



Department
for Education

Social work fast track programmes: tracking retention and progression

Interim Report

July 2020

**Jonathan Scourfield, Nina Maxwell, Laura Venn, John
Carpenter, Evgenia Stepanova and Roger Smith**



**Government
Social Research**

Contents

Executive summary	4
Background	4
Method.....	4
Findings	6
Preparation for practice.....	6
Destinations and early experiences of social work.....	7
Retention / attrition	7
Progression.....	8
Job satisfaction	8
Reasons for leaving	8
1.0 Introduction	10
1.1 Frontline.....	10
1.2 Step Up to Social Work.....	11
1.3 Evidence on retention and progression from previous studies of fast-track graduates.....	11
1.4 Aims.....	12
1.5 Research questions	13
2.0 Method	14
2.1 Online surveys of fast-track graduates	14
2.2 Tracking fast-track graduates	15
2.3 Qualitative interviews.....	17
2.4 Analysis	17
2.5 Comparing different social work programmes.....	18
3.0 Preparation for practice	20
3.1 Frontline.....	20
3.1.1 Survey responses	20
3.1.2 Insights from interviews.....	21
3.2 Step Up to Social Work.....	22
3.2.1 Survey responses	22
3.2.2 Insights from interviews.....	23

4.0 Destinations and early experiences of social work	25
4.1 Frontline.....	25
4.1.1 Survey and tracking results	25
4.1.2 Insights from interviews.....	29
4.2 Step Up to Social Work.....	30
4.2.1 Survey and tracking results	30
4.2.2 Insights from interviews.....	32
5.0 Retention / attrition, progression and future intentions	34
5.2 Frontline.....	34
5.2.1 Survey responses	34
5.1.2 Insights from interviews.....	37
5.2. Step up to Social Work	38
5.2.1 Survey responses	38
5.2.2 Insights from interviews.....	39
6.0 Job satisfaction, coping and resilience	41
6.1 Frontline.....	41
6.1.1 Survey responses	41
6.1.2 Insights from interviews.....	43
6.2 Step Up to Social Work.....	44
6.2.1 Survey responses	44
6.2.2 Insights from interviews.....	46
7.0 Reasons for leaving.....	48
7.1 Frontline.....	48
7.1.2 Survey responses	48
7.1.2 Insights from interviews.....	49
7.2 Step Up to Social Work.....	50
7.2.1 Survey responses	50
7.2.2 Insights from interviews.....	50
8.0 Next Steps.....	53
References	54
Appendix 1 – Tracking of survey non-respondents	56

Executive summary

Background

The organisation of social work education in England has been subject to some substantial change in recent years. Both recruitment and retention are currently very challenging in children's social work in England. One new model of initial social work education, developed in part as a response to recruitment and retention problems, has been fast track work-based routes to qualification.

Frontline was designed to attract graduates with strong academic records and excellent interpersonal skills who may not have considered social work as a career to come into statutory child protection work in local authorities. It offers a distinctive training model as it is heavily practice-based, using a specific theoretical model and two specific evidence-based practice approaches.

Step Up to Social Work was designed to attract high calibre career changers to an employment-based intensive route into child and family social work. Its aim was to strengthen the relationship between social work educators and employers via a coordinated training model, delivered at regional partnership level and focused on enabling graduates to be practice-ready on qualification.

This interim report presents a summary of initial findings from the first two years of a longitudinal study of these two fast-track child and family social work programmes.

Method

The aims of the study, as set out by the Department for Education, are to investigate the longer-term outcomes (up to early 2021) for Frontline cohorts 1 to 5 and Step Up to Social Work cohorts 4 and 5. By the end of the study, the longest follow-up will be 5 years for Frontline (cohort 1) and 3.5 years for Step Up (cohort 4). The key outcomes are employment destinations, rate of career progression and retention (or its reverse, attrition) within child and family social work. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the employment destinations and trajectories of fast-track graduates after they complete Step Up or Frontline programmes?
- What are the retention / attrition rates within social work over time for each of the fast-track cohorts?

- Are fast-track graduates who enter social work progressing to supervision or leadership roles and if so, how quickly?
- What are the longer term career plans and aspirations of fast-track graduates?
- What are the destinations of fast-track candidates who exit the programmes before completion, those who complete the programmes but do not enter social work and those who enter but later leave the profession? And what are their reasons for leaving?
- What are the push/ pull factors affecting retention / attrition in child and family social work amongst fast track graduates?
- Is the typology of career trajectories developed in previous Step Up studies transferable to Frontline graduates and what does this typology tell us about supervising and managing the workforce?
- What coping strategies do fast-track graduates employ? What impact could these have on future workforce management?

This interim report presents findings from data collection in 2017-2019. These findings do not yet address all of the questions above. Findings to date include respondents from:

- Frontline cohorts 1 to 4 (i.e. gaining licence to practise between 2015 and 2018), which comprised of students between six and 36 months post qualification;
- Step Up cohort 4 (graduating 2017) at six and 18 months post qualification.

Data from the fifth cohort of each programme will be presented in the final report. Only cohort 4 of Step Up are involved in this interim report. The already-published longitudinal study from Smith et al (2018) covers Step Up cohorts 1 and 2.

Participants from both programmes, including both those who have stayed in child and family social work and those who have left the profession, were invited to complete an online survey each year. The first survey completed 6 months post licence to practise, was more detailed than subsequent survey waves. A sub-sample of respondents, including those who have stayed in social work and those who have left the profession, were invited to participate in a semi-structured telephone interview. The survey questions covered progression, job satisfaction, stress and intention to remain in the profession.

The numbers responding to each survey range from 62 to 212, with response rates ranging from 49% to 82%. Response rates were higher from Frontline graduates. In the case of Frontline graduates, survey data come from the Frontline organisation's

own surveys. For Step Up, surveys were distributed directly by the research team. Telephone interviews were conducted with 21 graduates of Step Up and 27 of Frontline. Of these, for each programme ten interviewees had left social work.

To help estimate attrition rates from social work, fast-track graduates who did not respond to the surveys were tracked using the Health and Care Professions register.

Analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Destination of Leavers from Higher Education 2016/7 and already-published results from this same data set (Skills for Care, 2018) were used for comparison with mainstream programmes from across England.

Findings

This interim report was written on the basis of data collected up to the mid-point of the study, which began in 2017 and will end in 2021. While a more detailed picture of fast-track graduate trajectories will emerge over time, the headline results at this stage are summarised below.

For most of the results, no comparison is yet available with social workers who have qualified via mainstream (non-fast-track) programmes. In future, the longitudinal research commissioned by the Department for Education (Johnson et al., 2019) may allow for some comparison, once later waves of that survey have been conducted.

Preparation for practice

In comparison with 2016-17 HESA data on graduates of mainstream (i.e. non-fast-track) social work programmes, Frontline cohort 3 graduates - six months after licence to practise but while still on the programme - were slightly more likely to give an overall positive assessment of how well they were prepared for employment (by year 1 of their programme), but cohort 4 graduates were less likely than mainstream social work graduates to give a positive assessment. Frontline graduates in both cohorts were much less likely to respond in *very* positive terms than graduates from mainstream programmes.

Compared with the HESA data on all graduates from mainstream social work programmes, Step Up graduates were more likely to give an overall positive assessment of how well they were prepared for employment, but less likely to respond in *very* positive terms.

Destinations and early experiences of social work

Six months after qualifying as social workers, both fast-track programmes appear to have lower attrition rates from social work than can be seen in the statistics on other social work graduates in England:

- HESA data on all-England social work graduates from mainstream generic post-graduate programmes show that 22% did not categorise themselves as a social worker.
- Findings from 2017 Step Up graduates (cohort 4) showed that 10% of graduates were not confirmed as being in statutory social work roles in England.
- Of Frontline graduates, only 1% of those gaining a licence to practise in 2017 (cohort 3) and 2% of those graduating in 2018 (cohort 4) were not practising social workers. However, at this point in time - six months post-licence to practise - unlike for other routes into social work, Frontline participants are still formally engaged in their programme.

Supervision was rated as 'very good' or 'good' by around 77% of Frontline graduates and 'poor' by 12% (cohort 3) and 15% (cohort 4). Caseloads for Frontline graduates were 17 or more for 41% (cohort 3) and 47% (cohort 4).

Of Step Up cohort 4 graduates who responded to the survey, supervision was rated as 'very good' or 'good' by 81% and 'poor' by 16%. Caseloads were 17 or more for 51% of them.

Retention / attrition

It is not possible to present findings on retention in child and family social work, as the follow-up in this report depends on professional registration with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) to date and this does not indicate field of practice, neither can we be sure that all who are on the HCPC register are actually practising. We therefore refer to attrition rather than retention.

Eighteen months after licence to practise, the rate of Frontline graduates not working in a statutory social work role in England – either with children or adults - ranged from 5% (cohort 2) to 14% (cohort 3). After three years, 29% of Frontline cohort 1 had left statutory social work in England.

For Step Up cohort 4, the attrition rate 18 months after qualifying was 11%. Previous studies of Step Up cohorts 1 and 2 showed an attrition rate of 15-20% at three years post qualification. No data are yet available on Step Up cohort 4 three years after qualifying.

There are currently no comparable data at 18-month and three-year time points for social work students from mainstream courses. However, the final report in 2021 may allow some comparison to be made.

The vast majority of graduates from both Step Up and Frontline (all cohorts studied to date and all time points) who are social workers are working with children and families, rather than adults. Of those in child and family social work, the majority are working in children in need or child protection teams.

Of the Frontline graduates from all cohorts who responded to the surveys, a substantial amount had moved to a different local authority from where they had trained – for example 25% of cohort 1 (licence to practise in 2015) were still in the same authority three years after licence to practise. Results for Step Up graduates remaining in the local authorities where they trained after three years are not yet available, because only more recent cohorts are included in this study. However, these results for cohort 4 will be presented in the final report.

Progression

It is too early in the study for there to be much to say about progression. However, it can be noted that 3 years after gaining their licence to practise, 36% of Frontline graduates in social work responding to the survey had progressed to at least to senior social worker level. The equivalent results for Step Up will be available in the final report.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction results are presented for those 18 months post qualification. Intrinsic job satisfaction was high for graduates of both programmes – that is, factors such as your own accomplishments and opportunities to take your own initiative. Satisfaction with extrinsic factors was lower for both programmes; particularly hours of work and public respect for social work.

Reasons for leaving

For some of those leaving social work this was a positive shift into a different role while for others this was perceived more negatively in relation to off-putting factors in workplaces.

More findings on reasons for leaving are presented from Frontline graduates because data are available for that programme at later time points. The most often cited reasons for leaving by Frontline survey respondents were management / organisation and a positive decision to move into a job in an allied field. Stress,

mental health challenges or emotional burden and excessive workload were also mentioned by several respondents. For Step Up graduates the reason for leaving most commonly reported was workload, followed by management / organisation, stress and personal reasons unconnected to work.

1.0 Introduction

The organisation of social work in England has been subject to substantial change in recent years. In 2003, the attempt was made to raise professional qualifying standards by shifting entirely to a graduate level entry requirement for social work. There have been a series of subsequent initiatives to improve graduates' readiness to practise and strengthen the profession. These have included the work of the Social Work Reform Board, changes in the regulatory arrangements, the establishment (and subsequent demise) of the College of Social Work, the establishment of a series of frameworks designed to set the expected standards of good practice at differing career points, and the initiation of a variety of new entry routes into the profession.

New routes have included fast-track training, with Step Up to Social Work and Frontline specialised for child and family social work specifically, as opposed to mainstream social work programmes which prepare students for all areas of social work. Both recruitment and retention are currently very challenging in children's social work in England, as articulated by senior leaders in a recent survey (Marshall et al., 2017). The establishment of fast-track programmes is one response to this problem.

The Department for Education (DfE) describe the two fast-track programmes in the following terms.

