterative and interactive process that requires both critical reflection and discourse (Cleaver, Lintern and McLinden, 2018). This said, an emancipatory paradigm of pedagogy is most appropriate for social work, as it facilitates knowledge exchange and transformative learning (see Mezirow, 1996). In this paradigm, mental health, wellbeing and high morale all influence motivation and the likelihood of meeting objectives. A recent report from BASW (2021) that underscored key findings among social work practitioners and their experiences during COVID-19 revealed that 71.5% of those surveyed reported that the morale in their work environment has been seriously impacted, while 58.8% reported that recent circumstances have impacted their mental health. When matching the findings from this study (i.e. personal circumstances interfered with placements, study, education or training and students and that graduates/NQSW/ASWE were unable to perform fully during this period), the approaches used by course providers to negotiate placements and promote remote or online work, and the findings from the BASW report, a disquieting result becomes apparent. If placement providers, NQSWs and students experienced lower morale and a negative impact on their mental health, then logic requires that the intention to complete practice learning during this period may have disadvantaged or impacted the mental health and morale of students and graduates/NQSW/ASWE even further, given the already-present pressures around completing the practice assessment documents.

Chapter 8

Recommendations

To mitigate the challenges, risks and weaker areas that this report identifies, we are making the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Improving relationships and increasing understanding

Social Work England strives for a quality relationship with its registrants, one based on engagement, consultation and inclusion in decision making. To build on this, there will need to be greater awareness, training and engagement of students, social workers, educators and placement providers about the role and responsibilities of the regulator. Social Work England should continue to engage with local stakeholders and develop close relationships with course and placement providers to support their efforts in social work education and training. Further, Social Work England should take an active role in (1) ensuring that placement providers make adequate offers for practice learning relative to the number of students in courses, and (2) recognising social work and associated statutory tasks across all sectors, including the charitable and independent sectors, which will reinvigorate perceptions and attitudes toward social work outside of local authorities.

Recommendation 2: Social work student register

Social Work England should consider the establishment of a social work student register. The cost of such register would need to be carefully considered – either free of charge or of a small fee – to accommodate the needs of students who are already under financial pressures with university fees and often unable to work while studying given the full-time nature of practice placement in social work education and training. This register will have an important and central role in the education and training of students as it could contribute to their growth and the development of a professional identity, adherence to professional standards, and better comprehension of fitness to practise procedures. Lastly, student registration would facilitate a sense of belonging in the profession and a sense of accountability, both of which would empower individuals to advance their professionalism and ease the transition to practice later. The student register should be a provisional benefit and once course providers confirm that a student has met professional standards, they can be moved over to the main register. This would also shorten the waiting period for registration, which the graduates/NQSW/ASYE stakeholder group in this study mention as a challenge.

Recommendation 3: Filling in gaps

To mitigate the risk of incomplete or inadequate training during the COVID-19 period, Social Work England, course and placement providers should work collaboratively to develop mandatory CPD modules that will support the growth and development of all whose education has been impacted by COVID-19 and circumstances deemed meeting professional standards questionable. Alternatively, placement providers and employers can adjust ASYE programmes to include additional training for those graduates impacted by the pandemic, where necessary.

Recommendation 4: Building resilience in professional identities

Course and placement providers should develop further strategies and content that will prepare students and future practitioners to respond to adversities, however small or big. Developing emotional resilience is a necessity in social work, and this includes learning how to set boundaries (e.g. between personal and professional life), engaging with reflective and reflexive exercises, committing to self-care, and fostering positive and continuous contact with others. This study shows that all these areas have been impacted and participants could have benefited with further training.

Placement providers and employers should consider either developing or celebrating already developed mentoring schemes for graduates/NQSW/ASWE. Mentoring schemes can maximise engagement, ensure contact and peer support, as well as help minimise isolation, loneliness and anxiety during COVID-19, but also following COVID-19, in light of the possibilities for furthering remote working.

Equally, employers can enrich initiatives about self-care – not only providing the space for it but enabling staff members to disengage from work at times – and individual and group reflective exercises. The latter need to be placed outside of case management to allow individuals to reflect on their work about themselves and not about others they work with. This will increase the chances for heightened emotional resilience and improve the quality of the services staff are offering in the long-term.

Recommendation 5: Discussing equality, diversity and inclusion

Course and placement providers should increase the time dedicated to examining matters related to EDI. Students need to be given abundant opportunities for discussion of such matters, especially when those affect them personally and may be impacting on their overall performance. We are suggesting series of seminars on EDI which can be received and recognised as Advanced Skills Days by Social Work England and will further the dialogue about decolonising the curriculum. These seminars will provide a consistent dialogue with students, academics, practitioners and people with lived experience of social work, which will add to the students' conceptions about EDI, beyond race, as seems to be the tendency, based on the present study.

Recommendation 6: Challenging discrimination

Course and placement providers should emphasise the significance of supervision, particularly in the early stages of education, training and practice, to empower individuals, and by use of psychoeducation help them develop skills and strategies to challenge discrimination not only affecting others but themselves, too. The present study surfaces experiences of discrimination from people with lived experience directed to students and graduates/NQSW/ASWE. Providers of education and training should consider integrating this aspect of people's experience in their deliveries and enable students and those in the first year of their practice to challenge discrimination.

Recommendation 7: EDI leads

To mitigate instances and risks of indirect discrimination as is reported in this study, organisations, agencies and services should consider methods of engaging in organisational reflection and learning. We recommend EDI leads to be recognised in the structures of placement providers, or Social Work Academies, whose role will focus on scrutinising organisational policies, practices, rules and regulations with social work students in mind, and identify risks of indirect discrimination. Placement providers have the responsibility to ensure a discrimination-free environment to their students.

