Leadership in Social Work Qualifying Education

A REPORT FOR THE REVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK

Joanne Westwood, Catherine Pemble and

Frances Patterson

University of Stirling

1. Executive Summary.

The role of Social Work in Scotland is multifaceted and complex. As a wider discipline and an individual occupation it requires dedication to a set of particular values, backed by the skills and willingness to bring those values to bear. Social workers must practise in an interdisciplinary context, working relationally with both professionals and service users to share and achieve common goals. But are social workers leaders? This study originated from the substantial review of social work education commissioned by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in 2015, and focuses specifically on how leadership is communicated and taught in social work qualifying education. The study began with a literature review and followed with interviews with expert informants from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Scotland who were asked to discuss the nature, direction and facilitation of leadership in social work and in social work qualifying education.   The interviews were thematically analysed to highlight areas of agreement and dissonance. Participants reflected that good leadership practices were often synonymous with good social work practices, with the activities of a leader often being closely aligned with the role and responsibilities of a social worker in practice. Despite this, these participants reported that 'leadership' was rarely explicitly discussed on issue for qualifying social work education. The meaning of 'leadership' in Scottish social work is discussed, and the importance of leadership guided by values is emphasised.   The study concludes by identifying potential areas of progress for social work curricula, while highlighting the importance of change and facilitation at an organisational level.

2. Introduction.

> "A Wicked Problem is more complex, rather than just complicated - that is, it cannot be removed from its environment, solved and returned without affecting the environment"[1]

It belongs to the role of modern social workers to deal in wicked problems. They must at once innovate and facilitate innovation[2], they must 'envision a desirable future', 'promote supportive values' and 'intelligent strategies'[3]. They must, in short, be 'leaders at all levels'[4]. The aim of this research project was to investigate the role of social work qualifying education in developing social work students and newly qualified social workers as leaders within their profession. This is a complex task, as in order to study the ways in which leadership education is supported, one must first understand what 'leadership' means in the context of social work. Seven expert informants from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Scotland were interviewed about how leadership is integrated into social work qualifying education. They provided invaluable insight into how leadership skills are included in the curriculum, and in practice learning. Informants also highlighted key areas where improvements could be made to support newly qualified social workers and students to recognise and develop their leadership potential. In this report we present a brief overview of leadership theory and its relevance to social work in the current climate, a selection of key themes exploring the fostering of leadership skills in social work qualifying education, and reflections on how these findings can be applied in practice to inform the SSSC review of social work education.

[1] Grint, K (2008) Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: The Role of Leadership, *Clinical Leader*, 1(2), 54-68

[2] Grint, K (2008) *ibid*.

[3] Gill, R. (2011). *Theory and practice of leadership, 2nd Ed.* London, Sage.

[4] Leslie, K and Canwell, A (2010) Leadership at all levels: leading public sector organisations in an age of austerity, *European Management Journal*, 24 (8) 297-305

3. Leadership and Social Work: A Complex Relationship.

> "Of all the hazy and confounding areas in social psychology, leadership theory undoubtedly contends for top nomination. [...] More has been written and less is known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioural sciences."[5]

The question; 'What is a leader?' is beguilingly simple in its construction, reassuring in its straightforwardness and quick to trip off the tongue, yet its answer is complex, relative and above all, incomplete. The desire to define 'good leadership' has captured the attention of countless academics and professionals; a quest for the holy grail which will unlock good outcomes for those using services, the professionals delivering services, and the organisation itself. This report will reflect briefly on the existing literature regarding leadership itself, while maintaining a tight focus on how this may be applied to social work generally, and social work in Scotland more specifically. For a more extensive overview of leadership in Scotland's social services, we refer the reader to the 'Leading Together' report, published in 2010[6] and the ongoing research initiatives supported by the SSSC.