1.1 Frontline

Frontline is a two-year, fast-track training programme targeted at bringing high performing graduates with leadership potential into child and family social work. The Department for Education (DfE) began working with Frontline in September 2013 to deliver the first cohort in July 2014. Frontline then won a contract to supply a national fast-track entry programme that recruits and provides participants with a two-year regulator-approved training course, leading to a postgraduate social work qualification within a year and a Master's degree (MA) within two years.

Training comprises of an intensive 5-week Summer Institute followed by placement in a student unit in a local authority alongside ongoing academic input delivered in the unit, with the aim of theory-practice integration. It offers a distinctive training model, being heavily practice-based and promoting a specific theoretical model and two evidence-based practice approaches. Each unit is led by a consultant social worker who leads casework with the trainees. Students qualify as social workers after a year, having successfully attained a Post-Graduate Diploma and registered with Social Work England. Most make a commitment to practise for a further year,

with the opportunity to complete a Master's degree. Frontline training also includes a leadership development programme, as developing future leaders of the profession is an additional aim.

1.2 Step Up to Social Work

Step Up to Social Work (also referred to as Step Up) is a tailored training programme which provides successful trainees with a Post Graduate Diploma in social work (but no Master's qualification), alongside intensive hands-on experience, within 14 months. It has been specifically designed for high-achieving graduates and career changers, who already have experience of working with vulnerable children, young people and families, to train to become qualified social workers.

Step Up is a distinctive programme because it is employer-led, i.e. council employers work with universities to shape the course content and syllabus. It provides intensive hands-on practitioner input alongside academic learning, at an accelerated pace (compared to non-fast-track traditional routes). The programme is designed to enable coursework and practical experience to happen simultaneously. The Step Up to Social Work programme accepts applications every two years. At inception in 2010, Step Up operated in 42 local authorities; now 136 of England's 152 local authorities host the programme for cohort 6. This equates to 89% coverage of LA's in England. Some local authorities in Step Up regional partnerships may provide some additional academic input for graduates beyond their initial programme. However, for the purposes of this report we are treating it as a 14-month programme.

For both of the fast-track programmes, demands on the individual are rigorous and the level of commitment expected from students is high.

1.3 Evidence on retention and progression from previous studies of fast-track graduates

Earlier studies (Smith et al., 2013; 2018) have investigated the extent to which graduate entrants onto Step Up to Social Work have followed the expected path into professional practice, in terms of programme completion, retention and progression. Step Up participants were followed up as long as five years after qualification (Smith et al. 2018).

For the first two Step Up cohorts, the great majority completed the programme successfully and moved into posts in child and family social work (cohort 1, 87%, n=185; cohort 2, 93%, n=227). Three years after qualifying, most of these were still known to be practising in equivalent posts (cohort 1, 85%, n=161; cohort 2, 80%, n=212). Figures were only available for the first cohort at the five-year post-

qualification point, but at this stage, 73% were confirmed as still employed in child and family social work. For Step Up there appear to be relatively good completion, 'conversion' and retention rates; compared to the 78% figure of those completing mainstream postgraduate social work qualifying programmes who then take up jobs as social workers within six months of graduation (Skills for Care, 2018).

Surveys undertaken with the first Step Up cohort and a comparison group (of social work practitioners qualifying from traditional routes at approximately the same time) indicated little difference between the two in terms of continuity, with 39% of the Step Up respondents and 35% of the comparators remaining in their initial post three years after qualifying (Smith et al., 2018). Interview findings showed that a minority of Step Up graduates interviewed felt that they had progressed into senior roles more quickly than expected, and this was supported by employers who clearly believed that this group did have the potential to gain promotion relatively early in their careers; and in some cases, were able to point to examples of rapid progression.

In relation to leavers, interview findings from these previous Step Up studies identified a number of different contributing factors, including lack of 'fit' with the role, changing personal circumstances, 'moving on', and adverse experiences on the programme. However, the relatively infrequent occurrence of such problems did not appear to be indicative of fundamental programme flaws, however difficult the challenges may have been in a small number of cases.

No independent research has been published to date on retention or progression for Frontline graduates, although the Frontline organisation has published data in a retention briefing (Frontline, 2019). The independent evaluation of the Frontline pilot (Maxwell et al., 2016) focused on practice skills, demographics and experience of the programme.

There has been little or no large-scale research on the retention and progression of graduates from all routes into UK social work. An exception is the study, based on Labour Force Survey data by Curtis, Moriarty and Netten (2010) which found the average working life of a frontline social worker to be 7.7 years.

1.4 Aims

The aims of this study, as set out by the Department for Education, are to investigate the longer-term outcomes (up to March 2021) for Frontline cohorts 1 to 5 and Step Up cohorts 4 and 5. By the end of the study, the longest follow-up will be 5 years for Frontline (cohort 1) and 3.5 years for Step Up (cohort 4). The key outcomes are employment destinations, rate of career progression and retention (or its reverse, attrition) within child and family social work.

1.5 Research questions

The study addresses the following research questions. We note in brackets the data sources for answering each question. Research methods will be introduced in the next section of the report (2.0):

- What are the employment destinations and trajectories of fast-track graduates after they complete Step Up or Frontline programmes? (Tracking and surveys)
- What are the retention / attrition rates within social work over time for each of the fast-track cohorts? (Tracking and surveys)
- Are fast-track graduates who enter social work progressing to supervision or leadership roles and if so, how quickly? (Surveys)
- What are the longer term career plans and aspirations of fast-track graduates? (Surveys and interviews)
- What are the destinations of fast-track candidates who exit the programmes before completion, those who complete the programmes but do not enter social work and those who enter but later leave the profession? And what are their reasons for leaving? (Leavers' survey and interviews)
- What are the push/ pull factors affecting retention / attrition in child and family social work amongst fast track graduates? (Survey and interviews)
- Is the typology of career trajectories developed in previous Step Up studies transferable to Frontline graduates and what does this typology tell us about supervising and managing the workforce? (Survey and interviews)
- What coping strategies do fast-track graduates employ? What impact could these have on future workforce management? (Interviews)

2.0 Method

2.1 Online surveys of fast-track graduates

Graduates are invited to complete an annual online survey beginning six months after qualification (Table 2.1). The first survey, after 6 months, is more detailed than subsequent survey waves. For Frontline, graduates from cohorts one to five will be captured. Only cohorts four and five from Step Up are involved in this study. The already-published longitudinal study from Smith et al (2018) covers cohorts 1 and 2.

Table 2.1: Fast-track programme cohorts and timetable

Frontline							
Cohort	Date of licence to practise	Data Point & Survey 6m after attainment of PG Dip	Data Point & Survey after 18m	Data Point & Survey after 2.5 yrs	Data Point & Survey 3 yrs	Data Point & Survey after 4 yrs	Data Point & Survey after 5 yrs
1	Sept 2015			March 18	Sept 18	Sept 19	Sept 20
2	Sept 2016		March 18	March 19	Sept 19	Sept 20	
3	Sept 2017	March 18	March 19	March 20	Sept 20		
4	Sept 2018	March 19	March 20	March 21			
5	Sept 2019	March 20	March 21				

Step Up to Social Work							
Cohort	Date of licence to practise	Data Point & Survey 6m after attainment of PG Dip	Data Point & Survey after 18m	Data Point and Survey after 2.5 years	Data Point and Survey after 3.5 years		
4	Mar 2017	Sept 17	Sept 18	Sept 19	Sept 20		
5	Mar 2019	Sept 19	Sept 20				

This interim report includes findings from all surveys in 2017 and 2018. From 2019, only the surveys of Frontline are included, due to the timing of the Step Up surveys and the writing of this report. The length of time survey respondents had been in practice since qualification ranged from six months to 36 months.

2.2 Tracking fast-track graduates

Step Up graduates are tracked using study survey responses and non-respondents are looked up in the HCPC register of social workers. Frontline already track the destinations of their graduates and disseminate six-monthly questionnaires. To avoid survey burden and therefore potentially a very poor response rate, we are not contacting Frontline graduates separately, in addition to the follow-up surveys they are already asked to complete by the Frontline organisation. Instead, we add some questions to Frontline's own survey and then receive an anonymised linked data set for analysis. Frontline staff who have access to their participant database track survey non-respondents in the HCPC register on behalf of the research team. Table 2.2 below shows the response rates for the surveys.

To give an idea of expected response rates, some published rates from other comparable surveys are 37-52% for Step Up to Social Work cohorts 1 and 2 (Smith et al., 2018) and 29-44% (Hussein et al., 2014) and 37-51% (Carpenter et al., 2012) for previous surveys of newly qualified social workers. The average response rate for online surveys of the broadly comparably occupational group of health care professionals is only 13% (Cho, Johnson and Van Geest, 2013).

In places throughout the report, comparison is made with the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) graduate destination survey for 2016/7. This survey is non-mandatory and is sent to all graduates six months after leaving higher education. For 2016/7 it had a response rate of 71%. The survey data include the number of graduates who were employed as social workers or in social care related fields and where they found employment. In some places we make comparison with published aggregate results (Skills for Care, 2018) and in some places we refer to the research team's own analysis of individual-level HESA data for 2017 graduates. This data set is smaller than that used by Skills for Care (n=2125, compared with n=3000) as it only includes programmes coded under 'social work', however it can be considered fairly representative of the population of mainstream social work programme graduates who have responded to the HESA survey.

Table 2.2: Survey sample size and response rates

Fast-track programme	Cohort number ^f (start date)	Date cohort achieved licence to practise	N started programme	n (%) achieved licence to practise	n (%) responding to 2017 survey ^d	n (%) responding to 2018 survey ^d	n (%) responding to 2019 survey ^d
Frontline	1 (2014)	2015	104	100 (96%)	N/A	82 (82%)	71 (71%) ^e
	2 (2015)	2016	124	117 (94%) ^a	N/A	81 (69%)	62 (53%)
	3 (2016)	2017	155	140 (90%) ^b	N/A	99 (71%)	68 (49%)
	4 (2017)	2018	282	251 (89%)	N/A	N/A	155 (62%)
Step Up to Social Work	4 (2016)	2017	458	435 (95%) (423 ^c)	212 (49%)	171 (39%)	N/A

^a includes 5 deferrals who re-joined the programme and qualified at a later date (these were not included in the survey data set)

^b The number to date, 1 deferral due to achieve PG Diploma in 2018

^c the number that consented to be contacted for evaluation purposes

^d Response rate excludes respondents who did not consent to be surveyed

^e Cohort 1 Frontline survey was in fact conducted in September 2018, unlike the rest of this column

^f Frontline cohorts are classified by the year in which the Frontline participants commenced the programme

2.3 Qualitative interviews

Semi-structured telephone interviews are being conducted with graduates from each programme in each year of the study. Interviews will be conducted with employers from both programmes in 2020. To date interviews have been conducted with 48 fast-track graduates, between six and 30 months post licence to practise; 27 interviewees were from the Frontline programme and 21 from Step Up (Table 2.3). Of these, 28 have stayed in social work (four are repeat interviews) and 20 have left the profession, with three leaving before completing their programme.

Table 2.3: Characteristics of interviewees

Interviewee categories	SUSW			FL		FL	Total interviews
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Working as social workers	3	8	11	5	12	17	28
<i>(of which, repeat interviews)</i>	1	1	2	1	1	2	4
Have left social work	-*	10	10	-*	10	10	20

*Male leavers were invited to take part, but interviews could not be arranged.
SUSW = Step Up to Social Work; FL = Frontline

Both the Step Up and Frontline interviews followed a standardised topic guide. Interviewees were asked a number of questions in relation to four general themes: course expectations and motivations, course experiences, influencing factors and work experiences and commitment to social work.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A number of *a priori* codes were agreed by the research team, based on the interview schedule, and transcripts were analysed according to this thematic framework.

All respondents have been given pseudonyms throughout the report to preserve their anonymity.

2.4 Analysis

Analysis of interview data was managed within the qualitative software package, NVivo. All interview transcripts were coded by a member of the research team and 28 nodes generated were ordered hierarchically within four key themes: programme and preparation for practice, first experiences in post, coping and resilience, and commitment to social work.

