An audit of doctoral students in Social Work across the UK: the need for a national network

Professor Steven M Shardlow, Jadwiga Leigh and Lisa Morriss
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An audit of doctoral students in Social Work across the UK

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1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an audit in respect of Social Work doctoral students, which was conducted during the Summer of 2012. The audit was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and carried out by Professor Steven Shardlow and two PhD students, Jadwiga Leigh and Lisa Morriss, from the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Work at the University of Salford. This is the final report derived from the audit and presents the findings and discussion of key issues.

At the time of writing, the number of current Social Work doctoral students across the UK is not known. This is in part a function of the permeability of the discipline of Social Work within the social sciences field combined with the absence of a national network or framework for Social Work doctoral students.

1.2 Background

In 2012, when the HEA commissioned this audit, the numbers of current Social Work PhD students across the UK was not known (Scourfield, 2010; Scourfield and Maxwell, 2010). There was no evidence of either a national database of Social Work doctoral students or a national network that enabled contacts to be established and maintained. There was evidence of some successful regional groupings of Social Work doctoral students. The inability to identify Social Work doctoral students at a national level is an unfortunate deficit within Social Work academic life in the UK. There are, however, examples of successful functioning networks of doctoral students both in other disciplines within the UK and in other countries.

Doctoral students are a vital component to ensure the academic, and also where appropriate the professional, health of a discipline. In the case of Social Work, the health of the doctoral community is of vital concern as Social Work is one of the academic disciplines that has been identified as having succession problems due to the age profile of Social Work academics. A significant number of academics will retire in the next five to ten years. Efforts to support the Social Work doctoral community are vital to ensure that there will be a well-qualified body of academics in this discipline in the future. Despite this situation a number of Social Work doctoral students believe that there are few or no opportunities for them once they have completed their doctoral work (Scourfield and Maxwell, 2010). It is essential that our early career academics in Social Work are nurtured and supported in their progression from doctoral student to academic staff. A national network could have a role to play through the provision of support to the doctoral community in Social Work.

1.2.1 A comment on previous relevant studies

In this section some pertinent aspects of recent research studies into doctoral education for Social Work students are highlighted. This is not intended to provide a detailed literature analysis as this was beyond the scope of the audit.

A literature search has shown that although there is a growing interest in the community of doctoral Social Work students in the UK (see in particular, Lyons, 2002; Orme, 2003; Scourfield, 2010; Scourfield and Maxwell, 2010), obtaining detailed information about doctoral students in the UK and where they can be found has proven to be a difficult task that each of these studies has confronted.

In their study in 2010, Scourfield and Maxwell, used email contact lists of Social Work academics in the UK and asked them to forward a questionnaire to all their Social Work doctoral students. They, found that although 30% of respondents were ‘highly satisfied’ and a further 48% were ‘satisfied’ with their study: actually completing the doctoral study was seen to be a major challenge for some with 30% stating that they did not have enough time to conduct their research due to work and family commitments. In addition they commented that the numbers of doctoral students in Social Work seemed to increase following the introduction of the professional doctorate programmes. Scourfield and Maxwell (2010) also found that when
asked whether the doctorate had already led or was expected to lead to changes in the work role, only 6% of students had experienced a positive change and a further 36% stated that they had not experienced any change nor envisaged one to occur in the future. These figures are a cause for concern as doctoral students, a significant number of whom will be practitioners and who have committed their time to enhancing their professional practice should then, at least, feel there is an opportunity for them to use their skills and achievements in some shape or form in the future.

In 2010, Scourfield (p. 578) surveyed Social Work academics by email and telephone to explore the extent and nature of professional doctorate programmes. He found that the number of such programmes was small, as was the number of Social Work students pursing this type of doctoral degree. He commented that the viability of this type of programme was enhanced when provided as part of an interdisciplinary programme. In relation to the creation of a national network for doctoral students, he found indications that may have suggested a need for such a network. As he commented that the formation of strong bonds with other doctoral students was an important aspect of doctoral study for students and gave them a sense of ‘a strong cohort identity’.

