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North East Social Work Alliance Phase 1 Evaluation (January 2017 to April 2018)

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0.2 Glossary

ASYE	Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, a programme assessing and supporting newly qualified social workers during their first year in employment.
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service, an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Home Office which runs criminal records check
DfE	Department for Education
Frontline	An intense work-based conversion course for those with good degrees in other subjects.
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
KSS	Knowledge and Skills Statements
LA	Local Authorities
NESWA	The North East Social Work Alliance, the name of the teaching partnership in the North East of England.
NQSW	Newly qualified social workers
OU	The Open University
PCF	Professional Capabilities Framework
PE	Practice Educators, qualified staff who work at a placement provider as a social worker and who support students in placement.
PSW Network	Principal Social Worker Network
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector, providers of social care services outside local authority provision.
QAPL	Quality assurance in practice learning, the social work practice learning quality assurance benchmark statement and supporting evaluation tools.
SWENE	Social Work Education North East
SUSW	Step Up to Social Work
TP	Teaching Partnership(s), a DfE funded initiative aimed at improving joint working and planning by supporting universities and local authorities to work together.

Figure 1 - Glossary of abbreviations used in this document

1. Introduction and Background

The purpose of this report is to summarise and present the findings of a one-year evaluation of the NESWA teaching partnership. The evaluation team have sought to reflect on NESWA's objectives and processes, and to collate evidence of impact and progress, resulting in a number of judgements and recommendations for future partnership activity.

This report builds on the findings and observations presented in the Interim Evaluation Report shared with the NESWA Evaluation Subcommittee in September 2017.

The existence of NESWA has created an opportunity for partners to share expertise and approaches to challenges, streamline processes and policies, to better understand and support each other, and to develop and share resources. There has been a belief that increased cooperation will result in enhanced quality of education, learning and experiences for future social workers alongside the opportunities for growth and development of practitioners to engage with supporting learners and to build a quality workforce for the future. This evaluation report will assess how successful the first phase of the NESWA programme has been in working towards these goals.

1.1 Background to the Teaching Partnerships

In December 2008, Ministers announced the formation of the Social Work Task Force to help improve recruitment, training, and the overall quality and status of the profession in England, to be chaired by Moira Gibb.

In July 2009, the Task Force published its interim report with 15 recommendations for improving and reforming social work.

A key part of the recommendations involved a reformed system of initial education and training, increasing the number of confident, competent professionals coming into the workforce.

The Final report of the Social Work Task Force suggested that a reformed system of education and training should

- begin with clear, consistent criteria for entry to social work courses – with a new regime for testing and interviewing candidates that balances academic and personal skills – so that all students are of a high calibre
- provide courses where the content, teaching, placement opportunities and assessment are of a high standard across all providers – we are, for instance, proposing advanced teaching organization status for agencies providing high quality practice placements to social work students
- culminate in a new supported and assessed first year in employment, which would act as the final stage in becoming a full, practicing social worker

(Building a safe and Confident Future, November 2009)

The Task Force also suggested that the system for educating social workers will be strengthened by more transparent and effective regulation and by stronger local partnerships between universities and employers. This should give greater assurance of quality, consistency and supply.

The issue raised by the Task Force about a mismatch between employer and educator expectations is probably the area on which there is the greatest amount of research evidence. This reflects longstanding debates about whether the purpose of social work education is to prepare students to work in regulated social work settings ('fitness for purpose') or if there is a wider repertoire of transferable skills and understanding that social work graduates will need to work in a rapidly changing policy and service environment.

(King's College, London 2011¹)

The Social Work Reform Board was set up in 2010 to work with the government to take forward the recommendations of the Social Work Task Force. The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) reforms for social work education, based on the Professional Capabilities Framework, were passed to The College of Social Work for further development and implementation in October 2011. They included new arrangements for admissions and selection, a new degree framework and new arrangements for securing sufficient high-quality placements. The final guidance and resources were agreed by the Transitional Professional Assembly of The College on 19 April 2012.

In 2013, the Minister of State, Norman Lamb MP invited Professor David Croisdale-Appleby to undertake an Independent Review of Social Work Education following the recommendations of the Social Work Task Force and the progression by the Social Work Reform Board.

Professor Appleby's report suggested that the task for social work education is to equip practitioners with the theoretical knowledge and practical capability to do high quality work which is characterised in this way. It requires education in which both *theory-informing-practice* and *practice-informing-theory* are inexorably linked. Such considerations as these have led me to conclude that the outcomes of social work education need to be expressed in a new way which reflects this thinking, namely:

¹ Moriarty J., (2011) Literature Review for the Curriculum Development Workstream, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, Kings College London

- (1) the social worker as a practitioner**, with the ability to exhibit resilience under conditions of high pressure; able to communicate with the service receiver and carer; to diagnose and understand the situation and assess the risks involved; determine priorities in allocating limited resources; decide appropriate courses of action and manage that process; and communicate effectively with professional colleagues who can contribute to those processes.
- (2) the social worker as a professional**, understanding and applying to their practice the appropriate ethical and legal principles associated with working with a wide range of disadvantaged and vulnerable people; engaging in reflective practice; learning from and teaching other social workers; learning to work effectively with and contribute to other professions and disciplines; protecting and safeguarding those who receive social work services; improving the quality of their care and support; empowering them and increasing their independence.
- (3) the social worker as a social scientist**, able to understand and apply to their social work practice, the relevant principles, methods and knowledge of social work; seeking to further the understanding of social work through evidence gathering and through research.

(Revisioning Social Work Education, February 2014)

As a result of this review the government developed a programme to improve the quality of education received by social work students, including through clarifying and strengthening provision of statutory placements for more students and increased employer involvement in student selection. This programme is the Social Work Teaching Partnership (SWTP) and the aims are:

- enhance partnership arrangements between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employers;
- attract more able students;
- embed the knowledge and skills (KSS) into academic curricula and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for existing workers;
- raise the overall quality of social work practice.

The policy paper *Children's Social Care Reform: A Vision for Change* published by the DfE in January 2016 set out a vision:

“By 2020, we need to ensure that every local children’s social care service across this country has a workforce – on the front line, in leadership positions and in between – with the knowledge and skill to do this highly challenging work. This needs to be verified through robust assessment and accreditation. The social work qualification must have credibility and mean professionals are equipped to work with the highest levels of social

complexity, dealing with the highest levels of risk, and striving for the highest standards of practice excellence” King’s College, ibid

The Government in its response to the House of Commons Education Committee inquiry report stated that

“Teaching Partnerships continue to be part of the Government’s broader strategy to strengthen the quality of practice learning, not only among students but also among practising social workers. Expansion of teaching partnerships will support improving more widely the quantity and quality of practice placements, CPD for practitioners and good quality”

The pilot phase of the Teaching Partnership Programme featured four TPs across England, and notification of funding was issued in June 2015. The NESWA TP was in the subsequent wave with funding confirmed in November 2016.

1.2 NESWA Background

The teaching partnership plan was presented in a document submitted to the Department for Education in May 2016. It should be noted that some of the key members of the bid team left the region between writing and winning the bid, and the priorities and workforce challenges of partners changed both before and during the period of the evaluation.

The proposed work plan is impressive in breadth and depth and includes work that involves a change of attitude and approach amongst partners, managing competition for students and employees and the cooperation needed for such programmes. This kind of work is usually takes significant time.

The confirmation that this was a successful bid did not follow the original timetable, meaning NESWAs ambitious two-year programme had to be tackled in fifteen months. This pressure has also influenced the resource allocation process, with task and finish groups being identified and funded before the project team was in place. This was so that the project could begin to make progress; however, this influenced the outputs and value of some of the task and finish groups.

There are evident tensions between HEI and LA attitudes and their ability to introduce change. Both LAs and HEIs are very complex and large organisations with many different roles and priorities, both exist in a world of policy change and financial constraint, and in both types of organisation social worker education is a small part of what they do.

1.3 Partnership Structure

Four percent of the UK - over 2.6 million people - live in the North East of England. The region has relatively high unemployment, with 69,000 unemployed people; this is 5.3% of the economically active population compared to the national average of 4.4%. The

proportion of higher qualifications (NVQ level 4 and above equivalents) is lower and the rate of unskilled employment is higher in the North East than the UK as a whole.

Almost 15% of the area's employed people, 179,000 individuals, work in the broad category of 'Human Health and Social Work Activity'; this is more than the national average or 12.4%. Skills for Care estimate the Social Care sector in the North East employs 74,000 people, with 3,700 regulated professionals².

This partnership is large and complex, involving all twelve local authorities and six providers of social work higher education in the North East. Covering all HEIs and LAs in the entire North East of England, NESWA has more partners than any of the other teaching partnerships. Informal discussions at Teaching Partnership project manager meetings also suggest the NESWA has one of the smallest budgets.

Darlington Borough Council	Durham County Council
Durham University	Gateshead Council
Hartlepool Borough Council	Middlesbrough Borough Council
Newcastle City Council	New College Durham
North Tyneside Council	Northumberland County Council
Northumbria University	The Open University
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	South Tyneside Council
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council	Sunderland City Council (Adult services)
Sunderland City Council (Together for Children)	Teesside University
University of Sunderland	

Figure 2 - The 18 partners making up the NESWA Teaching Partnership

A partnership of this size presents many challenges and such a complex programme needs management; NESWA has a team of 2.4 full time equivalent staff comprising a full-time project manager, a full-time project administrator and a part-time Placement Co-ordinator. It is clearly the case, evidenced by the documentation produced by this team and analysed here, and the spontaneous comments of the partners during interviews, that this team have had a fundamental effect on the programme. Without them, it seems unlikely that significant progress could have been made. This raises questions about sustainability once these posts are no longer funded, which are discussed below.

The structure of the partnership was established in the bid document written in spring 2016 and has been followed throughout phase one. It consists of a Strategic Group, an Executive Group, and committees for each element of the work programme, Admissions, Programme,

² <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/NMDS-SC-intelligence/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Workforceestimates.aspx>, accessed April 2018

Placement and Progression. The structure has been followed in this evaluation, though there are many instances of crossover between committees. One notable success of the NESWA project team has been ensuring that communication exists between each committee. The team has also been able to ensure that NESWA's overall objectives are aligned across the committees, that there is effective joint working and active sharing of information. This is a vital role, particularly since many of the overall objectives have significant overlap between committees.

There have been subgroups to each committee, and together with the project team these have all led significant elements of work in order to try and tackle the ambitious work programme.

The committees are well-attended by members who are not funded by NESWA but supported by their own organisations. The travel and time demands made on those attending committees are significant and a key challenge has been in convening meetings which are geographically convenient for all partners who have busy roles to fulfil within their own organisations.

1.4 The NESWA Implementation Plan

The approved bid for developing NESWA during 2017 and up to April 2018 features an ambitious, complex and wide-ranging plan. Given that almost all members of the partnership have key roles in their own organisations, the additional workload has been very demanding for members, and this has impacted on the extent of each target being implemented. This has required each committee to prioritise their targets whilst controlling the "project creep" which can arise out of innovative and creative thinking.

There is evidence that additional issues have been identified as each group addressed the work plan and unravelled the complexity surrounding each objective. This is significant progress for the partnership which has also resulted in the expansion of the agenda in many areas. For example, when looking at entry criteria the admissions committee realised that they need to look also at post-graduate entry requirements, which uncovered issues and inconsistencies around currency of first degrees and requirements for evidence of study skills for these students.

1.5 The Approach to this Evaluation

The Bucks New University evaluation team is made up of two experienced researchers and two social work academics. The team principal was John Bateson, leading engagement with the NESWA Project Manager and other key members of the network. Each member of the evaluation team focussed on one area of the partnership activity (Admissions, Programme, Placement, and Progression). All members of the evaluation team visited the region on at least one occasion and utilised desk research and review of papers along with telephone and email communication to obtain and track evidence and summarise progress made in each area of the partnership activity.

An initial phase of information gathering and familiarisation with the structures of the partnership was followed by a period of primary research in which the evaluation interviewed a sample of partnership members, gathering information about the expectations and ambitions of the partnership, and this forms the basis of Section 2.

The information and evidence to track and assess progress has been drawn from the documentation generated by committees and individuals such as the committee meeting minutes, and the documents and reports that have been compiled as the year has progressed.

Much of the evidence gathered is qualitative, drawn from a range of sources including face to face meetings, committee meetings, attendance at the Strategic Group, telephone interviews, an online survey with HEIs, three student focus groups, documents, reports and minutes of each committee meeting. There is limited quantitative data to draw on, and this report includes recommendations on data for future collection where appropriate.

2. Aspirations of NESWA Partners

At the start of the evaluation process, the team undertook a series of structured telephone interviews with a wide selection of partners. The primary purpose of these discussions was to try and understand the goals of partners, and to judge if they were clear and commonly-held. Each interviewee was asked to consider numerical measures that might be used to indicate success, since the original bid did not contain many direct measures that were likely to be affected during the lifetime of the project.

The findings from these interviews were circulated to every committee member in NESWA. The timing of this element of the evaluation coincided with the summer holidays making it difficult for some partners to respond during the six-week period. In total twelve additional responses were received which have been incorporated into these findings.

The findings have five themes:

- What are the biggest issues facing social work?
- What do you hope to achieve as part of the NESWA Teaching Partnership?
- What are the specific actions and outcomes you hope to see?
- What would you like to measure to help demonstrate success?
- What are the biggest challenges for the Teaching Partnership?

The specific actions and outcomes have been integrated into the project specific sections of this report, but the issues facing social work and the hopes of partners are presented below.

2.1 What Are the Biggest Issues Facing Social Work?

There was a large amount of agreement on the main issues. Most responses identified that partners need to work together to provide and retain a workforce that is competent and capable, underpinned by core values, knowledge and skills.

Some differences were seen. Often these seemed to occur because some respondents chose to focus on current or near-term issues, such as the current shortage of experienced social workers (figure 3), and others concentrated on a slightly longer timeframe, for example the image of social work in society at large (figure 4).

Current Issues for Social Work include:

- Shortage of **experienced** Social Workers affecting skill mix, retention, and staff development pathways (CPD).
- Difficulty in supporting placements due to capacity issues
- Social worker “burn-out” related to capacity and associated pressures.
- Unwarranted variations in assessment and registration practice
- Need for stronger partnerships between academic and service provision.
- A confusing landscape within education and training, with many current initiative - Frontline, Think Ahead, Step Up, undergraduate, postgraduate, apprenticeships.

Figure 3 - Current issues facing social work

Fundamental Structural Issues facing Social Work:

- Current social issues faced in society, for example poverty and deprivation, and continuing changes in policy (the Children and Social Work Act and the move from Health and Care Professions Council to Social Work England).
- Reduced funding for services and specifically the task of continuing to adopt a person centred/child focused approach in the current climate of cost cutting and services/resources not being available.
- The current image of social work, and public understanding of the role, for example when social workers are identified as the primary failings in a child protection case, and the issues this causes for recruitment and retention.
- Presenting a positive image of the profession, concentrating on what social workers actually do.
- The challenging economic climate for local authorities may limit the development opportunities for existing social workers.
- Current approaches could lead to difficulties in maintaining diversity in the profession. For example, fast-track courses start don't appear to attract a wide range of individuals.
- The introduction of market-based approaches into elements of social work. For example, the role of increased competition in recruitment where new graduates are judged against more experienced candidates with a different background.

Figure 4 - Some of the structural issues facing social work

2.2 What Do You Hope to Achieve as Part of NESWA?

Respondents were generally very enthusiastic about the Teaching Partnership, feeling that it has the potential to make lasting improvements and enhance working relationships. Some chose to present this development as a chance to maintain (rather than build) strong existing networks.

Responses acknowledged the value of the opportunity to share experience and skills, the benefits of working together. Key issues were around education, training and CPD (figure 5) and building the profession (figure 6).

Education and Training ambitions include:

- The Teaching Partnership is about both pre-registration programmes and in-practice support.
- Working together to produce “Practice ready graduates” (job ready); employer influence over programmes – i.e. to better describe what employers need.
- Greater correlation between learning in HEI and practice, for example lecturers with more practice experience.
- Joined-up training – e.g. better integration in the interview processes, multiagency approach to placements.
- Better training for less experienced social workers in practice.
- Parity of experience for all candidates.
- Consistency in training.
- Better quality placements.
- Better recruitment practices.

Figure 5 - Education, Training and CPD aspirations for NESWA

To help build the profession:

- Sharing good practice, learning from each other, understanding, working together and progress for Social Work education.
- Present a collective voice for Social Work in the North East, HEIs and LAs working together – e.g. regional recruitment.
- Selling the NE; for recruitment and to build morale in current staff.
- Growing number and recognition of specialist in Social Work disciplines.
- Streamline some of the meetings through a joint approach to better use sector resources.
- Recognition of excellence in the region.
- Bringing evidence-based clarity to actions, e.g. recruitment practices.
- There was some disagreement amongst partners about how much could be learned from other approaches such as the fast-track programmes, with some arguing that successes in this area could illuminate the Teaching Partnership with others feeling that the differences in the target body means the lessons are limited.

Figure 6 - Building the profession aspirations for NESWA

3. Project Implementation

The project implementation was carefully considered when the bid was assembled in 2016 and at the start of the project, resulting in a clear and well-structured senior Strategic Group, and a project implementation team of 2.4 whole time equivalents. The expected relationship between the Strategic Group and the individual committees was management and oversight, shown in figure 7.



Figure 7 - Relationship of the Steering Group to the committees in the original bid and throughout phase 1

Senior leadership for NESWA was ensured through a director, Ewen Weir (Director for People at Newcastle City Council), chairing both the Steering and Executive groups. NESWA's work was additionally placed centrally in the North East by the lead local authority, Durham County Council, overseeing the bid process and then hosting the project team.

The committees map to the student and early career journey that is the focus of the NESWA partnership as shown in figure 8.

The NESWA pathway	Student selection	Prequalification Study	Post qualification and career
The committees	Admissions Committee	Placement & Programme Committees	Progression Committee
University Input (examples)	Attract and recruit suitable candidates	Design and deliver programme (to reflect KSS. Organise and support placements	Critical Friend and learning opportunities for practitioners
Local Authority Input (examples)	Support recruitment and selection (joint selection)	Organise and support placements. Support PEs	CPD support, progression pathways

Figure 8 - The link between the NESWA areas of interest and the four main committees

In practice, an Executive Group of Chairs and the project team was also established alongside the Strategic Group and convened between the Strategic Group meetings.

The bid document laid out specific goals for the Strategic Group:

- Appoint Project Manager, Placement Coordinator and Project Administrator
- [Ensure sound] governance arrangements
- Monitor and report and allocate resources
- Commission an evaluation framework

The specific **challenges** and questions identified in the initial consultation phase were:

- Are NESWA teams and committees are trying to improve existing systems or develop entirely new systems?
- New systems are particularly difficult to achieve, and might not be realistic given time, cash and infrastructure constraints. One partner said in an interview that it would be '*easier to achieve Brexit*' than deliver the whole plan.
- Should the committees concern themselves with the processes or the outcomes? "*It's been agreed [by the committee], they've just got to go away and do it*".

This section will consider the progress of the overarching groups (the Steering and Executive Groups) and through those the work of the project implementation team appointed and overseen by these groups.

3.1 Meetings

The Executive Group met twice (19 July 17 and 27 October 17) and the Strategic Group met four times (12 May 17, 15 September 17, 8 December 17, 5 March 18).

The meetings were generally well attended, with a core, consisting of the chair, the vice chair, the project management team, a committee chair and a senior member of a local council attending almost every meeting. Some organizations were able to ensure representation even if it was not the same person each time. Across the four Strategic Groups 54 attendances were registered, which suggests these were felt to be important meetings. Four organisations were not able to attend any Strategic Group or Executive Group: Darlington Borough Council; Durham University; Sunderland City Council, Together for Children.

An additional series of meetings that fall within project implementation are those which have aimed to widen understanding of the teaching partnership. There have been two meetings with a much wider audience; the first was the Development Day at New College Durham on 14 July 2017 and the second was the Development Day on 1 November 2017. A further large-scale event, this time focusing on Practice Educators, was scheduled for 2 March 2018, but was cancelled due to harsh winter weather and rescheduled for 18 June 2018 (in NESWA's second phase).

There have also been three meetings of an evaluation subgroup acting on behalf of the Strategic Group to liaise with the independent evaluation team.

3.2 Progress

a. Appoint the Project Implementation Team

Appointment of a project implementation team was a key priority for the Strategic Group and a Project Manager, Placement Co-ordinator and Project Administrator were all appointed during the first months of the programme. The Project Manager started in early May 2017 and the Placement Coordinator and Project Administrator at the end of April 2017.

This team, with a full-time project manager and administrator and a part time placement coordinator has been key to the ongoing progress of the NESWA project. It can be seen in meeting minutes and subsequent actions dating from after the project team appointments; there is clear evidence of actions taken away and pursued by a dedicated team between meetings. Progress becomes clear from the appointment of this team.

The impact of a dedicated part-time staff member can be seen in the large amount of project work undertaken in the placement strand (see Section 6). This work includes a variety of pilots aimed to test the approaches and create momentum, facilitated by the project team.

The larger events to broaden the understanding of the NESWA programme would not have happened without the project team.

b. Ensure Sound Governance Arrangements

The Strategic Group received formal feedback from each of the four committees (Admissions, Placement, Programme and Progression), usually delivered by the chairperson. There are examples of the Strategic Group and the Executive Group supporting these chairs and taking action at a senior level to help address blockages. This includes for example encouraging responses to the workforce survey from local authorities and discussing entry requirements for degree courses with HEIs.

Basic but essential project management tools were quickly introduced by the project team, for example a clear dashboard for the implementation plan which allowed the monitoring the allocations (funded task and finish groups) and instituted a traffic-light system for progress. This ensured a transparency and a clarity about the proposed actions which undoubtedly helped the Strategic Group keep track of this complex programme.

The Strategic Group identified a number of governance issues that they wished to prioritise prior to the project implementation team starting, including for example the signing of the Partnership Agreement, a memorandum of understanding for all partners in the Teaching Partnership, which would form the basis of the governance arrangements. This was not a straightforward process, and partners needed to work through their internal approval processes to ensure the Partnership Agreement was signed by the appropriate person. The initial bid document had been signed by all but one partner, but this did not mean automatic assent to the Partnership Agreement. Collecting all the signed Partnership Agreements took until December 2017.

c. Monitor and Report and Allocate Resources

Resource allocation was managed by the Strategic Group and was based on the initial bid and the best available understanding of how much resource should be allocated to individual task and finish projects.

The Strategic Group clearly felt a sense of urgency deriving from a delay in funding announcement and the consequent late start, meaning the ambitious two-year plan had to be delivered in 15 months:

*“There is potential scope to agree adjustments to proposed timescales.
However, adjustments must not require funding after March 2018.”
Strategic Group Minutes, 12/5/17*

The Strategic Group remained committed to keeping the project on schedule, and this meant conducting the resource allocation process prior to the start dates of the project implementation team. This was necessary to allow delivery work to begin, however later it proved quite difficult to understand the basis of the allocation. What was expected for the

money had not been sufficiently clarified, and this did cause later difficulties for the project team, Strategic Group and individual committees.

However, the early allocation was an understandable and strategically sound decision, and the process was open. Partners were all asked to express an interest through the lead contact involved in NESWA.

The financial allocations were sensible. The largest allowance was for the development of a postgraduate programme (MA in Management and Leadership), which in the end was not pursued and the associated money never claimed from the DfE (see Section 5). Another large allocation was for the evaluation, which at 14% of the overall budget is in line with good practice for complex pilot project evaluations.

The finances for the programme were under some pressure at various times in the first phase, since the bid did not make allowances for costs such as venue hire and travel costs for the core team and partners (minutes, 15/9/17). NESWA made cost savings in some areas and have managed to deliver the programme outcomes discussed in this document within the financial allocation.

NESWA's bid gave thought to future sustainability and any funding precedent established in the first phase, and therefore chose not to fund or backfill the time of partners attending meetings. This means that the contribution of partners represents a further, quite significant, contribution from the region to the development of this teaching partnership. Figure 9 illustrates meeting attendance at major meetings. There were also other meetings, groups and partnership activities, along with the contribution of meeting spaces that are not included.

Meeting	Number of meetings	Total in person attendees*
Admissions Committee	8	79
Away days	2	100
Executive and Strategic Group	6	55
Placement Committee	9	100
Programme Committee	12	120
Progression Committee	8	66
Totals	45	520
* excluding funded team members		

Figure 9 - Partner organisations in attending NESWA meetings

d. Commission an Evaluation Framework

The Institute of Vocational Learning and Workforce Research at Bucks New University was appointed through an open tendering process through the procurement portal. As noted above, the funding agreed for this process was appropriate for a programme of this size and complexity, and the start date of mid-April 2017 was early in the project. This was helpful, and meant that the evaluators were able to produce a baseline qualitative document based on extensive interviews with the partners during these early stages of the process.

e. NESWA Website

The website was managed by the Progression Committee (see section 7) but is considered here as since it so clearly relates to the overall project implementation and some of the key issues such as the communication strategy.

The identified objective for the website is the

Development of a North East Social Work Alliance Website (to provide information about the Alliance, social work education and social work initiatives e.g. Assessment and Accreditation, CPD Framework). To be updated on a regular basis. To include initial design - amendments as new initiatives are embedded (including Assessment and Accreditation, CPD framework etc) and to be updated on a regular basis

The rationale for the website is that a single point of entry for NESWA will help encourage regional cohesion and support many of the underlying aims of the programme to streamline and regularise processes and procedures. The single portal also offers opportunities to attract potential students and experienced staff to the region, and to support existing staff through clarification of the CPD offer and possibilities to develop share good practice.

North Tyneside Council's web development team is developing the NESWA website, and they were allocated funding in the open process described above. The website went live in September 2017. The lead in time between commission in April and the first public-facing version allowed time for partners to provide content and links, however there was significant missing content, a situation that continues today and is discussed below.

The NESWA ambition for the website is greater than the current website (October 2017). Later meetings also explored the possibility of using the website as a central portal for existing staff and academics to discuss practice, keep CPD records and access opportunities (for example, chances to contribute to academic programmes or practice study days). This also needs further functionality.

The website, though managed through the progression committee, is of wide interest across the network, and was the subject of much interest at the first NESWA development day.

NESWA spans the entire region and creates a large and complex new alliance. The existence of a website is an important focal point for this endeavour, allowing partners to identify the project, partners and the ambition.

The current website (March 2018)

The website is clear and attractive, has a simple vision statement for NESWA on the front page: *strengthening good practice by building strong partnerships*. Accessibility options (colours, fonts etc) are easy to find and work well, and the site performs well on mobile phones and other platforms.

It is well positioned on search engines: United Kingdom-specific searches for “NESWA” return the teaching partnership as the first hit (www.google.co.uk, bing.com, duckduckgo.com, accessed 21/3/18).

There are sections for practice educators, training, jobs, events and service user and carer involvement. The events section features a helpful and current overview calendar. All sections have content, but they are not currently very active and function as illustrations of what could work on the website. There is interesting and useful content, and some of it is relevant and has a regional flavour. The practice educator webpage (figure 10) is a good example, featuring some useful national resources in a single place, and with some links to current regional training opportunities.

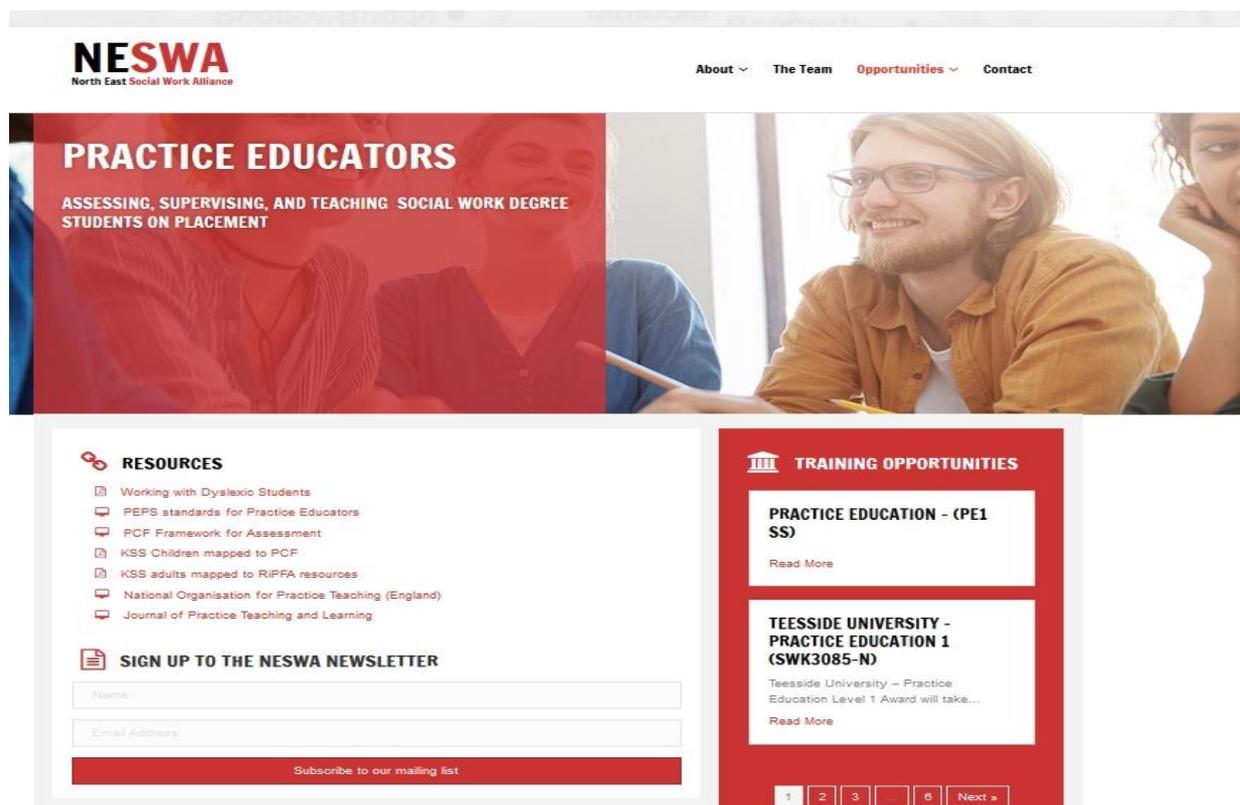


Figure 10 - A screengrab of the practice educator section of the website

The engagement with the website from partners, judged by the amount of content that has been developed and uploaded, is quite low. There are many reasons that may have little to do with the website itself, for example, perhaps some people

“don't tend to use websites all... because you know people tend to use social media or whatever” (team member interview, March 18)

The news articles on the website are mirrored to twitter, and this gives some indication of the current level of engagement. The 31 tweets since September 2017 have attracted 21 followers, and only a few of the postings were favoured or retweeted – this is a low level of engagement. The followers do include student social workers and current social workers however, which may indicate there is an appetite for this service amongst key target groups if an is made to actively promote the twitter account and post engaging content. Added to this, it is thought that there is significant social media use in the network:

[we should] try and garner some interest - lot of people in the sector who blog and tweet... divert some effort into NESWA to make it a much more engaging site. (Committee member interview, March 18)

As it stands, the website is not well used, but it remains a potentially useful tool:

it's not yet functioning quite as much as want it to but if we can put some real effort and energy into it over the next 12 months we will have a resource that ..can continue support us in the North East. (Committee member interview, March 18)

f. Communication

The communication strategy was not fully considered in the initial bid and has been developed at the programme progresses. The primary routes for communication have been the committees and the Development Days.

The lack of a well-developed communication strategy for those who are not already involved in the partnership is understandable in the early phases when the achievements are mainly functional (setting up committees, for example) and of limited interest to the wider workforce in HEIs and LAs, students and service users.

However, NESWA is beginning to make an impact, test interesting approaches, and demonstrate partnership working. These elements are likely to be interesting to a wider audience and are worth celebrating.

There are currently limited routes for communicating NESWA issues and achievements, and the most obvious one, the website, is not well used for this purpose at present.

g. Staff, Student and Service User Involvement.

Progress has been made on involving staff, students and service users, and is discussed within the programme sections below.

Student engagement has been limited to gathering their opinions and working towards better understanding their satisfaction. The focus groups held during this first year suggest that students and ASYE social workers are unlikely to want to take a role in strategy for NESWA.

There has been no representation from the PVI sector, and limited engagement with the service users in the overall programme implementation, though the processes of user involvement in specific elements have begun to be addressed in admissions and placement (see Sections 4 and 6).

h. Integration with Other Programmes of Work and Strategy Groups.

NESWA has many partners and spans an entire region. The impressive ambition is to include all local authorities and universities in the North East, and that alliance has held together throughout phase 1.

There are many other forums that consider issues which are similar or overlap with NESWA's, such as local workforce planning groups, and other programmes that are addressing similar concerns, such as the various other routes into social work like Frontline that are outside this programme. The potential for clashing and duplication of work has been mitigated because the members of the Strategic Group and other committees are usually senior and well-connected members of the social work communities and have deep understanding of local planning activities.

In one case this has been formalised in a different way, and the NESWA Project Manager has been invited to join the two regional workforce planning groups, as well as the PSW Network and SWENE. This seems a positive move and recognition of the growing maturity of NESWA.

3.3 Summary

The Strategic Groups has succeeded in establishing the NESWA programme, steering it in the right direction, and maintaining focus on programme delivery. Attendance at meetings has been quite good, largely ensuring representation from all partners.

The project implementation team (Project Manager, Administrator and Placement Coordinator) appointments were made quickly and successfully, and the existence of this team guided by the Strategic Group and Executive Group has been fundamental to the overall progress and monitoring of the NESWA programme of work.

Communication methods have been fit for purpose during phase one and wider involvement in the programme, whilst a work in progress, has begun.

On a small number of occasions, these groups have, through the chair, been willing to use alternative avenues, such as director-level meetings or letters to senior colleagues, to help address blockages.

Both the Executive Group and the Steering Group have given thought to project sustainability throughout the first year, thinking through what might happen if one or more partners decide to leave the partnership, and also what value NESWA brings to the region and how that might be demonstrated.

3.4 Recommendations

The Strategic Group has helped maintain overall focus, partner commitment and with some troubleshooting. The same or similar group should be maintained in phase 2.

Coming into phase 2, the communication strategy should be further developed, particularly to begin to share more widely the successes and demonstrate value to the sector. There is only one further year of external funding, so the existing communication needs to be developed in order to help decision makers who are not closely involved understand what NESWA offers. The website should be considered as a way of promoting the partnership's successes.

The website is an important element of the NESWA programme of work, but it does not yet meet the expectations of partners. Entering phase 2 is a good point to reflect on the purpose of the website. It would benefit from a critical appraisal that involves certain business planning elements: 1. Understanding the audience or target market. 2. A market analysis which looks at all the proposed or possible elements that the website could offer and considers where these needs are currently met and appraises the added value and likelihood of successful adoption by the target market 3. An options appraisal that considers having no website, a largely static website, and various options around an engaging and dynamic website.

Some key stakeholders have not been well represented at a programme level during the initial phase. Involving service users, students and the PVI sector should be further explored in the next phase so that their views can play a more central role in NESWA decisions.

4. Admissions

Aim: To examine the “student journey” through the selection and admissions process to bring in line standard admission processes, criteria and consistency relating to the suitability of students across all institutions within the region (Admissions Committee Meeting minutes 15/2/17).

This element was taken forward by the Admissions Committee under the chairmanship of Claire Morris (South Tyneside Local Authority). Members of the committee refined the aim as identifying the characteristics of a good Social Worker and working towards streamlined training and “more work prepared” social work graduates entering employment.

In addition to the identified objectives and work streams discussed below, there has been interest in developing a collaborative approach to promoting Social Work as a career, and there is a desire to work together to raise awareness of the degree route and career amongst the workforce of the future.

The specific **achievements** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section Three) were

- Providers and employers working together to support the admissions process
- Whilst acknowledging differences and strengths between institutions, work towards standardising admission processes and expectations.
- Website that helps recruit undergraduates
- One respondent reported the need for consistency in assessment of DBS outcomes as there has been variation in judgments made by HEI and employers

Figure 12 - Potential achievements for the Admissions Committee

The specific **measurements of success** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section 2) were

- Tracking admissions data over time.
- Increased consistency by identifying similarities in admissions processes. (More openness about this element may be a measure in itself.)
- Noticeable/measurable difference in the applicants (feedback from Social Workers who are part of panel)

Recruitment

- Website analytics – number of hits etc. Surveys on the site. Triangulate with other recruitment processes (e.g. ‘where did you hear about Social Work in the NE?’)
- Improved knowledge around what happens to graduates; where do Social Work graduates go? Early career Social Workers?
- Improve information about recruitment
- Numbers of students who have had placements going on to take jobs with NE LAs.

Figure 11 - Admission Committee measurements of success

4.1 Meetings

The Admissions Committee has representatives from each of the six HEI and twelve Local Authorities. Meetings have been convened between February 2017 and February 2018 with between 8 and 13 attendees. One member organisation has not been represented at any of the meetings to date (Gateshead Council). Some have only attended one occasion (Sunderland City Council Durham University and Middlesbrough Council).

Issues affecting attendance at meetings have been identified as pressures of other work responsibilities (“the day job”), alongside the demands of the partnership. Travel was identified as a major influence on attendance, the geographical size of the TP area, and a sense of a North/South divide, alongside some resistance from employers to paying travel expenses for meetings. This was addressed by convening a conference call instead of the December 2017 meeting, but there were still only ten participants.

The NESWA Implementation Plan identified five funded project groups a range of elements of the plan, coordinated and managed by Northumbria University. The task and finish groups have reported back to the Admissions Committee both verbally and with written updates and reports.

4.2 Progress

The key issues identified and discussed by the Admissions Committee are considered below.

a. Standardised Entry Requirements

The identified objective is to:

“Agree arrangements for the start of the 17/18 AY, that all students within the TP area will be required to meet a higher requirement of a 2:1 for postgraduate entry and 300 UCAS points for entry onto an undergraduate programme” (Ref: NESWA TP Implementation Plan Core Area 2)

The rationale is described as “a driver to ensure quality across all programmes”, and a way to “ensure a good calibre of students with the right skills”

It should be noted that discussions and documentation have referred to both the old UCAS tariff value of 300 points, and the new tariff which is 120 points for September 2017.

The DfE entry criteria requirement on all Teaching Partnerships was discussed at the December 2017 meeting of the committee and it was recognised by members of the committee that some applicants without this benchmark and with significant appropriate experience can be considered under the WP exceptional practice criteria (see e, f and g below).

Undergraduate admissions

The Open University have a nationwide standard baseline entry requirement for degrees of GCSE A*-C in English and Maths, plus 96 UCAS points, and 2:2 for master's level study.

These students are following the programme through an employer supported route and do not align directly with the agreed criteria. This was agreed at the Admissions Committee meeting in April (Minutes 6/4/17 item 7)

A review of published entry criteria from the remaining HEI websites was completed in September 2017 (desktop search). All six institutions stated an expectation for GCSE English Language and Maths at C grade, plus UCAS points. The range of UCAS points required was 96 to 128, and all institutions stated that they would accept a "certified equivalent". At this time, two institutions advertised an entry requirement less than 120 (Teesside and New College Durham).

This search was repeated in January 2018, at which point the New College Durham website refers to the OU criteria and Teesside still publish 112-128³. The assessment of the success and impact of this element of the partnership work will only be possible using retrospective data showing entry profile of students both before and after this policy agreement.

Postgraduate admissions

A desktop review of published entry criteria (September 2017 referred to above) identified four HEIs offering master's level study in addition to the Open University (see above). The advertised entry requirement for Durham was published as an Upper Second-class Honours degree (2:1); for Sunderland as a 2:2 with "*a relevant postgraduate qualification*"; Teesside as an Honours degree (normally at least 2.1) and Northumbria as a second-class Honours degree in a relevant subject.

This review was repeated in January 2018 and identified similar parameters for all Universities (although Sunderland now state significant experience requirements to support an application with 2:2). These published guidelines do not yet align with the agreed baseline of 2.1.

This baseline has been agreed but some institutions are advertising requirements below the benchmark. Retrospective data analysis in 2019 will assist in monitoring the profile of students recruited onto programmes in order to assess the level of compliance with the agreement. This should be gathered as part of phase 2 of NESWA.

³ This has been discussed by the partnership, for example at the March strategy group, and it is suggested that this is a discrepancy due to slowly updating websites. Nonetheless, this was the situation when we remeasured for the evaluation.

b. Regional Assessment Centre

The identified objective is the “Development of a co-owned regional assessment centre model” (Ref: NESWA TP Implementation Plan Core Area 2)

The initial objective was that all applicants undergo the same assessment centre experience (such as that used by Frontline and Step-Up) which is co-owned and delivered by HEIs and LAs as a partnership.

After a period of preliminary consultation, research and discussion, the Admissions Committee agreed to proceed with a streamlined regional assessment process rather than developing assessment centres. This decision was taken because it was felt that an assessment centre was not viable as it would compromise the individuality of HEI’s. A project group was convened and led by Northumbria University to standardise and develop assessment protocols and tools. (Admissions Committee Minutes 6/4/17 item 7)

The task and finish group examined the current assessment methodologies and processes, focussing on instruments, tests and tools used to assess readiness to start social work training, and reported in January 2018. (Admissions Interim Report for NESWA November 2017)

The initial findings included evidence that service users, carers and social workers are involved in the selection process for HEIs and that there were potential improvements to the process and its application. Consideration was also given to the aspiration of developing a centralised assessment centre and protocols. After consultation, it was agreed that this was not appropriate, so a set of guiding principles was developed alongside a bank of assessment tools for the region which would contribute to consistency across institutions but still allow variation to fit the character and requirements of each HEI. The assessment tools comprise of a bank of interview questions, written tests and a standardised format for group interviews.

The involvement of service users, carers and other professionals was also examined. The group concluded that their involvement is crucial in the selection process. One suggestion from the consultation was to develop a central register of institutions and people who participate in the recruitment and selection process to ensure that work is shared equally. This work is now called the Strong Practitioners list and is discussed below at section 5.2 c.

By October 2017, the group had agreed that there will be some standardised practice across all the HEI involved in admissions onto Social Work courses in the region (figure 13).

NESWA Standardised Student Recruitment

- There will be three components to the assessment: a group discussion, an individual interview, and a written test.
- There should be service user involvement in at least one but preferably both of the discussion and interview for each applicant.
- There needs to be professional involvement (i.e. Social Worker involvement) in at least one but preferably both of the discussion and interview for each applicant. Commitment from all the Local Authorities to support their staff in this involvement will be needed.
- The group discussion will be conducted first, so that a follow up question can be asked in the individual interview. This will enable students who struggled in the group discussion to reflect on this and talk about how they could improve their group involvement in future.
- The individual interview has a higher possible score than the group discussion. This is deliberate in order to ensure greater weighting is given to the individual interview performance.
- The group discussion and individual interview scores will be combined to provide an overall score, and it is this combined score that will be considered when deciding which applicants should be offered places. Some consideration needs to be made about minimum scores for acceptance given HEI admissions policy and procedure, and targets.
- The score from the written test will be considered separately from the combined interviews score, and there will be a pass/fail cut off score for written test performance. In order to reach an overall pass mark the candidate must score at least 10 (out of 20).
- All HEIs will use the same, standardised, assessment forms and scoring criteria / system for the group discussions, individual interviews and written tests.
- A minimum overall score of 50% must be achieved for consideration for selection.
- The source materials used in the group discussions and written tests will not be standardised, allowing each HEI flexibility and choice over what to use. Some example source materials are included (see appendices B and C) and these can be used by HEIs if desired. If using the source materials provided, the HEI must let the other HEIs know, so that duplication (i.e. multiple HEIs using the same materials in the same or consecutive recruitment cycles) can be avoided. This is important as applicants may attend interviews at multiple HEIs and an unfair advantage could be afforded to these applicants.
- The use of psychometric tests is not being recommended. This follows discussions at the admissions committee and based on the fact that these tests are largely driven by a biological determinist view thought to be inappropriate at recruitment and selection into social work education.
- The process and materials will be piloted, and learning from this reflected on, before the materials are rolled out. The feasibility of the process, paperwork and costs will be evaluated. Sunderland and the OU have agreed to pilot these materials with their BA applicants and Northumbria have agreed to pilot these materials with their MA applicants.

Figure 13 - The 12 components of recruitment agreed by the NESWA admissions committee

There has been a lot of activity undertaken to gather and share information and resources in order to assist all partners and ultimately make the admissions experience better for the student experience and to provide the admissions tutors with a more informed and comprehensive evidence base upon which to base outcome decisions.

c. Implementation of Portable DBS Checks

The Committee discussed issues around DBS checks at the February, April, June and September meetings. It was agreed that all students should obtain portable DBS Certificates.

Students on placement with Portable DBS Certificates will remove the need to obtain a new DBS Certificate for each placement, which is costly and time consuming. If all students undertake to subscribe to the update service at a cost of £13 per year, then they can carry the certificate throughout their training programme. This will need to be implemented by each HEI as part of their admissions process.

The October meeting of the Admissions Committee records that all partners have now agreed to implement this for 2018/9 entry (Admissions Committee Minutes 17/10/17 item 3).

There are clear benefits for all parties - the HEI, employer and placement provider and for the student. Examination of data for 2018/9 intakes will demonstrate that these checks are in place.

d. Agreed Processes for Review of Identified incidents on DBS returns.

Part of the feedback from the initial consultation phase (described in Section 2) focussed on protocols for assessment of risk when information was disclosed on a DBS return

“[one] student gained employment with us and when we discovered the extent of their DBS we were extremely concerned that the person would be allowed to join the course. My view is this is an area which should not only be looked at during the point of entry to a course but also be reviewed throughout their social work degree by use of a rolling DBS. “

Figure 14 - Improvements to the DBS process identified in the consultation phase

The February meeting agreed that *“all parties would share DBS and disclosure criteria”* (Admissions Committee Minutes 15/2/17 section 5.3)

Much more complex are the processes for considering DBS findings which may prevent the student from progressing onto a placement and ultimately into employment. It is vital to address these incidents as soon as possible to prevent the student wasting time and money on a degree if they will not be able work as a social worker at the end of the programme. There are clearly issues of confidentiality when sharing disclosure considerations between organisations. It has been agreed that the Partnership needs a common approach, and work is needed to examine the process for making assessments of risk. Many organisations have

policies for considering the impact of convictions or warnings on a DBS, but it would be beneficial to be agreed and streamlined across NESWA.

It has been agreed that a panel involving two Local Authorities would be convened to consider any issues raised on the DBS returns (Admissions Committee Minutes 16/01/18 section 6). This will be done electronically with a standard response period of 15 working days. This policy is summarised in the document “Student Themes That Impact on Placement Access” (Helen Woolley 02/12/17) and shared at the January meeting.

e. Experts by Experience - Engagement and Training

The identified objective is:

“by June 2017 develop and deliver a training programme to increase the ability and confidence of ‘Experts by Experience’ in admissions”

(Ref: NESWA TP Implementation Plan. Core Area 2)

The rationale for this work stream is to enhance and embed the involvement of service users and their carers in the admissions and selection processes within HEIs and also to continue this into the Induction and course content. Service users and carers need support and preparation for this role and this work seeks to ensure there is uniformity across all institutions.

This element was led by Dr Sarah Lonbay (University of Northumbria). A strategic group reviewed training information from each HEI, identify key elements and produced a draft training plan which was linked to admissions protocols. Consultation was undertaken with all HEI partners. A training event was delivered at the end of January 2018. This was attended by 16 service users and carers and the aim was to provide the skills and support needed to be an effective contributor to the admissions processes. Service users were involved in delivering the training.

A feedback and evaluation exercise demonstrated that the majority of participants (94%) found the training useful, and the following comments were made

“The course helped me to improve my interviewing skills that is good for my future endeavours and my confidence and self-esteem”

and

(I liked the....) “Informality and interactions with other participants and staff”

Participants were asked three things that they have learned from the course, example responses include

“Value of sharing experiences. Learning more about process and selection of students and possible contribution of service users. Ways of making effective presentations.”

“Interview techniques. Insight into what university is looking for with potential students. Meeting interesting people and learning. “

“A good candidate. A weak candidate. Confidence in interviewing”

In addition, an event planned for March 2018 will celebrate and promote this activity and launch the training resources and guidance. The training will be certified and integrated into the professional portfolio for practitioners.

The initial proposed timescale was delayed, but the initial training has now been developed and delivered. There are plans to share this across the region and to develop a Regional Reference Group.

f. Non-traditional Entry Pathways

The identified objective is to:

“Look to explore an “exceptional practice” entry route for practitioners who have already spent a significant amount of time in practice but without a formal social work qualification”.

(Ref: NESWA TP Implementation Plan. Core Area 2)

The partnership is aware of the need for alternative routes into Social Work degree programmes in order to develop those practitioners who have many years of experience in practice. There is a group of experienced and talented people who do not necessarily have the pre-requisite academic qualifications. In addition, there are many policy drivers for Higher Education to attract those with non-traditional entry pathways, utilising Access Agreements and OFFA funding to

“remove barriers to entry for people from groups that are under-represented at University or college”

(www.offa.org.uk accessed 070917)

This element is in its very early stages. It should be noted that the existing Open University provision enables those in employment to be sponsored to undertake training with more flexible entry requirements. In the future, the offer of Social Work Apprenticeships will also widen access into the profession.

This was discussed at the February meeting, and it was agreed that there is a need to attract more men and BME community into the courses (seen as a long-term aspiration) as well as partnership marketing in the short term.

g. Students with Additional Needs

A piece of work is currently underway which examines the issues around students with additional needs. This covers a range of possible scenarios, such as applicants with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities, those known to services, mature students and those who are not car drivers. There are a number of existing identified issues such as the availability and compatibility of dyslexia support software in placements.

The outcomes of this will feed into the second phase of the partnership activity. The findings can also inform the content of a frequently asked questions section of the website.

h. Review of International Student Admissions

A paper was presented to the September meeting by Felicity Shenton, which summarised the admissions processes for applications from students living abroad. Only New College Durham and Durham University get international applications whilst the other HEI reported very few or none.

Interviews are conducted by Skype and equivalence tables are used to assess qualifications. Scoring in IETLS (The International English Language Testing System) has to reach a minimum of 6.5 (Undergraduate New College) and 7.0 (Postgraduate Durham), with a written test and group work. Social work admissions tutors are supported by the International department of the university with regard to Visas, references and DBS checks.

These findings will be fed into the review of admissions processes and presented as an output to DfE and a resource for partners.

i. References

The objective was to work towards protocols which ensure that application references are authentic and informative.

The February meeting agreed that there is an expectation that referees need to be a current manager, previous manager, an academic or voluntary service leader (not family or friends). All HEI agreed to do this with immediate effect.

This was reviewed at the April meeting, and it was confirmed that Sunderland University and Northumbria University ask for one academic and one professional reference. Subsequent to the meeting, Durham University confirmed that they follow this policy. Teesside University seek verbal confirmation of references, and no information is available at the time of writing for New College Durham.

By February 2018 the committee had agreed that references could only be provided by a professional and that the HEI would undertake authentication checks at the point of making an offer to the student.

4.3 Summary

The Admissions Committee is well attended and is a lively, supportive and cooperative forum which has identified areas for developing and streamlining good practice. The leadership of this group achieves a good balance between allowing debate and supportive discussion of issues, whilst maintaining momentum to achieve goals in a tight time scale. The objectives for implementing change were clearly identified and closely monitored as the group completed the first year of NESWAs activity. The task and finish group should be acknowledged for the dedication and significant contribution to the work of the committee. In broad terms, most of the aspirations for achievement have been addressed or met by the group. There is a strong sense of cohesion and closer relationships between the organisations represented on the committee which will impact on collaborative working in the future.

4.4 Recommendations and Next Steps

The future activity of the partnership needs to focus on embedding the progress recorded above, and to ensure that change is sustainable into the future. Cooperative relationships have arisen from the first year will enable future streamlining and innovation which will benefit potential and actual students, educators and employers alike, ultimately increasing the quality of care provision across services.

The measurements of success highlighted above predominantly focussed on tracking and data to monitor the impact of change, and so data capture and analysis will be needed to assess the implementation and impact of much of the activity described in this section.

The involvement of service users and carers in programme recruitment and delivery needs to be broadened across the partnership, whilst ensuring that there is a broad scope of experts of different ages, gender, social backgrounds and ethnicity to create a broad and representative community of experts, who can contribute across a range of service needs, such as young people, mental health, and learning disability.

A reflective evaluation will be needed after the attendees have put the learning into practice during selection events for 2018 intake.

The NESWA website can be more effectively used to share the work undertaken by the Admissions Committee, and most importantly to disseminate the learning and resources developed for potential and actual students, admissions tutors practice educators and employers. The assessment protocols and tools should be widely shared and Admissions departments should be encouraged to use and further develop these; the website is the ideal vehicle for this.

Case studies are an effective way of sharing innovation, and a series of case studies can be developed to reflect the activity and development to date.

Some elements of the work described above are in their early stages (for example, the progression of experienced but unqualified practitioners onto degree programmes, and

considerations needed for those with additional needs). The outcomes of these work streams need to be widely disseminated and agreed changes implemented.

5. Programme

Aim: To develop a more standardised approach to course provision, to develop the curriculum where necessary and to review the design and delivery of practice skills days.

The partnership also aims to develop provision to enable practitioners to engage in a more systematic way with the academic delivery of programmes and provide opportunities for academic staff to spend time within LAs to update their experience and provide feedback on how legislation and theory are being applied. This is detailed in the Teaching Partnership bid document as follows:

- **Stretch Criteria 1:** Introduce a more systematic coordination at a regional level to further encourage involvement of practitioners, service users and carers in the delivery of programmes. (Teaching Partnership bid 4.4a)
- **Stretch Criteria 2:** Review current provision available for practitioners to develop their teaching skills and develop more systematic and easily accessible opportunities for practitioners and those with lived experience to develop their skills and confidence in contributing to academic delivery (Teaching Partnership bid 4.4a)
- **Stretch Criteria 3:** Explore sustainable routes for practitioners to engage with academic research and share with their LA and wider region. (Teaching Partnership bid 4.4a)

In addition to these identified objectives, there has been a desire to embed further the Chief Social Worker Knowledge and Skill Statements (KS). (Programme Committee meeting 15/2/18).

The specific **achievements** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section Three) were

- Programme consistency – core modules agreement, core skills/development agreement.
- Implementation of a Critical Friend programme where academics can go into practice and support development in practice as well as integrating practice experiences into teaching pedagogy. This was supported by partners from local authorities and HEIs, but not universally. Some respondents did not like this idea.
- Secondment of social work practitioners to support delivery in HEI.
- Academics into practice programmes/initiatives/pilots developed
- Joint practical work between academics and practitioners; research-aware, action-focused, developing leadership skills in frontline staff.
- More PhDs linking directly into practice

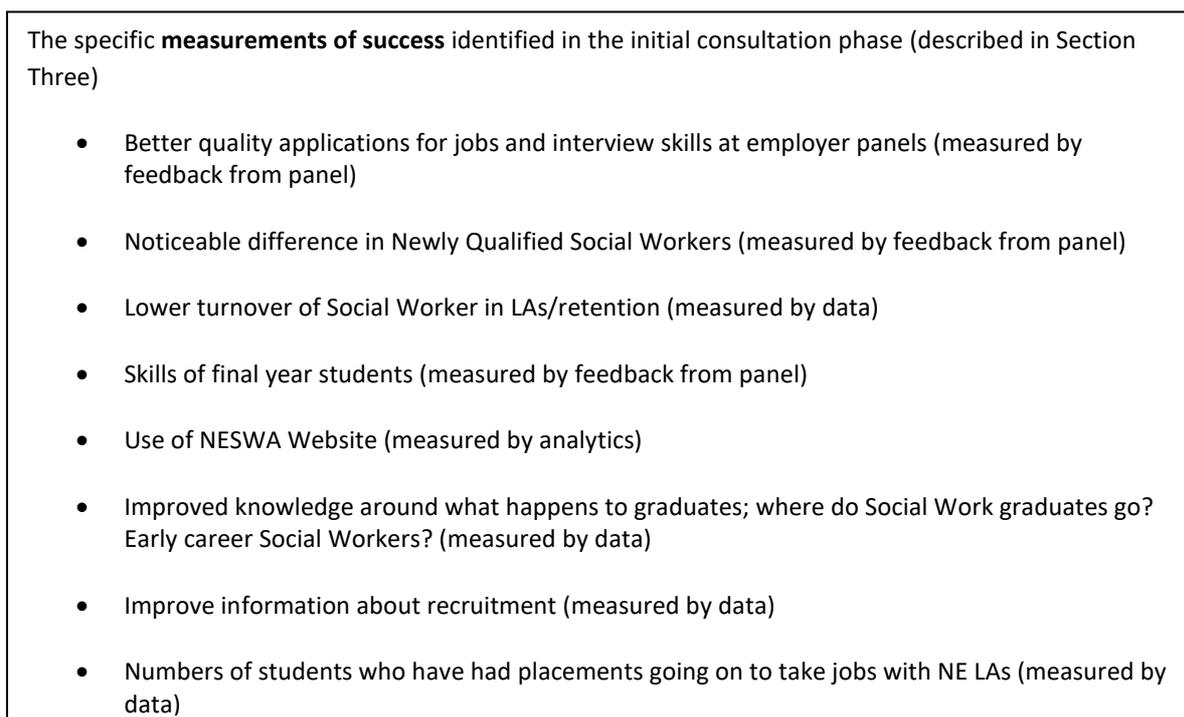


Figure 16 - Proposed success measures for the programme committee identified in consultation

5.1 Meetings

This element was taken forward by the Programme Committee under the chairmanship of Angela Wright from Redcar and Cleveland Council. The Programme Committee membership includes representatives from 8 LAs and 5 HEIs. On average the attendance has been between 7 and 11 out of a possible 20 members. Regular meetings were held between February 2017 and February 2018. Not all member organisations were represented at every meeting, and there was not always consistency with attendees, however there was very good attendance from HEIs which was achieved through a range of staff.

5.2 Programme

The key issues identified and discussed by the Programme Committee are considered below.

a. Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS).

The identified objective is to embed further the Chief Social Workers Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS).

The HEIs involved in the partnership examined the extent to which the KSS are embedded in programmes. All HEIs present confirmed that that students in undergraduate programmes are introduced to the KSS and they are embedded, albeit sometimes implicitly and in some modules more than others. Students are assessed against the Professional Capabilities

Framework (PCF) on placement so there is a “softer approach” to introducing the KSS so as not to confuse students. But the progressive increase in awareness of the KSS through the programme is seen as important to help students prepare for the KSS in CPD and post qualifying courses. LA training is focussed on embedding the KSS and raising awareness of the KSS.

It has been agreed by the committee that a narrative will be written in consultation with partners that will be sent to the DfE to identify more clearly how the KSS are embedded in the courses run by HEIs because although KSS are not always mapped explicitly in modules descriptors they are included in modules implicitly. Further work mapping KSS within an employer setting is discussed in section 7.

b. A 2-day 20 Credit Module in Academic Delivery for Practitioners Who Wish Deliver on Social Work Programmes

The identified objective is to

“Explore developing a 2-day 20 credit module in Academic Delivery accredited by one of NESWA organisations for practitioners who wish deliver on social work programmes” (NESWA TP Implementation Plan Core Area 4)

The committee examined multiple options regarding the design and delivery of this module. These included:

- A credit bearing course with an assessment
- A course with the option of not taking the assessment (and not obtaining credits)
- A tool to help practitioners engage in academic delivery.

Sunderland and Teesside University developed a pilot programme which was offered to 24 LA staff to undertake the programme. (11 staff attended at Teesside and 13 at Sunderland University). This pilot started in February 2018 and is expected to complete at the end May 2018.

The module structure provided for reading materials that were provided in advance and then the 2 teaching days were conducted at the university where participants were provided input around teaching and learning theory. An assessment day will allow participants to demonstrate their learning through delivering a mock lesson for half an hour and the assessment will also require a reflective essay where students will critically reflect on their own learning and performance.

Initial feedback indicates that the module may be valuable for Senior Social Workers who are considering a path to academia or enhancing their current work. Formal feedback will

only be available from the pilot cohorts on the programme following completion of the programme.

There is a proposal for four more courses to be provided in the next academic year (two offered by Teesside University and two by Sunderland University) with ongoing NESWA funding. However, the structure of the course will need to be reconsidered to ensure it fits in better with HEI requirements for a 20-credit module.

Some issues were identified in the telephone consultation which relate to the sustainability of the modules and costs. Beyond the pilot, the module will require payment of fees and also the long-term viability needs to be considered in terms numbers enrolling on the module and the location of delivery due to distances involved.

c. Specialist Practitioners Engaging in Academic Delivery

The identified objective is to:

Establish systematic co-ordination at a regional level to identify particularly strong practitioners in specialist areas, encouraging and supporting their contribution to courses. (NESWA TP Implementation Plan Core Area 4)

The committee agreed that a 2-day 20 credit module would be offered to develop the confidence of practitioners in delivering academic sessions.

A scoping exercise was completed to promote establishing systematic co-ordination at a regional level, and to identify strong practitioners in specialist areas, encouraging and supporting their contribution to course delivery.

A number of approaches to the secondment of practitioners into academic settings have been considered. Practitioners have been involved in curriculum development and in Practice Standards panels to quality assure placement portfolios. Practitioners have been involved in one-off sessions and recruitment processes.

There was also one good example of a three-month full-time secondment for a practitioner in a university for a period of three months. This was done systematically and equitably with the opportunity being opened up to all LAs and a candidate selected through a robust application and selection process.

A practitioner from Newcastle started a secondment period of three months in Northumbria University on 9 January 2018 and has so far been involved in joint teaching on modules and running workshops independently. The practitioner has developed new material for year 1 modules and is involved in years 2 and 3 modules “reflecting on practice”. This pilot will be reviewed at the end of the secondment in April 2018.

d. Critical Friend Programme

The identified objective is to

Introducing a NE Secondment Programme to share expertise between practitioners and academic staff. (NESWA TP Implementation Plan Core Area 4)

The critical friend programme has involved academics in three projects that are pressing and relevant for frontline social work teams.

The first project looked at involving academic staff from an HEI worked with LA partners to look at documentary evidence and LA policy to look at application of thresholds in neglect of children. The purpose was to identify best practice in application of threshold for neglect.

The second project focussed on intergenerational issues and was an initiative in one particular geographical area within the partnership where HEIs worked with LAs to promote community wellbeing through community work across generations. This meant working with Children's Services and Adult Services. This project considered early intervention and developed a process for establishing and promoting relationships between generations through an Older Adults Group and a Younger Peoples Group.

A third project looked at Self-Neglect and Hoarding, but the delivery was delayed to just beyond this evaluation period.

In addition, HEI academics have been involved in attending Safeguarding Board meetings in LAs.

Some LAs were less clear about the benefit of a "Critical Friend" and were unsure of the logistics of hosting academic staff from HEIs in practice in terms of how much time they would spend in practice. But there was also acknowledgement that having academic staff as a critical friend would help workforce development and can contribute to research in practice.

e. Tracking Progress and student satisfaction within the partnership area.

The identified objective is to

In conjunction with the Evaluation Team, develop a data set to track progress and student satisfaction within the partnership area.

The approach to this element was to capitalise on existing data rather than create a series of new questions for students.

Some of the existing data, such as the National Student Survey, is not really fit for the purpose of understanding student experience within NESWA, since it is hard to link back to key questions at a course level, and tends to have a time lag. Other routine data is

appropriate and highly relevant to the overall programme of work, for example the placement satisfaction data; this overlaps section 6 below.

Outside the meetings, the evaluation team contacted all academic leads to identify the currently collected data and establish a way to share this information. This work was tested with the detailed feedback information HEIs gather from students during and after placement. Some partners had concerns about sharing this data with a third party (the evaluators) and a simple data sharing agreement was circulated outlining the purpose of the data. To date three partners have shared information.

The evaluation team has also conducted two student focus groups (first years and third years) and one ASYE group; the student groups are used as source material in section 6 of this report. These groups were to explore the NESWA priorities with students to understand if they matched their concerns, and to begin to outline issues of student satisfaction.

f. Reviewing the Design and Delivery of Practice Skills Days

The identified objective is to encourage sharing of good practice and explore areas for development with regional solutions for provision of practice skills days.

The programme committee formally reviewed the existing HEI provision. HEIs were forthcoming in sharing the structure and content of their skills days and this was found to be a useful exercise. As university course structures are individually accredited by the Health and Care Professions Council there is little scope to change how skills days are structured within each HEI, but sharing ideas was considered useful. It was agreed, however, not to change the current structures. The Committee and the teaching partnership are keen to celebrate the diverse and interesting ways that the programmes differ, rather than seeking homogeneity.

This work led to a final report in December 2017, and a series of recommendations were agreed:

- I. Skills Days should focus on the areas that students and recently qualified social workers have indicated they need additional support. Student and ASYE feedback indicates strongly that they would benefit from the Skills Days being delivered by practitioners with a real focus on practical skills and current tools/processes etc.
- II. Skills Days should be delivered throughout the programme i.e. not just in the 1st year.
- III. In line with the future requirements for Teaching Partnerships to demonstrate opportunities 'to have frontline practitioners and their managers currently employed in statutory settings providing 'classroom' teaching' – to ensure that a significant element of the Skills Days are delivered by current practitioners on practice based issues and that current tools are demonstrated.
- IV. There should be active involvement with service users and carers and with organisations from the PVI sector.
- V. Extending the opportunities to deliver Mend the Gap programmes throughout the region should be considered.

- VI. Learning from the current pilots, outlined above, should be used to inform further developments.

Source: NESWA Final Report - Skills Days Review, December 2017

g. MSc Management and Leadership in Social Work

The identified objective is

to develop a MSc. /MA in Practice Leadership to develop the academic research base within LAs. (Stretch Criteria 3)

This was discussed at a meeting on 20th June 2017, and it was decided that a pilot programme would be developed and written by UNN and shared across the committee members for comment. One result of the development process was the raising of concerns regarding managers who may not have an academic background, for example, The Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). The following ways were suggested to mitigate against these concerns

- The possibility of exploring an 'exceptional practice' route, however, committee members were keen to ensure that potential candidates were not set up to fail the qualification.
- The possibility of pre-course tools that will give people an indication of the expected standards required to achieve the qualification.

The MA in Management and Leadership was explored in detail. As can be seen from the example above, some of the problems were considered carefully and solutions put forward. However, the consensus was that this course was not in high demand, being both costly (£6000 per student) and the wrong solution to the issues of leadership development on the frontline. As noted in Section 3.2, NESWA did not draw down any funding for this element of their initial plan.

h. Practice Development Educator Qualification

The identified objective was to identify a provider for a Practice Development Qualification by March 2017 and to deliver a pilot cohort during the 17/18 academic year).

The Programme Committee agreed to develop this qualification at their meeting of 27th Feb 2017. Initially, it was proposed that UNN would lead this element, with a single portfolio based non-credit bearing module delivered by Sunderland University. The course focussed on Adult Social Work and Supervision. A pilot was run in January 2018 and was delivered in-house by the NESWA Regional Placement Co-ordinator. The course focussed on equipping experienced social workers who have responsibility for supporting, assessing and supervising social workers who are undertaking PQ professional development and learning, e.g. ASYE, PE, BIA, AMPH, SG.

The course has been delivered as a pilot twice so far to a total of 35 students, with plans in place for further courses. The course has been well received and the pilots demonstrate that there is demand; the intention is for LAs to take ownership of this in the future.

5.3 Summary

The Programme Committee has met regularly and has consistently followed up on various action points/projects agreed at the first meeting. Most of the actions/projects have been delivered. This is extremely commendable given the changing membership of the committee and that the original priorities were agreed by a different group of people. The outcomes of the committee reflect the enormous commitment from individuals who took on additional work on top of their day job (see for example section 3.2). Responses from committee members show that the partnership has strengthened relationships and developed more effective networks.

There are numerous substantive outcomes from the work of the committee, such as the secondment and Critical Friend programmes. The activities of the committee have created an impetus for new pieces of work such as developing the 20-credit module.

It should be noted that the Project Team contributed to these successes by helping maintain the focus across a very large partnership.

One of the challenges of the size and diversity of the partnership was attendance at Committee meetings, and although each organisation was regularly represented, it was often different people attending, which gave difficulties in consistency of understanding and input to the work streams.

One impact of the increased involvement in the meetings was a perceived weakening of involvement in Programme Committees that HEIs run to get regular formal feedback from students about the courses and Practice Standards Panels in host organisations.

5.4 Recommendations

It would be helpful to create a document that clearly explains how the KSS are embedded in the courses run by HEIs given that KSS are not always mapped explicitly in modules descriptors but are implicit in the modules. By sharing this document across NESWA, local authority partners can clearly see how the KSS are embedded by university partners.

Consider using the 20-credit module in academic delivery as part of post qualifying CPD. Test the sustainability of the programme by identifying practitioners in LAs who will contribute to HEI course delivery through full time secondment or one-off sessions in a systematic and structured way. This could include provision of standalone sessions, and linking to recruitment and Practice Standards events.

Work is underway to create a Strong Practitioners Register, and this will be a valuable way to formally document the involvement of practitioners in HEIs in one-off teaching sessions

or other roles such as recruitment and attending Practice Standards panels. It should help to ensure that there is wider representation from LAs in HEIs.

The Northumbria University critical friend programme seems to have been successful and could be replicated by other universities. It could be further developed by use of a data set to track progress and student satisfaction within the partnership area.

Student experience is gathered by individual HEIs as part of their work. Ways of sharing this data for learning across NESWA should be further explored. Such data will reflect on the whole student experience, both in placement and in university.

Produce a case study of changes to academic delivery as initially programmed for 2017. This document can evidence impact and improvement, and can be published and disseminated widely.

The involvement of service users and carers in academic delivery throughout the region is an area for development and implementation in the future.

The provision of Practice Skills Days rolled out in the second phase of NESWA. The involvement of LAs may result in general support or specialist inputs. In particular;

- Create a mechanism for LAs to be involved in identifying relevant topics for skills days based on their assessment of gaps in skills of Newly Qualified Social Workers recently employed by them.
- Identify practitioners/experts to deliver one-off sessions
- Build confidence of practitioners undertaking teaching tasks
- Revisit development of the programme as a collaborative effort between HEIs and LAs so that there is clarity of expectations on both sides.
- Ensure decision makers in LAs are in the loop early so that decisions around payment of fees and releasing people for the course is decided in advance.
- Conduct a scoping exercise to identify interest in the programme among practitioners
- Evidence viability in terms of costs and student numbers
- Evaluate the programme and make necessary amendments to content and delivery for a wider roll-out.

6. Placement

Aim: To ensure all students in the partnership HEIs have a good quality 70 day and 100-day placement and explore more strategic approaches to the provision of statutory placements within the Alliance (Teaching partnership bid section 2.3:2)

The statutory placement defined in the DfE guidance document 'Teaching Partnerships 2015-16: Invitation to Express Interest' as:

- take place in a local authority setting;
- involve work on S17 and S47 cases (under the Children Act 1989);
- involve work on delivering requirements of the Care Act 2014 and Mental Capacity Act 2005;
- require case records to be updated by the student, under appropriate supervision.

Where PVIs offer placements that deliver statutory work, proposals must show how they are equivalent to statutory placements as defined above

This element complements the overarching aim of the NESWA partnership to ensure students are better prepared for the role of a social worker in frontline practice at the end of their training. This requires close collaboration between the LA and HEI partners and has been led by the Placement Committee.

The specific **achievements** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section Three) were

- Clearer, more efficient placement system
- An increase in the numbers of available Practice Educators, streamlining the process to complete the additional training required.
- Closer collaboration on placements – a network of quality and expertise.
- All level 6 placements offered in statutory settings with robust systems to ensure quality experience for the student.
- Practice Educator coordinators should standardise the interpretation of the PEPS (Practice Educator Professional Standards for Social Work).
- Greater consistency in placement paperwork and clearer understanding of the various routes for students
- Consistency in the recognition of practice educators in the workplace (eg financial or other incentives across the region).
- Explore scheduling of placements so that the demand isn't all at the same time.

Figure 17 - Anticipated achievements of the Placement Committee according to partners

The specific **measurements of success** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section Three) were

- Placement numbers (maintain current numbers, monitoring of the shortfall in the number of placements?)
- Increased enrolments on practice educator courses (year on year).
- Quality of practice educators (how measured – quality of PE reports?)
- Number of trained Practice Educators continuing to utilise these skills and being retained in the workplace

Figure 18 - Potential measures for the Placement Committee according to partners

6.1 Meetings

This element was taken forward by the Placement Committee under the chairmanship of Jane Tunmore (Sunderland University). The Placement Committee membership includes representatives from 13 LAs and 6 HEIs. The attendance has been between 6 and 20 representing every partner at least once. Regular meetings were held between April 2017 and February 2018.

6.2 Progress

The key issues identified and discussed by the Placement Committee are considered below.

a. Review of Regional Placement and Practice Education paperwork

The paperwork review rationale was:

“to enhance the student experience within the region” (Teaching partnership bid: Section 4:3)

This element had five main threads:

- i. A review of all paperwork and development of a handbook based on strengths of current documentation used by HEI partners. This is currently being trialled by students and PE’s at Sunderland University and New College Durham with a view to incorporate the learning and roll out to all students in the partnership from autumn 2018.
- ii. There are plans to draft a PE handbook to address common issues such as the length of a placement day, how to address “snow days” and students with additional needs/reasonable adjustments. Work relating to the latter group is currently underway and is described below.
- iii. Two events, one at Teesside and the other at Northumbria, have been held for partners from the PVI sector was held in January 2018. The aim of the event was “to explore how to use the placement curriculum and learning agreements to ensure that the statutory tasks are clear and robust”. All the PVI’s were invited who offer placements to final year students and those who are interested in offering

placements in the future, along with experienced Practice Educators, to discuss meeting the statutory tasks. The draft report was completed by the end of March 2018 as importantly and is currently being discussed by partners.

- iv. The committee is also working towards developing regional standard for Practice Educators and to agree on a regional process for lapsed PEs. This is called the currency agreement and has been agreed in principle.
- v. The student profile documentation is being reviewed in order to streamline student placement application forms and capture all the necessary details to make the appropriate placement match. However, there has been difficulty in implementing this as two universities in the region have integrated the student profile in their computer systems which can prove costly if any changes have to be made. The placement committee is working with the other partners and to change the student documentation by the end of April 2018.

It is anticipated that standardised documents for placements will assist all the partners in the region. This was reflected in the responses from an LA representative who felt that:

‘PE’s have to get their head around different types of documents used by different universities’ (Telephone interview response)

Student feedback also identified that each PE has different expectations on how often and how many reflective learning logs are required from students. Some students said they were asked to reflect on every event and every day and to bring their reflective work for supervision whereas other PE’s had a relaxed approach on the number of reflective learning logs to be submitted. The students also commented that each University had different amount of study days allocated to them.

Responses from the Regional Placement Coordinator indicate that Universities audit all placements to ensure that they meet the ‘Quality Assurance for Practice Learning’ (QAPL) standards. Placement committee members confirmed that the standards are embedded within existing Practice Learning Agreement as well as individual agreements. (Placement committee meeting 13/9/2017). The students and PE complete the evaluation forms.

b. Regional Placement Coordinator

The identified objective is to recruit a regional placement coordinator to support the work of placements at both a strategic and a problem-solver level.

A Regional Placement coordinator was appointed on 24/04/2017. One of the key tasks for this role is to match placement demand and processes against the sufficiency statements provided by employers in their annually reviewed workforce planning (*Teaching partnership bid: Section 4.3a*).

The minutes of the placement committee meetings and placement coordinator meetings as well as the responses from LA and HEI representatives were overwhelmingly positive about

having a Regional coordinator. It is acknowledged that the role is effective in providing a strategic overview of regional placement opportunities and allocation through managing and collating information, close collaboration with various partner and regular meetings with the representatives from LAs and HEIs.

A placement committee member from a local authority in an evaluation interview said having the Regional Placement Coordinator has helped immensely in the NESWA partnership, providing the LAs a single point of contact to discuss placement for students rather than dealing with numerous individuals representing different universities. This sentiment was echoed by the HEIs in their online survey stating that having a regional coordinator has been helpful as the role acted has been the central point of contact for placement issues.

‘The process was started earlier than in years prior to NESWA and this meant a more measured approach to allocation and problem solving. The involvement of the NESWA team in sorting out problematic placements (i.e. where there are DBS issues, personal student issues) was very supportive and helpful.’ (HEI representative).

c. Develop a Strategic Overview and Development Plan to Continue to Improve the Quality of Placements.

The identified objective is:

“Enhancing students experience within the region through shared long-term planning regarding placement provision and allocation”. (Teaching partnership bid: Section 1.2)

The LA representative in the telephone interview stated that they provide high quality placements to students through:

- i. Ensuring that they have good induction period.
- ii. Offering shadowing opportunities to different teams ensuring the students understand the process of the child’s journey in social work.
- iii. Establishing group supervision with students.
- iv. Arranging PE group supervision to ensure they feel supported.

Responses from the student focus group defined high quality placements as:

‘where I was given more responsibility’

'made to feel part of the team'

'support and listening ear from PE'

'training available for further learning'

'taking active role in the task rather than just shadowing people'

The students in the focus group unanimously agreed that they feel that their final year placement is providing them with high quality experience. However, they did not feel the same for the first placement. All the students present felt that their first placement did not prepare them for a statutory placement. A couple of students were able to articulate the importance of PVI placements in developing fundamental skills for communication and advocacy but did not feel it was enough to help them in their final year placement.

'Last year I didn't do single assessment in PVI setting'

'First placement has not given me any skills that I can use in the final year placement'

'Last year, my first placement was in PVI setting and I was left to doubt if I had done the right choice in undertaking social work course. The final year placement has cleared my doubt. The final year placement has given me experience that will help me to be more confident in what I am doing when I qualify'.

The students felt that the PVI settings didn't prepare them for final year placement which is very fast paced. The students who were placed in the PVI setting stated that they had not undertaken any assessments, report writing in the first placement making it difficult for them to undertake these tasks in the final year. Most of the students echoed that in the first placement most of the time they shadowed the workers but didn't undertake any independent case load.

d. Providing 170 Days of High Quality Placements for Every Student

The identified objective is

'enhance student experience by linking them with a local authority early in their social work education and exploring ways to improve the quality of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector placements.' (Teaching partnership bid2.3(2))

and

Reviewing the capacity within the PVI and Health sector for both statutory and non-statutory placements as a means of systematically identifying high quality placements within the region.

The NESWA bid suggests that the first placement of 70 days will be an opportunity to explore the context of social work provision and to engage in skills development activities (Teaching partnership bid section 2.3(2)).

The bid also suggests that by offering students a final year placement in a statutory setting, it will improve their experience by enhancing opportunities for engaging with statutory social work provision over time and in different ways. (Teaching partnership bid section 2.3(2)).

Consequently, the prime focus of the Placement committee has been to ensure that all the final year students have final year statutory placement. In the reports reviewing social work education by Croisdale-Appleby and Narey, it was recommended that the universities should offer good quality statutory placements to prepare them in undertaking highly skilled tasks in practice. Therefore, it is the requirement of the DfE that all potential TP's should guarantee one statutory placement.

Due to the increased demand on statutory placements due in part to the additional demand due to non-traditional routes such as Step-up and Frontline and the consequent availability of statutory placements in Local Authorities, additional work has been undertaken by NESWA to review the capacity within the PVI and health sector as a means of systematically identifying high quality placements within the region and developing equivalence for statutory tasks. This is discussed under capacity considerations below.

Work is also being undertaken to identify other settings which could be used as statutory settings such as schools who provide social work services and other commissioned services.

e. Regional Sufficiency Statement for 2016/17 to be Published

The identified objective is for

“all students from 2017-18 onwards will be guaranteed a final year placement within a statutory setting” (Teaching partnership bid)

There was no regional sufficiency statement for 2016/17, which predates NESWA given the delayed start (see section 3). There has been one developed for the current year, however, and this is considered below.

The minutes of the placement co-ordinators meeting (26th June 2017) states that 213 LA offers were made for 2017-18 student intake. However, in the placement committee meeting minutes of 7th Feb 2018, the feedback was that seeking LA placement offers in June 2018 may not be feasible for the LA due to many factors that could affect the actual numbers. The agreement at the committee was to liaise with LAs in June 2018.

The placement committee agreed that a statutory setting would be one that offered statutory tasks which can be in a LA, Trust or PVI. The committee has been overseeing a piece of work to agree a clear and detailed definition of a Statutory Task, which is due for completion after this evaluation. The committee members will ensure there is robust mechanism in place for assessing the equivalence of any non-LA placements. Therefore, it was also decided to approach PVI's and work in partnership to understand and agree the equivalency of the placement.

Regarding the sufficiency statements, out of five HEIs, three found them useful. However, not all the HEIs found the sufficiency statements to be helpful in addressing the placement needs in 2017, as one HEI commented *'They are useful however the numbers initially provided were different to the final numbers. This is just how it goes'* (HEI representative-online survey). There was some suggestion that the allocations were not considered fair by all HEIs, with one respondent saying that other HEIs were clearly 'disgruntled'.

One LA representative on the placement committee suggested that they deliberately offer low numbers in the sufficiency statement in an attempt to pre-empt a possibility of not being able to offer placements at a later stage due to various internal factors such as team restructuring, PE circumstances.

It appears that regional sufficiency statement has been helpful in meeting the placement needs for HEIs to some extent however it is difficult for LA's to provide offers well in advance due to internal factors.

That the numbers initially provided by LAs were different to the final numbers. Despite everyone being aware that the numbers were only a guide other HEIs were clearly disgruntled and this didn't help engender a partnership 'feel'. (HEI representative. online survey)

A short online survey was developed by the evaluation team, and all HEI partners were asked to complete it. One key piece of data the survey requested was the percentage of students who were allocated final year placement in the Local Authority. Four HEIs responded (figure 19).

HEI	Level 5	Level 6
1	2%	98%
2	0%	62%
3	100%	65%
4	27%	90%

Figure 19 - Percentage of year 2 and 3 students with a LA placement

Without the data for the preceding year (2016-17) from NESWA on the percentage of students from each university who received 70 days and 100 days placement in LA, it is difficult to conclude if the number has increased or decreased especially for the 100 days, but there is an evident variation. It is clear that for some HEIs things have improved:

...placements have immensely improved. Still have 0% placement in statutory setting at Level 5 but at Level 6, 90% of the students are placed in LA'. (HEI representative. online survey)

According to the placement sufficiency statement (draft sufficient statement-2/12/2017) the following key findings were highlighted:

- The data collected by NESWA identified that there 192 CF teams and 147 adult teams providing a total of 339 teams within the region. The core LA teams comprise 96 for children and families work and 69 for adult work. Data collected from the placement calendar demonstrates for final placements alone NESWA would require 324 placements which will increase to 365 when the step up final year students go out in September 2018
- NESWA cannot say from the sufficiency statement which teams have space to offer a student placement. It has also been noted that not all of these teams take students, and some would not fit a definition of statutory tasks e.g. early help or youth offending without links into the core LA teams.
- The non- traditional routes (Step up, Front line, Think Ahead) into social work, also require space and practice support/education from LAs

The admissions figures for 2017-18 are:

	UG	PG
Durham		35
New College	35	
Northumbria	85	25
Sunderland	25	20
Teesside	80	25
OU	9	9
TP Total	234	114
Step Up		41
Think Ahead		11
Frontline		37
Non-TP Total		89
Totals	234	203

Figure 20 - The breakdown of the anticipated 437 admission to all social work pre-qualification courses in 2107/18 in the North East

The PE numbers reported by LAs according to the placement sufficiency statement (draft report) are:

Qualified PE 2	248
Qualified PE 1	179
In training PE 2	40
In training PE 1	62

Figure 21 - estimates of existing practice educators in LAs

It is hard to establish if this is enough to meet the demands of the various programmes for a number of reasons including:

- It is not known if all the PEs in figure 23 are current or if they are located in statutory task teams.
- In the North East a number of Off-site Practice Educators have been used, and although the Teaching Partnerships are expected to limit this to no more than 20%, this issue has not yet been scoped.

Despite this uncertainty, the report suggests that implementing some of the innovative solutions discussed by the Placement Committee is very unlikely that placements can be offered to those currently being recruited across the various entry-route programmes.

Those various innovative strategies include:

- Match placement demand and processes against the sufficiency statements provided by the Local Authorities in their annually reviewed workforce planning.
- Formulate a regional timeline for placements including shadowing.
- Alter the dates of student placements by HEI partners to incorporate flexibility in order to increase potential placement numbers, particularly in Local Authorities.
- Identify a list of suitable PVI placements used in the North East Alliance that continue to offer 100 day or 70 days placement. Screening tool to identify if they can offer learning opportunities that meet the definition of Department of Education for statutory placements.
- Increase the number of PEs to generate more statutory placements.
- Collate information on all PEP 2 candidates undertaking the course who can be matched with students requiring 100 days statutory placement and current capacity of the LAs to offer students a statutory placement.

- Consider a combined PE route to push through more PE numbers. Even if this did not increase the placement offer, it will increase the potential pool of PE2, which will ensure better quality, and flexibility of practice.
- Ensure an equitable allocation will be made for those HEIs without a PE course.
- Develop strategies to mesh teams that do not strictly fall into the definition of DfE for statutory task to be meshed with other teams who offer the statutory task. To allow students to be based in a non-statutory task teams but undertake tasks from statutory task teams.
- Ensure early information from HEIs about their student requirements for the whole year.
- Draft a PE2 role to support PE1s to take students in statutory settings (October 2017).
- Use of other TP across the country to access placements in statutory task settings (Derby, Leeds, Wakefield and North Yorkshire).

f. Allocation of Placements and Placement Capacity

The identified objective is to develop a system for the regional allocation of placements, and the rationale is:

[NESWA] can be more creative about placement provision and allocation by engaging in shared long-term planning. (Teaching partnership bid: section 2:3:2)

In response, the Placement Committee has developed Regional Principles of Allocation (*Minutes of the Placement coordinators meeting 24/5/2017.*) which are shown in figure 19.

The Regional Principles of Allocation

- PE trainees being matched to a student from the HEI where they are receiving their training and should not disadvantage HEIs who are currently not offering a PE course.
- Whilst the PEPS are under review, the NESWA position will be that PE stage 1 including those in training when supported by a PE stage 2 and where the employer endorses the quality of the learning opportunities can be considered as 100 days placement.
- Prioritize those who were in a PVI placement in the first year or another non-statutory task placement.
- HEI coordinators to include information on child or Adult split, geographical preferences, defers/refers and any student with additional needs or requirements that require extra time to support the match.

Figure 22 - The placement principles agreed at the Placement Committee

Interviewed outside the meeting, one LA representative felt that the principle of allocation was more beneficial to HEI than to LAs. The LAs were of the view that although they would prioritise offering social work student placement to the Universities where their staff are undertaking a PE Award, they will also consider offering social work student placements to universities not offering PE Award. (Telephone interview response)

It was raised in the Placement Committee meeting in February 2018, that it should be the aim to place students in the area they wish to be employed in the future rather than where they study.

One of the LA committee members stated that they have an in-house PE Stage 2 which is not delivered by any HEI. This gives them an opportunity to offer social work students from all Universities within the region and more flexibility in the start date.

As part of the Teaching Partnership development, the Local Authorities have included in their letter of commitment the number of statutory placements they can host within the academic year 2016/17. The minutes of the Executive Committee (19/7/2017) states that 250 placement offers were received from LAs; this is discussed below as the number achieved grew from this number through the efforts of the regional placement coordinator, local authorities and HEIs.

The update by the Placement Committee in the Executive Committee minutes (19/7/2017) states that owing to the above process the HEIs are becoming aware of the placement availability sooner enabling the formal process to start well ahead of time. This helps to reduce student anxiety as well as being more efficient for LAs.

The efficiency of the placement process from a student perspective was checked in the student focus groups. Students were generally happy with their placement allocation. Although most of the students knew their placement details up to four weeks in advance, some knew just a few days before the placement started. Only one in the group had started later than the other students. Students who became aware of their placement later than the others said they received no communication from their university contact person. They said that they were not aware of the reason for the delay in sourcing placement and it made them anxious. The small numbers of students in the groups and the uneven representation of HEIs means this is only a suggestion of an issue that requires further explanation.

The placement committee meeting minutes state the:

'majority of individuals feel that they are in a much stronger position this year than in the previous instances and the issues of student placements has been resolved a lot sooner than historically and has been extremely positive' (minutes, 11/10/2017).

The placement committee meeting minutes (11/10/2017) also notes an increased number of placement offers by LA partners. This is also echoed by one of the representative from HEI who stated

'2018 placements were immensely improved. At Level 6 we have placed 90% of our students in LAs.'

The HEI's response was also positive in terms of the regional placement process.

'Early notifications of final placements allowing prompt allocation and matching to learning needs. Help with placements from other Placement co-ordinators.'

There is no doubt that this approach represents a change, and partners have some reservations. For example, in the past, HEIs have been able to source most of their LA placements for their students through LA staff undertaking Practice Educators Awards. However, this year one of the HEIs said students from their university have been allocated to LAs where HEIs were not delivering Practice Educators Awards.

A further challenge raised by one of the placement committee member in the telephone interview was the different timeline for student placements adopted by different universities. This results in difficulty in coordinating student placements starting at various points in the academic year. Whilst this may be seen as a difficulty by some LAs, there are other LAs who felt that having students starting at different times during the placement calendar will open up the opportunity to offer more statutory placement to students.

One of the HEIs expressed concern that they may be at a disadvantage if the students start late. In this HEI, out of 9 placements only 3 materialized. They had to make up the shortfall with newly identified placements (not in the sufficiency statements) and PVI placements.

There were mixed responses given by the students in the focus group regarding placement allocation process, with some seeing at simply a random allocation:

'We don't get a say. We fill out a document. We are asked to put preference, but we don't get it'

'We are told not to be specific which team we want placement as this will work in our disadvantage'

'Last year, we were randomly matched'

Some did feel that their preferences were taken into account:

'This year it's more tailored. I wrote in my form that I wanted to work in Safeguarding children team and that's where I got.'

'It feels that this year, they(HEI) have tried and matched us to our preferences. This may be due to new process.'

This perceived change could be a result of the NESWA partnership, but due to the small numbers of students interviewed and limited representation of HEIs, it is only a hint. In practice, though consideration may be given to match placement to learners needs, allocation of placements on the basis of student choice alone may not always possible due to various factors.

g. Analysis of Capacity for Statutory Placements within the PVI Sector

The identified objective is

NESWA aims to ensure that placements enhance the student experience within the region by ensuring opportunities for engaging with statutory social work provision over time and in different ways. (Teaching partnership bid: Section 2.3 under point 2. Placements)

As part of NESWA strategy to address the demand for statutory placements, the placement committee are in the process of developing PVI placements who are commissioned to undertake statutory task.

In January 2018, a session was held with the PVI placements at Northumbria and Teesside Universities. All the PVI's were invited who offer placements to final year students and those who may interested in offering placements in the future, along with LA representative, to discuss meeting the statutory tasks (*minutes of placement committee meeting 22/11/2017*).

This session helped in formulating a clearer definition of statutory tasks for both adults and children services (placement committee meeting 7/2/2018). The final report regarding this element is due by the end of March 2018. It was concluded that having a statement with clear definitions of statutory tasks within Children and Adults Social Work will help the PE's in the region to have a greater understanding on what learning opportunities are to be provided to students to meet the PCF domains. It will also help students to know what to expect in each setting.

Having a clear statutory task statement will enable NESWA to develop equivalence for statutory task placement other than LA, and it is planned that this will be possible subsequent to the Statutory Task definition work due in May 2018 (see above).

h. Case Studies of Changes to Placement Supervision.

A number of projects were piloted in the region to meet the above objective, see figure 20. In each case there are plans to share the above models across NESWA.

The link worker model by Durham council has generated eleven new placements by:

- Attracting new staff into the world of practice placements
- Re-engaging experienced staff with practice education

The hub model by Middlesbrough has been implemented with five final year students to:

- Attract new staff into the world of placements
- Evaluate a group supervision model from the perspective of student, PE and University
- Increase the number of placements available in children and family social work

The PE group work by Darlington to:

- Share and pool resources and skills to offer the best experience to students in Darlington
- Enthuse experienced PEs by recognizing their skills and building collective identity and status
- Increase the number of placements and PE's in Darlington

Figure 23 - Three examples of creative development of practice educators

i. Evaluation of Placements.

Placements are currently reviewed at the end of tenure through student feedback using QAPL. There are plans to review how QAPL is used in the region and if there is any scope to enhance. This is also discussed in section 5.2 as part of the student feedback element.

j. Mentors for Each Social Work Student in the Partnership.

The identified objective is

to adopt a wraparound model education for students to enhance their employability and supports them to be confident practitioners who can provide a sustained commitment to the profession and the region (Teaching partnership bid: Section 2.3 under point 2. Placements).

The rationale is that this model of supporting students by attaching them to a local authority early in their academic career will provide them with an additional level of both pastoral care and support and also access to Continuing Professional Development. The model will provide students an opportunity to have a preliminary experience of statutory social work at the onset of the course (Teaching Partnership bid section 4.3a)

In the wraparound model, students will access a short period of placement with their local authority early in their academic study. The link local authority will then also commit to

providing them with a high quality final year placement within statutory social work. (Section 4.3a)

However, there has been some variance in this interpretation. For example, one of the committee members interpreted the wrap around model as giving students preference to a geographical area where they may want to be employed, so they can become embedded within the processes of that LA. (*Placement committee meeting minutes 15/6/2017*).

There are different pilot projects underway to explore different elements of the wrap around model:

2nd year practitioners; Durham Council. An informal support mechanism to ease the transition into employment. Offer an opportunity for a social worker to mentor a student and begin to engage with supporting students.

ASYE group, Redcar. An informal support mechanism to ease the transition into employment. Offer an opportunity for a social worker to mentor a student and begin to engage with supporting students.

Swapped group of experienced social workers, Newcastle/Gateshead. An informal support mechanism to ease the transition into employment. Offer an opportunity for a social worker to mentor a student and begin to engage with supporting students.

2nd year practitioners: Northumberland. An informal support mechanism to ease the transition into employment. Offer an opportunity for a social worker to mentor a student and begin to engage with supporting students.

Full Wrap around Model: Redcar, Middlesbrough Darlington. To increase both confidence on final placement and commitment to the LA who have wrapped around them. A focus group feedback on any doubts or challenges, and measure how many go on to work at the host LA.

Full Wrap around pilot-Sunderland and south Tyneside. To consider what benefits or challenges this posed for LA, Student or HEI and understand whether someone feels better prepared by this process for LA social work.

Wrapping around LA and HEI courses. Advertise all open courses and social work forums so that students from local area could attend sessions. Advertise opportunities for LA staff to come in and teach on the programmes. Offer opportunities for students to register to be volunteers with PVI. HEI or LAs through existing schemes.

Figure 24 - Mentorship pilots across NESWA

There have been struggles with the mentoring workstrand. One placement committee member stated that they are unsure if mentoring projects are the answer to enable students to move confidently to work.

Only one student took the offer for mentoring in Newcastle and Durham whereas six students accepted in Redcar. The feedback from students according to the Placement Committee has been that by their final year, students already have a high number of

mentors: PEs from both placements, tutors for various modules and dissertation etc and therefore did not feel the need for any more mentors.

Given the current constraints in providing statutory placements in Local Authority (see above), the placement committee held in July 2017 agreed that more research is needed to understand the desirability and feasibility to translate shadowing placements to final year placements. It was also felt by the LA that they could commit easily to mentoring in year one and offering a final year placement. The placement committee have unanimously agreed to strengthen the shadowing days by providing minimum two days of shadowing with a registered social worker (Placement committee meeting 6/7/2017).

In addition, some HEIs have brought back shadowing days as part of the curriculum.

k. Referred and Deferred Students

The committee agreed that priority should be given to ensure that referred and deferred students have a quality experience on placement, that they should be considered first in the process of placement allocations and should be supervised by a very experience practice educator. This is to avoid referred and deferred students waiting for a number of months before a placement is identified for them so that there is not a long gap between teaching and placement. This mechanism was identified to test if the referred and deferred students are able to meet the required standard and thereby ensuring good quality of future social workers. However, on further exploration it was noted that the delay inherent in them going through an assessment panel and board meant that they come out later for placements. It was agreed that one way of addressing the issue is to identify Practice Educators who can take on assessment of this student group. This will be considered alongside the work that is being undertaken on the process for failing students at the regional level.

l. Driving and Placements

Several additional themes have arisen during the work of the Placement Committee:

- The portability of DBS clearance
- Students with additional needs
- Students with caring responsibilities
- Student without access to a vehicle
- Students already known to services

These have been largely addressed by the Admissions Committee and are evaluated in section 4.2, but the issue of transport is particularly relevant to the Placement Committee.

In the student focus group in February with final year students, the issue of vehicles was raised. The students felt that there are LAs who provide placements for non-drivers. They cited an example of their current placement where it is not necessary for student to have access to car and yet there were students matched to the team who have access to cars.

Speaking to LA representatives who offer social work student placements it became apparent that they had different views about students' access to vehicles. One of the LA representative felt it is important for students to have access to vehicles as the LAs are in rural places and the public transport is not good. They also said they would prioritise students who are not living far from the LA and not those who would be spending long hours driving to placement. This approach will help them in their recruitment process as it is more likely for students who live locally to take up job offers than students who do not live locally.

However, another LA representative felt that students should be placed in teams where you don't necessarily have access to vehicle especially in the urban area. However, this may be restricted to small number of LAs and teams offering placements to small number of non-drivers. Therefore, it is imperative to have a closer dialogue with all involved parties (including students) and manage the expectations of the students when they start the social work course.

m. Commit to Further Embedding the KSS.

This element of the Implementation plan has been taken forward by the Programme and Progression Committees and is evaluated above in section 5.2 and 7.2. However, the KSS will be incorporated into the placement documentation.

n. Review the Design and Delivery of Practice Skills Days to Develop Aspects of the Curriculum.

This element of the Implementation plan has been taken forward by the Programme Committee and is evaluated above in section 5.2.

o. Development of a Practice Development/Practice and Leadership Qualification.

This is discussed under the work of the Programme Committee (Section 5.2).

6.3 Summary

Through regular HEI co-ordinators meetings and Placement Committee meetings, there has been a clear and transparent process of regional placement allocations.

The placement committee acts a forum to discuss various strategies and resolve placement related issues at a regional level. Local Authorities have placed 437 students (including the non-traditional routes), of which 347 were traditional routes and placed with the help of the NESWA partnership. Given the increasing demands, and the inability to influence the non-traditional placements, placing 347 students is a significant achievement.

The partnership appears to have an overview of the number of students requiring placements and consistently monitoring shortfall of placements through regular meetings.

The regional partnership appears to be working as a platform for sharing best practice within the region and adopting new ways of working for a good student experience.

The Placement Committee has been looking at different models to develop a long-term strategy to address the possibility of shortage of placements. Pressures include the growing number of Frontline, Step up, apprentices, and OU Students who are guaranteed local authority placements.

NESWA is working on identifying a mechanism in circumstances where LAs are unable to honour their commitment to placement offers made in the beginning of the year. This could be due to a range of factors including shortage of staff, lack of space, lack of PE, restructuring of teams.

There is evidence of strategic placement planning to ensure good quality placements across the region and enhance the student experience. In the student focus groups there was limited recognition of NESWA; one student recognised it because she was approached for a mentoring project.

Given the number of LA and HEI partners involved, challenges are to be expected. The Placement Committee has worked with variance in internal processes, priorities and visions, and different perspectives of the new processes remain. Common shared agreement between all the LA and HEI partners will be crucial in implementing the suggestions agreed at the regional placement committee meetings.

It is important that there is a shared understanding and expectations of placement from students. This will help allay concerns raised by students and will also enable LAs and HEIs to communicate, promote and deliver the common vision of the NESWA teaching partnership.

Having a standardised approach at regional level in terms of number of supervision sessions, direct observation, reflective learning logs and study days will not only help students, but also the Practice Educators.

6.4 Recommendations and Next Steps

Having a clear statutory task statement may enable NESWA to develop equivalence for statutory task placement other than LA and should be pursued. This is being developed.

Focused attention should be given to the planning stage regarding the numbers of placements that can be offered by the LA for students starting later in the placement calendar to ensure that those HEIs and students are not at a disadvantage compared to the ones who start earlier. This will also ensure that the bulk of LA placements are not allocated to students who start placement earlier in the year.

There should be a shared placement protocol identifying clear roles and responsibilities when there are placement concerns such as a failing student or a PE who is not performing well. Expectations for communication with students, for example when placements start later than expected for some students, should also be agreed at a regional level.

Further student consultation will help better understand the views and issues of the students from different universities about their expectations from NESWA and their experience regarding placements.

Continue development of a robust mechanism for placement quality assurance and evaluation processes which enhance the QAPL will benefit placement experience for first and final year students. This should include clear processes to operationalise the feedback from the quality assurance processes.

The development of a standardised induction plan in the region for the first and final year placements, and alignment of the allocation of study days across all HEIs, will improve the quality of placement experience.

Ensuring that there is support in place in LAs where the staff are undertaking PE courses, and creation of a regional support systems, such as meetings and mentor support, for PE's who are qualified will ensure the quality of practice education as well as improve morale.

Given the initial student feedback in the focus groups that they were not well prepared for placements, in the coming year there should be further investigation into this issue and development of suitable support mechanisms. For example, the implementation of mock assessments as part of the skills module will prepare students for placement.

Development of a clear statutory task statement will enable NESWA to develop equivalence for statutory task placements other than in LAs

The creation and maintenance of a database of PEs in each LA will enable HEIs to track and monitor the currency of Practice Educators

Implementation of workshops and other training for work-based supervisors will ensure they have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities in the placement processes.

7. Progression

Aims:

- Transition to workplace supported, and ASYE using leadership skills to demonstrate competency.
- Regional SW website enhancing access to information about vacancies and recruitment.
- Regional workforce planning informed by research, data and evaluation, with arrangements for medium to long term tracking.
(NE Teaching Partnership Overview (V2 final))

The progression committee is chaired by Steph Downey, Service Director, Adult Social Care at Gateshead Council and have been guided by the bid documents in assigning their priorities (minutes 19/4/17). The committee is particularly aware of the close links between

their work and those of the other committees, and this is especially clear in the work overseeing the development of the NESWA website.

The specific projects addressing the three strategic aims and led by the progression committee are:

developing a mentoring scheme;

- creating a regional continuing professional development framework;
- revisiting the workforce analysis completed in April 2016;
- managing the website creation and implementation.

The website work, led by this committee is considered in section 2 of this report.

The specific **challenges** and aims identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section 3) were:

Recruitment

- Identify how to recruit “right students” and deliver the “right training”.
- More integrated approach to recruiting new staff – matching jobs, career fairs, getting ready for interviews.
- Robust evidence-based recruitment processes
- An active and successful mentor programme
- Website that helps recruit qualified social workers from elsewhere.

Progression in practice

- Clearer progression routes in practice.
- More post-qualified social worker learning (eg Masters programmes).
- Training for first time line managers.
- Learn from ASYE and the variable practice that has exposed.
- Develop more flexible/short learning opportunities for practicing social workers, eg lunchtime learning etc.

Retention

- Tracking retention data over time.
- Vacancy levels across the region.
- Proportion of social workers leaving simply because they lack (progression) opportunities with their current employer (eg improved exit interview data collation).
- Length of average career increases (long term)
- More learning opportunities

Figure 25 - Progression challenges and issues raised in the initial interviews

7.1 Progression Committee Meetings

Nominated representation for the progression committee is good with 23 standing members. Attendance at the eight meetings held during the first phase has been generally quite good, ranging from eight to 14 attendees. Northumbria University and Gateshead Council have attended all meetings. Six partners were able to attend only one or two of the meetings and one did not make it to any meetings (Darlington Borough Council).

In common with the other committees, task and finish groups were established to deliver some elements of the progression committee work plan. The four were:

- Revisit the Children and Adult Services Workforce Survey
- Produce a medium to long term workforce development plan
- Development of a North East Social Work Alliance Website (see Section 2)
- Development of a regional CPD framework/offer linked to progression within local authorities

7.2 Progress

The key issues identified and discussed by the Progression Committee are considered below.

a. Developing a Mentoring Scheme

The identified objective in the initial bid was to:

[ensure] final year placement students are mentored by an ASYE or recently qualified SW

This was part of the proposed wrap-around model where students receive formal support from employers before, during and after their studies. This helps prepare students for the move into work, especially practical elements such as the application process. Through this mentor, students will have access to support that is not directly tied to their studies from those who are close to peers, initially expected to be ASYE employees. The mentor also benefits from this reflective process and it perhaps represents a step towards becoming a practice educator.

This element, though part of the initial bid, did not appear to have strong support across all partners and, importantly, with the newly graduated social workers. The committee consulted with ASYE groups and received “mixed response – some groups have indicated that the workload is too busy, whilst others have indicated that they are willing to take on some elements”. (12 July 2017 minutes). In student interviews conducted by the evaluation team in October 2017, newly appointed social workers expressed similar reservations:

“I feel like I need to gain more mastery of my subject before I could offer support to a student”

“I’ve got enough to cope with managing the new job!”

To move this element forward, the committee agreed to pilot a variety of mentorship approaches with willing volunteer organisations to try and understand the impact on workload for the mentors and the perceived value for the mentees. Given the nature of the wraparound idea, this element of the progression committee’s work also overlaps with the student mentorship that is considered in section 6, where the detail of the pilots is given. It falls within the remit of the progression committee for the ASYE students who offer mentorship, and those who benefit from mentorship in their first and subsequent years of work. It did not make sense to duplicate the work however, and in practice both committees received regular updates.

The evaluation undertaken by the pilots themselves is not yet complete, however the committee noted that the pilot work is uncovering some interesting observations. For example, the role of peer and informal mentoring “[students] received more mentoring or support formally or informally though peers as well as staff” has been highlighted by the pilot studies. It also hints that “group meetings have proved to be more beneficial as opposed to individual mentoring” (minutes, 31 January 2018).

The current feeling is that there may be adequate support for students in place without the need for additional mentoring, but the pilots are helping explore this. Learning is being collected throughout, with the bid plans tested by practice. For example, ASYE students are generally unwilling to offer mentoring support because they do not feel sufficiently qualified. As noted above, this mature and considered exploration of the issue of mentoring, though a series of pilots despite some initial scepticism, is a hallmark of the maturing partnership.

b. CPD Framework

The identified objective is the “development of a regional CPD framework / offer linked to progression within local authorities”. The rationale is that clarity around available progression routes will help support existing staff and inspire new staff. It should also help construct new educational pathways and learning and research opportunities by clarifying what employers want to support and what employees can expect.

This work was led by Northumbria University in one of the funded task and finish groups. Through regular meetings, a framework based on CPD training and education offered as statutory, in-house, and HEI-delivered Masters-level programme, a so-called three-tier system has been developed. This has been loosely mapped to the KSS (see Programme Committee Section), and the mapping tool will be made available to all partners.

This is a helpful development, concentrating as it does on one element of the objective, the training and education offer. This is not the complete objective, as noted by the committee “training is only one area of evidence for this exercise, so it needs to be part of something on a wider scale” (minutes, 31/1/18). It has not proved possible to link this with the

progression routes within local authorities across the region, though the use and amendment of the framework by the pilot sites is a positive sign.

The KSS work has been linked to the local authority workplace development through an explicit KSS mapping tool. This has been piloted in practice, and a series of six briefing sessions have been held leading to the agreed roll out across the region in local authorities. The impact of this joined-up approach will be seen in the coming year.

Creating a CPD offer that allows local authority employed social workers across the North East to understand the steps and training needed to progress their career is undoubtedly challenging, given the differences between local authority employment practices. However, there are examples of partners in the network moving a long way towards standardisation and keeping these individual differences in place, for example the work of the admission committee in agreeing and approach to recruitment. The identified benefits of clarifying progression routes included ‘inspiring and supporting new staff’ and should be further pursued.

In the interim report we suggested that a measure of success for the CPD framework would be adoption by employers and it has clearly not reached this stage yet since the framework has not been completed.

c. Workforce Survey

This is an important part of the overall programme of work, as highlighted in the bid documentation (2016):

An important aspiration of this Alliance is to use data and research effectively to instigate and support innovation and change in relation to the workforce concerned with social work education. The strategic group will make effective use of data collected to drive regional planning, co-operation and implementation of projects and initiatives.

This was developed in detail at the start of the first phase as a plan is to gather on an annual basis the data in the first regional workforce survey compiled by Myriad Research in 2016:

Re-run of regional workforce research to inform a labour-market planning process

There are several reasons for trying to better understand the workforce across the region. NESWA believes that the region tends to retain the workforce it attracts to the North East, and that there is also a relatively high degree of workforce movement between partners for career enhancement. This means that the region could improve the workforce planning procedures by considering the North East as a whole. The workforce survey was conceived to help understand and plan for the workforce as a region, informing other elements of the programme such as university recruitment and CPD.

The first requests for data were sent out on the 17 July 17 and responses requested by the end of August. Some partners felt the format of the request made it harder to fulfil since it was not in line with their standard reporting and in practice completing the data gathering exercise turned out to be a long and drawn out process; the draft report was delivered and discussed in the meeting at the end of January 2018.

The survey results were interesting to the admission committee, and members suggested that some elements should be used to promote the region. It was well received judged against the specific objective yet unable to meet the overall needs:

The Group also acknowledged that this is a good replication of previous survey, however, question if this is really fit for purpose (31/1/18)

The general feeling was that there remain key unanswered questions that might be better illuminated by qualitative investigation and expressed concerns that there is unwarranted overlap with work being undertaken by individual employers and other North East employer workforce groups.

There is no doubt that a good understanding of the workforce situation is vital to the regional workplan NESWA partners have agreed. It is the fundamental of workforce planning, for example. The format of the survey instrument seemed to cause issues; this was dictated by the initial survey and the hope and expectation of the committee was that this would allow comparability year on year. This possibility seems, however, to have been outweighed by the difficulty of collection.

The Regional Workforce Development Report has been agreed by the committee (March 2018) and this is an important achievement for the committee. It contains recommendations which are sensible and which we endorse below.

d. Mapping the KSS in Local Authorities

Complementing the discussion about aligning courses with the KSS in HEIs, a mapping tool has been developed, piloted and adopted by the local authorities. The *NESWA KSS Mapping Tool* is being used to “*gauge the training currently offered within organisations and whether this meets the KSS as required*”. It contains tables for the appropriate KSS items for both adult and children’s services and is in the process of being completed by local authorities.

7.3 Summary

This has been a lively and focussed committee, pushing forward some difficult elements of the NESWA plan, and has achieved some notable successes. They have proved particularly good at integrating their work with other strands of activity where the format of four committees has not mapped well to the activities, for example with mentoring scheme and the workforce survey.

The handling of the website development, considered in section 3, has been notable; given the problems faced in agreeing the purpose and developing content, the fact the website is attractive and still viable with future plans in place is an achievement.

The overall goals of addressing CPD, mentoring and workforce planning issues have been started, but have not yet had significant impact on the region. In one case, the workforce survey, the agreed plan to repeat a past survey has not been completely successful. However, the committee has been able to discuss this in a mature, open and constructive manner, and agree an outline strategy for the next stage.

The CPD work has started the process, and it could be argued that an attempt to tackle this complex issue in less than 12 months was always overambitious. Again, what has been done is a move in the right direction and has allowed significant learning as a partnership thanks to the explicit and honest discussions.

The mentorship work is a good illustration of one of the themes of the evaluation, that the committee structure did not fit well with the programme of work in some cases. There was some duplication evident in that both the Admissions and Progression committees received reports on the mentor pilots, discussed them and made recommendations.

The workforce data collection achieved the basic outcome but did not solve issues of data comparability and partners are still concerned that responses are based on different understandings or definitions. This needs to be addressed, and the suggestions already made by the committee to explore this in more detail through qualitative discussions are recommended.

7.4 Recommendations

Further develop the CPD work with local authority input, including the learning from the mentorship pilots and ASYE feedback, with the aim of developing a series of CPD agreements that the entire region can sign up to. This will give clarity to employees and may help realise some of the aims of the initial bid to improve the understanding of options and progression routes in order to empower and enthuse frontline social workers.

In common with other strands of work, going forward, the workforce planning and mapping work needs to be coordinated with the existing groups across the region who have been looking at workforce planning over a long period.

Ensure that task and finish groups or similar discrete projects have clear and single lines of accountability rather than reporting to multiple parallel groups.

Revisit the workforce data with the aim of establishing a format that will allow the data each employer already collects and analyses to be shared easily between partners to facilitate workforce planning. Data collection should, for example, record the number of students from Local HEIs securing employment in the region.

As noted above, the *Regional Workforce Development Plan* (March 2018) contains some recommendations in draft which address the above issue and that we therefore endorse. The key recommendations that reflect the findings of this evaluation are:

- The Annual Workforce Survey will be repeated. In consultation with the Regional Workforce Strategic Network the research team will agree the content of the survey which will be developed so that collecting the data does not duplicate existing data collection processes and is manageable. The data that is collected will be useful i.e. have a real purpose and will provide important evidence that is useful and meaningful to the individual Local Authorities and across the region.
- In addition to the quantitative data collected through the survey some qualitative data will also be collected. Evidence from Focus Groups, exit Surveys etc. will help to better understand issues around recruitment and retention and, therefore, enable the development of a strategy to address the causes of high staff turnover.
- To support a properly resourced workforce that is fit for purpose the region must gather, share and use data on the changing demographics of the population. This includes data about age, areas of economic and social deprivation, health data etc.

8. Summary

All elements of the first phase bid plan have been delivered in some form, with the exception of a planned MSc which did not meet the region's needs and for which the money was returned to the DfE. Not all elements have turned out as envisaged in the initial bid, but they have usually been discussed, tested and assessed by the committees thereby building knowledge and understanding. For example, the wraparound model of mentorship during and after graduation has been explored through various pilots looking at elements of the model.

NESWA has had some notable successes that are likely to make a positive impact on Social Work. These include:

- Agreement to 120 UCAS points and a 12-point recruitment standard for entry onto undergraduate programmes across the region.
- Agreement and implementation of portable Disclosure and Barring Service Certificate for students across the region.
- A secondment and critical friend programme linking universities and local authorities through concrete activities, including three workshops on key subjects agreed across the region.
- A clear and transparent process of regional placement allocations.
- Development of website that shares information and can be the basis of better communication in future.
- A workforce survey that throws light on student and worker movements around the region.
- Two regional development days involving a wide audience including service users and students.

NESWA shows signs of working as a platform for sharing best practice within the region. Relationships between partners have generally been strengthened by the partnership working.

Significant and demonstrable impacts have not yet been made, primarily because the project has only been active for a little over a year.

In the initial interviews we asked a representative sample of partners what they would like to see achieved by NESWA and what they saw as the challenges. We have returned to these throughout this evaluation, and figure 25 is a summary of the responses about the overall potential of this programme.

Partners wanted to see a number of things from the partnership as it developed. Establishing baselines and understanding the current processes was an important feature of the responses, and the first year of NESWA has made a significant start on this. There is undoubtedly greater understanding and sharing taking place now than one year ago.

Some of those interviewed were worried that the challenge of working together across such a large partnership would be overwhelming, and though this evaluation discusses some areas where there are clear tensions, for example in agreeing practice educator expectations in light of workforce pressures that vary across the region, in general the partnership is finding ways to work with these issues through sharing both their aspirations and practical limitations in a spirit of shared endeavour.

A further area of concern was that the aspirations of the partnership may collide with the needs of individual organisations and stop progress. Undoubtedly, there are instances where this has been true, for example the approach to regional admissions, but again a solution has been found through shared principles that appears to have improved practice whilst retaining individuality. In fact, the diversity of approaches has been often celebrated in the minutes of meetings.

Captured in the final quote in figure 25 is the unifying element that holds the partnership together, they hope to help would-be social workers develop into skilled and dedicated practitioners through a coordinated effort from local authorities and universities in the North East.

NESWA has so far shown impressive commitment to their goal, as illustrated on one hand by dedicated time and energy (see section 3.2 for an indicative costing and a list of the 45 major meetings held in twelve months), and on the other by a determination to seek solutions. A good example of this is the approach to the wraparound mentorship model, which was an important part of the bid, but was met with little enthusiasm in the implementation phase. Nonetheless, this has been carefully explored by partners through a series of convenience pilots.

The first phase bid has been delivered, with few exceptions. There are things that can be improved, and we have suggested some of these. However, NESWA has learned throughout

the first year, and this accumulated knowledge has been poured into the successful bid for the final year of national Teaching Partnership Funding.

The specific overall **challenges** and **measurements** identified in the initial consultation phase (described in Section 2) were

- We need a baseline of current practice Ask HEIs and LAs what has changed as a result of the Teaching Partnership and why?
- Measure impact on cases and outcomes e.g. child assessment needs measurement is a basic task but need to measure output, new Social Worker don't understand this concept (result of intervention, not the intervention itself)
- Gather and assess information on activity and new projects and interview those involved, particularly looking at impact on service users.
- Assess processes – do we have a regional approach where one was proposed? Where can we demonstrate joined up working between LA/HEI
- LAs closing the gap between strategic and operational aspirations.
- Are Teaching Partnerships likely to continue/are they sustainable without further financial input or minimal support? Is the Teaching Partnership still happening?
- On reflection, one partner felt that there was a danger that some specific actions may conflict with the larger needs of employers, for example the work to clarify placements may lead to more placement demands, which might not be what is needed:

[new programmes such as Frontline have] resulted in many of those placed as student with us not gaining employment with us. We do not need increasing numbers of NQSW's and as the report highlights the issue is in retaining experienced workers without using agency staff.

The responses can be summed up by the following comments:

"...biggest challenge is to gain consensus across so many organisations, with different policies and practices, but there is a strong sense that we can work together. It is a huge achievement feels collaborative and positive"

"The partnership can support employers to develop Social Workers who are well prepared to practice"

Figure 26 – Partners' thoughts on the overall NESWA programme

There have been some important challenges that have not yet been resolved and that should be tackled in the coming phase to April 2019.

For example, the distances involved for travel across the network has had an impact on attendance at committee meetings and away days. This has made it difficult for some organisations to field representatives at meetings. Sometimes the partners send different representatives to the committee meetings, but this has an impact on the decision making and ongoing discussions.

The organisations involved have their own, often complex, management structures, so inevitably many decisions made at partnership level have to be taken back and cleared or agreed within organisations. This has been difficult for NESWA due to the time constraints attached to the initial funding. It is also challenging for organisations that need to maintain streamlining across their many departments or faculties as well as comply with partnership commitments.

These issues - difficulty ensuring consistency of representation, organisation complexity and the size and complexity of NESWA – make communication difficult, as summarised by the response from one HEI representative to the online survey in February 2018:

'I think there are teething problems around people not fully understanding new/different processes. A great number (perhaps too) many partners (HEI and LA) - making organisation difficult at times i.e. people remembering to communicate with the right people at the right time etc.' (HEI representative-online survey)

It is also true that organisations in the partnership are often competing for the same pool of students or staff, for placement opportunities, training or funding, which likely compounds the complexity.

Indeed, whilst the interviews and analysis demonstrate a willingness to make changes amongst all those closely involved in NESWA and serving on committees, it is not clear that those representatives have sufficient power and influence within their organisations to make change happen.

Similarly, there is an in-built inflexibility to the systems in which partners work. For example, HEIs are restricted in the extent to which accredited programmes can be changed and some partners do not think this is not fully appreciated by LAs.

These issues have a bearing on a particularly important issue as NESWA look towards future sustainability with around twelve months to demonstrate value, and that is data collection and sharing. Throughout this evaluation we have noted points where data gathering has been attempted and some of the shortfalls. Some obstacles remain before routine data sharing takes place but gathering quantitative data will prove an important part of any ongoing investment case.

In summary, NESWA has achieved a great deal in its first 18 months, and this should be celebrated. Contributors to events including service users and front-line staff, the Strategic Group, the Executive Group, the committees, Funded Project groups, and the project team have all shown impressive determination and commitment to delivering the funded programme.

This is all the more remarkable given some of those centrally involved in constructing the bid were no longer working in the region so not all elements had full support, and the constrained time available for the work.

The committees have met regularly and consistently followed up on various action points and projects agreed and delivered on most of them. This is extremely commendable given the changing membership of the committees and that the original priorities were often agreed by a different group of people. The outcomes of the committee reflect the enormous commitment from individuals who took on additional work on top of their day job (see for example section 3.2). Responses from committee members show that the partnership has strengthened relationships and developed more effective networks.

The work of partners has been facilitated by the NESWA project team (Project Manager, Placement Co-ordinator, Administrator) who have managed and coordinated all the meetings, the pilot programmes and the development days. Without this team, the programme committees could not have worked effectively, as illustrated by the lack of minutes for some of the early meetings, including the meeting of the Strategic Group, and the absence of clear project accountability for the funded projects that was seen prior to the NESWA project team. Additionally, the NESWA team has been involved in delivering training, researching and writing key reports and position papers. This has been possible because the two of the team members are experienced social workers and trainers in their own right.

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There have been achievements, some of which are described above, but in phase 2 NESWA must ensure that improvements are gathered and presented in a convincing manner to a wider audience.

The most important success in year one has been developing a solid foundation. The project has moved quickly, particularly given the complexity and nature of the relationships between organisations (which include competitive elements), and in the coming year must build on and nurture these relationships that have the potential lead to greater improvements to the recruitment and retention of workers in coming years.

9. Recommendations

a. Establish Key Success Indicators

The development and sharing of measures for success is vital if a strong case is to be made for NESWA when investment decisions are made after the funded period. This work has begun, particularly with key workforce and student satisfaction indicators, but it is not yet fit for purpose. The aim should remain the routine gathering and discussion of a small number of key indicators.

In the very early stages of the second phase, the senior partners need to discuss and agree a set of measures that will be pursued that will help judge the impact of the teaching partnership activity. Measures they should discuss and consider gathering **routinely** include:

- Numbers of admissions (undergraduate)
- Numbers of new students on all social worker paths (including non-traditional routes)
- Graduate/non-traditional destinations (geographical and job role)
- UCAS points; published requirements and average accepted (i.e. in practice through exceptional routes, clearing etc)
- Available placements
- Number of active practice educators and levels
- New practice educators per year
- Student experience data from placements (currently gathered routinely by HEI partners)
- Workforce survey including vacancies, turnover
- Worker destinations (e.g. from leavers' forms)

One or two non-standard questions should be developed to gauge the partners' views on the impact of the work. For example, all key committee members could be surveyed at the start and end of phase 2. For example:

- Would you recommend investing in NESWA?
- How much would you recommend your organisation contribute to NESWA?

b. Build on the Communication Plan

The communication strategy that has guided phase 1 of the teaching partnership was necessarily focussed on keeping the engaged partners informed. Going forward, this needs to be built upon, with an added focus on communicating NESWA achievements to a larger audience. This is an important part of gaining broader commitment and understanding, ensuring fair consideration is given to continued funding considerations after April 2019.

In particular:

- Make use of the website for communicating NESWA success, building its reach and impact.
- Establish communication channels with those who are not closely involved with NESWA but are invested social work (for example social workers in local authorities and other settings, academics delivering social work education).
- Better captured and more thoroughly publicise successful case studies
- Consider publicising the work more widely in local media, for example, since this will also raise the profile of the work with partners.

c. Travel and meeting attendance

Distances are significant in the North East, and NESWA has held a quite demanding series of meetings. Continuous effort is needed to support consistent representation from all organisations:

- Meeting frequency, location and attendance should be carefully considered to ensure broad representation and consistency of representation is possible.
- Greater use must be made of alternatives such as video conferencing.
- During phase 1 there has been some duplication of reporting requirements because the subprojects do not align neatly with the committee structure; for example, the mentor work spans Placement and Progression. In phase 2 the task and finish groups or similar discrete projects should have clear single lines of accountability rather than reporting to multiple parallel groups.

d. Widening Involvement During Phase 2

There has been some work on involving other interested parties during phase 1, which should be built upon, beginning with:

- The involvement of service users in programme recruitment and delivery needs to be broadened across the partnership.
- The involvement of users in strategic development should be explored during the coming year.
- Involving the PVI sector, given their role in placements and forming new social workers, is important to explore in the coming year.

e. Recognize Complexity

Partner organisations have their own, often complex, management structures and so decisions made at partnership level have to be taken back and agreed within organisations. This has been difficult for NESWA due to the time constraints attached to the initial funding. It is also challenging for organisations that need to maintain streamlining across their many departments or faculties as well as comply with partnership commitments.

It is also true that organisations in the partnership are often competing for the same pool of students or staff, for placement opportunities, training or funding, which likely compounds the complexity.

Partners have expressed anxiety throughout the evaluation process that there is a divide between HEIs and LAs. Some of the project work discussed in this evaluation offers excellent examples of genuine joint working, but there are also less successful efforts at partnership working. NESWA needs to be aware of this potential for division and continue the positive efforts to work together.

- Phase 2 of the partnership should aim to embed any initial progress and ensure that positive changes are sustainable.
- Cooperative relationships which have been built during phase 1 are powerful and should be nurtured and grown in phase 2.

10. Acknowledgements

The evaluation team is very grateful for the enthusiastic support of the project team, the evaluation subgroup, the Chair, lead authority, committee chairs and committee members, and all partners in the gathering of information for this interim evaluation. Partners have gone out of their way to make themselves available for interviews and phone calls, and we've been made very welcome at any meetings or events we've attended. The commitment shown is indicative of the approach partners have taken to the first year of this project.