Most of the quantitative data in the report are presented as descriptive statistics only, generated by Stata software. Statistical tests are used deliberately sparingly, as over-use can lead to false positives. The only comparisons in the report that have been tested statistically, using chi-square tests, are between graduates from fast-track and mainstream social work programmes, where these are possible, using HESA data. A significance level of 0.05 is used.

2.5 Comparing different social work programmes

There cannot be a like-for-like comparison of different social work programmes. The structure of programme delivery is different. Frontline, as an organisation, is a single provider of its own programme, whereas Step Up to Social Work has multiple university providers, as with mainstream (non-fast-track) programmes. Both fast-track programmes are exclusively at postgraduate level, whereas mainstream programmes exist at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The fast-track programmes have tax-free bursaries of £18-20,000 to cover living expenses and no fees charged to students, whereas mainstream programmes rely on students (other than those funded by employers) applying for bursaries at substantially lower levels and students are charged fees. These financial differences affect the student market for different programmes.

Our approach to both surveys and tracking of non-respondents has been different for the two fast-track programmes. Because of the differences in survey distribution (mentioned in section 2.2) the Frontline surveys have response rates (49-82%) which are higher than the response rate for Step Up (39-51%). This disparity is to be expected when Frontline respondents are either still on the Frontline programme (when 6 months after licence to practise) or, for later waves, are responding to the organisation that trained them, hence they will have a certain sense of social obligation, whereas Step Up respondents are being surveyed by people with whom they have no connection. For Step Up to Social Work respondents, the research team used chase-up mechanisms which achieved a response rate within a similar range to that found in previous studies (see pp.15). Although we note Frontline's higher response rates, the research team have no way of establishing whether the responses are more representative of either programme's graduates.

When it comes to tracking non-respondents, for data protection reasons it has not been possible for the research team to have access to identifiable data from Frontline; therefore, it is Frontline themselves who have tracked non-respondents via the HCPC register. Because Frontline is a single national programme, the research team are able to have anonymised demographic data on the whole cohort, whereas for Step Up graduates, demographic data are only available for those who have responded to the survey. Demographic results are not presented in this report.

It should be noted that at most time points no comparison is yet available with social workers who have qualified via mainstream (non-fast-track) programmes. Longitudinal research commissioned by the Department for Education (Johnson et al., 2019) may allow for some comparison in future, once later waves of that survey have been conducted.

3.0 Preparation for practice

Six months after gaining a licence to practise, graduates were asked 'how well did the Step Up to Social Work programme / year 1 of the Frontline programme prepare you for employment?' In the HESA destinations survey, respondents are asked a very similar question – 'how well did your degree prepare you for employment?' The 2016-17 HESA data showed that of graduates from mainstream (i.e. not fast-track) social work programmes – undergraduate and postgraduate combined - 85% responded positively (well or very well). Of these, 40% said their degree had prepared them 'very well' and 45% 'well'. Of the other respondents, 11% selected 'not very well' and 2% 'not at all'.

Comparisons are made below between these HESA results and fast-track survey data, however it should be noted that these are not like for like comparisons. As noted above, the question asked is not identical. Also, Frontline participants were answering a survey from their programme provider rather than an independent body and they were still engaged with their programme.

The longitudinal study by Johnson et al. (2019) also asked about preparation for practice, with the same question for all survey respondents, albeit with a small sample of fast-track graduates. They found an overall positive response from 94% of Frontline graduates, 89% of Step Up graduates, 75% of postgraduate social work degree graduates, 75% of those with a Diploma in Social Work and 70% of undergraduate social work degree graduates.

3.1 Frontline

3.1.1 Survey responses

Six months after gaining a licence to practise, 87% of cohort 3 and 80% of cohort 4 responded positively (well or very well) to how well the programme prepared them for employment. Conversely, 12% of cohort 3 and 17% of cohort 4 responded that the programme had prepared them 'not very well' or 'not at all' for employment (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Frontline graduates' views on preparedness for employment, 6m post licence to practise

How well did year 1 of the Frontline programme prepare you for employment?	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
	n (%)	n (%)
Very well	16 (16%)	33 (21%)
Well	70 (71%)	91 (59%)
Not very well	10 (10%)	22 (14%)
Not at all	*	5 (3%)
Can't tell	*	*
Total	99 (100%)	155 (100%)

*Values less than 5 are not reported

In comparison with 2016-17 HESA data on graduates of mainstream social work programmes (see previous page, first paragraph of 3.0), Frontline cohort 3 graduates were slightly (2 percentage points) more likely than mainstream social work graduates to give an overall positive assessment of how well they were prepared for employment, but Frontline cohort 4 graduates were 5 percentage points less likely than mainstream social work graduates. Frontline graduates in both cohorts were much less likely to respond in very positive terms than graduates from mainstream programmes. The differences in the distribution of responses between graduates of Frontline and mainstream programmes were statistically significant for both cohort 3^a and cohort 4^b. It is worth noting that mainstream graduates are expected to go into a wider range of employment, with a much bigger proportion getting jobs in social work with adults.

3.1.2 Insights from interviews

With regard to programme demands, it is well documented in previous studies that fast-track courses are "intense" and "all-encompassing" (Smith et al, 2018, Baginsky and Manthorpe, 2016, Maxwell et al, 2016) and interviewees for this current study gave similar accounts. In retrospect, most of the Frontline graduates interviewed perceived the intense nature of academic learning, practice learning, and assignments as good preparation for practice once qualified. However, for those interviewed 18 months and 30 months after the end of the programme there was a suggestion that balancing the second year of the programme alongside full time work and the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) could be challenging:

It's incredibly hard to squeeze all of that in and do it in a meaningful way that isn't just ticking the boxes. (Ingrid)

^a $\chi^2=27.13, p<0.001$

^b $\chi^2=21.54, p<0.001$

As interviewees were embedded within local authorities, practice learning represented the core of the programme. Interviewees were positive about their placements, perceiving them to have offered an invaluable opportunity to apply what they had been taught and to learn about the realities of social work.

Generally, Frontline graduates interviewed were positive about the programme, acknowledging the value gained from being embedded within local authorities. This enabled them to develop their knowledge regarding systems and processes as well as providing the opportunity to work with families from referral to closure.

Frontline graduates perceived there to be no significant differences between themselves and other graduates. There were comments relating to differences around specific teaching areas. For example, one interviewee said:

We haven't learned some of the things they've learned and they haven't necessarily kind of learned the things that we've learned. (Lisa)

When asked how the programme could be improved there was a sense that Frontline's approach to advertising and marketing could serve to distance interviewees from their social worker colleagues. In addition, changes to the Master's offering were reported with some disappointment noted at the removal of the Master's in Systemic Approaches. By 18 months and 30 months post licence to practise, some interviewees described difficulties in reconciling what was construed as idealised teaching of working with children and families with the realities of social work:

So I think sometimes Frontline don't prepare you for the fact, like what they're giving you is the tools to use in an ideal world where you only have one case and you can work with people endlessly and I don't think they necessarily think about how that translates to a caseload in reality. (Diane)

Hence some interviewees suggested that they would have benefitted from more teaching on risk and the practicalities of working with families.

3.2 Step Up to Social Work

3.2.1 Survey responses

When asked six months after qualification 'how well did the Step Up to Social Work programme prepare you for employment?', Step Up cohort 4 graduates replied as shown in Table 3.2 below. Compared with all graduates from mainstream (i.e. non-fast-track) social work programmes, from HESA destinations survey data (see

above, at the start of 3.0), Step Up graduates were more likely to give an overall positive assessment of how well they were prepared for employment, but were less likely to respond in very positive terms. Overall, 91% said that Step Up prepared them well or very well. The differences in the distribution of responses between Step Up cohort 4 graduates and graduates from mainstream programmes were statistically significant^c.

Table 3.2: Step Up cohort 4 graduates' views on preparedness for employment

How well did the Step Up programme prepare you for employment?	n (%)
Very well	68 (32%)
Well	124 (59%)
Not very well	15 (7%)
Not at all	*
Total	208 (100%)

*Values less than 5 are not reported

3.2.2 Insights from interviews

Interviews with Step Up graduates suggested the programme was experienced as more difficult for those with families and/or caring responsibilities due to the requirements of combining academic teaching with local authority placements.

In relation to placements, graduate views on Step Up placement experiences were varied. Where placements worked well, graduates perceived they had been well supported and given the opportunity to consolidate theoretical knowledge with practical application and experience of tools and skills required in practice. Those with positive experiences identified the strengths of the course as being the degree of autonomy in terms of both self-directed learning and opportunity to integrate theory and practice in placements. When asked how the programme could be improved, this group identified inconsistencies in delivery and implementation. Where placements did not work so well this was associated with a perceived lack of support, high caseloads and limited practice opportunities. For this group, the suitability of the intense course for those with caring responsibilities was questioned. Doubts were also expressed as to whether the 14-month course was sufficient for training.

At six months post-qualifying, Step Up graduates were ambivalent regarding the differences between themselves and those who had graduated through mainstream social work courses. The noticeable difference at the 18-month interviews was that the majority of interviewees were more candid about the differences observed between fast track and non-fast track social workers. Greater time in post and

^c $\chi^2=15.68, p=0.001$

interaction with a larger pool of colleagues led several interviewees to the conclusion that they were better equipped and prepared for practice than those who qualified via traditional routes:

For instance, we've had a new qualified starter, six months ago on a traditional route and she's been completely unprepared. She is not ready for frontline work, and I can really see the difference between the course that she's been on and the training that I received on Step Up. (Natalie)

This was felt to be as a result of a number of factors; the foundation provided by the course and the opportunities it provided interviewees to be embedded in teams; differences inherent in the individuals as a result of life stage or life experiences; and differences potentially resulting from how the course is perceived by others and how interviewees are treated as a result by senior staff and colleagues.

4.0 Destinations and early experiences of social work

4.1 Frontline

4.1.1 Survey and tracking results

Table 4.1 below shows the results for which type of team the Frontline survey respondents were currently working in. Most respondents were working in children in need or child protection teams, although the proportions working in these settings reduced over time in each of the three cohorts. One exception was cohort 2 at 30 months after obtaining their licence to practise, where almost as many respondents were working in an 'other' role as in a children in need or child protection team. On inspection, these 'other' roles were in fact mainstream children's social work (e.g. locality team), rather than specialist positions, but the scope of these teams was clearly not thought by respondents to quite fit the questionnaire categories.

Of the 140 participants in cohort 3 who achieved a licence to practise in 2017, just one had dropped out of employment in social work by the time of the survey six months later. Of the 251 participants in cohort 4 who had achieved a licence to practise in 2018, 11 had dropped out by the time of the 6-month survey and four had deferred their place with a view to return at a later date, so 94% were in social work practice. This is a much higher proportion in social work six months after gaining a licence to practise than for all social workers in England, where 78% of those qualifying in 2017 from mainstream PG programmes were social workers (Skills for Care, 2018) and this difference is clearly statistically significant^d. However, this is not a like-for-like comparison as the Frontline participants are still engaged with the Frontline programme for a further 12 months after qualifying.

Participants who came through Frontline were asked about caseloads six months post-licence to practise (Table 4.2). For cohort 3, five respondents (5%) said this was eight or less; for 16 (16%) the caseload was between 9 and 12. For the largest proportion (37; 37%) caseload was between 13 and 16. Twenty-one Frontline graduates (21%) reported a caseload of between 17 and 20; and 17 (17%) a caseload of 21-24.