The complexities surrounding what makes a 'good' leader often spring from the context in which the question is asked. Would the qualities which made an individual successful in business, for example, be as successful in the realms of social work or social care? The notions of 'heroic' or 'trait' leadership, where an individual who embodies a certain set of traits and stands in a position of authority may have largely fallen out of favour[7,8] although they continue to wield more influence than might be assumed. It is this concept of leadership as something undertaken solely by those in formal positions of power that the SSSC has sought to challenge and question in its recent work. Resources like the Leadership

---

[5] Bennis, W. G. (1959). Leadership theory and administrative behavior: The problem of authority. *Administrative science quarterly*, 259-301.

[6] SSSC/University of Stirling (2010) *Leading Together: An analysis of leadership activity and development needs across Scotland's Social Services*, Dundee, SSSC.

[7] Day, D. V., & Zaccaro, S. J. (2007). Leadership: A critical historical analysis of the influence of leader traits. *Historical perspectives in industrial and organizational psychology*, 383-405.

[8] Gardner, W. L., Lowe, K. B., Moss, T. W., Mahoney, K. T., & Cogliser, C. C. (2010). Scholarly leadership of the study of leadership: A review of The Leadership Quarterly's second decade, 2000–2009. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *21*(6), 922-958.

Capabilities[9] and the Step Into Leadership website seek to reinforce the concept of distributed[10] or shared leadership where leadership becomes an inclusive activity, drawing on the strengths of leaders at all levels whether they be people using services, social work students, frontline staff or those in management roles. Leadership can, therefore, comprise of acts so small they can go unnoticed,[11] performed by those behind the scenes as well as those occupying more visible and formal 'leadership' roles.

It is this commitment to leadership at all levels which Scotland's social services has embraced. By acknowledging and valuing the contribution of all participants, including people who use services, and explicitly recognising them as citizen leaders[12] social services could be said to model participatory[13] or engaging[14] styles of leadership. Alternatively, the focus on upholding a particular set of values could be linked to ideas of servant leadership[15], authentic leadership[16] or selfless leadership[17]. To lead effectively in social work draws upon all of these approaches, yet this study identified a limited range of peer-reviewed research which specifically addresses leadership in Scottish social work practice. There is growing recognition across the UK that the role of the social worker requires leadership skills and qualities[18]. In Scotland this is evidenced in the Leadership Capabilities[19] and the Strategy for Building Capacity in Scotland's Social Services[20]. The Scottish social work education and training community must therefore give attention to leadership within qualifying as well as post qualifying programmes, enabling those preparing for professional roles to identify their leadership strengths and future potential.

---

[9] SSSC (2012) *Leadership Capabilities*, Step into Leadership, http://www.stepintoleadership.info/

[10] Gronn, P (2002) Distributed Leadership as a Unit of Analysis, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 423–451

[11] Fletcher, J K and Kaufer, K (2003) Shared leadership: paradox and possibility, in C L Pearce and J A Conger, *Shared Leadership,* California, Sage

[12] Scottish Government (2008) *Principles and Standards of Citizen Leadership.* Edinburgh, Scottish Government

[13] Pine, B. A., & Healy, L. M. (2007). New leadership for the human services: involving and empowering staff through participatory management, in Aldgate, J.; Healy,L.; Barris, M.; Pine, B.; Rose, W. and Seden J. *Enhancing Social Work Management. Theory and Best Practice from the UK and USA*, 35-56.

[14] Alban-Metcalfe, J and Alimo-Metcalfe, B (2009) Engaging Leadership part one*, International Journal of Leadership in Public Services*, 5 (1), 10-18

[15] Greenleaf, R (1998) *The power of servant-leadership: essays*, San Francisco, CA, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

[16] Thompson, N (2016) *The Authentic Leader*, London, Palgrave Macmillan

[17] Brookes, S (2016) *The Selfless Leader*, London, Palgrave Macmillan

[18] Van Zwanenberg, Z. (2010). *Leadership in social care* . London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

[19] SSSC (2012) *Leadership Capabilities*, Step into Leadership, http://www.stepintoleadership.info/

[20] SSSC (2014) *Strategy for building leadership capacity in Scotland's social services 2013-2015*, Dundee, SSSC.