In an article that discussed the characteristics of Social Work as a discipline in higher education, Lyons (2002) has argued that the lack of identity, or ‘disciplinary recognition’ previously experienced by PhD students is as a result of studentships being formerly situated within other social sciences or humanities areas, thus leading to fragmentation and a loss of social work as an occupational group. While Orme (2003) has argued having “doctors in social work” is much needed if practitioners are to be offered meaningful continuing professional development and if social work is to avoid becoming an ailing activity. Like Scourfield and Maxwell (2010), Orme also identified that recruiting Social Work researchers can be difficult, with some mature practitioners having limited experience of research methods and/or encountering financial disincentives after having earned a professional wage as a social worker. However, in order to meet the needs of the Social Work doctoral student the research culture needs to change. Orme (2003) has suggested that one of these changes should be the creation of an opportunity in which groups of PhD students are brought together in order for them to share what they know, learn from one another and provide a social context for their work.

A number of studies about doctoral education for social workers have been conducted in the United States, see for example: employment and fees (Anastas and Kuerbis, 2009); career opportunities (Barsky, Green and Ayayo, in press); facilitating success for doctoral students (Liechty, Liao and Schull, 2009); the need for a practice doctorate (Anastas and Videka, 2012). Of note in the current context is the study carried out by Khinduka (2012) into Social Work doctorates that had already been completed, which found that “excellence in doctoral education is unlikely to be achieved in schools that do not have an institutional culture to nurture, support, or sustain it” (2012, p. 685), therefore indicating that a some kind of professional support network is vital if the social work profession is to benefit from its doctoral students.

The foregoing discussion has described that identifying and locating Social Work doctoral students in the UK can still be a difficult process. Yet the majority of those that have been located and contacted have reported that they are enjoying the doctoral experience. It would seem, however, that the foremost challenge for students in the UK completing their studies.

### 1.3 Aims

The audit was conducted with the following aims:

1. To explore the extent of interest among doctoral students in Social Work across the UK (with a primary emphasis on England) to attend an event that that would explore academic and professional issues that relate to the transition from doctoral student to academic.
2. To explore the extent of interest among doctoral students in Social Work across the UK (with a primary emphasis on England) in the establishment of national network that could support their study.
1.4 Methods of enquiry

The target populations for the audit were the departmental co-ordinators for Social Work doctoral students at English universities and Social Work doctoral students, to include PhD students (including by publication) and Social Work professional doctorate students, who were studying on either a full-time or part-time basis.

Ethical approval was not required as this was an audit commissioned by the HEA.

At the end of June 2012, a letter was emailed to departmental co-ordinators for doctoral students in Social Work at every university across England. Key members of the academic community in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were also contacted. The letter contained two links to two separate surveys that used the web-based tool Bristol Online Survey (BOS). The departmental co-ordinators were asked to complete the first survey and forward the letter on to all of their Social Work doctoral students. The students were then provided with another link, which connected them to a second survey. They were also asked to complete the questionnaire and, if they so wished, provide their contact details.

Records of all the emails sent were tracked through the ‘read/ delivery receipt’ option in Microsoft Outlook. If an email was undelivered and returned due to server issues, the academic contact no longer being in post or there being no Social Work course available, the information was recorded and fresh emails were re-sent to the appropriate contacts. However, if a message was returned informing that there were no doctoral students at the institution, the university was then removed from the mailing list.

An email prompt was sent again two weeks later, with the same letter containing the same links to the surveys mentioned above, reminding contacts that the survey needed to be completed by the end of July. This was to encourage further replies and to establish if there were any problems with the survey or the mode of enquiry.

1.4.1 Response rates

A total of 34 departmental co-ordinators completed the survey out of a possible 95 institutions that offer Social Work courses, giving a response rate of 35.8%. A total of 54 doctoral students completed the survey. The total number of doctoral students across the UK is not known, so response rates cannot be estimated.