^d $\chi^2=43.89$, $p<0.001$ for cohort four

Table 4.1: Type of team – Frontline respondents, 6m after licence to practise

Cohort number							
	1	1	2	2	3	3	4
	Time since licence to practise						
Current team	30m	36m	18m	30m	6m	18m	6m
Adoption, fostering, leaving care, looked after teams	7 (9%)	6 (10%)	8 (10%)	9 (16%)	6 (6%)	4 (7%)	12 (8%)
Assessment, Access, MASH teams	5 (7%)	5 (7%)	11 (14%)	8 (13%)	19 (19%)	13 (22%)	19 (12%)
Child in Need/ Child Protection Team	42 (66%)	36 (54%)	43 (57%)	18 (32%)	65 (66%)	35 (58%)	104 (67%)
Other, e.g. Adolescent Team, Children with Disabilities Team, Youth Offending Team	20 (27%)	20 (28%)	14 (19%)	22 (38%)	9 (9%)	8 (14%)	20 (13%)
Total	74	67	76	57	99	60	155

Table 4.2: Caseload – Frontline respondents, 6m after licence to practise

Caseload	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
8 or less	5 (5%)	7 (5%)
9 – 12	16 (16%)	31 (20%)
13 – 16	37 (37%)	53 (34%)
17 – 20	21 (21%)	38 (25%)
21 – 24	17 (17%)	20 (13%)
25 or more	*	6 (4%)
Total	99	135

*Values less than 5 are not reported

For cohort 4, the spread of responses was similar to that for cohort 3: seven (5%) said their caseload was eight or less; for 31 (20%) it was between 9 and 12. For the largest proportion (53; 34%) caseload was between 13 and 16. Thirty-eight Frontline graduates (25%) reported a caseload of between 17 and 20; 20 (13%) a caseload of 21-24 and 6 (4%) a caseload of 25 or more.

Not all these caseload responses can be directly compared with all social workers via the DfE-commissioned longitudinal study (Johnson et al., 2019) because the response categories are different. However, we can see from the table above that the percentage of Frontline graduates six months into the job who have caseloads of 25 or more is much lower than the longitudinal study findings for all social workers at all career stages, where 16% have caseloads of 26 or more.

Two questions were asked about supervision: how often it takes place and how respondents rate its quality. The Local Government Association ‘Standards for employers of social workers in England’ require that ‘Supervision takes place at least weekly for the first six weeks of employment of a newly qualified social worker, at least fortnightly for the duration of the first six months, and a minimum of monthly supervision thereafter’^e.

The surveys in this study suggested that six months after qualification less than half of respondents from Frontline cohorts 3 and 4 were receiving fortnightly supervision and around one in five had supervision less than once a month.

^e [Local Government Association standards for employers of social workers in England](#)

Table 4.3: Frequency of supervision. Frontline respondents 6m post qualifying

How frequently, if at all, have you received supervision in your local authority since you started this post?	Cohort number	
	3*	4*
Once every two weeks or more often	42 (42%)	53 (34%)
Once every three to four weeks	36 (36%)	73 (47%)
Once every five to six weeks	15 (15%)	19 (12%)
Less than once every six weeks	5 (5%)	9 (6%)
Total	99	155

* totals add up to more than individual counts as table excludes those who indicated that they didn't know

For cohort 3 (Table 4.3), surveyed in 2017, the most common response was 'once every two weeks or more often' (42%). Thirty-six (36%) said they were supervised once every three to four weeks; fifteen (15%) once every five to six weeks and just five (5%) less than once every six weeks. In terms of supervision quality, most respondents (55; 56%) rated it 'good', with 21 (21%) rating theirs 'very good'. However, for twelve (12%) it was 'poor'. Four (4%) selected the option 'don't know'.

For cohort 4 (Table 4.3), surveyed in 2018, responses were less positive. The most common response on frequency of supervision was 'once every three to four weeks' (73; 47%). Fifty-three (34%) said they were supervised 'once every two weeks or more often'; 19 (12%) once every five to six weeks and nine (6%) less than once every six weeks. In terms of quality, most respondents (86; 55%) rated it 'good', with 34 (22%) rating theirs 'very good'. However, for 24 (15%) it was 'poor'. Seven (5%) selected the option 'don't know'.

Frontline graduates were asked whether they felt supported by their line manager and by the wider local authority. Around half felt supported by their manager 'to a great extent'. The results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Perceived support from manager and local authority. Frontline graduates, 6m after licence to practise

To what extent, if at all, have you felt supported by your manager and local authority since you started this post?	Your line manager	Your line manager	Wider local authority	Wider local authority
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
To a great extent	49 (50%)	87 (56%)	21 (21%)	36 (23%)
To a moderate extent	38 (38%)	46 (30%)	46 (47%)	73 (47%)
To a small extent	10 (10%)	20 (13%)	24 (24%)	42 (27%)
To no extent	*	*	8 (8%)	*
Total	99	155	99	155

*Values less than 5 are not reported

4.1.2 Insights from interviews

As it is a two-year programme, Frontline participants remained in the local authority in which they had completed the first year of training. Participants were asked which team they wanted to be placed in and where possible consultant social workers endeavoured to fulfil these wishes. This was however constrained by the need to fill vacancies in existing teams. As a result, a few graduates were allocated to their second choice. Nevertheless, participant views were still heard rather than jobs simply being assigned.

The opportunity to remain in the local authority facilitated the transition into practice for Frontline graduates. At six months after licence to practise there had been a degree of disappointment that once qualified, graduates increased their workload at the detriment of having time to spend conducting direct work with families. This emerged as the main pull factor for opting for a social work career and a particularly valued aspect of the training programme. The graduated nature of the Frontline programme appeared to have prepared Frontline participants to manage increases in their workload. Findings were mixed in relation to how well protected graduate caseloads were. Eighteen months after licence to practise, some participants reported having restricted caseloads, but staff absenteeism and under-staffing could at times mean that participants had to take their share of the re-distributed workloads. Whilst high caseloads and complex cases appeared to be an accepted part of social work, statutory guidelines for when assessments had to be completed emerged as a difficult aspect of the work. This placed pressure upon Frontline graduates who were also embarking on the second year of study. The difficulty that shone through most clearly from the Frontline qualitative interviews was the emotional impact of cases, followed by the amount of paperwork.

Level of support emerged as a key facilitator in helping participants manage their caseload and recognising when participants had too many cases to work upon. Formal and informal support was perceived as instrumental in the decision to remain in social work:

If I didn't have a manager that I felt able to talk to, or who was able to support me, I don't think I could do the job. I think having a good manager and having a good team is so key to staying in this role.
(Georgina)

However, the reduction in support from the first to the second year of the Frontline programme was particularly notable for the graduates. This rendered the support provided through supervision, both formal and informal, as paramount:

So talking to my colleagues and getting thoughts from them and that has helped a lot you know, to have that. (Diane)

The vast majority of participants reported having supportive managers with whom they had supervision sessions on a monthly basis. Whilst it was noted that supervision should include both case management and reflection, participants reported a focus on case management either due to time constraints or individual preference.

Frontline graduates also accessed help and support from the wider team. This was particularly pertinent having been based in a unit of four students the previous year. Many graduates noted the positive team culture and opportunities to access impromptu advice and guidance.

As theirs is a two-year programme, Frontline graduates did not complete all aspects of the ASYE training programme. In the second year graduates attended eight further Frontline training days and were required to complete essays and a dissertation. Some graduates perceived the ASYE programme as repetitive of the work they had already completed as part of their first year of training. Participants were positive about the range of local authority-specific courses and mandatory training available, perceiving these courses as helpful.

4.2 Step Up to Social Work

4.2.1 Survey and tracking results

Of the Step Up cohort 4 graduates, who graduated in March 2017, 180 (85%) had registered with the HCPC by the end of June that year, with the peak month being May (n=80; 38%). One hundred and forty-two (67%) reported having applied for only one job, 34 (16%) had applied for two jobs, and 11 (5%) had applied for three jobs. Only fourteen (7%) had applied for four or more jobs.

At six months post-qualification, 198 of 211 participants who responded to this question (94%) were currently in social work posts, eight (4%) said they were intending to in future and five (2%) were not intending to be social workers. Of those in social work, 187 out of 196 respondents (95%) were in child and family work and eight (4%) in adult social work. Of those in social work, 175 (89%) were working full-time and 21 (11%) part-time.

If we add these to the tracking of non-respondents in the HCPC register (see Appendix 1), the overall number of Step Up cohort 4 graduates confirmed as not being in social work roles in England six months post-qualification was 48 out of 423 (11%). This is a higher proportion working in social work at this time point than for social workers qualifying from mainstream postgraduate programmes in England. HESA statistics show that 22% of those qualifying in 2017 from mainstream postgraduate programmes were reported as not being social workers (Skills for

Care, 2018). The difference between mainstream and Step Up graduates at six months post qualification is statistically significant^f.

The survey asked about caseloads at six months post-qualification. Fourteen respondents (7%) said this was eight or less; for 43 (22%) the caseload was between 9 and 12. The most common responses were caseloads between 13 and 16 (n=48; 24%) and caseloads between 17 and 20 (n=48; 24%). Seventeen (8%) reported caseloads of 25 or more. The percentage of Step Up graduates at six months post-qualification with the very highest caseloads is much lower than for all child and family social workers in England at all career stages, where 16% have caseloads of 26 or more (Johnson et al., 2019). Lower caseloads would be expected for newly qualified staff.

As noted above, the expectation is that newly qualified social workers will have supervision fortnightly in the first six months and at least monthly thereafter. Sixty-seven respondents (34%) said they were supervised once every two weeks or more often and almost half 'once every three to four weeks' (n=98; 49%); 28 (14%) once every five to six weeks and four responded 'don't know'. In terms of supervision quality, most respondents (n=111; 57%) rated it 'good', with 47 (24%) rating theirs 'very good'. For 32 (16%) it was 'poor' and three (2%) selected 'don't know'.

Step Up graduates were also asked whether they felt supported by their line manager and by the wider local authority. The results are presented in Table 4.5. Half felt supported by their line managers 'to a great extent'.

Table 4.5: Perceived support from manager and LA. Step Up Cohort 4, 6m post qualification

To what extent, if at all, have you felt supported by your manager and local authority since you started this post?	Your line manager: n (%)	Wider local authority: n (%)
To a great extent	98 (50%)	46 (24%)
To a moderate extent	71 (36%)	90 (46%)
To a small extent	21 (11%)	48 (25%)
To no extent	*	7 (4%)
Don't know	*	*
Total	195	194

*Values less than 5 are not reported

^f $\chi^2=25.65, p<0.001$

4.2.2 Insights from interviews

For Step Up, there was an expectation that graduates would apply and accept roles within the placement local authority, albeit sometimes in different teams. Whilst there were some exceptions, most obtained roles within the placement local authority.

Most Step Up graduates interviewed said they were supported in the transition into practice and had, to varying degrees, a protected caseload. The transition to qualified status was described as a steep learning curve with access to regular supervision and informal support perceived as particularly important. Reflecting on their transition into practice most Step Up graduates interviewed felt that they had been well supported in their transition and that the programme had insulated them from a 'reality shock' as the training programme reflected the reality of the job in terms of intensity, workload, multi-tasking and continual learning:

I think it might just be linked with the fast pace of the course. I think it's less of a shock when you get into it, because you've already had to juggle so much...So I think the transition to the Social Work team, full time isn't necessarily as big a shock. (Ellie)

Transitions were said to be gradual in most cases with protected caseloads allowing for a gradual increase in number and complexity of cases.

Although there was an awareness of the heightened expectations placed on Step Up graduates to 'hit the ground running', this was particularly the case for those Step Up interviewees who remained in the same team post qualification, who reported being expected to quickly take on complex cases despite their newly qualified status. The risk identified by some interviewees at 18-month post qualifying was that this expectation could be burdensome and potentially mask genuine needs for additional support. As valuable as fast track courses including Step Up were felt to be, interviewees felt that irrespective of how social workers train, no course can entirely replicate the emotions, clients, colleagues, organisational culture or pressure of being a frontline child and family social worker in practice.

Interestingly, with greater time in the role, interviewees at the 18-month phase reflected more deeply on how they had grown into the role in terms of skills development; awareness of risk; personal (direct or indirect) experiences of stress and anxiety. With regard to skills, several interviewees talked of being more assertive as a result of experiencing different situations (i.e. court proceedings) and having grown in confidence. Such experiences helped them become autonomous and independent in their work and capable of recognising when work posed a risk to their own physical or mental wellbeing.