In keeping with the short timescale of the project, a rapid review of the literature was undertaken[21]. Three key databases[22,23,24] were consulted for the primary literature review, with desk based searches of organisational materials and a supplementary search providing additional literature to inform the study. A summary of the literature review process is given in Tables 1 and 2. All references were imported to Endnote bibliographic management software and the resources remaining after initial filtering were reviewed using the Stirling Literature Review Proforma[25].

Table 1: *Details of Literature Search*
Search Terms: "social work" AND (Leadership Or Leader*) AND Scotland*

Database	Results	Cumulative Total
Emerald Insight	81	81
SCIE-Social Care	13	94
Web Of Science	7	101

Table 2: *Details of Literature Filtering*

Resource Type	As Imported	Carried Forward to Proforma Review
Journal Articles	86	18
Books	7	0
Organisational Reports	7	7
Pamphlet/Leaflet	1	1
Duplicates Found	1	0

Given the strict timeline, books were excluded from the final review process. It should be noted, however, that 'Leadership in Social Care'[26] provides a review of leadership in Scottish social care specifically and was drawn upon elsewhere in the project. Of the 26 resources listed in Table 2, six were carried forward to an in depth review but only two focussed on leadership in social work in Scotland specifically, details are provided in Table 3. In 2010 the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) published 'A

[21] Ganann, R., Ciliska, D., & Thomas, H. (2010). Expediting systematic reviews: methods and implications of rapid reviews. *Implementation Science*, *5*(1), 56.

[22] Web of Science (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2016, from https://webofknowledge.com/

[23] Emerald Insight. (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2016, from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/

[24] Social Care Online. (n.d.). Retrieved March 08, 2016, from http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/

[25] Bowes, A., Dawson, A., Jepson, R., & McCabe, L. (2013). Physical activity for people with dementia: a scoping study. *BMC geriatrics*, *13*(1), 1.

[26] Van Zwanenberg, Z. (2010). *Leadership in social care* . London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Guide to Leadership'[27], which addressed strategic leadership for council led social services. It was decided to focus on their publication 'Improving Social Work in Scotland' as this offered an overview of inspection findings from across the country. In view of the current integration agenda[28,29], it was also deemed important to include documents focused on the NHS in Scotland as well as social services.

Table 3: *Articles Undergoing In Depth Review*

Title	Leadership in Scottish Health and Social Care?	Leadership in Scottish Social Work Specifically?
Improving social work in Scotland.[30]	Yes	Yes
Embarking on self-directed support in Scotland: a focused scoping review of the literature.[31]	Yes	Yes
The development of strategic clinical leaders in the National Health Service in Scotland.[32]	Yes	No
An exploration of the integration of health and social care within Scotland: Senior stakeholders' views of the key enablers and barriers[33]	Yes	No
NHS Lanarkshire's leadership development programme's impact on clinical practice[34]	Yes	No
Delivering integrated care and support.[35]	Yes	No

---

[27] Social Work Inspection Agency (2010*): A guide to Leadership: taking a closer look at leadership in social work services*, Edinburgh, Social Work Inspection Agency

[28] Christie, C (2011) *Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services*, Scottish Government

[29] Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014

[30] Social Work Inspection Agency (2010). *Improving social work in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Social Work Inspection Agency.

[31] Manthorpe, J., Martineau, S., Ridley, J., Cornes, M., Rosengard, A., & Hunter, S. (2015). Embarking on self-directed support in Scotland: a focused scoping review of the literature. *European Journal of Social Work,* 18(1), 36-50.

[32] Dickson, G. and J. Edmonstone (2011). "The development of strategic clinical leaders in the National Health Service in Scotland*." Leadership in Health Services* 24(4): 337-353.