1.5 Findings from audit of co-ordinators

The departmental co-ordinators provided the following information about the provision of doctoral study.

1.5.1 Institutions offering an opportunity to study for a PhD and/or a professional doctorate in Social Work

Of the 34 institutions responding to the survey, 32 offered an opportunity to study for a PhD and/or a professional doctorate in Social Work. In two institutions where co-ordinators responded to the survey they stated that they currently do not offer an opportunity to study for a PhD or a professional doctorate in Social Work. The survey responses given by the departmental co-ordinators indicate that there are a total of 301 students engaged in doctoral study at their institutions. The results on the routes to doctoral studies are based on the information given by the departmental co-ordinators regarding these 301 students (as opposed to any information given to us by the 54 students who answered the survey).
1.5.2 The four routes of doctoral study

There are four routes of doctoral study in Social Work: PhD by thesis, PhD by publication, professional doctorate in Social Work and professional doctorate in Social Work combined with other disciplines. The departmental co-ordinators were asked to indicate the numbers of doctoral students engaged in each of these four routes. The results are shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Routes to doctoral study](image)

**Figure 1: Routes to doctoral study**

- Professional doctorate (combined): 10%
- Professional doctorate (Social Work): 24%
- PhD by publication: 65%
- PhD by thesis: 1%

1.5.3 PhD by thesis

All of the 32 institutions offer an opportunity to study for a PhD by thesis. The overwhelming majority of students (65%) undertaking doctoral study are engaged in this form of study. This result concurs closely with the findings of Scourfield and Maxwell (2010) that 60% of doctoral candidates were studying towards a PhD by thesis.

1.5.4 PhD by publication

In contrast, only four students (1%) appear to be undertaking the PhD by publication route. Again these findings concur with those of Scourfield and Maxwell (2010). Similarly, only three students undertaking a PhD by publication responded to the study by Scourfield and Maxwell (2010) of doctoral students in the UK. Scourfield and Maxwell (2010, p. 557) argued that these results could perhaps be seen as a “methodological artefact” in that it is likely to be senior academics who are undertaking a PhD by this route and so may not regard themselves as ‘doctoral students’. While all the institutions offer an opportunity to study for a PhD by thesis, only 20 offer the PhD by publication route.

1.5.5 Professional doctorate in Social Work

The second largest group of doctoral students identified in the survey were those undertaking a professional doctorate in Social Work. A total of 73 students (24%) were identified as studying by this route. However, only nine of the institutions represented in the survey appear to offer a professional doctorate in Social Work.

1.5.6 Professional doctorate in Social Work combined with other disciplines
The departmental co-ordinators identified 29 students (10%) studying towards a professional doctorate in Social Work combined with other disciplines. However, only 11 of the institutions represented in the survey appear to offer this route to a doctorate.

### 1.5.7 Pre- and post-1992 universities

From the survey responses it appears that most of the doctoral students (69%) were based in pre-1992 universities (see Table 1).

#### Table 1: Doctoral type by institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of university</th>
<th>PhD by thesis</th>
<th>PhD by publication</th>
<th>Professional doctorate (Social Work)</th>
<th>Professional doctorate (combined)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992</td>
<td>149 (71.3%)</td>
<td>3 (1.4%)</td>
<td>37 (17.7%)</td>
<td>20 (9.6%)</td>
<td>209 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992</td>
<td>46 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>36 (39%)</td>
<td>9 (9.8%)</td>
<td>92 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the pre-1992 institutions, the overwhelming majority of the doctoral students (71.3%) were engaged in the traditional PhD by thesis route. Students working towards a professional doctorate in Social Work comprise the next largest group (17.7%) with a further 9.6% working towards a professional doctorate in Social Work combined with other disciplines. The PhD by publication route was only being taken by 1.4% of doctoral students in the pre-1992 universities.