Now I've been doing it ... coming up for almost two years, I feel a lot more confident. And therefore ... my manager and my team trust my judgement. I think the more I do my job the more I realise that I'm not a super hero and I can't do everything and I don't have responsibility over children's lives. And I kind of feel like if I have helped in some way and I've followed the policies and the processes and I know I've done everything, then that's enough. I can't physically do more than that. (Mel)

Whilst high caseloads appeared to be normalised in many authorities (often dependent on workforce levels), the level of bureaucracy emerged as the most difficult aspect of the work for those at both 6-month and 18-month post qualifying. Notably, those further into their career talked of a shift in terms of their acceptance of contextual factors such as austerity, scarce resources, heightened scrutiny as a result of reviews and audits. Whereas these were all anxiety-creators to relatively inexperienced social workers, those remaining in post beyond 18 months appeared more at ease with an ability to distinguish between things they could, and could not, influence.

The ability to build relationships with children and families, hear their voices and implement services aimed at making a difference emerged as a key factor in job satisfaction. Supervision was said to be fundamental in one's ability to effectively manage cases, ensure continued personal development and keep in equilibrium the emotional aspects of the work. Interestingly, some interviewees were accessing other forms of support either through advanced practitioners or mentors. Almost all interviewees who were satisfied in their roles, cited supportive teams and colleagues as being key to their ability to fulfil their own duties.

5.0 Retention / attrition, progression and future intentions

5.2 Frontline

5.2.1 Survey responses

The first three cohorts of Frontline gained their licence to practise (and started employment as qualified social workers) in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively and then finished the full Frontline Master’s programme a year later. Their employment status in social work is presented in Table 5.1 below. These categories are not mutually exclusive – e.g. further study (probably part-time) combined with another category, or non-social work role and other could be selected by same respondent.

Table 5.1: Frontline graduates’ employment status, 18-36 months post-qualifying

	Cohort number				
	1	1	2	2	3
	Time since licence to practise				
Current team	30m	36m	18m	30m	18m
Children’s social work	59 (72%)	49 (69%)	71 (88%)	45 (75%)	59 (84%)
Adult social work	*	*	*	*	0 (0%)
Non-social work role	19 (23%)	17 (24%)	5 (6%)	12 (20%)	9 (13%)
Further study	5 (6%)	4 (6%)	4 (5%)	11 (18%)	9 (13%)
Other	5 (6%)	9 (13%)	*	5 (8%)	0 (0%)
N	82	71	81	60	70

*Values less than 5 are not reported

Columns may not add up to 100% as some participants were in multiple categories

Text responses clarifying the ‘other’ category were only received from Frontline for Cohorts 2 and 3. The responses included civil service posts, international humanitarian / social work, voluntary social work, travelling and maternity leave.

For both fast-track programmes, in calculating attrition from social work we have relied on the survey response of ‘non-social work role’. In fact, when individual responses are examined, a few respondents selecting ‘non-social work role’ could be seen as working in the wider social care field, albeit not in a statutory role. On balance, we decided on using the ‘non-social work’ responses as the most defensible strategy, rather than examining individual responses, as this involves a standardised approach across cohorts and programmes rather than a reliance on the research team’s interpretation of job titles.

If we add these survey results to the tracking of non-respondents in the HCPC register (see Appendix 1), we can note an overall rate of graduates confirmed as not

being in statutory social work roles in England – i.e. they have either reported in the survey they are not in a social work role or their name does not appear on the HCPC register. Table 5.2 below presents the estimated attrition rates for Frontline graduates. These are conservative estimates, as there is no guarantee that all who are listed on the HCPC register will be currently practising and there are the caveats mentioned above about the survey responses. To present an estimated attrition rate is more accurate than any attempt at a retention rate. This is because we are reliant on the HCPC register, but being on the register does not necessarily mean currently practising.

Table 5.2 – Frontline graduates’ attrition rates from social work in England

Time since licence to practise	Frontline cohort	N of graduates	Non-respondents not on HCPC register	Survey respondents in non-social work role	Attrition from social work
6 months*	3	140	1	0	1%
6 months*	4	251	4	0	2%
18 months	2	112	1	5	5%
18 months	3	140	11	9	14%
30 months	1	100	4	19	23%
30 months	2	112	8	12	19%
36 months	1	100	12	17	29%

* still on Frontline programme

It is not possible to produce the overall rate of retention in child and family social work specifically, from whole cohorts including non-respondents, as where the same name as a fast-track graduate appears on the HCPC register it is not possible to know which field of social work they are in. However, if the survey responses above are representative of all Frontline graduates on the HCPC register, we could estimate the percentage in an adult social work role to be no more than 2% (i.e. adults’ social workers as a percentage of all social workers).

The proportion of respondents in cohorts 1 and 2 working in local authorities reduced over time. Three years after gaining licence to practise, there was substantial movement away from the host local authority for the Frontline programme to other local authorities (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Survey respondents' employment location: Frontline cohorts 1 - 3

Time since licence to practise	Frontline cohort	Employed in a local authority: n (%)	Employed in same LA as for Frontline programme: n (%)	Total N
18 months	2	70 (88%)	61 (76%)	80
18 months	3	58 (83%)	47 (67%)	70
30 months	1	53 (65%)	25 (31%)	82
30 months	2	39 (65%)	22 (37%)	60
36 months	1	40 (56%)	18 (25%)	71

When asked how likely they were, if at all, to continue to work as a children's social worker in their current local authority after the Frontline Programme ends (Table 5.4) – i.e. one year after licence to practise or six months ahead from the survey - from cohort 3, 34 (34%) responded that this was very likely, 22 (22%) moderately likely, 17 (17%) slightly likely and 20 (20%) that it was not at all likely. From cohort 4, 61 (39%) were very likely, 44 (28%) moderately likely, 26 (17%) slightly likely and 18 (12%) not at all likely.

Table 5.4: Intention to remain in children's social work in the current local authority: Frontline graduates, 6 months after licence to practise

How likely, if at all, will you continue to work as a children's social worker in your current local authority?	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Very likely	34 (34%)	61 (39%)
Moderately likely	22 (22%)	44 (28%)
Slightly likely	17 (17%)	26 (17%)
Not at all likely	20 (20%)	18 (12%)
Don't know	6 (6%)	6 (4%)
Total	99	149

When asked the same question but for working in any local authority or organisation, from cohort 3, 43 (43%) responded that this was very likely, 29 (29%) moderately likely, 17 (17%) slightly likely and five (5%) that it was not at all likely. From cohort 4, 82 (53%) responded that this was very likely, 40 (26%) moderately likely, 21 (14%) slightly likely and only six (4%) that it was not at all likely.

Table 5.5: Survey respondents' intention to remain in children's social work in any local authority or organisation: Frontline graduates

How likely, if at all, will you continue to work as a children's social worker in any local authority or organisation?	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Very likely	43 (43%)	82 (53%)
Moderately likely	29 (29%)	40 (26%)
Slightly likely	17 (17%)	21 (14%)
Not at all likely	5 (5%)	6 (4%)
Don't know	5 (5%)	6 (4%)
Total	99	149

There was evidence of career progression from the survey responses. From the first Frontline cohort, surveyed at 36 months, one respondent was a team manager, five were consultant social workers and fifteen were senior social workers, so 21 out of 58 (36%) respondents had been promoted beyond basic social work grade.

Table 5.6: Progression in child and family social work – Frontline

Time since licence to practise	30m	30m	36m
Frontline cohort	1	2	1
Consultant Social Worker	*	*	5 (9%)
Other	*	*	*
Senior social worker	10 (16%)	*	15 (26%)
Social worker	51 (80%)	49 (92%)	36 (62%)
Team manager	*	0	*
Total (100%)	64	53	58

*Values less than 5 are not reported

5.1.2 Insights from interviews

At six months into a qualified role, most of the Frontline graduates interviewed indicated the intention to remain in social work, although there were several comments alluding to the intention to leave child and family social work in either the short to medium term. For some there was disenchantment with the role exacerbated by pressure felt by recent cutbacks while others questioned the sustainability of working long hours. By 18 months, three interviewees indicated an intention to leave child and family social work. Of these, one had reported similar views at a six-month interview and the other two Frontline graduates reported that they had always envisaged that Frontline would be a pathway to other careers:

I think it was always on the cards that I'd try to develop my career in other ways. (Georgina)

Despite reporting the intention to leave social work in the short-term, all three participants reported they were pleased that they had completed the programme.

5.2. Step up to Social Work

5.2.1 Survey responses

At 18 months post-qualification, 11 Step Up cohort 4 survey respondents (7%) reported that they were in a non-social work role, and a further six were not in any type of role. Ten (6%) were working in adult social work. We can therefore estimate, by combining HCPC registration data and survey data, that the Step Up cohort 4 attrition rate from social work in England at 18 months is 11%. Table 5.7 summarises the attrition rates from social work for Step Up graduates.

Table 5.7: Step Up Cohort 4 attrition rates from social work in England

Time since licence to practise	N of graduates in study	Non-respondents not on HCPC register	Survey respondents in non-social work role	Attrition from social work
6 months	423	30	13	10%
18 months	423	30	17	11%

As noted earlier, it is not possible to produce an overall rate of retention specifically in child and family social work from whole cohorts, but if the survey responses are representative, we could estimate that of all those in social work roles six months after qualifying, the rate of Step Up graduates in social work with adults is around 4% at six months after qualification and 6% at eighteen months.

Table 5.8 below lists the types of social work team the Step Up cohort 4 graduates were working in, six and 18 months after qualification. Over half of respondents were working in children in need or child protection teams in both surveys.

Table 5.8: Type of team: Step Up Cohort 4 survey respondents (6 and 18 months qualified)

Team	6m qualified	18m qualified
Adoption, fostering, leaving care or looked after team	28 (14%)	19 (15%)
Assessment, Access, MASH teams	31 (16%)	18 (14%)
Child in Need / Child Protection Team	110 (56%)	83 (64%)
Other, e.g. Adolescent Team, Children with Disabilities Team	27 (14%)	10 (8%)
Total (100%)	196	130*

* percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding

When asked how likely they were to continue to work as a children's social worker six months ahead – 144 (74%) of Step Up cohort 4 at six months post-qualification responded that this was very likely, 30 (15%) moderately likely, five (3%) slightly likely and 12 (6%) that it was not at all likely. Four (2%) selected 'don't know'.

Survey questions were asked of Step Up graduates about promotions, but there was minimal evidence of this by the 18-month qualified time point, with the majority still in positions as social workers, as would be expected. Later waves will provide more meaningful data on career progression.

5.2.2 Insights from interviews

At the 6-month post qualifying interview most Step Up interviewees were still settling into post and so had not considered their career advancement in any great depth. Hence, there was a sense of embarrassment or awkwardness in discussing the desire for promotion into management or other leadership roles that was not apparent for those considering advancement into practice educator positions. It is fair to say that interviewees were more candid at 18-months and whilst the original desire to work with families remained strong, other factors such as bureaucracy, extended hours, performance frameworks and reduction in services were all said to prevent meaningful direct work leading to varying levels of dissatisfaction with the role. As indicated at 6-months, several interviewees at 18-months were similarly contemplating a move away from frontline child and family social work once reaching a senior grade. This was not the case for all interviewed, however even those committed to staying in post beyond three years were unconvinced of the attraction of applying for senior management roles, recognising that in most cases this further reduced the opportunities for direct work whilst simultaneously increasing responsibility and risk.

Regards management I think it's one you have to seriously think about because as much as what you gain there's a lot you can also lose as well and the sort of contact you have with families. (Laura)

6.0 Job satisfaction, coping and resilience

6.1 Frontline

6.1.1 Survey responses

Responses on job satisfaction for one of the Frontline cohorts (cohort 3), at 18 months qualified, are presented in figures 6.1 and 6.2 below, separated into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors refer to satisfaction with the nature of the job itself, the nature and variety of tasks, their own accomplishments and relationships with colleagues. Extrinsic factors refer to hours of work, pay and working conditions, job security, the quality of management and supervision and ease of travel to work.