Recommendation 8: Blended pedagogy in social work education and training

Social Work England, course and placement providers should engage in consultations and further the dialogue about the blended approaches used in social work education and training. If any of these approaches (e.g. teaching online) are to be maintained, Social Work England should provide clear guidance to course and placement providers about what is expected and what might hinder students' ability to meet professional standards.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

This research examined the views, perceptions and experiences of social work students, graduates, NQSWs, those in their ASYE, academics in social work courses and placement providers, including practice educators, in three distinct areas of concern. Those are the specialist regulator and its first year of regulation; COVID-19 experiences and the views of social work education and training stakeholders about the way the specialist regulator responded to COVID-19; and views and experiences related to EDI, as well as how members of the social work education and training community have experienced COVID-19 based on their protected characteristics.

The study inferred important insights to the above and highlights the need for further research in many of those areas. The most significant findings among all stakeholder groups suggested the desire for a social work student register, which would contribute towards building students' professional identity. In addition, the findings in this report demonstrate the need to advance the understanding of the specialist regulator's role and responsibilities among students, early practitioners, course and placement providers. An emerging experience divide is also evident, whereby those with much longer experience in social work and interaction with previous regulators present a heightened desire for a relationship-based model to be applied, while those with less experience, or none, do not have pre-conceived expectations from Social Work England.

Further, this study surfaced key knowledge in relation to the experiences of all stakeholder groups during COVID-19, including the heightened challenges of balancing personal and professional/study life; the lack of emotional resilience, while the need for radicalising the social work curriculum in relation to EDI is clear, timely and necessary. Current coverage appears to be leaning towards anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, and discussions about race. Yet, other protected characteristics, as well as intersectionality appear distant from current practices and deliveries.

The experiences and views of COVID-19 and the first year of running for the specialist regulator are unfortunately not two separate areas, despite the intent of the study. As the new regulator came into existence at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is difficult to separate general views about the regulator's engagement with course providers and that during and because of COVID-19.

The learning from this study is important across the spectrum of social work education and training. To enable students, practitioners, course and placement providers to continue the dialogue around the findings of this study, we are providing four vignettes at the end of this report (see appendix C-F). Each vignette presents the experience and views of a member of one stakeholder group at a time and invites readers to use them as learning tools to reflect further and explore this study's recommendations in relation to the case studies.

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Appendix A

Table 5.1: Significant findings reported from Chi-Square test to examine relationships between questions asked (name of questionnaires)

<u>Relationship between question 1 & 2</u>		<u>Scale Total %</u>								
<u>Question 1</u>	<u>Question 2</u>	<u>Value*</u>	<u>Df**</u>	<u>Sig***</u>	<u>Strongly disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	
<u>Students</u>										
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and student life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	53.707	16	.001	5.5%	26.7%	28.5%	29.7%	9.7%	
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and student life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.	35.023	16	.004	3.6%	24.2%	10.3%	43.0%	18.8%	
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my progress on my course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	43.657	16	.001	5.5%	26.7%	28.5%	29.7%	9.7%	
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my progress on My course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	43.700	16	.001	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%	
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my progress on my course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	30.476	16	.016	0.6%	14.5%	27.3%	47.3%	10.3%	