[33] Hutchison, K. (2015) "An exploration of the integration of health and social care within Scotland: Senior stakeholders' views of the key enablers and barriers", *Journal of Integrated Care*, Vol. 23 Iss: 3, pp.129 - 142

[34] Sutherland, A. M.; Dodd, F. (2008),"NHS Lanarkshire's leadership development programme's impact on clinical practice", *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, Vol. 21 Iss 6 pp. 569 -584

[35] Petch, A. (2013). *Delivering integrated care and support*. Glasgow, IRISS.

While much attention in Scotland's social services over recent years has been directed at developing leadership at all levels (for example the SSSC Leadership Capabilities and Step into Leadership website), the SWIA report 'Improving Social Work in Scotland'[36] kept its main focus on how social work services were led at a senior, political and corporate level across Scotland's local authorities. In this case, indicators of good leadership included effective communication, leading by example and making the workforce feel valued. Furthermore, the report highlighted that

> "Staff at all levels in social work services looked for their leaders to show commitment to the values of social work and to give them a clear sense of direction. This directly impacted on staff morale and confidence. [And] they were acutely aware when these elements were absent."[37]

The report casts leaders as managing not only the existing state of play, but also providing a sense of direction and order in a period of change. Here, 'designated' leaders who valued the contribution of social work services were linked to better staff morale and open lines of communication between front line staff and senior managers.

The role of effective leadership in managing change was also discussed by Manthorpe and colleagues[38], in relation to facilitating and promoting the use of Self Directed Support. Here, however, they make a distinction between managers and leaders, implying that while managers can be leaders, leaders need not be managers. Significantly Manthorpe et al.,[39] argue that leaders themselves require a support network in order to effectively fulfil their roles. This becomes particularly important where 'leadership' becomes a shared endeavour, requiring each leader to have the support of other leaders in order to effectively lead. Indeed;

> "Leadership seems to be portrayed as what social workers need to provide to others and what they are being charged to do —to adapt their practice to new imperatives."[40]

---

[36] Social Work Inspection Agency (2010). *Improving social work in Scotland*. Edinburgh, Social Work Inspection Agency.

[37] *ibid*, Page 108

[38] Manthorpe, J., Martineau, S., Ridley, J., Cornes, M., Rosengard, A., & Hunter, S. (2015). Embarking on self-directed support in Scotland: a focused scoping review of the literature. *European Journal of Social Work,* 18(1), 36-50.

[39] *ibid*.

[40] ibid, Page 43.

If, therefore, leadership is considered a fundamental aspect of the social worker role either as managers of change or as communicators, building relationships with others and pursuing professional development[41,42], then there is scope for continued investigation into how such leadership can be supported at the front line of services.

One area which provides some insight within the Scottish setting is that of leadership within healthcare. While studies focusing on what makes a leader 'effective' in business may in the past have highlighted the traits of individuals, and the effect those traits have on subordinate groups, health literature is particularly useful when considering how effective leadership can improve outcomes for the patient[43]. It is this focus on those receiving services, which allows valuable lessons to be drawn from the health literature. Within the NHS the importance of "front line leadership"[44] or 'clinical leadership' has been recognised for over a decade. The concept of "leadership of clinicians by clinicians"[45] seems in accord with the vision of social workers as leaders who both lead and are led. Here, too, the literature suggests that leaders must be 'transformational' to foster good results[46], yet critically, a single leader adopting a transformational style was not enough. Rather, if outcomes were to improve across the board, the organisations themselves had to be willing to change. In practice, transformational leadership required the organisation to commit the time, resources, training and support necessary to foster leaders at all levels; espoused commitment was not sufficient[47]. In addition effective clinical leadership requires critical thinking and strong interpersonal skills with leaders seen as managers of relationships[48]. These relationships span all directions; between different agencies and professionals, the leader and

---

[41] *ibid.*

[42] Cullen, A. F. (2013). 'Leaders in Our Own Lives': Suggested Indications for Social Work Leadership from a Study of Social Work Practice in a Palliative Care Setting. *British Journal of Social Work*, *43*(8), 1527-1544.

[43] Vance, C., & Larson, E. (2002). Leadership research in business and health care. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *34*(2), 165-171.

[44] Millward, L. J., & Bryan, K. (2005). Clinical leadership in health care: a position statement. *Leadership in Health Services*, *18*(2), 13-25.

[45] Edmonstone, J. (2005). What is clinical leadership development. *Clinical leadership: a book of readings*, 16-19.

[46] Alimo-Metcalfe, B., & Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2003). Leadership. Stamp of greatness. *The Health service journal*, *113*(5861), 28-32.

[47] Alimo-Metcalfe, B., & Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2010) *Engaging Leadership: Creating organisations that maximise the potential of their people*, London, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development.

[48] Millward, L. J., & Bryan, K. (2005). Clinical leadership in health care: a position statement. *Leadership in Health Services*, *18*(2), 13-25.

the team, the team and the organisation and the team and the service user[49].

The development and support of leadership skills in social work is a topic of contemporary debate. Public services are located within a wider political and cultural system, therefore to discuss social work without reference to this broader landscape risks over simplifying the issues. The challenge of improving social work services is a 'wicked' one[50] insofar as it cannot be considered, or addressed, in isolation. This study draws upon the insight of expert informants who design curricula, teach and support social work students while themselves being immersed within the wider societal context. The significance of effective leadership relates not only to the commitment to improved outcomes for people using services, but also the heightened challenge of sustaining public services in the context of austerity[51]. So how can leadership be fostered, when social work education is perceived by some as too 'idealistic', encouraging social workers to view those they work with as 'victims of social injustice'[52]. If leadership skills can not only contribute to better outcomes for people using services, but also support greater resilience and wellbeing for front line staff[53] then the argument for building leadership capacity at all levels of Scotland's social services is a strong one.

4. Gathering Information: Mapping and Methodology

The initial stage of this project involved a desk-based search of social work qualifying courses in Scotland. While the Memorandum of Understanding[54] allows Social workers qualified in other areas of the UK to transfer their registration to Scotland, the question of how leadership was approached by social work qualifying courses in Scotland required the

---

[49] *ibid*

[50] Grint, K (2008) Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions: The Role of Leadership, *Clinical Leader*, 1(2), 54-

[51] Leslie, K and Canwell, A (2010) Leadership at all levels: leading public sector organisations in an age of austerity, *European Management Journal*, 24 (8) 297-305

[52] Ramesh, R. (2013). Michael Gove on a quest to reform social work training. Retrieved March 09, 2016, from http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/nov/12/michael-gove-reform-social-work

[53] Holmberg, R., Larsson, M., & Bäckström, M. (2016). Developing leadership skills and resilience in turbulent times. A quasi-experimental evaluation study. *Journal of Management Development,* 35(2).

[54] Health and Care Professions Council (2013) *Memorandum of Understanding between the Care Council for Wales, the Health and Care Professions Council, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Scottish Social Services Council.* London, HCPC.

range of the investigation to be narrowed. As a result, eight Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were identified as the main pathways towards qualified social worker status, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: *HEIs Providing Qualifying Social Work in Scotland*

HEI	Course Title	Method of Study	Duration (Months)
University of Edinburgh	BSc Social Work MSW in Social Work	On Site/ Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 24
University of Dundee	BA (Hons)Social Work MSc Social Work	On Site/ Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 24
Glasgow Caledonian University	BSc (Hons) Social Work MSc Social Work	On Site/ Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 24
Open University	BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland)	Distance Learning/ Full or Part Time	48 F/T 96 P/T
Robert Gordon University	BA(Hons) Social Work MSc Social Work	On Site/Distance Learning/ Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 27
University of Strathclyde	BSc Social Work MSW in Social Work	On Site/Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 24
University of Stirling	BA (Hons) Social Work MSc Social Work	On Site/Full Time On Site/Full Time	48 24
University of the West of Scotland	BA (Honours) Social Work	On Site/Full Time	48

Having identified these major pathways, a small steering group of four Heads of Social Work education (or their nominees) was assembled and worked together to identify key areas of investigation for the study. This discussion served as a grounding focus in the generation of the stimulus questions which were to form the backbone of the semi-structured interviews to follow.

Seven expert informants working in different HEIs across Scotland took part in the interview stage. Interviews were approximately 1 hour in length and conducted either face-to-face, or remotely using Skype or the telephone. A semi-structured interview format was adopted, allowing the interviewer to ask spontaneous questions as the interview progressed to access the depth of knowledge held by participants, while still providing some consistency between interviews. These interviews were recorded digitally and reviewed by both members of the research team, with key segments being transcribed manually as they were identified.

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, due to the flexibility of the approach. To protect the anonymity of participants, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5; *Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Job role
Alex	Senior Lecturer
Blaine	Senior Teaching Fellow
Charlie	Lecturer
Darcy	Senior Lecturer
Eli	Senior Lecturer
Finley	Staff Tutor
Gene	Lecturer

5. Results and Analysis.

Social workers are Leaders.

> *"I think that, for me, good leadership and good social work skills are very similar"*
>
> *(Alex)*

As participants discussed the role of the Social Worker, both as something that the student rehearsed during their education and as something they took on once they qualified, it became clear that the skills they associated with good social workers were synonymous with good leaders. Such 'Good' leaders were committed to managing relationships, self-reflection, critical thinking and making difficult choices. These were the skills that were highlighted as key facets of the Social Worker role.

For many participants, the role of the Social-Worker-as-Leader was borne from the value base upon which the profession was built. Acts of leadership were described as a 'necessity', emerging from a commitment to values like social justice and equality.

> *"It's about morality and taking action and advocacy and all of these things!"*
>
> *(Darcy)*

Participants often drew upon the current cultural and political landscape to demonstrate why they felt that the ability to carry out leadership tasks was important. Blaine highlighted that the current financial constraints to services meant that it was more important than ever for Social workers, and social work students, to be prepared to advocate for the interests of the people that they worked with. Critically, interviewees discussed providing students with the skills necessary to 'lead while not in charge', using the relational and people-centric skills they relied upon as social workers in combination with their value base to take action, even when that action was simply raising their concerns with those who were more influential than themselves.

> *"[Social work is] at the centre of people's lives. […]. We are central to the processes of change that we wish to effect in their lives. And, that we assume therefore some kind leadership in that process that is our job is to be a leader in that sense"*
>
> *(Charlie)*

Difficulties with Leadership

> *"Do they want the kind of leaders that I'm describing?"*
>
> *(Darcy)*

Participants reflected that while 'leadership' and social work skills may have many facets in common, they were concerned that the 'type' of leader that social work qualifying produced was not the kind of leader that was welcomed in practice. Here, too, parallels were drawn to the English social work system, particularly to the Frontline initiative. Several participants expressed concerns over the 'type' of leaders that such programs would produce, suggesting that cutting short the education process and relying on practical placements would reinforce managerial practices, which each participant discussed as a negative influence which often ran contrary to Social Work values.

> *[People]"are saying 'this isn't the Social Work I came into and they're starting to challenge some of the managerial and you know, protocolised ways of working [..] Social work is changing."*
>
> *(Alex)*

Interestingly, although participants often drew upon the idea of value-based practice and the Social-Worker-as-Leader as the antithesis of managerialism, there was still a reluctance to explicitly label 'leadership' while working with students. Interviewees framed this in various ways, from wanting to avoid the value-laden term of 'leadership' itself, to not wanting to frighten students;

> *"[Leadership] seemed to be a term that most of us avoided. […] But we don't actually stipulate that leadership is certainly a sort a characteristic if not necessarily an actual value. So we kind of avoid it in the early years I think. Seems to be that maybe we don't want to scare them into thinking that that's the expectation."*
>
> *(Charlie)*

In such cases, participants such as Gene explained that leadership might be equated with managerial roles which take the individual further away from the client base. There was a sense across interviews that, while social workers were expected to develop and utilise leadership skills in the course of their daily practice, they were rarely explicitly encouraged to frame this knowledge in the context of leadership.

> *"If you had to […] speak to students who've come through the programme and ask them the question 'how much do you get specifically on leadership' I think*

you might well get the answer 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' whereas if you encourage them to tease it out, think of 'right well what would be some of the skills and qualities that we'd be looking for leaders to exhibit?' […] then I would hope that they would be saying 'well, yeah, actually when you think about it, it does!"

(Blaine)

Transforming Students into Social Workers.

"If it's done properly, and if it provides the learning opportunities it should, I don't see how [social work education] can be anything other than a transformative learning experience."

(Eli)

For interviewees, the value of social work education was often tied to the personal transformational experience of the student. Participants explained that it was through the communication of social work values and providing students with both critical thinking skills and theoretical knowledge that they facilitated the shift from 'student' to 'Social Worker' during the HEI education process. Often it was the experiences students drew from their two placements that provided the most opportunity on reflection. One participant shared that it was through the insight students gained from their fourth-year placement that allowed her to highlight their roles as leaders.

"We would talk about things like feeling ethical stress […] so, you might want to, to, you know, do work based on your values. [..…] But the agency is saying 'no, you can't' […] Ethical stress results from that, we talk about that feeling. And saying 'that's a good thing to think! Because, that's a good thing to feel, because you've maybe detected that somethings a bit wrong here. If you're not able to put your values into practice."

(Darcy)

In this example, Darcy was reflecting on the negative reaction that students had to moving from the values-focused teaching of the

University, to the 'more managerial' style of placements. In this case, however, the discomfort becomes a learning opportunity as students are encouraged to engage with their discomfort by taking action, or to put it more plainly, by taking on a leadership role. Across the interviews, placements were seen as an invaluable teaching opportunity where the students gain applied knowledge, while their time within the HEI was dedicated to enhancing theoretical knowledge and reflecting on practice. More importantly, however, their time within the university setting was cast as an opportunity to 'rehearse' and strengthen the relational and people-focused skills that would be required of them in a practice setting. Indeed, Alex reflected that it was only through providing these opportunities for rehearsal that values and skills could be taught, as each student engaged with them personally, rather than as theoretical constructs.

> *"Providing those spaces to critically engage with knowledge and values, allows people to begin to develop a more critical appreciation of who they are, what they are, and what their knowledge and value base actually is."*

> *(Eli)*

Defining Leadership in Social Work

> *"Social work should have a role that is about acting as […] the guard and the conscience of society. It's that whole thing about the kind of 'the best reflection of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members' […] And there's almost the sense that, well if the social work profession can't keep an eye to that then who the hell is going to do it. […]. If we need social work to be taking on that role, then we need all social workers to be kinda standing up […] right across the profession as a whole."*

> *(Blaine)*

The difficulty, therefore, became one of definition, value-loading and semantics. Participants resisted what they considered to be 'managerialist' tendencies in leadership, characterised as 'heroic' or 'authoritative' styles where the social worker decreed a course of action and expected others to follow along. They often reflected that these older notions of 'leadership' seemed to be at odds with a value base that

hinged on 'hearing the service-user voice' and advocating for their needs, in reflecting that the underlying message behind the word 'leadership' was one to which social work as a discipline was particularly sensitive, as it was to 'client' vs 'service user' vs 'people we support' all of which presented different problems for different people.

Despite this, however, participants reflected that it was critical that they, and social work education as a whole, began to highlight the link between social work skills and values and those which underpinned a modern interpretation of leadership. Participants agreed that there was a need to 'brand' leadership skills more clearly to students, particularly as they would eventually engage with other professionals who 'weren't afraid' to exhibit those behaviours and claim the credit. The question of how to begin to tease apart traditional and modern ideas of leadership from what might apply to social work was considered to be a difficult task. Darcy suggested, however, that 'leadership in social work' may not lie simply in the presence of leadership skills, but the willingness to bring this skills to bear to uphold social work values in an active way.

> *"When you're out visiting a family, ok, and you're employing all those skills that I said were really important and all that knowledge, social justice and all that, and you're being a proper occupational professional. You're working with a family, are you being a leader there? Maybe not. Maybe not. But if you come back and your senior says 'you spent too much time with that family, and you can't go back next week.' And you say 'right, you know, here is why I did it, here is…' and you're trying to influence that. Being a leader there in that context. […] It is about influence, that's the key thing."*
>
> *(Darcy)*

6.   Discussion and Recommendations.

It was clear throughout the interview process that all participants viewed leadership skills as fundamental to good social work practice. Conversely, however, each participant reflected on the failure of their respective programs to explicitly identify the skills they were teaching as being ones of 'leadership'.   Although the reasons behind this varied between participants, it was common for interviewees to express some uncertainty

about what leadership 'meant' for Social Work and to highlight the differences between what they saw as leadership, and what they considered to be managerialism. For interviewees, social workers were bound to exercise leadership because of the values at the core of their professional discipline. In order to advocate for people using services; to work with others of different professions and engage in teams in order to achieve the best outcomes, social workers had to be demonstrate leadership. The Leadership Capabilities of empowerment, self-leadership, creativity and innovation, motivating and inspiring, collaborating and influencing and vision[55] closely matched the concepts of leadership held by interviewees. Moreover, they held the view that these capabilities (without explicit linkage to leadership) could be considered core aspects of good social work practice.

The question arises then of how leadership development might best be supported within social work education. A next step could be to work with social work educators to identify key areas where leadership skills and practices are evident in their curricula and explore how these can be articulated more clearly for students. Two specific practice examples may be worth consideration: firstly, a recent study carried out within a graduate social work programme which investigated the impact of a taught course on the social change model of leadership[56]. While this research was not based in Scotland, it nevertheless provides useful insight into a specific initiative to include teaching on leadership within social work education. Secondly there may be helpful lessons to learn from an action research project carried out in Scotland in 2015[57]. This project explored the dynamics of citizen and frontline worker leadership including what this means for skills development and the workforce. The findings, as well as the inclusive methodology employed, could usefully inform teaching on leadership within qualifying programmes.

Our research participants from HEIs reflected that it was important for social workers to take on leadership roles, both on an interpersonal basis and as members of the wider social work discipline. However, several raised their concerns that what 'leadership' meant for those outside social work may not be synonymous with what they believed leadership to be. If the sector genuinely wants leaders who act from a strong base of social work values; are ready to challenge bad practice and advocate on behalf of people using services, then the perception that 'practice is often managerial' must be challenged. As mentioned earlier, research into facilitating clinical leadership in a health context has demonstrated that

---

[55] IRISS/SSSC (2008, updated 2014) *Continuous Learning Framework*, Dundee, SSSC
[56] Iachini, L; Cross, T P & Freedman, D A (2015) Leadership in Social Work Education and the Social Change Model of Leadership, *Social Work Education*, Vol. 34, No. 6, 650–665
[57] Diversity Matters (2015) *Dynamics of Citizen and Frontline Leadership*, www.sssc.org.uk

'leadership at all levels' can only occur when the organisations themselves support the process[58]. If there is true commitment to fostering and developing leadership skills in social workers both pre and post qualifying, then there must be continuing debate between those in practice and those in training and education about what 'leadership' means in the social work context.   Only through that dialogue and shared understanding will meaningful progress be achieved.

> *"[Social Work is] about relationships, negotiation, you know, bringing people together […] its people skills. So I think that, […] in some ways, of all the professions, social work should be fairly well equipped to put out graduates who are equipped to think about leadership."*
>
> *(Alex)*

---

[58] Alimo-Metcalfe, B., & Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2010) *Engaging Leadership: Creating organisations that maximise the potential of their people*, London, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development.