The majority of respondents reported that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with intrinsic factors, their relationships with fellow workers; with the nature and variety of the work they were doing; having challenges to meet; being able to use their initiative and develop their skills; and with their own accomplishments. These findings are very similar to a survey of 175 child and family social workers at a similar stage of their careers (15-18 months after qualification) who were starting an Early Professional Development (EPD) programme (Carpenter et al. 2013). In that study, which used the same measure, the proportions with high intrinsic satisfaction were almost as high 18 months later.

A majority of Frontline respondents were satisfied with most of the extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction, notably job security (see figure 6.2). Nevertheless, over a third (39%) were dissatisfied with the number of hours they were required to work and their physical work conditions. Slightly more of the respondents were dissatisfied with public respect for their work than were satisfied with this. Overall, nearly eight in ten respondents reported that they were satisfied, or very satisfied with their work in general.

In comparison, social workers responding to the EPD survey mentioned above were less satisfied with salary (42% vs 76% for Frontline) and job security (81% vs 95%), which likely reflects employment conditions in 2010. Both groups were 15-18 months post qualification. EPD graduates came through traditional university undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. However, a high proportion were similarly satisfied with their work overall, management and supervision, and physical work conditions. The proportions of dissatisfied responses were likewise around 40 per cent for the number of hours of work and public respect for social work. The only significant change in EPD respondents at follow up was in opportunities for advancement which dropped from 57 per cent satisfied to 36 per cent. This aspect is worth monitoring in the follow up surveys in the present study.

Figure 6.1: Frontline Cohort 3 at 18 months qualified – intrinsic job satisfaction

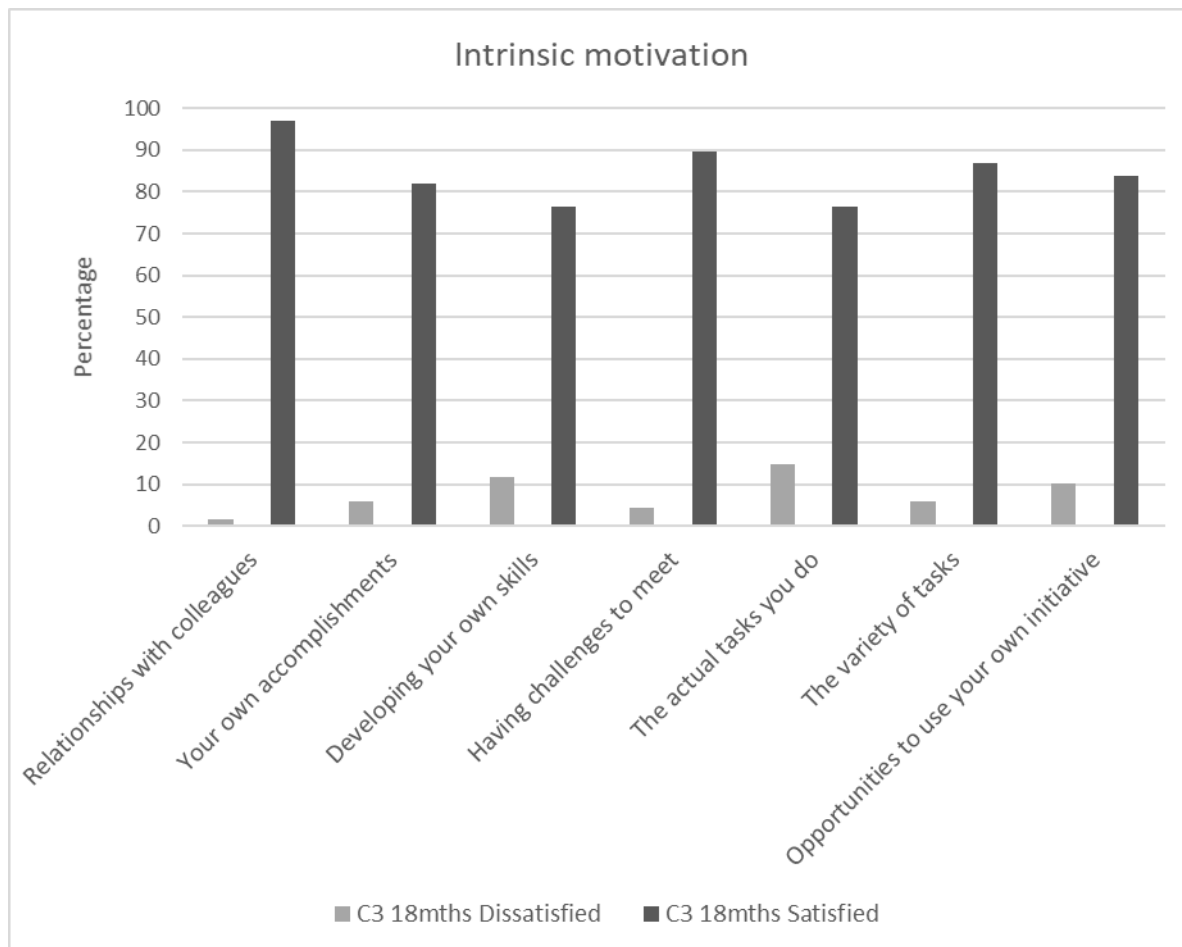
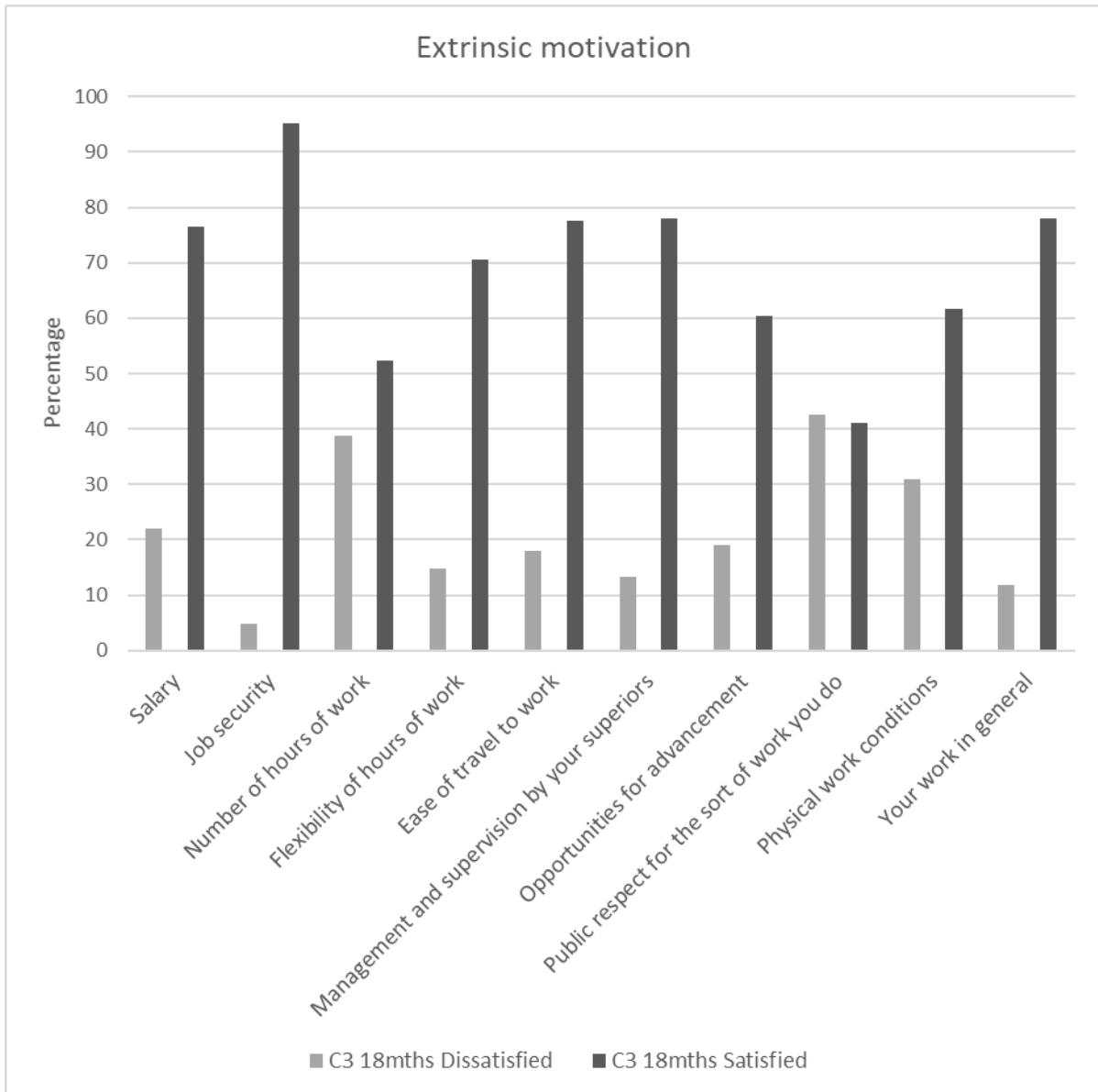


Figure 6.2: Frontline Cohort 3 at 18 months qualified – extrinsic job satisfaction



6.1.2 Insights from interviews

When asked what they found difficult about being a social worker, most Frontline graduates highlighted the emotional effects of the role. Broadly speaking, this could be divided into the emotional impact of undertaking child protection work and the difficulties with working within a system that they felt to be under-funded, under-staffed and with too much bureaucracy. In terms of the emotional impact, child protection work meant that they were often involved in difficult situations with families, with little support from other professionals. Moreover, there was a perception that good social work largely goes unnoticed, as this participant described:

With social work the wins or the good bits, no one else will ever see, trying to have a conversation with a kid that's been really nice and has spoken to you or whatever else. (Chris)

System factors included the difficulties in supporting families with so little funding to offer interventions. This reduced their ability to support children and families which for many, had been the main reason for pursuing a career in social work.

In terms of whether interviewees thought social work was more or less stressful than they imagined, views were mixed. Even for those who reported that the job was as stressful as they had imagined, there was a sense that stress varied over time in relation to cases and other factors both organisational and personal. When asked about resilience, most participants perceived this to be both something that individuals needed to develop and something which the wider organisation needed to support. By 18 and 30 months post licence to practise, views on resilience had shifted towards the need to look at the bigger picture rather than focusing on one difficult conversation or experience. In order to tolerate the uncertainty and challenges of the role, participants discussed the need to accept that at times the work may not quite go as they had planned.