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my progress on my course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.	33.393	16	.007	3.6%	24.2%	10.3%	43.0%	18.8%
During COVID-19, my placement was disrupted/paused/delayed.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	52.730	16	.001	4.9%	26.8%	28.7%	29.9%	9.8%
During COVID-19, my placement was disrupted/paused/delayed.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	52.653	16	.001	0.6%	14.6%	27.4%	47.0%	10.4%
During COVID-19, my placement was disrupted/paused/delayed.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.	37.390	16	.002	3.7%	24.4%	10.4%	42.7%	18.9%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect (build rapport) with my tutor(s)/practice supervisor/practice educator.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	57.659	16	.001	5.5%	26.7%	28.5%	29.7%	9.7%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect (build rapport) with my tutor(s)/practice supervisor/practice educator.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	43.724	16	.001	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect (build rapport) with my tutor(s)/practice supervisor/practice educator.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	41.792	16	.001	0.6%	14.5%	27.3%	47.3%	10.3%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect (build rapport) with my tutor(s)/practice supervisor/practice educator.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.	45.807	16	.001	3.6%	24.2%	10.3%	43.0%	18.8%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	91.416	16	.001	5.5%	26.7%	28.5%	29.7%	9.7%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	48.662	16	.001	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	54.944	16	.001	0.6%	14.5%	27.3%	47.3%	10.3%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.	34.139	16	.005	3.6%	24.2%	10.3%	43.0%	18.8%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	62.022	16	.001	5.5%	26.7%	28.5%	29.7%	9.7%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	43.009	16	.001	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with	I found the use of technology for the	28.798	16	.025	3.7%	24.4%	10.4%	43.3%	18.3%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	purposes of my education, training and/or assessment challenging.								
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and student life.	I feel confident that my practice/placement organisation can achieve cultural sensitivity and anti-discriminatory practice.	31.433	16	.012	3.2%	4.5%	26.9%	46.2%	19.2%
During COVID-19, my placement was disrupted/paused/delayed.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	29.417	16	.021	1.9%	2.6%	4.5%	38.1%	52.9%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect (build rapport) with my tutor(s)/practice supervisor/practice educator.	Cultural sensitivity is adhered to in my practice/placement.	27.915	16	.032	1.9%	5.2%	31.6%	37.4%	23.9%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	Social activism or social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my learning and/or placement.	27.315	16	.038	16.8%	29.0%	24.5%	25.8%	3.9%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	35.712	16	.003	1.9%	0.6%	6.4%	52.9%	38.2%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices for the purposes of my placement.	I feel confident that my practice /placement organisation can achieve cultural sensitivity and anti-discriminatory practice.	53.222	16	.001	3.2%	4.5%	26.9%	46.2%	19.2%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	111.711	16	.001	1.9%	3.2%	0.6%	41.3%	52.9%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	108.416	16	.001	1.9%	2.6%	4.5%	38.1%	52.9%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-racist practice.	46.809	12	.001	1.3%	14.8%	13.4%	30.9%	39.6%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online activities for the purposes of my course /programme.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	54.131	16	.001	1.9%	0.6%	6.4%	53.2%	37.8%
During COVID-19, my course /programme offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	Cultural sensitivity is adhered to in my practice/placement.	31.667	16	.011	11.0%	37.7%	14.9%	25.3%	11.0%
During COVID-19, my course /programme offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	28.576	16	.027	11.0%	38.1%	14.8%	25.2%	11.0%
During COVID-19, my course /programme offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I feel confident in my application of anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	32.443	16	.009	11.1%	37.9%	15.0%	24.8%	11.1%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices)	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my programme and/or	50.869	16	.000	45.5%	34.6%	6.4%	9.6%	3.8%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
and/or the internet to support me and my progress on the programme.	placement site, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.								
During COVID-19, my course /programme offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my programme and/or placement site, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	33.974	16	.005	11.0%	38.1%	14.8%	25.2%	11.0%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	38.874	16	.001	3.2%	11.6%	6.5%	45.2%	33.5%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	56.061	16	.001	1.9%	3.2%	0.6%	41.3%	52.9%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	56.545	16	.001	1.9%	2.6%	4.5%	38.1%	52.9%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement challenging.	Cultural sensitivity is adhered to in my practice/placement.	39.467	16	.001	1.9%	5.2%	31.2%	37.7%	24.0%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	29.539	16	.021	3.2%	11.7%	6.5%	44.8%	33.8%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my education, training and/or	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	33.757	16	.006	1.9%	0.6%	6.4%	52.6%	38.5%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
assessment challenging.									
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	35.460	8	.001	3.2%	11.5%	7.1%	44.9%	33.3%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	20.450	8	.009	1.9%	3.8%	0.6%	41.0%	52.6%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	22.783	8	.004	1.9%	2.6%	5.1%	37.8%	52.6%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	Cultural sensitivity is adhered to in my practice/placement.	24.623	8	.002	1.9%	5.2%	31.6%	37.4%	23.9%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my programme and/or placement site, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	20.652	8	.008	6.4%	8.3%	9.0%	30.8%	
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	Social activism or social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my learning and/or placement.	19.662	8	.012	16.8%	29.0%	24.5%	25.8%	3.9%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	I feel confident that my practice/placement organisation can achieve cultural sensitivity and	23.346	8	.003	3.2%	4.5%	26.9%	46.2%	19.2%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
	anti-discriminatory practice.								
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on the programme.	19.958	8	.010	44.0%	34.9%	7.2%	9.6%	4.2%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	15.495	8	.050	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%
<u>NQSW</u>									
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	19.588	4	.001	1.8%	8.9%	25.0%	46.4%	17.9%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	9.509	4	.050	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	18.642	4	.001	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	Social activism or social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my practice and/or ASYE programme.	17.714	4	.001	7.1%	25.0%	30.4%	30.4%	7.1%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good	During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good	33.623	16	.006	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
	anti-discriminatory practice.								
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on the programme.	19.958	8	.010	44.0%	34.9%	7.2%	9.6%	4.2%
Would you apply to a social work student register by Social Work England?	I found the use of technology for the purposes of placement unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	15.495	8	.050	3.7%	24.4%	31.1%	29.9%	11.0%
<u>NQSW</u>									
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	19.588	4	.001	1.8%	8.9%	25.0%	46.4%	17.9%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	9.509	4	.050	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	18.642	4	.001	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
Have you registered or are you in the process of registering with Social Work England?	Social activism or social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my practice and/or ASYE programme.	17.714	4	.001	7.1%	25.0%	30.4%	30.4%	7.1%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good	During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good	33.623	16	.006	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	21.630	12	.042	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	21.693	12	.041	3.6%	3.6%	5.4%	58.9%	28.6%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I feel confident in my application of anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	23.142	12	.027	7.1%	3.6%	12.5%	55.4%	21.4%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	48.367	12	.001	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	31.250	16	.013	7.1%	8.9%	10.7%	55.4%	17.9%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	40.998	16	.001	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	39.719	16	.001	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	50.9%	40.0%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	62.882	16	.001	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
disruption.									
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	Social activism or social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my practice and/or ASYE programme.	27.092	16	.040	7.1%	25.0%	30.4%	30.4%	7.1%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	40.585	16	.001	3.6%	3.6%	5.4%	58.9%	28.6%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I feel confident in my application of anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	32.445	16	.009	7.1%	3.6%	12.5%	55.4%	21.4%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	23.993	12	.020	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
During COVID-19, I struggled to access adequate resources and/or other financial support to support myself and my family.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	35.602	16	.003	3.6%	32.1%	12.5%	25.0%	26.8%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	37.629	16	.002	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices)	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about	27.158	16	.040	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	50.9%	40.0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	anti-oppressive practice.								
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	32.182	16	.009	3.6%	32.1%	12.5%	25.0%	26.8%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	31.860	16	.010	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	36.296	16	.003	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	42.446	16	.001	3.6%	32.1%	12.5%	25.0%	26.8%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice difficult to exercise with social work values at times	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	47.857	16	.001	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2	15.1%
I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive	27.268	16	.039	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
assessment challenging.	and anti-discriminatory practice.								
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice challenging.	30.535	16	.015	8.9%	26.8%	21.4%	39.3%	3.6%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	33.834	16	.006	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	37.033	16	.002	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	27.828	16	.033	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	29.838	16	.019	1.8%	19.6%	14.3%	46.4%	17.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	30.878	15	.014	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I faced many disruptions in my	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my	35.450	16	.003	8.9%	26.8%	21.4%	39.3%	3.6%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
assessment challenging.	and anti-discriminatory practice.								
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice challenging.	30.535	16	.015	8.9%	26.8%	21.4%	39.3%	3.6%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	33.834	16	.006	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	37.033	16	.002	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	27.828	16	.033	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	29.838	16	.019	1.8%	19.6%	14.3%	46.4%	17.9%
During COVID-19, personal circumstances interfered with my abilities to continue practising effectively.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	30.878	15	.014	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I faced many disruptions in my	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my	35.450	16	.003	8.9%	26.8%	21.4%	39.3%	3.6%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
my practice.	work values at times.								
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	21.017	12	.050	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	48.990	16	.001	3.6%	16.1%	21.4%	50.0%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I struggled to access adequate resources and/or other financial support to support myself and my family.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my practice difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	40.058	16	.001	1.8%	19.6%	14.3%	46.4%	17.9%
During COVID-19, I struggled to access adequate resources and/or other financial support to support myself and my family.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	26.996	16	.042	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	I found the use of technology for the purposes of my training and/or assessment challenging.	28.991	16	.024	8.9%	21.4%	17.9%	42.9%	8.9%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between personal and professional life.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	33.623	16	.006	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, I have found it very challenging to maintain a good	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice	34.098	16	.005	26.8%	25.0%	12.5%	32.1%	3.6%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
balance between personal and professional life.	environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.								
During COVID-19, I faced many disruptions in my practice and assessed work.	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	30.399	16	.016	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues, people with lived experience of social work and/or practice supervisor.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	27.058	16	.041	5.5%	9.1%	10.9%	56.4%	18.2%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues, people with lived experience of social work and/or practice supervisor.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	34.143	16	.005	25.5%	25.5%	12.7%	32.7%	3.6%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues, people with lived experience of social work and/or practice supervisor.	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	38.200	16	.001	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	36.098	12	.001	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	34.980	12	.001	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	50.9%	40.0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	21.630	12	.042	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	21.693	12	.041	3.6%	3.6%	5.4%	58.9%	28.6%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I feel confident in my application of anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	23.142	12	.027	7.1%	3.6%	12.5%	55.4%	21.4%
During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of my practice.	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	48.367	12	.001	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about cultural sensitivity.	31.250	16	.013	7.1%	8.9%	10.7%	55.4%	17.9%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	40.998	16	.001	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	39.719	16	.001	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	50.9%	40.0%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	Cultural sensitivity is represented in my practice.	62.882	16	.001	1.8%	1.8%	18.2%	58.2%	20.0%
During COVID-19,	Social activism or	27.092	16	.040	7.1%	25.0%	30.4%	30.4%	7.1%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	social activist movements, like Black Lives Matter, has impacted on my experiences in my practice and/or ASYE programme.								
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I apply my knowledge about anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	40.585	16	.001	3.6%	3.6%	5.4%	58.9%	28.6%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I feel confident in my application of anti-discriminatory practice in theory and practice.	32.445	16	.009	7.1%	3.6%	12.5%	55.4%	21.4%
During COVID-19, my work placement offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	I feel confident that my work placement can achieve culturally sensitive and anti-discriminatory practice.	23.993	12	.020	3.8%	5.7%	28.3%	47.2%	15.1%
During COVID-19, I struggled to access adequate resources and/or other financial support to support myself and my family.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	35.602	16	.003	26.8%	25.0%	12.5%	32.1%	3.6%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-discriminatory practice.	37.629	16	.002	3.6%	1.8%	5.4%	46.4%	42.9%
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and	In my social work course/programme, I have been taught about anti-oppressive practice.	27.158	16	.040	3.6%	1.8%	3.6%	50.9%	40.0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.									
During COVID-19, I did not have access to computers (other devices) and/or the internet to support me and my progress on my practice/ASYE programme.	I have felt oppressed and/or discriminated in my practice environment, due to my ethnicity, age, sexuality, faith, or any other personal characteristic.	32.182	16	.009	26.8%	25.0%	12.5%	32.1%	3.6%
Academic									
Are you registered with Social Work England?	I think the changes made in the course(s) I am involved with, due to COVID-19, have been beneficial and adhere to the new Education and Training Standards by Social Work England.	19.588	8	.012	7.7%	5.1%	28.2%	41.0%	17.9%
Are you registered with Social Work England?	During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities for the purposes of learning, teaching and assessment.	19.710	6	.003	2.6%	5.1%	30.8%	61.5%	
Do you think that social work students should have the option to register with Social Work England?	Social Work England provided clear guidance to inform course adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19.	15.350	6	.018	5.1%	48.7%	28.2%	17.9%	
Do you think that social work students should have the option to register with Social Work England?	During COVID-19, learning and teaching activities were highly disrupted.	12.836	6	.046	0%	15.8%	31.6%	31.6%	21.1%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
Having a specialist regulator helps to develop more focused social work education and training.	Social Work England has been flexible and understanding with re-approval processes, following disruptions due to COVID-19.	35.116	15	.004	2.6%	10.3%	28.2%	48.7%	10.30%
Having a specialist regulator helps to develop more focused social work education and training.	During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption in social work education and training.	30.851	16	.014	2.6%	56.4%	25.6%	10.3%	5.1%
Having a specialist regulator has helped with the design of new curricula. *	Social Work England has been flexible and understanding with re-approval processes, following disruptions due to COVID-19.	28.871	16	.025	2.6%	10.3%	28.2%	48.7%	10.3%
Having a specialist regulator has helped with the design of new curricula.	I think the changes made in the course(s) I am involved with, due to COVID-19, have been beneficial and adhere to the new Education and Training Standards by Social Work England.	27.219	16	.039	7.7%	5.1%	28.2%	41.0%	17.9%
Having a specialist regulator has helped with the design of new curricula.	During COVID-19, the programmes I am involved with had to make many course adjustments (structure and/or delivery) to minimise disruption in student learning and assessment.	27.192	16	.039	30.8%	51.3%	12.8%	2.6%	2.6%
Having a specialist regulator has	Social Work England provided clear	23.295	12	.025	5.1%	48.7%	28.2%	17.9%	0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
helped with the design of new curricula.	guidance to inform course.								
Having a specialist regulator has helped with the design of new curricula.	During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities.	21.667	12	.041	2.6%	5.1%	0%	30.8%	61.5%
Social work courses/programmes have received regular support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	Social Work England has been flexible and understanding with re-approval processes, following disruptions due to COVID-19.	27.344	16	.038	2.6%	10.3%	28.2%	48.7%	10.3%
Social work courses/programmes have received regular support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	I think the changes made in the course(s) I am involved with, due to COVID-19, have been beneficial and adhere to the new Education and Training Standards by Social Work England.	27.550	16	.036	7.7%	5.1%	28.2%	41.0%	17.9%
Social work courses/programmes have received regular support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	Social Work England provided clear guidance to inform course adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19.	25.783	12	.012	5.1%	48.7%	28.2%	17.9%	0%
Social work courses/programmes have received regular support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues (external and internal) and students.	31.116	16	.013	5.1%	35.9%	10.3%	41.0%	7.7%
Support and guidance from Social Work England to date have been easily accessible.	Social Work England has been supportive with the availability of placements, following disruptions due to	30.045	16	.018	12.1%	15.2%	33.3%	30.3%	9.1%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
	COVID-19.								
Support and guidance from Social Work England to date have been easily accessible.	Social Work England provided clear guidance to inform course adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19.	30.319	12	.002	3.0%	48.5%	30.3%	18.2%	0%
I found the use of technology at times unethical.	During COVID-19, learning and teaching activities were highly disrupted.	24.855	12	.016	0%	16.2%	32.4%	32.4%	18.9%
I found the use of technology at times unethical.	During COVID-19, assessment of social work students was highly	27.320	12	.007	0%	45.9%	24.3%	21.6%	8.1%
I found the use of technology at times unethical.	During COVID-19, I faced many challenges in my efforts to continue to support and assess social work students with their coursework and placement.	26.763	16	.044	2.6%	31.6%	5.3%	50.0%	10.5%
I found the use of technology at times unethical.	During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues (external and internal) and students.	44.480	16	.001	5.3%	36.8%	10.5%	42.1%	5.3%
I found the use of technology at times unethical.	During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption in social work education and training.	33.906	16	.006	2.6%	55.3%	26.3%	10.5%	5.3%
I found the use of technology difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	Social Work England has been supportive with the availability of placements, following disruptions due to COVID-19.	27.342	16	.038	12.1%	15.2%	33.3%	30.3%	9.1%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
I found the use of technology difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	During COVID-19, assessment of social work students was highly disrupted.	24.610	12	.017	0%	44.7%	23.7%	23.7%	7.9%
I found the use of technology difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues (external and internal) and students.	30.164	16	.017	5.1%	35.9%	10.3%	41.0%	7.7%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	Social Work England has been flexible and understanding with re-approval processes, following disruptions due to COVID-19.	49.551	16	.001	2.6%	10.3%	28.2%	48.7%	10.3%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	During COVID-19, the programmes I am involved with had to make many course adjustments (structure and/or delivery) to minimise disruption in student learning and assessment.	42.112	16	.001	30.8 %	51.3%	12.8%	2.6%	2.6%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	Social Work England provided clear guidance to inform course adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19.	35.734	12	.001	5.1%	48.7%	28.2%	17.9%	0%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	During COVID-19, I faced many challenges in my efforts to continue to support and assess social work students with their coursework and placement.	48.725	16	.001	2.6%	31.6%	5.3%	50.0%	10.5%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to	During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues.	31.708	16	.011	5.1%	35.9%	10.3%	41.0%	7.7%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.									
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	During COVID-19, I had to engage with online practices and activities.	27.096	12	.007	2.6%	5.1%	0%	30.8%	61.5%
I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption.	32.110	16	.010	2.6%	56.4%	25.6%	10.3%	5.1%
Having a specialist regulator has helped with the design of new curricula.	I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	37.575	16	.002	2.6%	7.7%	23.1%	56.4%	10.3%
Social work courses/programmes have received regular support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	I found virtual placements or remote placements as a response to COVID-19 an opportunity for learning new skills.	32.443	16	.009	2.6%	7.7%	23.1%	56.4%	10.3%
Practice Educators									
Do you think that social work students should have the option to register with Social Work England?	During COVID-19, learning and teaching activities were highly disrupted.	19.633	8	.012	2.6%	5.3%	15.8%	31.6%	44.7%
Having a specialist regulator helps to develop more focused social work education and training.	During COVID-19, learning and teaching activities were highly disrupted.	29.353	16	.022	2.6%	5.3%	15.8%	31.6%	44.7%
Social work courses/programmes have received extensive support	Social Work England provided clear guidance to inform course	18.497	9	.030	0%	15.0%	47.5%	32.5%	5.0%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
and guidance from Social Work England to date.	adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19.								
Social work courses/programmes have received extensive support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	During COVID-19, learning and teaching activities were highly disrupted.	22.912	12	.028	2.6%	5.3%	15.8%	31.6%	44.7%
Social work courses/programmes have received extensive support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	During COVID-19, assessment of social work students on placement was highly disrupted.	28.509	12	.005	2.5%	10.0%	7.5%	45.0%	35.0%
Social work courses/programmes have received extensive support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption in social work education and training.	31.825	12	.001	7.5%	40.0%	40.0%	10.0%	2.5%
I think the changes made in the course(s) I am involved with have been beneficial and adhere to the new Education and Training Standards by Social Work England.	During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption in social work education and training.	23.633	12	.023	7.7%	38.5%	41.0%	10.3%	2.6%
Social work courses/programmes have received extensive support and guidance from Social Work England to date.	I found the use of technology unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	28.778	12	.004	2.5%	30.0%	17.5%	40.0%	10.0%
During COVID-19, I faced many challenges in my efforts to continue to support and assess social work	I found the use of technology difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	30.730	12	.002	7.7%	17.9%	20.5%	41.0%	12.8%

		Value*	Df	Sig**	Str.	Disg.	Neut.	Agree	Strongly
			**	*	Dis.Agr				Agree
students in their placement.									
During COVID-19, social work students who had to continue placements virtually/remotely were still able to meet the professional standards.	I found the use of technology difficult to exercise with social work values at times.	34.043	16	.005	12.8%	46.2%	12.8%	23.1%	5.1%
During COVID-19, I found it challenging to connect with my colleagues (external and internal) and students.	I found the use of technology unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	33.604	16	.006	5.1%	28.2%	12.8%	48.7%	5.1%
During COVID-19, Social Work England offered flexibility to ensure minimum disruption in social work education and training.	I found the use of technology unethical at times (e.g. invading personal space).	55.186	16	.001	7.5%	40.0%	40.0%	10.0%	2.5%

Appendix B

Table 6.1: Student perceptions, views and attitudes by protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Specialist regulator			COVID-19 responses			Use of technology			EDI		
	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df
	H ¹			H			H			H		
Age	3.72	.45	4	2.35	.67	4	5.9	.21	4	601	.96	4
Sex	7.39	.62	3	4.66	.2	3	.46	.93	3	1.43	.49	3
Gender	3.87	.28	3	3.59	.31	3	.4	.94	3	.13	.94	3
Sexual orientation	2.99	.39	3	2.25	.53	3	4.35	.23	3	3.21	.36	3
Disability	8.19	.82	7	1.69	.98	7	12.55	.08	7	9.58	.21	7
Ethnicity	2.90	.72	5	5.95	.31	5	3.24	.66	5	3.57	.74	5
Religion	7.60	.27	6	3.72	.72	6	2.14	.91	6	3.46	.75	6
Relationship/partnership status	12.85	.03	5	9.08	.25	5	5.08	.41	5	10.61	.16	5
Pregnancy status	2.77	.98	1	2.45	.29	1	.80	.37	1	.009	.92	1

¹ Kruskal-Wallis H

Table 6.2: Graduates/NQSW/ASYE perceptions, views and attitudes by protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Specialist regulator			COVID-19 responses			Use of			EDI		
	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df	K-W	p	df
	H ¹			H			H			H		
Age	1.8	.77	4	3.06	.55	4	2.14	.71	-4	6.4	.17	4
Sex	1.8	.77	4	3.06	.55	4	1.25	.74	3	6.4	.17	4
Gender	1.99	.37	2	.85	.65	2	.29	.87	2	1.66	.44	2
Sexual orientation	1.1	.78	3	.61	.9	3	5.76	.12	3	5.75	.12	3
Disability	2.75	.74	5	4.51	.48	5	4.16	.53	5	6.19	.29	5
Ethnicity	6.14	.29	5	4.05	.54	5	8.24	.22	6	5.03	.41	5
Religion	.83	.84	3	3.3	.35	3	2.4	.71	4	3.32	.35	3
Relationship/partnership status	6.18	.19	4	1.28	.86	4	7.37	.29	6	3.98	.41	4
Pregnancy status	.008	.93	1	1.32	.25	1	.13	.94	2	1.61	.21	1

¹ Kruskal-Wallis H

Table 6.3: Social work academics and course providers perceptions, views and attitudes by protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Specialist regulator			COVID-19 responses					
	K-W H ¹	p	df	K-W H	p	df	K-W H	p	df
Age	9.77	.045	4	2.4	.66	4	6.4	.17	4
Sex	3.7	.16	2	.84	.66	2	1.67	.43	2
Gender	4.67	.1	2	.97	.62	2	1.57	.46	2
Sexual orientation	1.8	.62	3	1.74	.63	3	5.59	.13	3
Disability	3.83	.57	5	7.16	.21	5	6.31	.28	5
Ethnicity	8.3	.14	5	6.71	.24	5	2.64	.76	5
Religion	3.3	.2	2	.28	.87	2	.06	.97	2
Relationship/partnership status	3.93	.42	4	2.98	.56	4	2.23	.69	4
Pregnancy status	1.39	.24	1	.21	.65	1	1.39	.24	1

¹ Kruskal-Wallis H

Table 6.4. Practice educators and placement providers perceptions, views and attitudes by protected characteristics

Protected characteristic	Specialist regulator			COVID-19 responses			Use of technology		
	K-W H ¹	p	df	K-W H	p	df	K-W H	p	df
Age	4.11	.13	2	.36	.84	2	.26	.88	2
Sex	4.11	.13	2	.36	.84	2	.26	.88	2
Gender	2.83	.42	3	1.54	.67	3	1.44	.7	3
Sexual orientation	1.26	.74	3	2.68	.44	3	3.1	.38	3
Disability	6	.42	6	6	.42	6	6	.42	6
Ethnicity	3.93	.42	4	4.16	.39	4	2.21	.7	4
Religion	8.4	.3	7	5.68	.58	7	6.76	.45	7
Relationship/partnership status	1.06	.6	2	2.69	.26	2	1.22	.54	2
Pregnancy status	2.18	.14	1	.71	.4	1	.03	.87	1

¹ Kruskal-Wallis H

Appendix C

Vignette: Social Work Students

Key findings

- Narratives from the study show that students portrayed an interest in a potential social work student register with the regulator; highlighting a desire to be recognised as part of the profession at entry point.
- Less positive was the impact that Covid-19 has on students, personally and on their studies, with many revealing personal experiences of disruption and at times uncertainty.
- However, there were some great examples of how HEI has adapted and in hindsight how education and training can be improved.
- Similarly, equality, diversity and inclusion in social work practice and education appear to be areas that students felt fairly confident in, with background discussion on how this can be improved on the course placement and where future work need to be ensure further inclusion of those with protected characteristics.

Meet Chris

Chris is a 33-year-old social work student, who lives in South London but attends a university in North London. Chris currently lives with their partner and 4-year-old daughter. Chris is in the second year of their social work degree. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted many areas of their course and placement, as well as their personal life. Chris's course moved to an online platform, and with their 4-year-old daughter and partner working from home, this was not always the best environment for them to concentrate on the content of the course. They found it challenging to balance student and personal life.

Chris also felt the impact of lack of social relation and not being able to see the friends they had made in class and having that peer support. Chris's placement started later than planned, and there was a lot of uncertainty in the lead up to this but eventually they were able to complete their placement online, which has been working well; but again, they do miss the human relations and wonders how this will impact their learning for future practice.

One thing that Chris did not struggle with was accessing required resources for their course. Their University provided ways for them to electronically get access to all required resources for this course and they found this reassuring. Chris also used the website of the regulator as a resource to contribute to this knowledge of social work standards which they are required to demonstrate understanding of in their academic and social work placement.

Chris's course continuously linked their work to anti oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. Chris is confident in their understanding of both and feels that their placement has built on this. In addition, Chris has personally been keeping up with social activist movements such as Black Lives Matter through social media platforms, but doesn't personally felt this has impacted their course, as they believes anti-discriminatory practice has always been in the epicentre of social work.

Reflective questions

1. What support should Chris request from their course provider to tackle the challenge of balancing student and personal life?
2. What possible measures can the placement provider put in place to ensure that Chris's progress is maximised, despite their lack of social interaction with people with lived experience?
3. Chris informed that they do not feel that the socio-political movement Black Lives Matter impacted their course. Should social work programmes adapt to the learning of contemporary social activist movements or is the current representation of anti-discriminatory practice in the social work curriculum adequate as Chris states?

Appendix D

Vignette: Graduate/NQSW/ASYE

Key findings

- The majority of graduates/NQSW/ASYE (62.5%) suggested that they would apply to register to as a student, if they had the option.
- Approximately 51.8% reported that during COVID-19 they have found it very challenging to maintain a good balance between their personal and professional lives.
- 69.7% of these participants faced numerous disruptions in their practice and assessed work in the ASYE programme.
- 72.7% found it challenging to connect with colleagues, their supervisor(s) and/or people with lived experience of social work, during COVID-19.
- 64.30% found the use of technology for the purposes of their practice difficult to exercise social work values and 58.90% found it unethical.
- Regarding equality, diversity and inclusion, graduates/NQSW/ASYE reported they felt that their social work programme had covered anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice adequately and they had seen examples of both practices in the field.

Meet Tina

Tina is 43 years old and lives with her girlfriend in Bristol. This is her first year of practice, and she is currently completing an ASYE programme. She was employed with her local authority for 2 weeks before the pandemic was declared, and like everyone else, followed the advice to work from home. Tina found this a very challenging time; her girlfriend lost her job at the coffee shop, which had financial implications for them. Tina also had to provide emotional support to her partner. The pressure of juggling an unstable personal life and uncertainties in the workplace was difficult.

Tina found it hard to reach out to colleague as she didn't know them well but was also concerned about calling people while they were at home, even though they were working remotely. She could not help but feel she was invading their personal space. Tina worried about how she will be able to connect with colleagues after the pandemic, given the lack of opportunity to build rapport.

She also felt concerned that this vital year in her practice (i.e. ASYE) was being hindered by lack of what she called 'real social work practice'. There were some tasks she couldn't do as a student in her organisation and was looking forward to being qualified to be able to put this in practice. Her ASYE programme has had lots of disruptions too. She recognises that there are other pressing issues for the organisation to deal with now, but she still feels disheartened by this.

Tina felt that her course at University had prepared her well in relation to anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and felt that her employer also adheres to the values of these practices.

Reflective questions

1. How can Tina's employer provide her with support to aid her to manage a good balance between personal and professional life?
2. What measures can Tina's employer put in place to ensure she feels more connected to her team?
3. How can Tina's employer support her development as practitioner whilst in a 'online forum'?
4. Why does Tina feel that she is deprived from 'real social work practice' under the circumstances, and how can she change that?

Appendix E

Vignette: Social Work Academics

Key findings

- 67% of Social Work Academics are in favour of establishing a student register.
- 53% of academics agreed or strongly agreed that COVID-19 had disrupted programme delivery and assessment.
- 53.8% of the academics representing courses report that they did not receive clear guidance from the regulator to inform course adjustments necessary in response to COVID-19. A small percentage of 17.9% agreed that guidance was clear.
- Largely, academics faced challenges during COVID-19, which impacted their abilities to support and assess social work students with their coursework and placement (60.5%).

Meet Lisa

My name is Lisa, and I am a social work academic in my mid-fifties. I am a white working class married woman from a working-class background and have worked as a social work educator for eight years. Prior to that I worked as a social worker and supervisor mainly in the public sector.

The first lockdown happened with little warning and had a serious effect on our final year students' placements, many of which were paused over the summer months while placement providers adjusted to new socially distanced workplaces. This created a lot of stress for our students and many difficulties in locating appropriate placements. Transferring to an online student admissions process also involved significant work, developing new systems, teaching ourselves the technology, and supporting our colleagues with lived experience of social work. Making the processes user friendly for candidates was challenging. We have adapted well however, although seeing applicants online is not the same as interacting and watching them perform in person.

In the beginning of the academic year 2020-21, I struggled with the teaching platform but have gained in confidence over time, and there are some aspects of online working that our programme would now like to retain. Not the teaching however! We have all missed our face-to-face contact with students, we miss them and they us. It is difficult to develop relationships and encourage interaction in a virtual classroom especially when most students have their microphones and cameras turned off. Students often struggle with the technology and in the case of our first years, they do not know each other very well. Our students, however, have showed considerable perseverance stuck with their studies despite digital poverty, home schooling and lack of quiet spaces at home. Despite the new way of teaching and learning environment, anti-oppressive practice remains a student and staff passion and is at the heart of our curriculum delivery. Academic staff however, speaking for myself, are very tired. We have all (staff, students, and placement providers) worked long hours blurring the boundaries between work and home life to keep our programmes going.

My views on Social Work England? To be fair, they have been a new organisation during a very challenging period, and any assessment of their performance should factor that in. I am very troubled about the professional standards, while they are clear I believe scrupulousness has been sacrificed for the sake of clarity and they are not as rigorous as the professional standards of other equivalent professions. I also believe it is important that students are included on the register as this supports them to develop a sense of accountability for their professional behaviour right from the beginning of their journey.

Reflective questions

1. How can social work academics support students to develop a strong knowledge and relationship with Social Work England from the beginning of their academic studies?
2. How can social work academics promote with students the important relationship between the professional standards and accountability when working with vulnerable populations?
3. How can social work academics work collaboratively with placement providers to support students to develop clear ideas about what the professional standards look like in practice?
4. What support do you think Lisa needs in her efforts to continue in her role, albeit the difficulties?

Appendix F

Vignette Practice Educators

Key findings

- Practice educators, only by a small portion (20%), agree that regular support and guidance have been received by the new regulator, and more than half (52.5%) neither agree nor disagree.
- 80% agreed that assessing students on placement during this period (i.e. COVID-19) was highly disrupted.
- 72.5% and 53.8% found it challenging to support students on placement, and connect and build rapport with them, respectively.
- 53% of practice educators found the use of technology for the purposes of their practice with students a challenging way to ensure the application of social work values as they would like.
- 50% had concerns about the use of technology in this context (i.e. COVID-19) being unethical.
- Largely, practice educators expressed unsettling feelings about the level to which students are well equipped for practice, when experiential learning has transformed into an online

Meet Abebi

I work in the charitable sector with vulnerable adults. I am an older experienced practice educator and have taken students on placement regularly for many years. It is a commitment to have a student on placement, but they are the future of our profession, so it is important to do so.

This year I had two students one was on placement with me at the time of the first lockdown and my next student joined me earlier this year for her final placement.

I noticed a considerable difference in the experience of the first placement and the second. In March we were completely thrown by the placement implications of the pandemic and I had to suspend that first placement for a couple of months while as an organisation we reconfigured our way of working with people with lived experience of social work and adjusted our workplaces to ensure they were compliant to safety regulations pertinent to COVID-19. My student who was a more mature student initially found the use of technology confusing as did I, but with practice we both grew in confidence and felt more able to manage this aspect of the work. How we ensure this is an ethical way of working that promotes social work values has been a hot topic of discussion in our supervision sessions and something we have bonded over, as I worried about how to connect and support her with this new way of working.

The university initially struggled to support us with advice, and from a placement point of view there seemed little concrete support and guidance from our new regulator Social Work England as it strove to provide leadership in this area. We learnt from our initial experience however and the contrast between the two placements has been very marked; I was much more prepared and confident the second time round.

Social Work England has now given clearer general guidance about placements. However, it was left largely up to individual university programmes to determine the detail. While the university I work with has not compromised on the number of placement days students must do complete, other universities have been more flexible in their approach. This has caused confusion for practice educator colleagues who take students from different institutions in trying to determine how standards might be met and assessed in the shorter time frame.

Reflective Questions

1. What have this experience taught us about practice education and how can we effectively communicate lessons learnt to the specialist regulator?
2. What aspects of the technology will we want to keep and what would we want to discard?
3. How will we ensure that students recover lost developmental ground in their academic studies and/or during their ASYE programme?
4. How do you think Abebi's experience would differ, were they an independent practice educator and not a member of an organisation/agency?