In the post-1992 institutions, half of the students were engaged in the traditional PhD by thesis route (see Table 1). The other half are mainly engaged in professional doctorate study with the majority (39%) working towards a professional doctorate in Social Work. The PhD by publication route was only being taken by 1.2% of doctoral students in the post-1992 universities.

### 1.5.8 Doctoral study by country

Table 2 shows the type of doctoral study sorted by country (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland). In all four countries the majority of students are engaged in the PhD by thesis route of doctoral study.

#### Table 2: Doctoral type by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>PhD by thesis</th>
<th>PhD by publication</th>
<th>Professional doctorate (Social Work)</th>
<th>Professional doctorate (combined)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5.9 The development of a national network for Social Work PhD and professional doctorate students

The majority of departmental co-ordinators agreed that there is a need to develop a national network for Social Work PhD and professional doctorate students. Twenty-four of the respondents viewed the proposed network as facilitating an annual workshop, 19 viewed the network as facilitating electronic dialogue, with 22 indicating that the network would facilitate regional meetings.

Other suggestions for the network included:
- an online open access journal to disseminate doctoral work;
- developing studies;
- an annual conference; methodology workshops;
- the use of social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook page).

A few respondents pointed out that some Social Work regional networks already exist: for example, the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre, the recently established Doctoral Training Centre for Wales, and the South West Doctoral Training Centre. There is already an annual South Wales/South West England Social Work Doctoral Conference (Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea). However, these approaches are not replicated throughout the UK, with some areas having little or no regional provision.

1.5.10 The development of an event for PhD and professional doctorate students in Social Work to explore the development of their skills from ‘being a student to becoming an academic member of staff’

A third of the departmental co-ordinators agreed that there is a need to hold an event for PhD and professional doctorate students in Social Work to explore the development of their skills from ‘being a student to becoming an academic member of staff’.

1.5.11 Attendance at a meeting at the University of Salford in September to discuss the development of a network and to explore the development of a national event for doctoral students in Social Work

Finally, the departmental co-ordinators were asked if they wished and/or were able to attend a meeting to be held at the University of Salford to discuss the development of the network and to explore the development of a national event for doctoral students. Nineteen of the departmental co-ordinators indicated that they would be willing to attend the meeting.

1.6 Findings from audit of doctoral students

A total of 54 doctoral students completed the survey.

1.6.1 Awareness of regional networks or forums that have been designed specifically to meet the needs of PhD and professional doctorate Social Work students

Less than a third of the doctoral students who responded to the survey indicated that they were aware of networks or forums in their region designed specifically for Social Work students. Like the departmental co-ordinators, a few of the students mentioned the White Rose Doctoral Training Centre and the South West Doctoral Training Centre. They also mentioned the annual doctoral conference for PhD students in Social Work, which is held jointly by the South West and South Wales Doctoral Training Centres. Several students also stated that there are both formal and informal Social Work doctoral networks within their institutions. Vitae (north-west region) was mentioned by one respondent.
1.6.2 The development of a national network for Social Work PhD and professional doctorate students

The overwhelming majority of the doctoral students agreed that there is a need to develop a national network for Social Work PhD and professional doctorate students. Some 41 of the doctoral students viewed the proposed network as facilitating an annual workshop, 31 viewed the network as facilitating electronic dialogue, with 41 indicating that the network would facilitate regional meetings.

Other suggestions for the network included:
- an aid to networking, the development of mentor support;
- online forums;
- facilitating informal contacts;
- sharing ideas and experiences.

1.6.3 The development of an event for PhD and professional doctorate students in Social Work to explore the development of their skills from ‘being a student to becoming an academic member of staff’

The majority of the doctoral students agreed that there is a need to hold an event for PhD and professional doctorate students in Social Work to explore the development of their skills from ‘being a student to becoming an academic member of staff’.

1.6.4 An annual national PhD and professional doctorate Social Work event focused exclusively on developing research skills

Again, the majority of the doctoral students (47) supported this proposal. Two students commented that the focus on ‘becoming an academic’ seems to be based on an assumption that doctoral students intend to become academic staff and made the point that doctoral thinking can also be applied to social work practice.

1.6.5 Other seminars and workshops doctoral students would be interested in attending

The doctoral students were asked if there were any other specific seminars or workshops that they would be interested in attending. These included:
- bridging the academic and practice divide;
- developing theory from Social Work knowledge;
- clinical supervision needs for Social Work research students;
- a conference to present research and receive feedback;
- developing academic writing;
- journals: writing for publication, getting published and assessing impact;
- recently completed doctoral students sharing their experience and skills;
- methodological training;
- reflexivity in the research process;
- topic-specific workshops (e.g. disability studies, conversation analysis working with fathers);
- developing capacity of Social Work research;
- changing the organisation of social work.

1.6.6 Involvement in the steering committee for the proposed network

The doctoral students were asked if they would like to become involved in a steering committee to help develop a network for doctoral students in Social Work. About half of the doctoral students (28) indicated that they would like to become involved. However, two of these did not complete their name and contact details on the survey.
1.6.7  Attendance at a meeting at the University of Salford to discuss the development of a network and to explore the development of a national event for doctoral students in Social Work

The doctoral students were asked if they would like to attend a meeting to discuss the development of a network and explore the development of a national event for Social Work doctoral students. More than half of the doctoral students indicated that they would like to attend the meeting. However, three of these did not complete their name and contact details on the questionnaire.

1.6.8  Provisional title of thesis

The doctoral students were asked to give the provisional title of their thesis. Thirty-eight of the students did so and these are listed in the Appendix. Like Scourfield and Maxwell (2010), the responses have been categorised following Lyons (Lyons, 2002, p. 341). Lyons identified five main categories of Social Work research:

1. Research that relates to a particular service users group. This category is subdivided into:
   • children, young people and families;
   • adult service users.
2. Research that relates to social work knowledge, theories, skills and/or values.
3. Research that relates to the organisation and/or management of social work.
4. Research that relates to particular methods or settings.
5. Research that focuses on education, training and/or professional development.

The categorisation of the theses into one of the six research categories based on their title is admittedly open to interpretation, and it is acknowledged that the doctoral students themselves may not agree with the assignation given. For transparency, the titles of the theses and their categories are listed in the Appendix. Table 3 shows the results of this categorisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children, young people and families</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, theories, skills and/or values</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult service users</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation and/or management of social work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods or settings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, training and/or professional development</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most popular research area was children, young people and families, with half of all the doctoral theses relating to this category. This concurs with the findings of Scourfield and Maxwell (2010) where 43% were categorised under this heading. Again like Scourfield and Maxwell (2010), the next most popular category (32%) was adult service users. Education, training and/or professional development was the third most popular category (10.5%). None of the proposed titles seem to be concerned with the organisation and/or management of social work.

1.6.9  Social work area of interest

Finally, the doctoral students were asked to list the social work areas that they were interested in. Many of the students listed several areas of interest. Again the most popular area was children, young people and families, with 23 of the doctoral students listing this as an area of interest. The next most popular area of interest was knowledge, theories, skills and professional development (eight students) followed by mental health and mental capacity (six students) and education, training and professional development (six students). These results are shown below:
Table 4: Areas of interest among doctoral students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of interest</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children and families social work</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge, theories, skills and professional development</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and mental capacity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, training and professional development</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation, profession and management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research methods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration, migrant integration</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal justice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-oppressive practice and social justice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide prevention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of life</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.7 Discussion

There are several aspects of the audit that merit discussion, in particular these are: the definition of a Social Work doctorate; the needs of doctoral students; and the spread of doctoral work.

In the conduct of the audit, a self-ascription was accepted that a doctorate undertaken by whatever mode where the candidate and/or supervisor defined this as a Social Work doctorate was taken to be just that, a Social Work doctorate. Several of the academic respondents to the audit raised questions about the definition of a Social Work doctorate as being somewhat problematic. From those questions it is clear that a range of different criteria could be applied to determine if a doctorate could be classified as a Social Work doctorate. These criteria fall within the following areas:

1. the subject matter is located with the academic discipline or professional practice arena of Social Work;
2. the subject matter is part of the foundational knowledge on which Social Work is grounded: in such a doctorate some discussion of the application to social work may be expected to qualify as Social Work doctorate;
3. the doctoral candidate is a registered social worker, and there is a connection to social work of the doctoral study;
4. the supervisor is a registered social worker and there is a connection to social work of the doctoral study;
the doctorate is being undertaken as part of an interdisciplinary programme of advanced learning, part of which is related to social work.

Bounding the discipline and professional practice arena for social work is problematic not only for the determination of what constitutes a Social Work doctorate, but it has been a persistent issue that derives from the very diversity of activities that fall under the rubric of social work.

The audit confirmed that there was no existing national network for doctoral students. Although there are two regional collaborations of note, one in the South West and the other in Yorkshire, that provide opportunities for doctoral students in Social Work to network with each other. Some regional events are also provided through these collaborative arrangements between universities. Previously, there have been at national level four ESRC-sponsored Researcher Development Initiatives, from 2004 and most recently in 2010, that have sought to promote the development of research capacity and capability for early career staff in academic Social Work. These initiatives while not exclusively targeted at doctoral students would have been appropriate for doctoral students. There is support among both the academics surveyed and the doctoral students both for a creation of a network and for the development of a national development event. There are some different shades of opinion between the academics and the doctoral students about the activities that a network might provide.

The audit enabled a categorisation of the areas currently being studied by doctoral students. Details of the span of research topics is given in category form above and listed by title in the Appendix. With the reservation that this sample is a part of the total number of Social Work doctorates currently being undertaken, it is evident that there appears to be an unequal distribution of doctoral study across the discipline of Social Work. Care must be taken in making too firm a pronouncement about this, as the categorisation is made only on the basis of title and some of the doctoral studies currently in progress. A more detailed understanding based, for example, on the abstracts may reveal that these categorisations are inaccurate or that the studies belong to more than one domain. Taking these factors into account there is disparity between the various areas of social work in which doctoral study is being undertaken. There appears to be a greater concentration of studies in the field of child welfare than elsewhere. More investigation is needed, but if this is the case action may be necessary to encourage doctoral study in other domains of social work.

With a few doctoral students expecting there to be no professional opportunities available to them upon completion of their doctorate, and a call for the present social work culture to change, it would appear that there is a need for a PhD support network. If, as Scourfield (2010) has argued, professional doctoral students have benefited from being in a cohort as a result of forming strong bonds with other students, then it is evident that this kind of experience should be extended to include other PhD students nationally so that they too may benefit from and work towards strengthening the contemporary Social Work doctoral student identity of the future.

1.8 Limitations of the audit

The audit was by its very nature a limited exercise, which had narrowly defined but achievable goals. The information collected was circumscribed by the aims of the audit and by the short period of time available for planning and implementation of the data collection. The audit was conducted at the end of the second semester in 2012, and this may have meant that the response rate was lower than might have been obtained if the data collection had been conducted over a more extended period of time at a more favourable time of year.

The audit suggests that a more extensive research study to build upon previous studies in this field would be helpful to gain an impression of how doctoral study in Social Work is developing across England in particular and the UK in general.
1.9 Meetings outcomes

A meeting was held in Salford in October for those that expressed interest in taking forward the development of a network for Social Work doctoral students and also to begin to set up a working group to plan an event for doctoral students across the UK. Nine people attended and several others expressed interest but were not able to attend. It was agreed to hold another meeting in January 2013 with the intention of initiating a detailed planning process for an event in October/November 2013.

1.10 Other outcomes

There have been additional outcomes to this audit that were not foreseen at the time the audit was initiated. These include:

- **a website**: some of the students that have been involved in these developments have set up a website, using Word Press. This is located at the following address: http://swdoctornalnetwork.wordpress.com. The site contains a summary of the meeting that was held in October and a lighthearted podcast. This forms a base from which a more substantial website can be built in due course to further promote and encourage the development of the network;

- **an academic article**: an academic article based on the audit and subsequent work is under development by the team that has undertaken this audit;

- **JUC SWEC Research Committee**: a flyer of the work done to date has been presented to JUC SWEC Research Committee, with a view to seeking a representative for the planning group from JUC.

1.11 Conclusions

The audit established that:

1. There is significant interest among doctoral students in Social Work across the UK (with a primary emphasis on England) to attend an event that would explore academic and professional issues that relate to the transition from doctoral student to academic.

2. There is significant interest among doctoral students in Social Work across the UK (with a primary emphasis on England) in the establishment of national network that could support their study.

3. Opportunities to secure further funding to continue the development of a network and to develop a national event for Social Work doctoral students should be explored.
References


Appendix: Provisional title of thesis listed by category

Children, young people, families
1. ‘The theory doesn’t work here’: an exploratory study of childcare practice in a 52-week residential special school
2. Adoption - a lifelong journey
3. Assessing parenting capacity in BME families
4. Breaking down barriers: including fathers in children’s social care
5. Care leavers as parents or parents as care leavers?
6. Exploring the professional identities of child protection social workers in the UK and in Belgium
7. Voicing experiences of adult survivors of abuse by father figure
8. What is the experience of parents with pre-pubescent children who have gender identity issues?
9. Who would be a residential childcare worker?
10. Families experiences of domestic violence and substance misuse
11. How do practitioners talk to parents about fathers joining a parenting course?
12. Parents who kill: an exploration of their journey through the Scottish criminal justice system and of the prison-based interventions that address their needs
13. Practitioner narratives of involvement in non-accidental injury and child deaths
14. Looked-after children and care leavers’ experiences of volunteering: enablers, barriers and impacts
15. Organisational support and child protection
16. Quickening steps: an institutional ethnography of pre-birth child protection in Scotland
17. Safeguarding children and young people in local communities: a neighbourhood study
18. The experiences of young people leaving residential childcare institutions in Bangladesh
19. The internal worlds and external circumstances of hard-to-reach adolescents

Adult service users: adult services
1. Behind the rhetoric: exploring perceptions and experiences of the personalisation agenda in adult social care
2. Impacts of life story work among people with intellectual disability 45 years and over and their conversations friends from staff
3. Stash the cash: an intergenerational study of attitudes to financial planning and provision for social care in later life
4. The impact of hierarchy in the integration of health and social care practice (hospital social work as a case study)
5. Sexual wellbeing: a phenomenological exploration of the perspective of adults with physical disabilities in Dorset
6. Social justice and newly arrived communities. Examining the rhetoric and reality of service provision in Manchester
7. Transpeople’s experiences of domestic abuse and social care agencies
8. Exploring the role of statutory social workers in suicide prevention
9. Exploring professional decision making in high risk offender work – culture and professional judgement

**Adult service users: mental health and mental capacity**
1. Community mental health service delivery systems
2. Exploring the role and experiences of the approved mental health professional: a phenomenological study
3. Social work identity in mental health teams

**Knowledge, theories, skills and/or values**
1. The influence of postmodernism on the development of social work theory and practice
2. Does the provision of outcome-focused intervention improve individual level of physical and emotional functioning as opposed to current time and task models?

**Organisation and/or management of social work**
None

**Methods**
1. Sport as a force for social change

**Education, training and professional development**
1. Social Work education and Disability Studies
2. Progression issues in male Social Work students
3. Factors that affect the decisions made by skilled professionals to migrate to the UK: a qualitative case study of Cypriot migrant and returning physicians
4. A qualitative exploration of how therapists use their personal development group experience in their client work