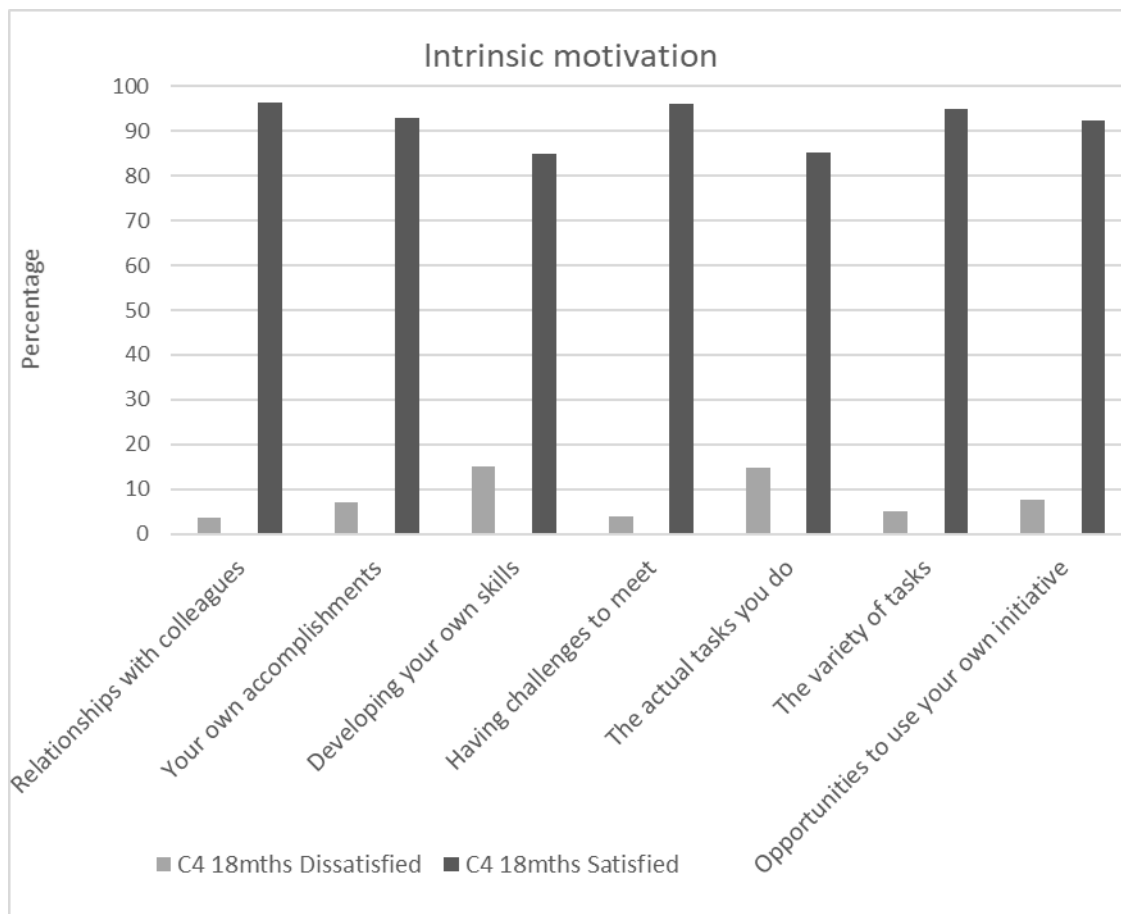
Differences emerged in coping strategies between those who had been in a qualified role for six months and those who had been in a qualified role for 18 or 30 months. At six months, most Frontline graduates used exercise and having a support network as their main coping strategies. However, for those who had been qualified for a longer period, there was greater reliance on support from managers and colleagues followed by a range of strategies including exercise and having clear boundaries between work and home so that they could 'switch off'. This involved leaving work on time and attempts not to take work home with them. Termed 'internal hygiene' by one graduate, the need to look after oneself was acknowledged by most of the Frontline interview sample at both time points.

6.2 Step Up to Social Work

6.2.1 Survey responses

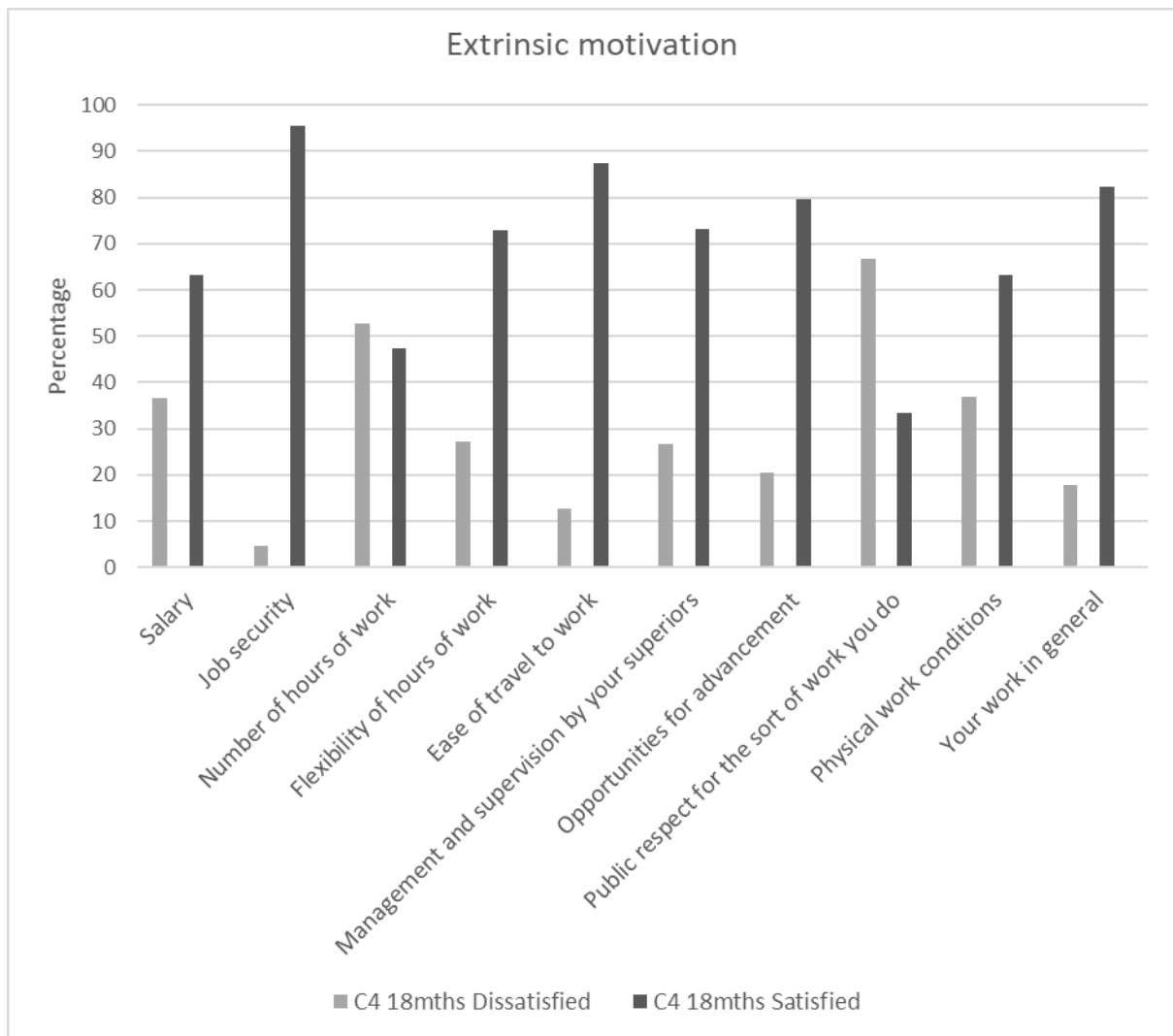
Findings on Step Up Cohort 4 graduates' job satisfaction are presented in Figures 6.3 and 6.4. On almost every issue, the majority of respondents were satisfied. The exceptions were public respect for their work (as social workers) and number of hours they were required to work, where the majority were dissatisfied. The satisfaction levels for intrinsic factors were high.

Figure 6.3 Step Up Cohort 4 at 18 months qualified: Intrinsic job satisfaction



In comparison to the child and family social workers in the Early Professional Development Programme mentioned above, a higher proportion of Step Up respondents gave satisfied or very satisfied ratings for intrinsic satisfaction, again using the same measure (Carpenter et al. 2013). For example, 92 per cent of Step Up respondents were satisfied with their own accomplishments compared to 83 per cent EPD respondents; and for satisfaction with the actual tasks of social work, the figures were 85% vs. 70%. The responses for the current Step Up participants at 18 months are actually quite similar to Step Up Cohort 1 (n = 61) surveyed by Smith et al., (2018) three years after qualification.

Figure 6.4 Step Up Cohort 4 at 18 months qualified: Extrinsic job satisfaction



Step Up respondents were generally more likely to be satisfied with extrinsic factors than the EPD respondents, notably for salary and job security. A considerably higher proportion were satisfied with opportunities for advancement compared to EPD respondents (80% vs 60%). In contrast, the three year follow up of Step Up cohort 1 (Smith et al. 2018), reported only 55 per cent being satisfied with such opportunities.

6.2.2 Insights from interviews

All Step Up graduates interviewed had either personal direct experience of stress in the workplace (several talked of periods of ill-health requiring time off) or talked of witnessing colleagues experience high levels of stress. Several aspects of the social work role were seen to be stress-inducing including the normalisation of extended working hours, balancing competing demands, emotional burden of cases, bureaucracy and the external perceptions of the profession.

In terms of whether interviewees thought social work was more or less stressful than they imagined, views were mixed. There was some agreement that stress levels can and do fluctuate, hence stress levels will vary depending on workload and other organisational and personal factors. Amongst those who had been in post longer, discussions often focused on how stress manifests itself differently for different individuals, and that even the most resilient of colleagues are not immune from stressful periods:

I'd say at least sixty to seventy per cent of the time, I feel that the role is really stressful and it's very difficult to switch off from the role. I still feel even two years down the line like I'm still learning, and I still get stressed out about certain things. So I don't know if that will ever change for me, whether that's just who I am and how I handle things.
(Pauline)

There was a sense amongst this group that coping and resilience is an inherently individual thing and that whereas some will require time off to recharge others will experience a stressful episode and for them this leads to a decision to leave the profession.

The most popular coping strategies were reported to be talking to peers, colleagues and managers either informally or formally via supervision whilst at work. Outside of work, several interviewees used sport and recreational activities as diversionary pursuits as well as socialising with friends and family. Interestingly, for those in later stages of their career there was a sense of getting back to basics, or focusing on things you can control in terms of self-care, such as cooking a nice meal, having an early night. Simple things which you can control were referred to by one interviewee as the best way of coping with the uncertainty inherent in the role.

Work life balance was an interesting area of discussion, for some this was achievable and personal boundaries were clear in terms of how much they would allow the role to encroach into their personal life (i.e. working at evenings and weekends was acceptable if required for specific impending court proceedings for instance). Whereas other respondents were less convinced that the role was conducive to a work life balance, and in many instances this was particularly the case where the social worker had family/carer commitments:

It's a great irony that in some respects it [the role] sure makes having your own family quite difficult. (Matthew)

Unsurprisingly work life balance emerged as a significant factor underpinning people's sense of commitment to the sector.

7.0 Reasons for leaving

7.1 Frontline

7.1.2 Survey responses

There are qualitative survey data free-text boxes on reasons for leaving. Twenty-seven Frontline graduates from cohorts 1 and 2 gave free-text responses in the 2017 survey for why they had left social work. These were coded into main categories of reasons for leaving, which could overlap because an individual could cite more than one reason.

The most often cited reasons for leaving, both mentioned by 9 out of 27 respondents, were management / organisation and a positive decision to move into a job in an allied field. Stress, mental health challenges or emotional burden were mentioned by seven and excessive workload by six.

Three of the Frontline graduates from cohorts 1 and 2 mentioned work-life balance and three mentioned lack of career or professional development opportunities. Two reported the role was not what they expected. Two mentioned interests in travelling; one ill health; and one was intending to return to statutory social work after a few months out.

A selection of quotations from Frontline graduates follow, with some of the fuller and more complex responses selected:

I did not feel that my role as social worker was fulfilling my expectations in relation to the skills I had learnt on my degree. I did not feel that I was being supported by managers and my team to develop my therapeutic skills.

I became increasingly convinced that the context of LA social work needs to change for social workers to be effective and children to get the help they really need - joining the civil service was an opportunity to try to do that.

I think there was a push factor: it's hard to remain in child protection for much longer than a couple of years as (it is) emotionally draining. I didn't feel adequately supported by (my) manager (though we got on greatly on a personal level) and the LA was really struggling and had, in my view, quite a toxic environment.

7.1.2 Insights from interviews

Interviews were conducted with ten Frontline participants who had left child and family social work. Of these, eight participants had an average of two years in child and family post qualification and two participants had left prior to completion of year one, and as such had not achieved qualified status. Seven of the ten were currently working in allied professions in a variety of roles including safeguarding, youth support and participation work in statutory and non-statutory settings. Indeed, most had opted for positions where they were able to undertake direct work with children:

A lot of the stuff I'm doing now is stuff that I hoped social work would be and admin and overworkedness just got in the way. (Rachel)

Participants reported a range of push factors including high caseloads, poor working conditions and a lack of support. This was especially pertinent given the high levels of support and protected learning environment provided in the first year of training with one participant explaining that 'by the end I was drowning'. Two participants reported having made mistakes while in post. In both cases it appeared to be the lack of help and support prior to and following the mistake that led to the decision to leave child and family social work. Both participants reported that their views and newly qualified status had not been taken into consideration

Several participants reported that they had received little to no support, either due to staff turnover or where clashes occurred between individuals or styles of working. Indeed, those participants placed in local authorities that had not adopted systemic practice appeared to experience greater dissatisfaction with the programme:

I found that there was quite a lot of conflict sometimes in terms of how we approached problems and managers didn't necessarily understand where we were coming from with things. (Jane)

Consequently, participants reported feeling alone and unsure of how to use their skills, especially in local authorities that had not adopted systemic practice. This led to frustration, especially where prior work experience was not taken into consideration. Without access to support and help to manage their careers, participants stated that they lacked direction and a way to move forward.

Mixed findings emerged as to what interviewees felt that organisations could do to encourage Frontline graduates to remain in social work. Several participants stated that with a reduced caseload and more time for reflection they would have remained. While others reported that they would remain only if they had access to a supportive manager where they felt valued and where there were opportunities for career advancement that enabled them to continue working directly with children.

Finally, of the ten Frontline leavers interviewed, four reported an intention to return to child and family social work. Of these, the two who had not qualified were intending on completing a traditional Master's social work course. One leaver was seeking mental health support but felt that given time to build their resilience they would return to social work and one leaver reported an interest in obtaining a part-time social work role in the future.

7.2 Step Up to Social Work

7.2.1 Survey responses

There were fewer free text responses from Step Up graduates than Frontline, mainly because the study so far does not include Step Up survey waves later than 18 months post-qualification, so there have been fewer leavers. Thirteen Step Up respondents gave reasons for no longer being in a social work role. Of these, the most common was workload (n=7). Three people gave reasons related to management/ organisation; three noted the impact of stress; and three gave personal reasons not related to work (wanting to travel or pregnancy). Two wrote about difficulties with work-family balance and one about ethical dilemmas. Some examples follow:

It is difficult to see - given the continued local authority cuts to front line support services, the increasing demand for support from families and the accompanying caseloads on each social worker - how a functioning and satisfying professional life can be achieved, even in ASYE year, in the current climate.

The expectations placed on frontline staff are unrealistic and the amount of additional hours, pressure and emotional stress I experienced had a significant negative impact on my own health and well-being.

The hours and workload (working well above and beyond 37 hours every single week) wasn't compatible with having school age children. It's heart-breaking I couldn't make this work.

7.2.2 Insights from interviews

Ten Step Up leavers have so far been interviewed during the course of this research. Whilst each interviewee had different experiences and stories to tell of their careers as qualified social workers there were a number of similarities in their reasons for leaving and circumstances which led to their decisions to seek employment elsewhere. A summary of discussions is presented in this section of the report.

Of the ten interviewees, three decided after qualification not to pursue a career in child and family social work, one failed to complete the course and the remaining six left child and family social work within two years of qualification.

Four out of the ten leavers decided whilst on the course that child and family front line social work was not a desirable career for them and in three cases, these individuals sought jobs in Adult Social Services where they felt stress levels were lower and the work more attuned with their interests. Of note, is that often the interest in Adult Services existed prior to starting the Step Up course, albeit all interviewees stressed that they were open to the idea of working in Children's Services at the outset. The fourth interviewee in this group admitted that whilst she had decided not to pursue a career in child and family social work during the Step Up programme, her decision had been reversed after positive placement experiences, and as a result she did work within Children's Services for a year.

Upon leaving frontline child and family social work, the six leavers not employed in Adult Services have sought work and roles which facilitate a better work life balance, and in the case of four interviewees the new roles were more fixed in terms of regular working patterns. Four of the six now work in non-social work roles: one in the charity sector, one in an educational project working with children with behavioural difficulties, one as a learning and development officer in a Local Authority and one in an early intervention team in a Local Authority. The other two interviewees left in order to become full-time carers for their children.

Leavers often attributed their decision to leave to one major push factor, but on closer scrutiny and reflection acknowledged that over a period of time, this major issue was underpinned by an accumulation of other frustrations that ultimately led to the decision to leave. Push factors tended to be unmanageable caseloads, high levels of stress and anxiety, internal policies including shared workspaces, thresholds for promotion relating to how long qualified rather than previous work experiences etc.

Whilst individual circumstances differed, there was a sense for each interviewee that there was a conflict between their personal lives and work lives. For the two individuals who left to become full-time carers, both felt that caring for their children became too much to manage alongside the pressures of the role and that having caring responsibilities was not conducive to working in frontline social work. Similarly, another interviewee cited family commitments as being incompatible with the demands of the job:

I've got a family and statutory social work is very very hard to work in when you've got kids and you've got other commitments. I wouldn't

rule out returning but I cannot see how that's compatible with me having a family at the moment (Rebecca)

This sense of being in an unworkable situation was reported to take its toll on personal well-being over a period of time (i.e. not being able to sleep, returning to work once children had gone to bed etc.).

For those who had worked in frontline teams, interviewees had attempted to make adjustments and employers were said to have been receptive to requests to move team or reduce working hours. However, these were seen as short-term fixes which often did not go far enough to address the imbalances. High caseloads and service expectations in terms of paperwork and procedures were most frequently cited as being the cause of needing to work beyond contracted hours.

Of note, is that all interviewees spoke of a work ethic which meant they were eager to maintain the quality of their work and deliver a service that the clients deserved, as such compromises were unsatisfactory and ultimately led to maintenance of unhealthy circumstances (i.e. working part time but actually working above and beyond hours).

Five of the ten interviewees classified themselves as 'reluctant leavers' who would not rule out returning to child and family social work once their personal circumstances change (i.e. family members have grown or caring responsibilities change):

I don't regret doing the qualification at all...I just didn't end up in the area of practice that I liked or that worked for me. But I wouldn't rule it out [returning to child and family social work] and I'm still using what I did [on the course]. (Charlotte)

8.0 Next Steps

There are some survey and interview data from late 2019 and early 2020 already collected but not yet analysed. There are three rounds of data collection to be completed in the period 2020 – 2021 (see Table 2.1). Timings may depend on the Covid-19 situation:

- For Frontline, surveys are being distributed in 2020 (cohorts 1–5) and 2021 (cohort 4 and 5) which the research team will analyse. It is anticipated that a further 25 or so semi-structured interviews will be conducted.
- For Step Up, we have already conducted further interviews with respondents from cohort 4 and 5. The final surveys are planned to be distributed in September 2020 and final interviews conducted.
- Interviews with employers from both programmes (n = 20) are planned to be conducted during Autumn 2020.

The final report will also include results on social worker well-being; data from all the graduate cohorts; and analysis of factors influencing retention / attrition.

References

- Baginsky, M. and Manthorpe, J. (2016) The views and experiences of step up to social work graduates: Two and a half years following qualification. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46, 7: pp.2016–2032
- Carpenter, J., Patsios, D., Wood, M., Platt, D., Shardlow, S., McLaughlin, H., Scholar, H., Haines, C., Wong, C. and Blewett, J. (2012). *Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme Final Evaluation Report (2008-2011)*. Department for Education. DfE-RR229.
- Carpenter, J., Patsios, D., Wood, M. J. E., Platt, D., Shardlow, S., Mclaughlin, H., & Blewett, J. (2013). *Early Professional Development Pilot Programme (First cohort 2009 to 2011): Final Evaluation Report*. Department for Education. (DFE-RR 267)
- Cho, Y. I., Johnson, T. P. and Van Geest, J. B. (2013). Enhancing surveys of health care professionals: A meta-analysis of techniques to improve response. *Evaluation and the Health Professions*, 36(3): 382–407.
- Curtis, L., Moriarty, J. and Netten, A. (2010) The expected working life of a social worker, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 5: 1628–1643.
- Frontline (2019) [Retention Briefing](#), Frontline website, accessed May 2020.
- Hussein, S., Moriarty, J., Stevens, M., Sharpe, E. and Manthorpe, J. (2014) Organisational factors, job satisfaction and intention to leave among newly qualified social workers in England. *Social Work Education*. 33, 3.
- Johnson, C., Coburn, S., Sanders-Earley, A., Felton, J., Winterbotham, M., McLaughlin, H., Pollock, S. Scholar, H., and McCaughan, S. (2019) *Longitudinal study of local authority child and family social workers (Wave 1) Research report*, London, Department for Education.
- Marshall, L., Leach, T. and Cornick, P. (2017) *Children's Services Omnibus Wave 1 Research Report*, London, Department for Education.
- Maxwell, N., Scourfield, J., Zhang, M, L, de Villiers, T., Hadfield, M., Kinnersley, P., Metcalf, L., Pithouse, A. and Tayyaba, S. (2016) *Evaluation of the Frontline Pilot*. London, Department for Education.
- Skills for Care (2018) Social Work Education 2018. Skills for Care analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. Leeds, Skills for Care.

Smith, R., McLenachan, J., Venn, L., Weich, H. and Anthony, D. (2013) *Step Up to Social Work Programme Evaluation 2012: The Regional Partnerships and Employers Perspectives*, London, Department for Education

Smith, R., Stepanova, E., Venn, L., Carpenter, J. and Patsios, D. (2018) *Evaluation of Step Up to Social Work, Cohorts 1 and 2: 3-years and 5-years on*, Department for Education Research Report.

Appendix 1 – Tracking of survey non-respondents

Tables A1.1 and A1.2 present the results of the tracking of non-respondents in the HCPC register. By ‘non-respondents’ we mean graduates who did not complete the survey (response rates are presented in Table 2.2) and did not confirm employment status in an email message. It should not be assumed that having your name on the HCPC register necessarily means current practice in social work. For many individuals this will be the case, but it is possible to still have your name on the register but to have in fact recently left a social work post. It is also possible to make a decision to continue being registered whilst not being in a practitioner role - e.g. some of the authors of this report would be in this category, as social work academics. Also, for people with common names, it cannot be certain that the person listed on the register is the same individual. Tables A1.1 and A1.2 are rather complex but it is important to present the detail of the tracking, so that the attrition rates presented in the report can be understood.

Table A1.1: Tracking of non-respondents, Frontline cohorts 1-4

	Cohort number							
	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	
	Time since licence to practise							
Survey non-respondents who confirmed their occupational status by email	30m	36m	18m	30m	6m	18m	6m	
Confirmed: in social work	-	-	4	-	N/A	-	N/A	
Confirmed: not in social work	-	-	1	-	N/A	-	N/A	
Sub-total	-	-	5	-	N/A	-	N/A	
Non-respondents (not including the category above) and the HCPC register								
Other non-respondents whose names appear on the HCPC register	11	15	22	38	0	54	2	
Other non-respondents whose names do not appear on the HCPC register	4	12	1	8	0	11	2	
Sub-total	15	27	23	46	0	65	4	
Graduates who opted out of further contact with evaluation and the HCPC register								
Email opt-out graduates whose names appear on the HCPC register	3	2	2	5	0	5	2	
Email opt-out graduates whose names do not appear on the HCPC register	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	
Sub-total	3	2	3	5	0	6	4	
Totals								
N original survey respondents	82	71	81	62	99	68	155	
Total surveys sent	97	98	109	107	140	133	247	
Grand Total (all graduates)	100	100	112	112	140	140	251	

Table A1.2: Tracking of non-respondents - Step Up to Social Work Cohort 4

	Step Up to Social Work Cohort 4	
	6m post-qualification	18m post-qualification
Survey non-respondents who confirmed their occupational status by email		
Confirmed: in social work	5	0
Confirmed: not in social work	0	2
Sub-total	5	2
Non-respondents (not including the category above) and the HCPC register		
Other non-respondents whose names appear on the HCPC register	176	222
Other non-respondents whose names do not appear on the HCPC register	30	28
Sub-total	206	250
Graduates who opted out of further contact with evaluation and the HCPC register*		
Email opt-out graduates whose names appear on the HCPC register	1	0
Email opt-out graduates whose names do not appear on the HCPC register	0	0
Sub-total	1	0
Totals		
N survey respondents answering question about current employment	211	171
Total surveys sent	423	423
Grand Total (all graduates)	435	435

* Names of those who originally opted out, before the study began, were not given to the research team

© Department for Education 2020

Reference: RR988

ISBN: 978-1-83870-106-2

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact us at:

socialworkreform.sg@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications