Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: A five-year longitudinal study

Interim Report 2: December 2018

Scott Grant, Trish McCulloch, Maura Daly, Martin Kettle, and Lynn Sheridan.

Funded by the Scottish Social Services Council

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project team would like to thank the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) for commissioning and funding the research, and members of the reference group for their ongoing support and advice.

Reference Group

- Pat McCowan, SSSC
- Jo Moriarty, King's College London
- Billy Fisher, South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership
- Dave Clarke, East Ayrshire Council

We would also like to thank Social Work Scotland, participating local authorities, Chief Social Work Officers, social work managers – and most importantly, the participants themselves for their time and contribution to this project.

PROJECT TEAM

- Dr Scott Grant, Lecturer in Social Work, Glasgow Caledonian University

- Dr Trish McCulloch, Reader in Social Work, University of Dundee

- Dr Martin Kettle, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, Glasgow Caledonian University

- Dr Maura Daly, Teaching Fellow, University of Dundee

GLOSSARY

ECSW	Early career social worker
NQSW	Newly qualified social worker
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
T1	Year 1 data
T2	Year 2 data

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> 'I just remembered actually … I did come into [social work] to change things positively for [people]. So I think I'm in the process of forming that identity. I think the first year's been about kind of technically learning the processes, and who do you invite to what meeting and… procedures and all that. And now I just feel like I'm starting to know the basics enough where I can sort of start to shape how I want to approach that… how are you going to meet the challenges of not being a corporate, council person?'
>
> (Interview participant)

This report presents findings from year 2 of a five-year longitudinal study which aims to develop a national picture of how early career social workers (ECSWs) experience and navigate their first years in practice. Methods of data collection include a review of available literature, annual repeat-measure online questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Year 2 findings draw on 118 ECSW responses to a national online questionnaire, 14 in-depth interviews with ECSWs across Scotland, and a ten-day period of observation in a single local authority.

Key findings from available literature

As is often the case in Scottish-based social work research, existing research knowledge on this subject is limited by a lack of research, a necessary reliance on English-based studies, and a focus on experiences within children's services. In this respect, the findings underscore the need to extend and deepen our knowledge base in this area, and caution against drawing definitive conclusions. With these caveats in mind, the available literature speaks to a number of themes relevant to this study, as summarised below.

The relationship between **social work education** and the **professional readiness** of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) has long been an important, if not politicised, issue for the profession. Research illuminating this relationship is scant. Broadly speaking, NQSWs appear to value their education and believe that they are reasonably well-prepared for practice. However, across studies, NQSWs identify feeling more prepared for some aspects of practice over others. Relatedly, NQSWs remind us that readiness is ultimately achieved over the first year of practice, prompting a more critical conception of readiness – and a more integrated conception of learning - than is sometimes in evidence.

Induction is an important feature of early career transitions, though there appears to be considerable variation in what induction means and involves across settings and jurisdictions. There is some evidence of a trend towards more structured and standardised induction processes; developments in this regard are broadly positive but need to be tailored to the needs of the developing professional *and* the employing organisation. There is a need to better understand which aspects of induction and post-qualifying support are most and least useful, when, and for whom.

NQSWs place significant value on professional **supervision**. Experiences of supervision appear to vary across settings; however, NQSWs appear more concerned with the quality of support available rather than issues of

frequency, duration, etc. Case management issues appear to dominate supervision agendas across settings, with limited space for critical reflection and learning.

Informal support emerges as a critical component of early career transitions; although the literature on informal support is significantly underdeveloped. There is little evidence of informal, peer or off-site support being harnessed or supported as a professional development tool.

Most NQSWs embark on their career with a reasonable degree of confidence in their capabilities and, for most, **professional confidence and capability** develops significantly over the first year. Early career challenges typically relate to issues of bureaucracy and/or 'role conflict'. For some, particularly those working in children's services, challenges can be severe, prompting consideration of early exit from the profession or service setting.

Research suggests varying experiences in respect of **caseload** volume, protection and complexity. In Scotland, there appears to be no agreed mechanisms for managing inconsistencies.

Overall, the literature suggests reasonable levels of **job satisfaction** amongst NQSWs. Job fulfilment, job security, flexibility and access to support emerge as significant factors. A small but significant number appear to report lower levels of job satisfaction. For this group, pay, working hours and opportunities for career progression appear significant. For both groups, a perception of low public value also emerges as significant.

Key findings from Year 2

Year 2 findings affirm and add to our developing understanding of how early career social workers experience and navigate their first years in practice. The findings suggest clear areas of strength within the profession as well as areas for improvement and/or more in-depth inquiry.

Employment

- The majority of participants continue to be employed in statutory roles (92%). Most are working in children's services (59%), followed by adult services (32%) and justice services (6%). 24% of year 2 participants had moved or changed jobs in the last 12 months.

- 60% of participants describe working in an agile working environment. For most, agile working was discussed in negative terms, with participants highlighting time inefficiencies, obstacles to concentrated work, reduced access to peer or team support, and negative impacts on wellbeing.

- Broadly, year 2 data continues to suggest reasonable and improved levels of professional confidence and competence across four broad domains: skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and values. Decreases in confidence were noted in the following areas: delivering personalised services, synthesis of knowledge and practice, and research-informed practice. Similar to year 1 findings, qualitative data again presents a more mixed picture of professional confidence and competence, highlighting the negative impacts

of broader factors – including organisational cultures, structures and resourcing - on the worker's ability to 'do the job'.

- Participants continue to describe varied caseloads in terms of volume and complexity. For most, the work is stimulating and appropriately complex. However, half of the year 2 participants report that their workload makes them feel anxious and less than half feel their workload is manageable. Intersectional findings suggest that workload anxiety is linked to volume of cases, lack of resource and a sense of vulnerability rather than workload complexity.

- Participants continue to spend the majority of their time on desk based activities, specifically report writing and case recording. As per year 1 data, least and diminishing time is spent on 'reading, analysing and using research knowledge and evidence'.

Support, learning and development

- Quantitative data indicates that participants are broadly satisfied with formal learning and development opportunities, most of which appear to be delivered in-house or via partner agencies. Participants and employers continue to prioritise a range of mostly practical knowledge. Qualitative data presents a more mixed picture with participants indicating a desire for 'deeper and richer' learning as well are more responsive, structured and joined-up learning and development pathways.

- Intersectional findings underscore that learning occurs mostly 'on the job' through everyday practice, relationships and reflection. This appears to be an underdeveloped aspect of learning and development strategy.

- Two thirds of participants continue to report regular experiences of supervision. ECSWs continue to value supervision; although satisfaction levels were slightly lower than those reported in year 1. Participants continue to highlight a desire for a more balanced approach, extending beyond case-management, and including greater space for critical reflection, learning and emotions.

- Informal support continues to emerge as a critical component of professional development, with increased emphasis on access to emotional support. Issues of proximity to, and distance from, supports affected by agile working practices appear significant.

Professional identity

- Most participants continue to describe a reasonably clear sense of professional identity, rooted in a strong sense of professional purpose and values. However, recognition and respect from others - policy makers, other professionals and publics - remains significant, suggesting both a personal and relational dynamic to developing professional identity.

- In practice however, professional identity appears both *in* development and under pressure as ECSWs grapple with the application of professional values within a 'corporate' council culture.

- As per year 1 findings, the two key challenges to professional identity and confidence were a perceived lack of respect from others, with emphasis on health colleagues, and a lack of resource to do the job well.

Conclusions

Broadly, the findings suggest a committed and capable early career workforce, motivated by making a difference in the lives of those with whom they work. At the same time the demands on early career social workers, and those who support them, are significant. There are signs of a workforce struggling, sometimes, to deliver on key elements of their professional identity within current (inter-)organisational structures, cultures and fiscal frameworks. To some extent, this struggle appears to be accepted as part of the territory of 'being a social worker' and raises important questions regarding the role and impact of those with particular responsibilities for professional leadership. Practice provides a critical site for professional development and has many areas of strength. Yet, some of the structures and cultures required to model, support and sustain learning and development in practice appear weak or underdeveloped. Relatedly, the findings suggest a profession committed to improvement in this area yet struggling to innovate and deliver amidst established and shifting professional patterns. The relationship between research, knowledge and practice appears particularly weak, with deleterious effects on professional identity and confidence. These findings point to a need to significantly strengthen and invest in professional leadership - as distinct from management, and for the profession to consider its arguably ambivalent relationship with knowledge and research.

Developing findings suggest that professional identity and professional development rest on an interplay of objective and subjective dimensions, affected in particular by the relational dynamic of 'being' a social worker. There is a need to better understand this interplay and to consider the implications for workforce learning and development strategies at local and national levels.

INTRODUCTION

This interim report presents findings from Year 2 of a five-year longitudinal study exploring the experiences of NQSWs as they progress in their careers. Findings from years' 1 and 2 will be compared in this report.

Led by researchers from Glasgow Caledonian University and the University of Dundee, this project aims to provide a broad view of how early career social workers develop as professionals in Scotland. By exploring professional development at incremental stages, this project will develop a national picture of how social workers experience and navigate their first years in practice. This research will explore organisational, practical and subjective dimensions of professional social work life.

(i) Overarching aim

The research aims to incrementally develop a national picture of how NQSW experience and navigate their first years in practice.

(ii) Objectives

1. To examine NQSWs' journeys of professional transition and development.
2. To understand how NQSWs experience and navigate a complex, contested and dynamic professional landscape, in relation to professional roles, tasks, structures and settings.
3. To understand how NQSWs are supported, trained and developed across diverse practice settings.
4. To identify NQSWs' ongoing professional development needs as they progress their careers.

(iii) Themes

Mindful of aims and objectives set for this project, the research will address the following key themes:

- Professional identity and socialisation
- Knowledge and skills development (professional learning and development)
- Navigating dynamic professional roles and contexts
- Emotions, self-care and resilience
- Developing value commitment and value strain
- Recruitment and retention
- Supervision & support
- Leadership

METHOD

Each year includes data collection, data analysis and data reporting. Methods of data collection include annual repeat-measure online questionnaires, focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation. Members of the research team have responsibility for different aspects of data collection and analysis.

(i) Literature review

The project team completed a preliminary stage 1 literature review in 2016. Methods of data collection were informed by initial appraisal of existing research. Stage 2 of this review was completed in 2018, with the production of a comprehensive literature review authored by Clarke and McCulloch (2018). For reasons of space, the stage 2 review is included as **Appendix 1** to this report.

(ii) Online survey

For each year, the online survey will follow a repeat-measure process where participants will be asked to complete the same questions at each stage of the project. Measuring incremental change in longitudinal research requires the same questions to be asked at equidistant points. This enables researchers to map changes and identify patterns over the course of this study. However, the Year 2 survey removed sections on previous work experience, education and induction, as these areas were not relevant to repeat-measure data collection. This made the questionnaire shorter (and quicker to complete) in Year 2.

The Year 2 online survey took place in March 2018. We received 118 responses (giving a response rate of 29% - based on a total population of 404). Whilst attrition is to be expected in longitudinal studies, this represents a reduction of 25% in respondents. This may be due to a number of issues: practitioners leaving social work altogether; participants simply choosing not to respond; participants unavailable for other reasons, such as illness or career breaks. However, as we are not able to confirm the number of participants who may have left the profession or otherwise since 2016, the total population of 404 may itself be lower in Year 2.

The Year 2 survey comprised of 8 sections:

- Section 1 Current employment
- Section 2 Professional confidence and competence
- Section 3 Formal supervision
- Section 4 Informal support
- Section 5 Professional learning and development
- Section 6 Professional identity
- Section 7 Developing leadership
- Section 8 Space for you to add anything else you'd like us to know about your experiences

The Year 3 online survey will take place in March 2019 and will use the Year 2 questionnaire structure.

Survey respondents

Whilst we had a reduction of 25% in online survey respondents in Year 2, the overall composition of participants remained broadly similar. The majority of survey respondents in Year 2 described their gender as female (80%), and the rest as male. No participants self-described another gender. The largest proportion were aged between 25-34 years (42%), followed by 35-44 (29%), and 45+ (22%). The smallest proportion were aged between 20-24 years (7%). The majority of respondents described their ethnic origin as 'White Scottish' (74%), followed by 'White British' (13%), 'White Irish' (4%), 'Other White' (3%), 'Other African' (2%), 'Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British' (1%), and 'African, African Scottish or African British' (1%). The majority of respondents said they had no disability (93%). Only 4% said they had a registered disability, and 2% said they had a self-defined disability.

(iii) Individual interviews

In order to explore the individual career trajectories of social workers in greater depth, we recruited a small subsample of 14 participants for a series of in-depth interviews at three key points during their careers: years' one, three and five. Participants were recruited from 4 local authority areas (see Table 1) via Chief Social Work Officers who invited NQSW in their respective authorities to contact the research team. We completed the first wave of individual interviews in July 2017. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Table 1: Composition of interviews

Local authority area	Number of participants	Gender
North	4	3xF; 1xM
Central	4	2xF; 2xM
South East	4	2xF; 2xM
South	2	2xF

Each interview followed a semi-structured schedule where researchers asked a series of questions (see below), using prompts where necessary.

- How did you come to be a social worker?
- How are you supported in your role as a social worker?
- What has influenced the development of your professional identity?
- How do you see the next phase of your career developing?

Findings from Year 1 (first wave interviews) are included in this report. A second wave of interviews (Year 3) will take place in July 2019.

(iv) Focus groups

We initially proposed to conduct regional focus groups in years' two, three and four of this project. Year 2 focus groups were completed in November 2017 in three locations. Locations were selected in discussion with local authority learning and development leads. We sought to

provide geographical spread while also taking into account existing NQSW networks. All registered NQSWs who graduated in 2016 were invited by email to attend one of the three groups. Participation was also encouraged by local authority learning and development leads.

10 social workers from across three local authorities took part in the focus groups. Table 2 details the composition of each group. Sign up for the north and east groups was slow and there were a number of 'no shows' on the day. Focus groups lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were audio-recorded digitally.

Table 2: Composition of focus groups

Group	Numbers	Gender
North	2	2xF
Central	6	4xF; 2xM
East	2	2xM

Focus groups were framed by the project aims and objectives. They were conducted using a semi-structured schedule which was used as a prompt to explore the following themes:

- Reflections on 'readiness'
- Professional transitions (A) education to practice
- Professional transitions (B) becoming a social worker
- Career progression: expectations, ambitions and needs
- Exploring what else matters.

Because of low engagement overall, and following a review of qualitative data collected through survey methods and individual interviews (and the significant overlaps noted across the interview and focus group data), the project team, in discussion with the Research Advisory Group, decided to remove focus groups as a method of data collection over the remainder of the study.

(v) Observational Analysis

To help address bias in self-reporting by participants involved in focus groups, online surveys and individual interviews, we proposed three small-scale concentrated periods of participant observation. These would ideally take place in a representative sample of social work organisations. A member of the research team would spend around ten days in a social work office to observe participants in practice. We proposed to do this in years' two, three and four.

The first period of observation began in March 2018. This took place in a local authority setting. Data collection in this first observation was undertaken by a PhD student attached to the project. The student observed participants in situ, and compiled fieldnotes, conducted interviews, and captured audio reflections on their experiences. Findings from this first period of observation are integrated throughout this report.

Second and third periods of observation will be conducted in other parts of Scotland, covering east and northern areas of the country. The next

period (Year 3) will be conducted by a researcher in July 2019.
Note on terminology

The project team recognised that the phrase 'newly qualified social worker' may be a poor fit for social workers navigating the first five years of their career. For this reason, we have chosen to replace 'NQSWs' with 'participants' and 'early career social workers' in the body of this report. Further discussion is required about how we operationalise a label to capture the transition from newly qualified to something else – possibly leading to a change in the title of the project itself. We propose to address this question in the year three survey.

FINDINGS – YEAR 2

This section will present findings under key themes related to the aims and objectives of this project. Given the breath of data collected, the structure of the online survey will be used to frame findings in a manageable form for the reader.

This section will highlight emerging themes from Year 2 of the project, and will comment on any significant changes from Year 1 findings. As highlighted earlier, the reader will note that our Year 2 online survey was reduced by removing sections not open to change or development, e.g. previous work experience, etc.

Current employment

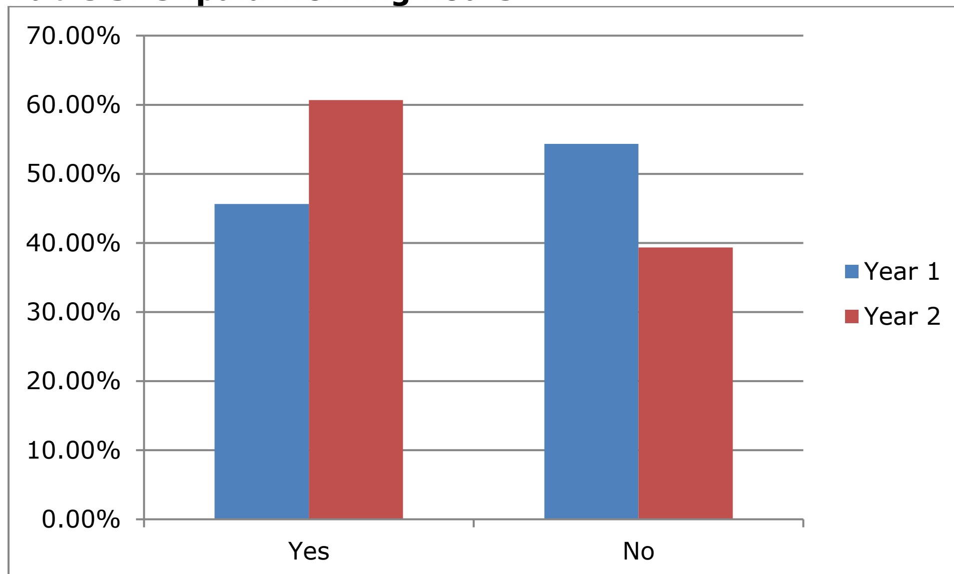
The majority of participants in Year 1 were in statutory roles (96%) at the point at which they completed the first online survey. By the second online survey, the Year 2 sample indicates a slight drop in those employed in statutory roles (to 92%). This may reflect a statistical effect however, in that our Year 2 sample is smaller than Year 1 (i.e. by 25%) – but it could also indicate that some participants have moved from statutory to voluntary sector / private roles in the last year.

Slight changes were noted in terms of social work setting (i.e. areas of practice where participants are situated). A rise in Year 2 was noted in children's services (59% - up from 52% in Year 1), followed by reduction in adult services (32% - down from 38%) and smaller reduction in criminal justice (6% - down from 7%). Indeed, 24% of Year 2 participants had moved or changed jobs within the last 12 months. Qualitative responses to this question indicate that a proportion of staff have relocated to new local authority areas within the last year, whilst others had moved to new teams within their own organization.

Year 2 data shows an increase in participants employed on permanent contracts, increasing from 74% in year 1 to 89% in year 2.

Participants were asked if they did unpaid hours of work for their employer. This had increased to 61% in Year 2 (see Table 3). There is little difference between qualitative data from Year 1 and Year 2 in that most of this time is said to be spent on catching up with case recording, report writing and other administrative desk-based tasks.

Table 3: Unpaid working hours



Agile working

The majority of participants in Year 1 and Year 2 report to be working for an employer with agile working policies in place. In Year 1 this figure was 51%. In Year 2 this figure had increased to 58%.

Similar to Year 1 findings, the impact of agile working in Year 2 emerged as a significant issue for those participants subject to it. A smaller number of participants highlighted positive aspects in Year 2 – these included the option to work from multiple sites/locations and to find quiet places to work when required. A much larger proportion of Year 2 participants discussed negative impacts of agile working. Comparable with Year 1 data, we found a similar interplay of practical and emotional costs:

1. **Time:** this emerged as a significant theme. The majority of participants spoke about extra time required to function effectively in agile working environments. This refers to setting-up workstations in the morning; finding desk space; carrying computer equipment, files and other relevant literature from different locations; and clearing desks before the end of the working day. When referring to time spent on these tasks, many participants in qualitative responses referred to terms like: 'unsettling', 'frustration', 'stressful', 'distraction', and 'waste'. During observational analysis, the researcher noted that newly-qualified staff in agile working environments seemed to spend additional time trying to locate team managers and colleagues.

2. **Concentration:** in qualitative survey responses, some participants expressed concern about their ability to focus on complex work in noisy, unfamiliar environments. Some referred to the importance of 'quiet spaces' when trying to complete more sensitive roles and tasks. Data from observational analysis shows that seating arrangements in open plan offices (two such were observed) meant that privacy was impossible unless a room (typically an

interview room) was made available. The researcher noted that in one particular office, all staff sat in rows facing the same direction. This meant that sound travelled forward, thus affecting each subsequent row. The researcher observed that no sound dampening materials were in place, but noted that some staff wore headphones (to drown out background noise).

3. **Health:** some participants expressed strong concerns in qualitative responses about the impact of agile environments on personal wellbeing. For some this referred to necessary adaptations required to do work, such as specific chairs, computer equipment and other aids. For others, this referred to feelings of stress, isolation and detachment. Fieldnotes from observational analysis describe a sense of depersonalization in agile working space, as staff were not allowed to display or arrange personal items (such as photographs) on or around the area in which they worked. Staff were allocated lockers to keep their personal items in. Fieldnotes also revealed that procedures were implemented where administration staff were tasked with removing personal items at the end of each working day (the researcher observed that items were placed in a basket and put a locked room).

4. **Peer support:** A number of participants described that agile working was having an impact on their interactions with peers and colleagues. Some participants expressed concerns at not being able to discuss cases or share experiences with team members, as many find themselves sitting beside a mix of social work disciplines. The term 'isolation' emerged in a number of responses. Relatedly, observational analysis revealed that newly-qualified staff (as indicated above) often found it difficult to find managers, so relied heavily on advice, support and guidance from peers they could find in their immediate working space. Fieldnotes suggest that seating patterns (referred to above) made it difficult to engage in open conversations with colleagues, as participants had to turn left or right (in their rows) to engage in communication about cases. The researcher observed that whilst these open agile spaces were noisy, many conversations were being conducted on telephones, with very few reflective (collective) conversations taking place amongst peers.

For those participants subject to agile working policies, around two thirds expressed significant concerns. Many still see this mode of working as unsettling, and few had anything positive to say about the practice. Comparatively, we noticed a shift towards more negative reporting in Year 2. However, observational data confirms that early career social workers value immediate support and advice offered by colleagues when, for example, returning from home visits, returning from difficult meetings, and typically some degree of interaction after difficult phone calls. It was also observed that participants often reflected on practice with colleagues in other spaces, such as cars (if doing joint visits).

Improvements to working environment

Participants were invited to comment on changes or improvements they would like to see made to their working environments. Responses in Year 1 were more negative than positive, with frequent references to desk allocation and availability. This was reflected again in Year 2 data. Around a third of participants expressed a desire to be with their team in one office, with fixed work spaces. Some participants expressed anxiety that their employer is about to adopt agile working policies, which these participants felt would be detrimental to their current working arrangements. Around a third of participants referred to physical characteristics of working environments, mostly referring to old buildings, poor lighting, need for modernisation, and temperature (either too high or too low at times). The remaining participants (around a third) were satisfied with their working environments, with many referring to space and fixed desks as particular features.

Individual interview data here presents a similar picture. One respondent stated that he "hates" hot-desking and believes it is generally unpopular:

> "We're all crammed into one little area with… there's not enough desks for the number of staff that we've got for the three teams. We do have a hot-desking area elsewhere in the building, which you have to book, but obviously being hot-desk, any worker from anywhere can book that and so sometimes it's not available".

Another respondent said that hot-desking was "alright… there's times if you come in too late there's not a desk available, but there is the break-out area, so there's computers there as well". He qualified this by comparing this office to others where there is no parking which is "just a stress that you can do without to be honest".

By contrast, a respondent commented on the value of having "our own desks and our own office" and the value of having your colleagues around you at times of need and crises. Again, the importance of colleagues and peers emerged strongly throughout individual interviews.

Time spent on tasks

To get a sense of where efforts are focused at the start of their professional careers, survey participants were asked to estimate time spent on typical social work tasks, ranking from most (scored 1) to least (scored 7).

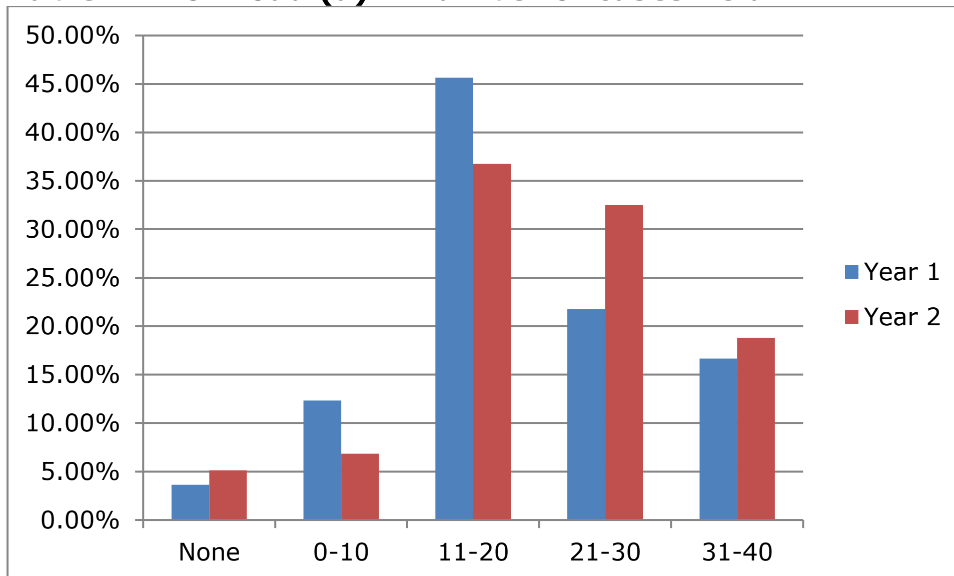
Similar to Year 1 findings, data from Year 2 showed that most time was spent on 'report writing' and 'case recording'. Year 2 data showed an 8% increase in time spent on 'report writing' and a 4% increase on time spent on 'case recording' (please see **Figure 1** in Appendix 2). At the opposite end, Year 2 data showed a 17% reduction on time spent using research, knowledge and evidence.

Workload

In terms of average caseloads in Year 1, the largest proportion held between 11-20 cases. Year 2 data indicates that average caseloads have increased, with more holding 21-30 and 31-40 cases (see Table 4).

Variation in caseload numbers may reflect diverse arrangements for workload management across 32 local authorities and other agencies in Scotland. Also, it should be noted that participants who answered 'none' are mostly based in secondary settings (such as hospital or court-based services) where working practices largely follow non-case holding models.

Table 4: Workload (a) – Number of cases held



In Year 1, around 48% of participants were holding cases relating to child protection, sex offenders or adult protection. This figure has increased to 68% in Year 2. The spread and number of cases between Year 1 and Year 2 is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that over half of the survey participants are holding child protection cases, with increases in those holding 1-3 and 7-9 cases. There is a small rise in those holding 4-6 adult protection cases, and a rise in those holding 1-2 and 4-6 sex offender cases. This may reflect increasing confidence felt by local authorities by allocating more complex work to early-career social workers; perhaps suggesting increased levels of competence and skills as they progress in their careers. But variation here will have multiple explanations, not least workload demands and service needs in different agencies and local authorities.

The majority of participants in Year 1 reported that work allocated to them was appropriate for their level of skill and knowledge, that workloads were manageable and that they felt confident to take on more complex work. However, data from Year 2 suggests that whilst most continue to feel that allocated cases remain broadly appropriate for levels of skill and knowledge at this point, there appears to be less agreement that current workloads are manageable, and more agreement that workloads are making early career social workers feel anxious (see Table 6).

Table 5: Type and number of case held

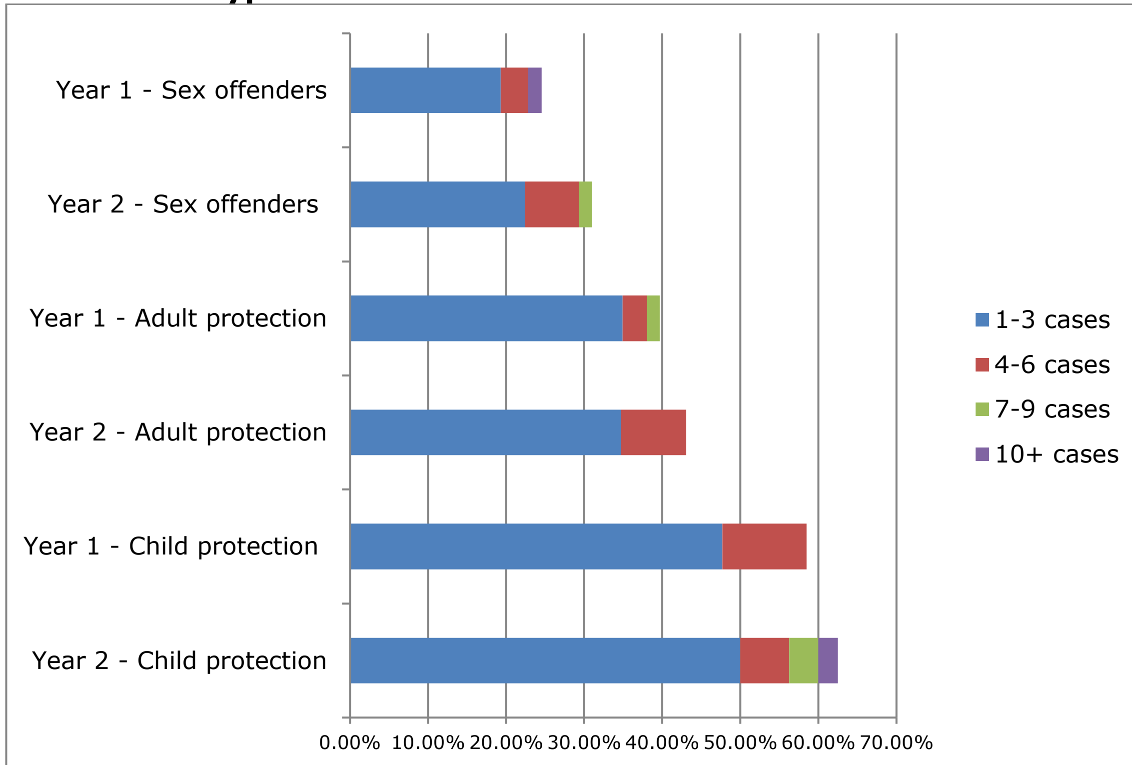
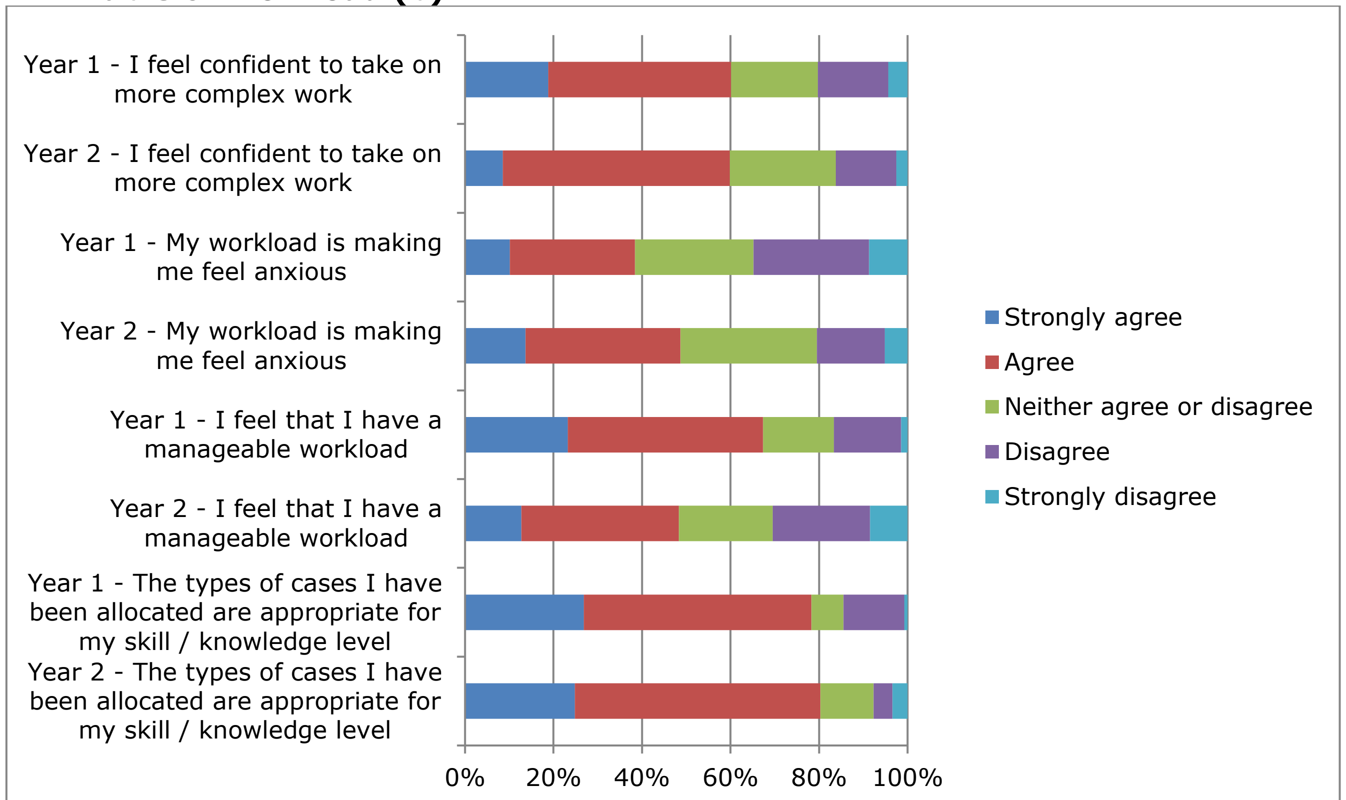


Table 6: Workload (b)



Professional confidence and competence

Key to this study is examining and charting the development of professional confidence and competence of social workers as they progress in their careers. Our aim in Year 1 was to establish baseline levels of confidence and competence across a range of occupational items drawn from the Professional Capabilities Framework and National Occupational Standards. We repeated this in Year 2, and findings will be presented and compared here. We retained our focus on four key domains: skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and professional values.

Skills

In this domain, respondents were asked to rank how confident they felt across a range of typical social work skills. Participants ranked themselves on a scale from 'confident' to 'unconfident'. Although broadly similar to Year 1 findings (in that levels of confidence are still generally high), Year 2 findings indicate slight variation in levels of confidence across some categories (see Table 7). Confidence levels have increased with 'making professional judgements…' and 'producing records and reports that meet professional standards'. However, confidence has reduced in 'delivering personalised services', 'using research skills to inform practice and enhance learning', and 'managing demands on own time to prioritise what is important as well as what is urgent'. These findings merit further investigation going forward. The delivery of personalised services is recognised as a cornerstone of good social work practice. Similarly, research informed practice is, or ought to be, a foundational aspect of professional practice. If early career social workers are struggling to deliver on these key skills, there is a need to better understand why.

Knowledge

Respondents were asked to rank how confident they felt in their understanding of knowledge across a range of social work areas. Participants ranked themselves on a scale from 'confident' to 'unconfident'. Year 2 findings are broadly similar to Year 1 in that levels of confidence remain high across most categories (see Table 8). Compared with Year 1, knowledge on 'legislation', and 'statutory and professional codes' showed an increase in confidence. Slight aggregate decreases were noted in 'knowledge on theories of discrimination…' and 'theories underpinning our understanding of social issues…'. Indeed, if it is the case that early career social workers are spending less time on reading and engaging with academic literature, then we might expect confidence levels to drop further in categories relating to the use of theory and research in practice.

Table 7: Skills – Levels of confidence

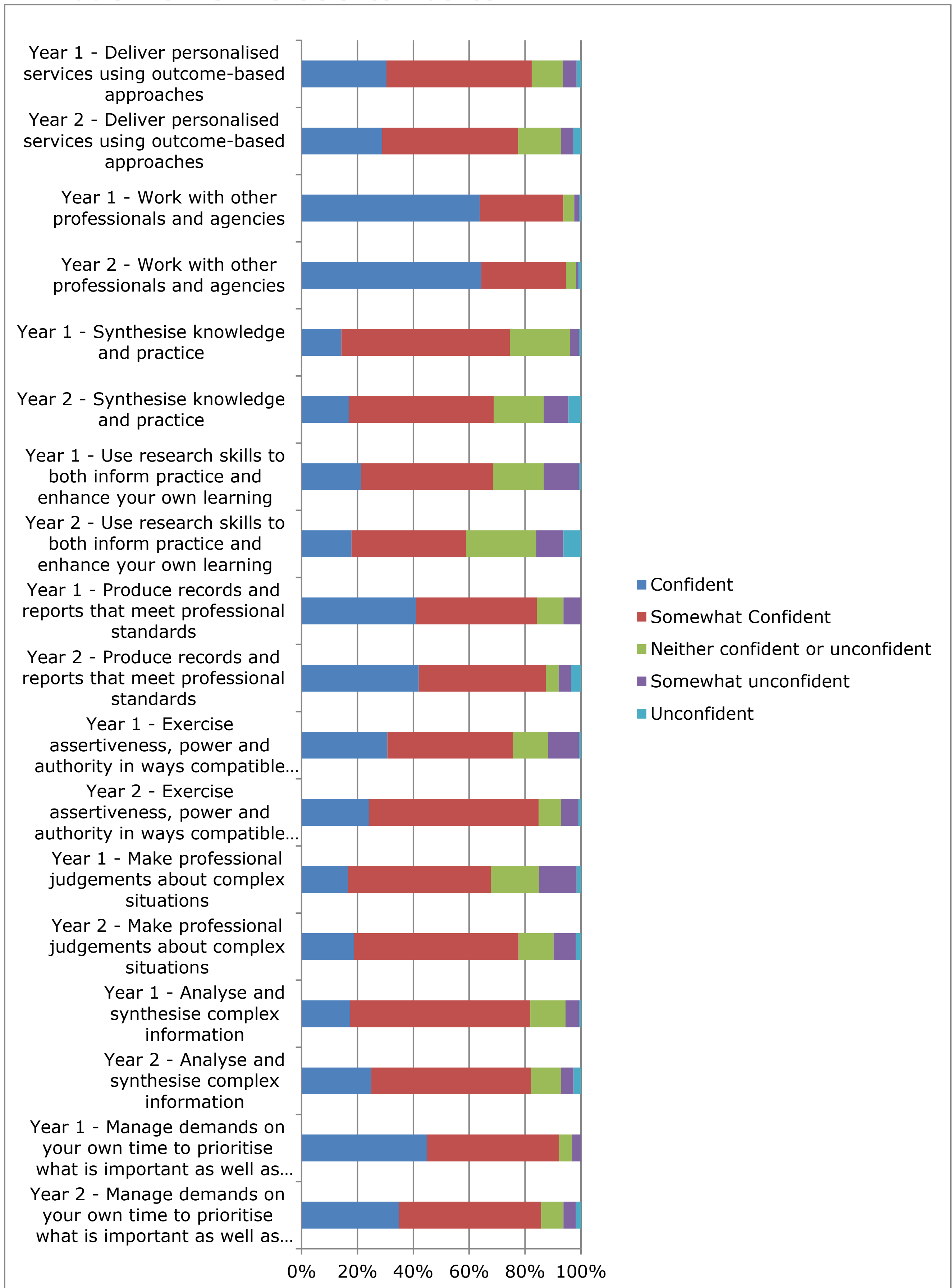
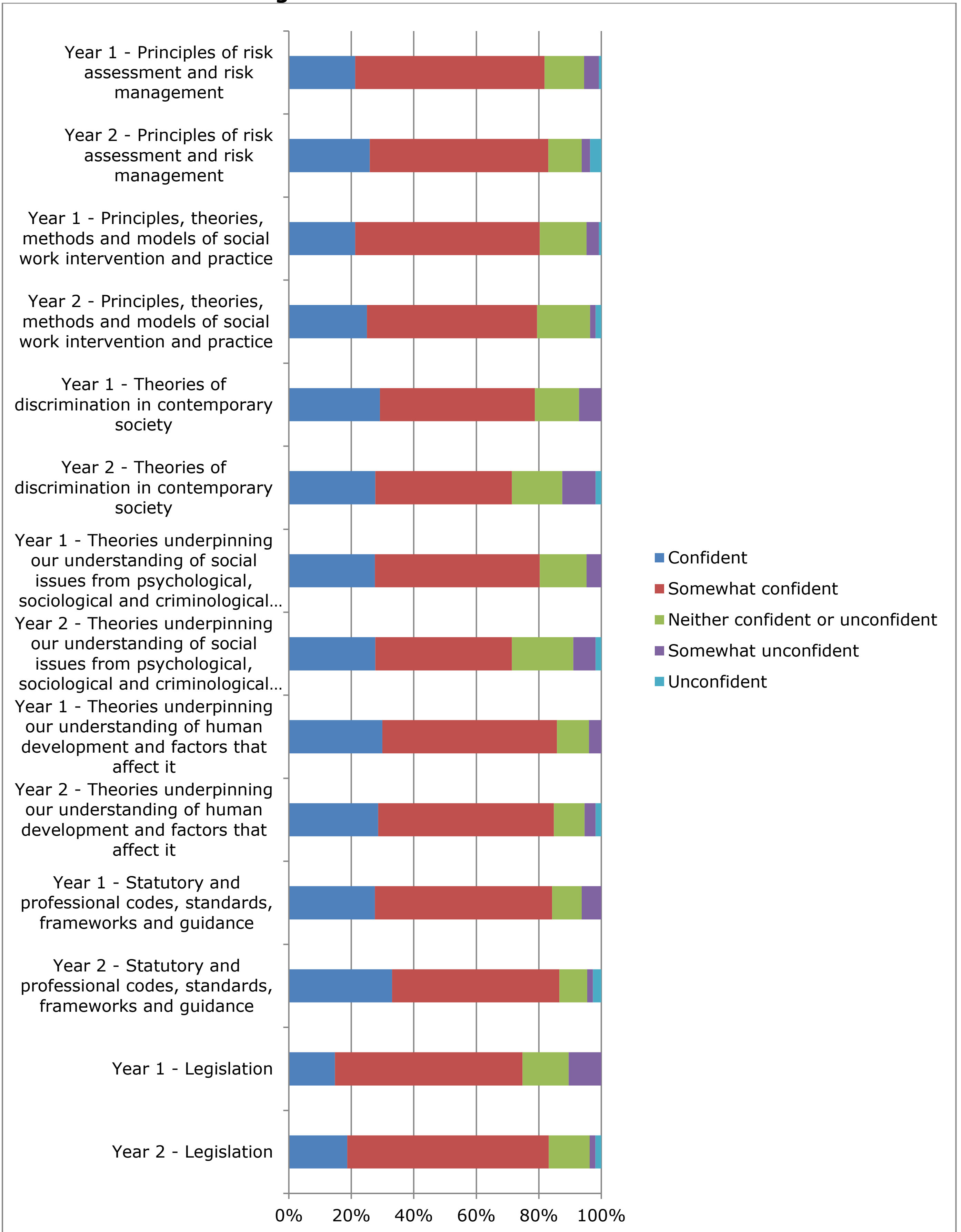


Table 8: Knowledge – Levels of confidence



Self-efficacy

The project team used a widely adopted method of measuring self-efficacy developed by Ralf Schwarzer & Matthias Jerusalem (1995) (see Year 1 report for more detail).

As per year 1, participants were asked to consider 9 areas of self- efficacy and rate themselves against a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. In year 2, the same three areas of self-efficacy emerged as top:

1. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities
2. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events
3. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.

Similar to Year 1, the only negative skew found in the data on self-efficacy related to the item 'If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want'.

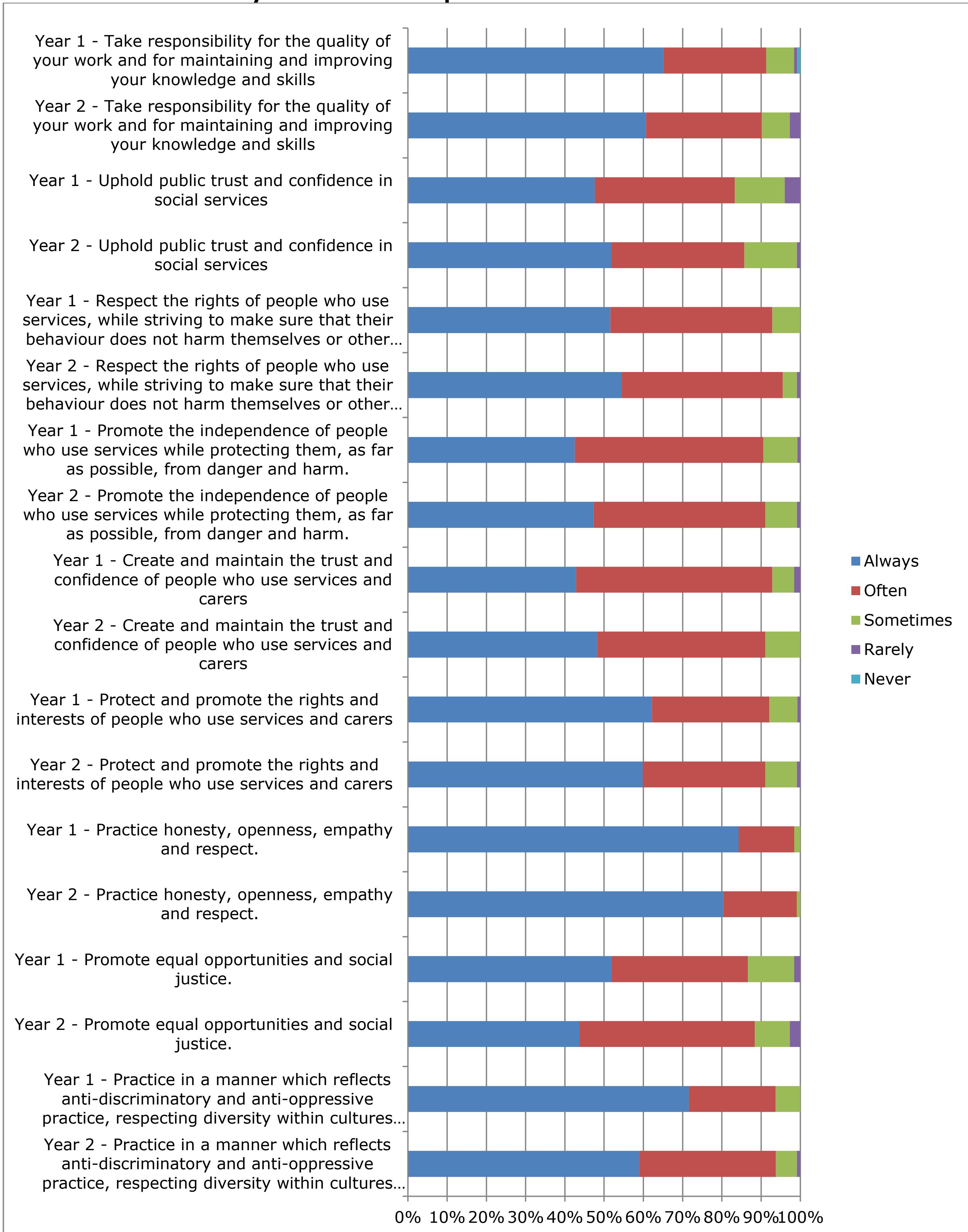
It seems clear that the majority of early-career social workers in Year 2 have sustained high levels of self-efficacy since the last survey.

Professional values

We asked participants here to consider a number of items relating to professional values (drawn largely from codes of practice). Participants were asked to rate their ability to demonstrate professional values on a scale from 'always' to 'never'.

The majority of participants in Year 1 felt able to demonstrate professional values in practice. Slight variation is noted in Year 2, but the majority of early-career social workers still feel they can demonstrate professional values either 'always' or 'often' (see Table 9). Slight increases were noted in abilities to 'uphold public trust and confidence…', 'respect the rights of people who use services…', and 'promote the independence of people…'

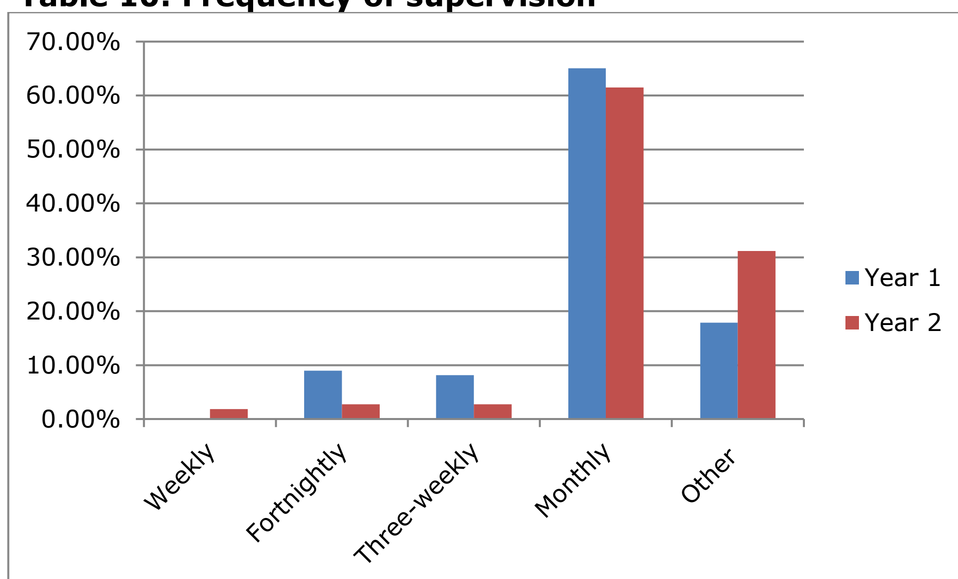
Table 9: Ability to demonstrate professional values



Formal supervision

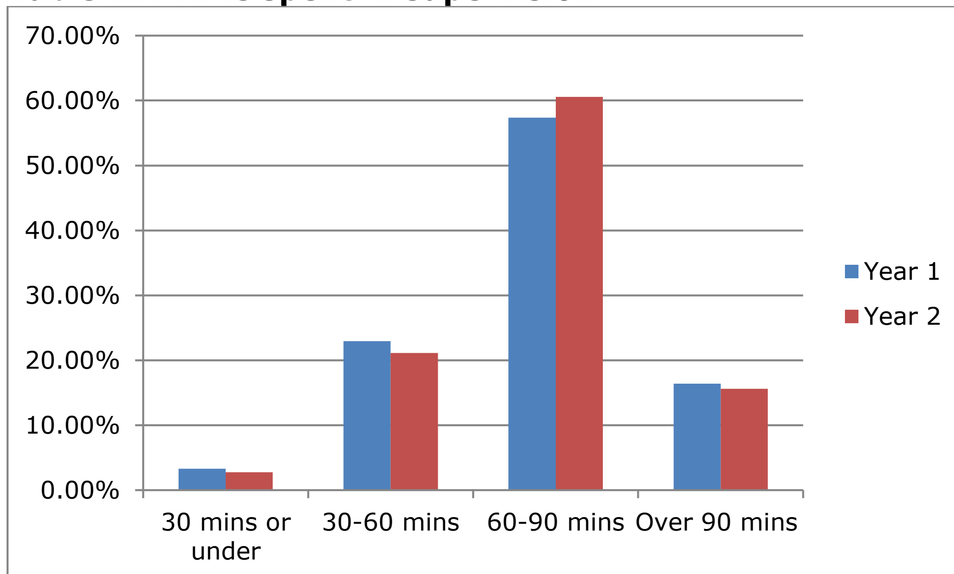
Data from Year 1 and Year 2 shows that most participants receive formal supervision on a monthly basis. There is a slight reduction in those receiving fortnightly or three-weekly supervision. However, we noticed an increase in the number subject to 'other' arrangements: from 18% to 32% (see Table 10). Participants who answered 'other' were invited to comment in free text boxes. Responses in Year 2 were similar to Year 1 in that 'other' arrangements included supervision on a six-weekly basis for some, and every 2-5 months for others. A small proportion referred to frequent cancellations by managers, and others referred to more ad hoc arrangements where supervision is conducted 'as and when required'.

Table 10: Frequency of supervision



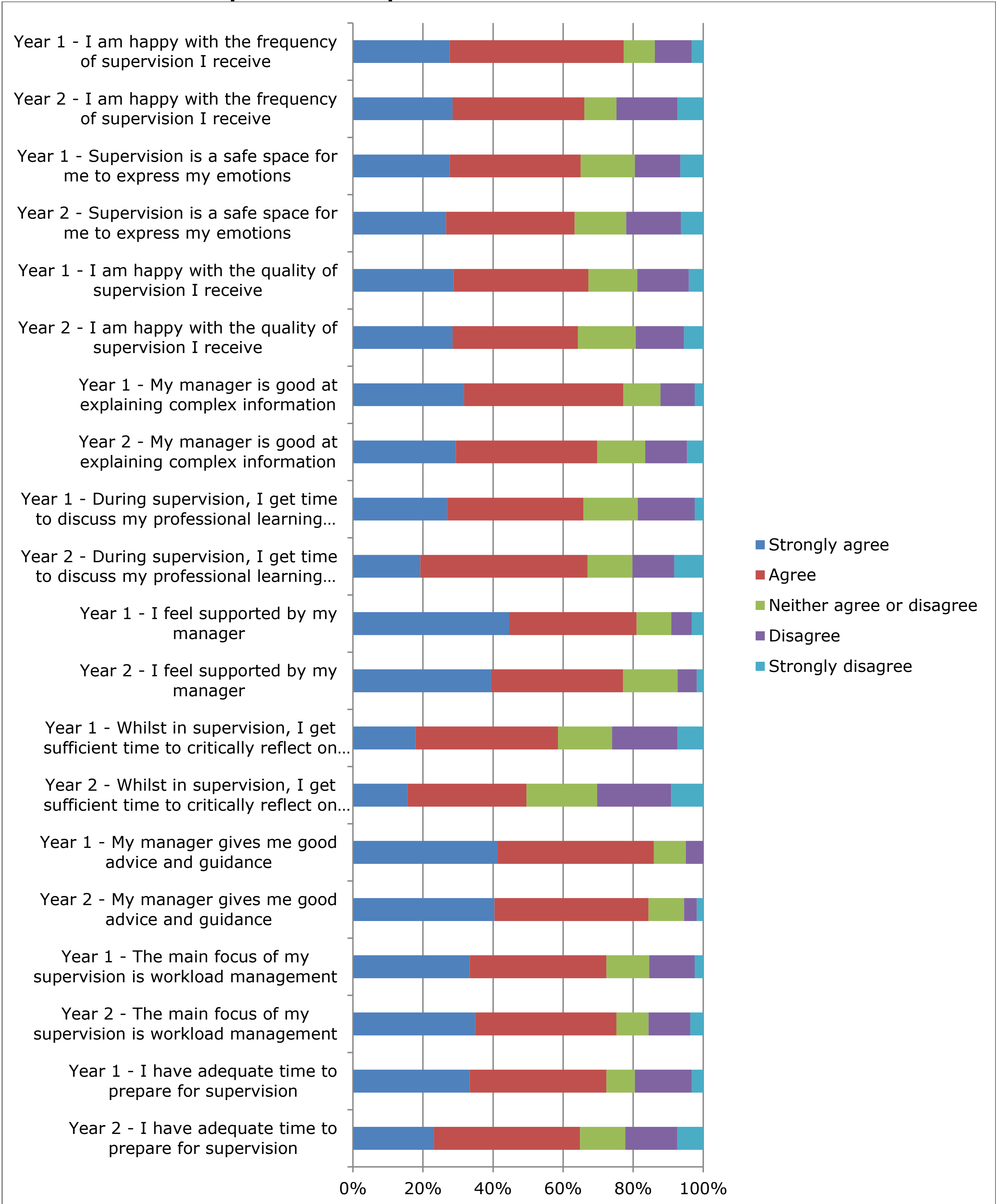
In respect of the duration of supervision and where it takes place, no significant differences emerged between Year 1 and Year 2 data. For the majority of participants, supervision continues to take place in a closed office space and lasts, typically, between 60 and 90 minutes (see Table 11).

Table 11: Time spent in supervision



Respondents were invited to rank a number of statements on aspects of supervision on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Responses were generally positive in both Year 1 and Year 2 data (see Table 12); however, variation is noted in Year 2 with less agreement on: 'frequency of supervision…', 'my manager is good at explaining complex information', 'I feel supported by my manager', 'time to critically reflect…' and 'I have adequate time to prepare for supervision'. An increase was noted in agreement that workload management is the main focus of supervision. We also noted a slight decrease in agreement that supervision is a safe space to express emotions.

Table 12: Experience of supervision



Improvements to supervision

Using free text boxes, participants were asked to comment on what they would like to see changed or improved in their experience of formal supervision. Identified areas for improvement in Year 2 were broadly consistent with responses from Year 1. However, some Year 2 responses included reference to improvements in consistency, content and quality of minutes taken during supervision sessions. A greater emphasis was placed in Year 2 on the need for supervision to provide adequate space for critical reflection. Frequent comments are summarised below:

- more time spent on analysing practice through critical reflection.
- less emphasis on case management and more focus on professional and personal development.
- consistent with Year 1, a number of participants want supervision to be a safe and confidential space, where they feel listened to, trusted, and not judged.

A number of responses are captured in the following response from one survey participant:

> 'I would like my supervisor to focus more on theorizing and actually learning from my cases as opposed to signposting my service users to other services in response to their issues. I would like to speak openly and honestly about my own thoughts and feelings regarding my role and responsibilities… without feeling judged by my team manager'.

Supervision is clearly important to participants. The findings here suggest that supervision is being provided with variable degrees of frequency, support, depth and attention.

Findings from individual interview data suggest supervision mostly takes a case-management approach. Within this, there is variation from the worker determining which cases are discussed, to situations where every case is explored in great detail. One respondent described this as "micromanagement" which she experiences as both overly time-consuming and damaging to her confidence. Others however find the case-management approach helpful and reassuring "to make sure that I'm on the right track, that I'm basically doing the right thing".

For some, supervision is formally recorded on case-management proformas, while for others the manager makes "rough notes, but I don't actually know what happens to those minutes, I've never seen them typed up, I've never seen them come back".

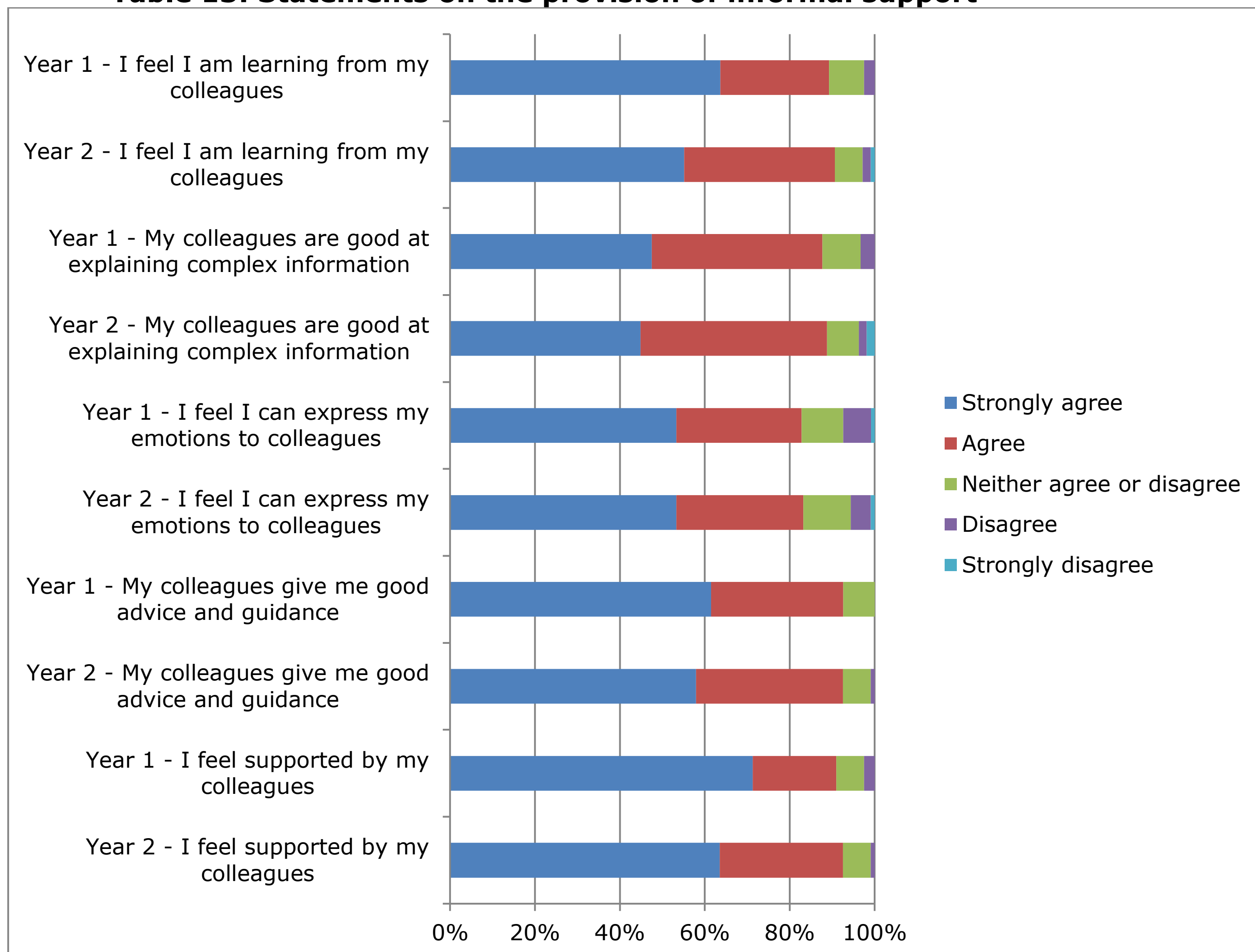
For the majority of interview participants, supervision appears to happen regularly, with some variations. Most also describe an "open-door" policy with their supervisors, though most tend to seek out informal support first from colleagues rather than managers, as discussed below.

Informal support

In this section of the survey we explored participant experiences of informal support from team members and other non-management staff in their employment settings.

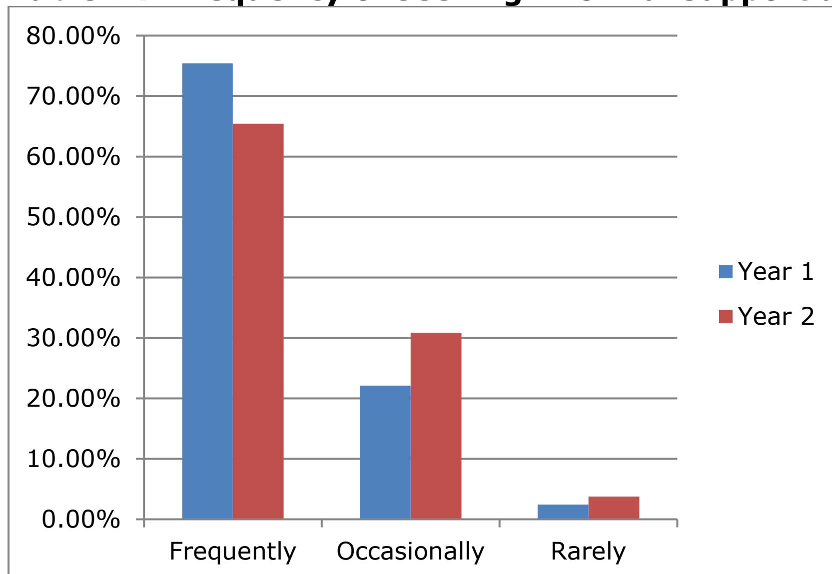
Participants in Year 1 and Year 2 were asked first about the extent to which they agreed or not with a number of statements in relation to informal support. Respondents were invited to rank their responses on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (see Table 13).

Table 13: Statements on the provision of informal support



Data presented in Table 13 shows that the majority of participants continue to greatly value the support, advice and learning opportunities provided by their colleagues. Variation here between Year 1 and Year 2 is negligible, with no significant shifts. However, in a subsequent question on how often advice and guidance was sought from colleagues, we noted a reduction in those who 'frequently' sought this, whilst an increase was noted in those who did this 'occasionally' (see Table 14).

Table 14: Frequency of seeking informal support and advice



In free text boxes, participants were invited to comment on the types of informal support accessed from colleagues and peers. The majority of responses in Year 1 referred to professional advice and guidance from colleagues, followed by emotional support (cited by over a third). Year 2 data shows a similar pattern in that advice and guidance remains important; however, two differences were noted. Firstly, a significant proportion of responses referred to the ability to reflect and discuss complex issues relating to casework. Participants in Year 2 seemed to place more emphasis on support as helping to work through difficult practice issues using reflective dialogue with colleagues and peers. This may indicate that participants in Year 2 are engaging in more complex areas of work; it may be that deeper levels of analysis and discussion are sought from those in proximity. Secondly, we noticed a slight increase in responses that referred to the provision of emotional support or care (sometimes framed as reassurance or offloading). This indicates that participants clearly value the ability of colleagues and peers to provide emotional and pastoral support (alongside practical advice and guidance).

We also found that individual interview data reflected the value respondents place on informal support for both practical advice about processes, and for personal and emotional support. The concept of 'team' emerged as important, and respondents valued having their peers around them. Some described a chance to discuss personal or emotional content in supervision, but the majority relied on informal peer support for this. One interview participant captured the general sentiment about what supports them best here:

> "And it possibly isn't down to formal supervision. It's possibly not down to productive team meetings. It's more likely to be down to good peer support, my feelings towards the job, my enthusiasm for it, and the things I do outside work".

Proximity emerged as an important sub-theme during interviews, where participants used terms such as 'close knit', 'discussions at lunch', 'office chats', 'see me struggling'. The importance of proximity – both physical

and psychological - cannot be underplayed. Participants saw colleagues and peers as crucial to their ability not only to function within their professional role, but also to develop and grow as confident, knowledgeable and resilient practitioners. As one participant put it, 'Without peer support I would be unable to do my job'. Another participant added, 'my colleagues have been the heart of my learning, support and development'. Observational data confirms that practitioners spend a great deal of time engaging in reflective dialogue about cases, events and concerns – most of which take place in a mixture of bound and unbound spaces, such as offices, corridors, cars, interview rooms and staff kitchens. Early career social workers frequently participate in these dialogues – reflecting 'in action' with regard to their own cases. However, in one office with an agile working policy, it was observed that reflective dialogues seemed to be less intense and more fractured. This was due, in part, to participants feeling uneasy to speak freely in rooms with other practitioners they did not know (i.e. not from their own team).

During individual interviews, participants were also asked to comment on how colleagues and peers contribute to their professional development. In both Year 1 and Year 2 data, a number of responses here echoed the previous section by referencing a variety of formal and informal ways that professional learning is shaped by colleagues and peers, such as providing advice, guidance and support through day-to-day listening and discussion with team members. However, Year 2 data had more emphasis on sharing experiences of practice (helping practitioners to explore or resolve similar issues) and sharing knowledge (mostly by signposting participants to policy documents, journal articles and current research). As one participant put it, 'suggesting resources, reading, or other sources of information/advice [and] giving examples based on their professional experience'.

Observational data shows that mid- to late-career social workers tend to share their accumulated knowledge and experience with early career social workers through informal office chats and discussions (often prompted by a participants return from a difficult meeting or home visit). On these occasions, more experienced staff were observed to comfort and reassure early-career social workers, sometimes by touch – but mostly by asking how the event went.

Informal support from peers and colleagues is clearly important to early career social workers. The findings across Year 1 and Year 2 suggest that participants continue to gain significant benefit across emotional, intellectual, organisational and practical domains.

Professional learning and development

Appropriate and adequate learning and development opportunities are known to be critical to the progression of young professionals. Dimensions of quality, frequency and depth of learning opportunities were explored in this study.

The first aspect explored was the amount of time spent on different aspects of learning and development. On a scale from 1-6, participants were asked to rank the time spent on items from **most** (scoring 1) to

least (scoring 6).

Analysis of Year 1 and Year 2 data shows that participants are engaging less in shadowing activities in Year 2, whilst engaging more in learning and professional development opportunities provided by employers and outside agencies. We noted a general increase in self-directed learning at home, and an aggregate decrease in self-directed learning at work. We also found a reduction in time spent on learning provided by universities (which was also low in Year 1) (please see *Figure 2* in Appendix 2). Overall, these findings reflect earlier observations that early career staff in Year 2 appear increasingly concerned with on-the-job tasks and prescribed learning opportunities (usually training), over engagement with research and academic literature (particularly during work time). Observational analysis in three sites found no evidence of active reading or research done by participants during the course of their day-to-day work.

Types of knowledge important to participants in their role was captured by asking participants to rank a number of items on a scale from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). These items included:

- health and safety
- employer policy and procedures
- government policy and guidance
- risk assessment and risk management
- legislation
- social work theory, research and evidence summaries
- social work interventions.

Our analysis of Year 1 and Year 2 data revealed little by way of significant variation. The majority of participants in both years ranked the following areas of knowledge as being most important:

1. risk assessment and risk management
2. social work interventions
3. legislation.

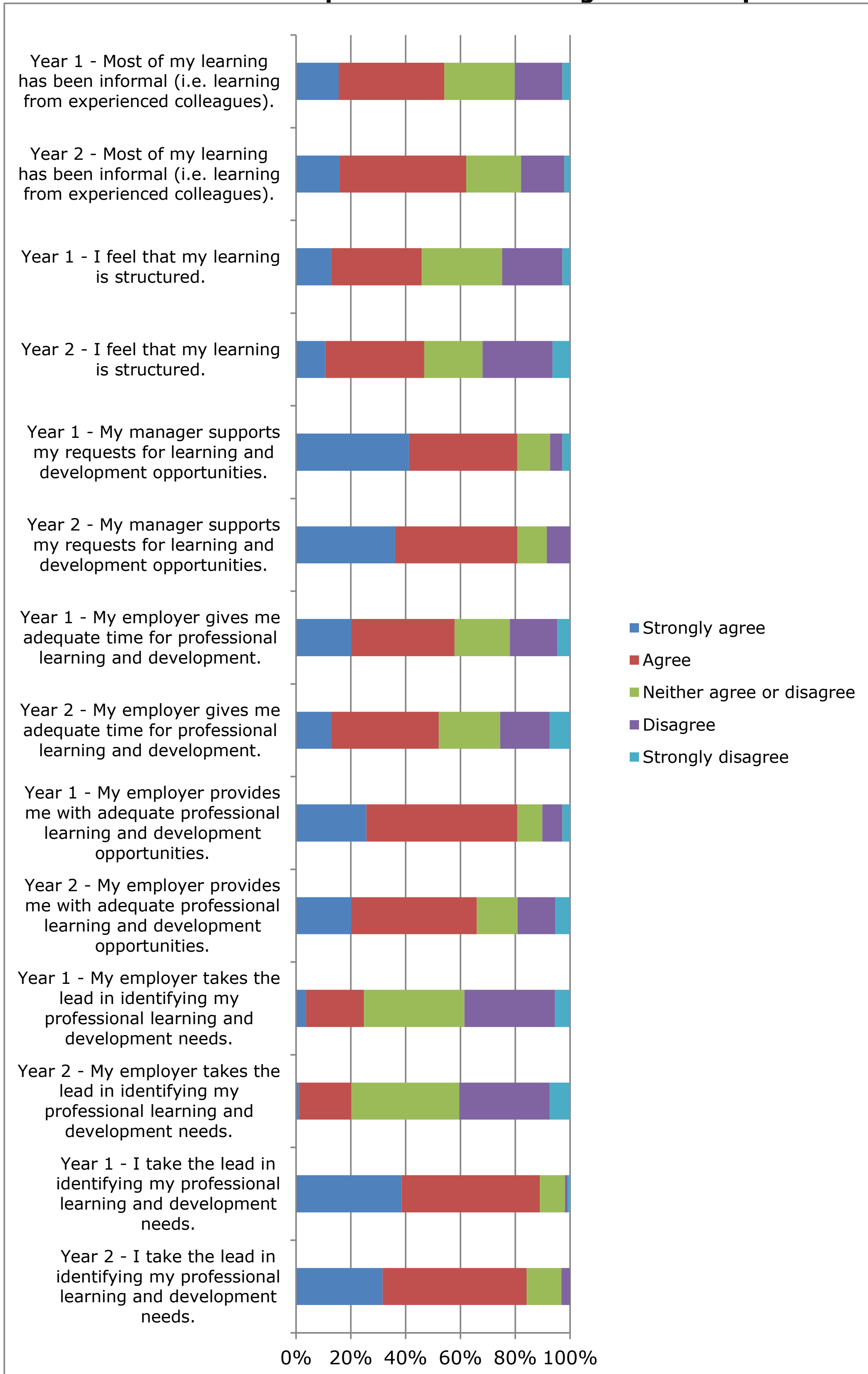
The least important area of knowledge was 'health and safety' (although this had decreased slightly from 62% in Year 1 to 57% in Year 2). The remaining areas of knowledge in Year 1 and Year 2 scored somewhere in between. We found no significant variation in Year 2 data.

Participants in Year 1 and Year 2 were asked about the extent to which they agreed or not with a number of statements in relation to professional development and learning. Respondents were invited to rank their responses on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' (see Table 15).

Despite some variation, findings across Year 1 and Year 2 suggest that the majority of participants appear to have control over their own learning, and that – for the majority - adequate learning opportunities are made available. In Year 2 we noted a slight increase in agreement that most learning experienced by participants was 'informal'. Data showed less agreement with time made available by employers for professional learning

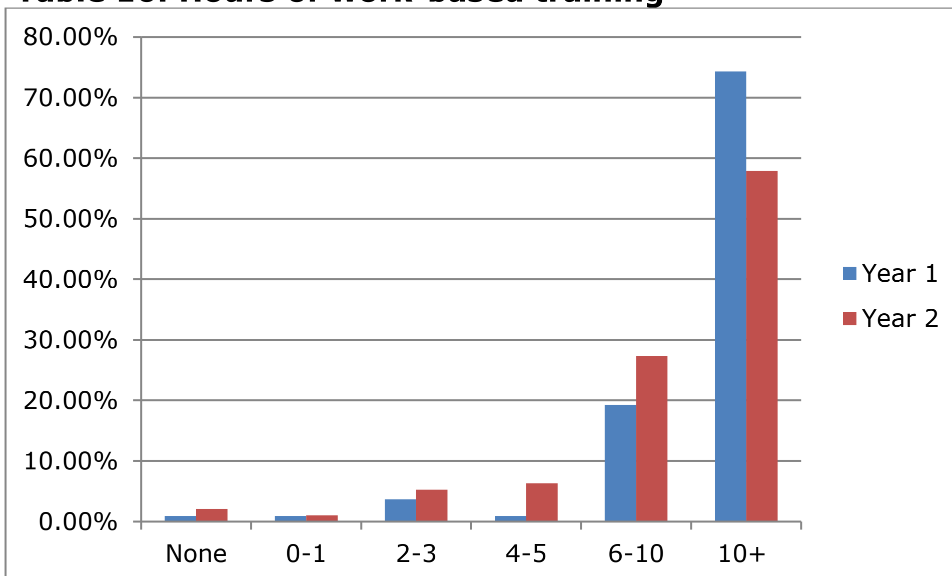
and development, and less agreement that employers were providing adequate learning opportunities. Another slight change from Year 1 to Year 2 is that fewer participants see employers or themselves as taking the lead in identifying their professional development needs.

Table 15: Statements on professional learning and development



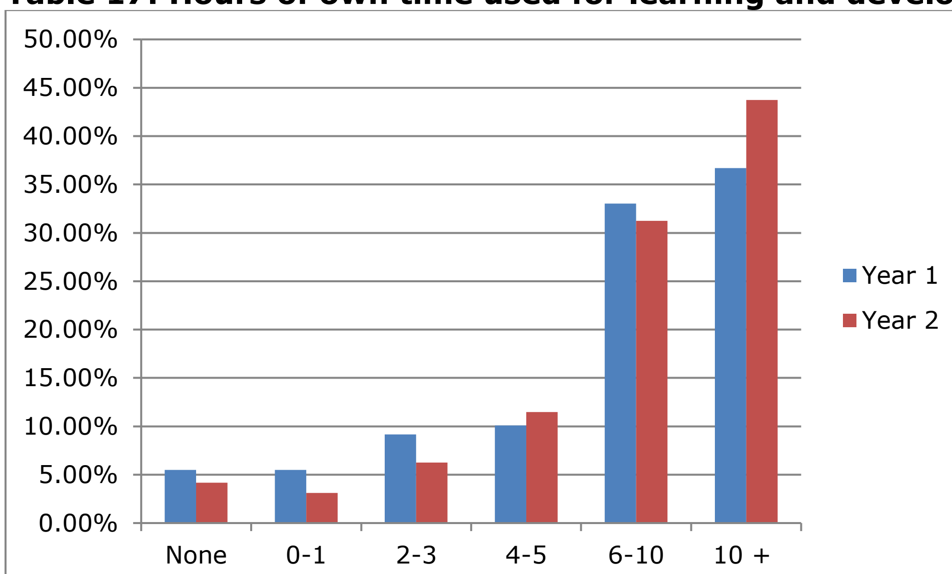
The majority of respondents across Year 1 and Year 2 said they had received over 10 hours of work-based training in the last twelve months. However, Year 2 data shows a reduction in the number receiving 10+ hours, and an increase in those receiving between 0-10 hours (see Table 16).

Table 16: Hours of work-based training



Participants across Year 1 and Year 2 also spent a significant amount of their own time on learning and development (i.e. researching topics, reading books and journal articles) outside office hours (see Table 17). Data from Year 2 suggests an increase in the number of early-career social workers using 10+ hours of their own time for learning and development.

Table 17: Hours of own time used for learning and development



Figures from Year 2 in Table 17 suggest that participants are still keen to supplement their work-based learning with additional time spend on more traditional forms of knowledge acquisition.

Participants were also invited to rank how satisfied they felt with the amount of learning and development opportunities made available to them. Table 18 provides Year 1 and Year 2 results for comparison.

Table 18: Satisfaction with amount of learning and development opportunities

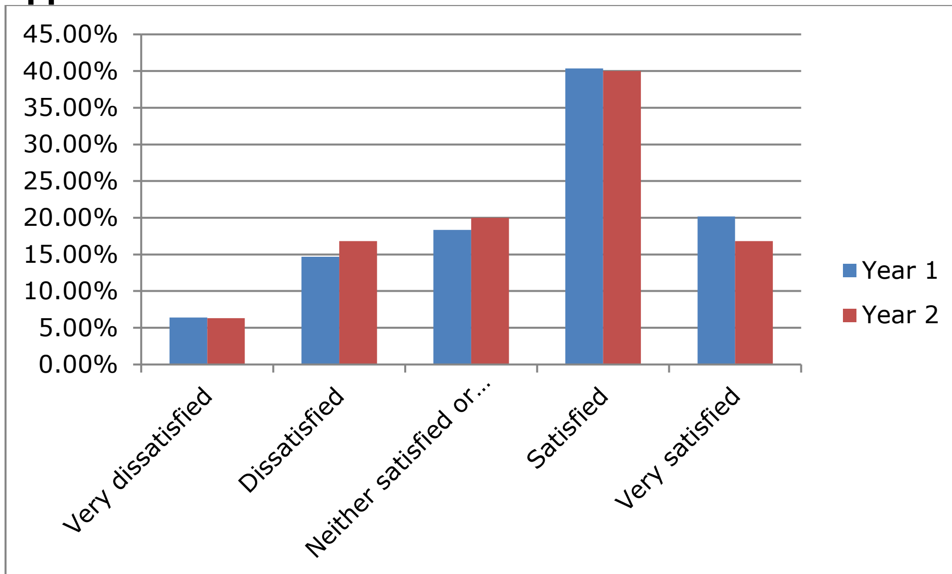
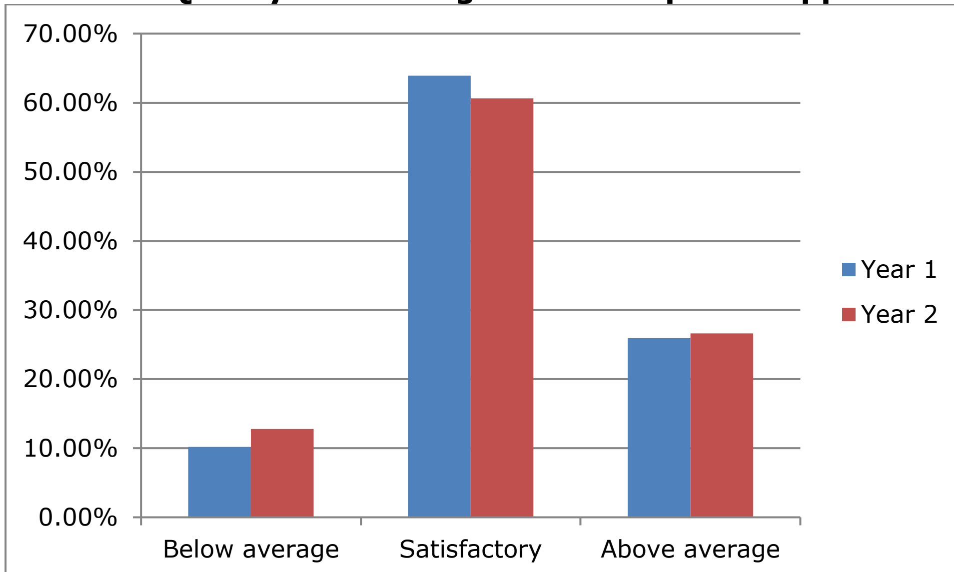


Table 18 shows that from Year 1 to Year 2, participants have felt generally satisfied with the amount of learning opportunities made available to them; however, we noted a slight reduction in those who said 'very satisfied', and a slight increase in those who felt 'dissatisfied'.

Participants were then asked about the 'quality' of learning and development opportunities made available to them. Table 19 shows that from Year 1 to Year 2, participants continue to rate the quality of learning and development opportunities as positive. However, we noted a slight reduction in those who said 'satisfactory', and a slight increase in those who said 'below average'.

Table 19: Quality of learning and development opportunities



In free text boxes, participants were invited to comment on their professional learning and development needs at the current time. Year 1 responses to this question were varied, but needs were broadly framed as wanting more formal training and more protected opportunities for self-directed learning (i.e. space for independent learning, reading and research). Year 2 data is more specific in terms of learning needs. As might be expected, we identified some correlation between learning needs and current practice setting. Those employed in children and families contexts often referred to further training in child protection; practitioners in adult settings referred to training in adult protection and mental health; and practitioners in criminal justice referred to training on risk and sexual offending. A common theme across the majority of responses here was a wish for deeper, richer knowledge. For some this meant having tools to make sense of complex cases within their particular practice area. For others, this meant expanding on existing skills and knowledge, consolidating previous learning and moving forward in terms of professional development (e.g. some referred to becoming Mental Health Officers eventually; others referred to becoming trainers in specialist areas, such as GIRFEC, or becoming practice teachers).

Participants were then asked to comment on how their employer could support their professional learning and development. In Year 1 the most commonly cited word was 'training' – often modified by 'more' or 'better'. In most cases, this referred to going beyond what is currently offered by employers as in-house training - towards specialised opportunities around areas relevant to current practice roles. In Year 2 we found a similar focus on additional role-specific training, with more emphasis on issues relating to funding, access to external courses, providing opportunities and protecting time. Some participants referred to professional development plans (using various acronyms, such as PRD) and their use in identifying learning needs; however, a number of responses called for employers to 'agree' to training plans (suggesting that some participants may be facing difficulties in getting their learning needs met). Responses here left the impression that some participants seem more than able to identify what they need, but that difficulties with time, resources and lack

of opportunities may continue to hinder professional development.

Learning and development are clearly important to early career social workers. Survey findings across Year 1 and Year 2 suggest that participants are generally content with existing opportunities made available to them. However, in qualitative free-text responses, many felt that learning could be improved by wider access to training opportunities, protected time to engage in learning activity, and better recognition (agreement) of training needs through professional development plans.

Findings from individual interview data suggest there is a high level of awareness among supervisors of participants' training needs (usually framed by Post Registration Training and Learning requirements). Some respondents described very full programmes which include engagement in specific NQSW training forums and structured periods of induction, all of which are to be welcomed. A minority however, felt it was almost 'too full', describing this as 'unsystematic' and therefore unsympathetic to individual learning needs. One described being on "twenty-four different training courses, on top of my induction training and on top of all the mandatory training". For a good proportion of participants however, it seems that informal learning "on-the-job" also has important benefits:

> "I think the learning that I need now, moving on, doesn't come in the form of formal training. I think I need to learn more on the job, I think maybe being better supported in supervision, having a more dynamic team meeting set up, having organised formal interaction between the team, instead of just informal peer discussions, would probably bring me on more, now, than any more training courses"

The challenge here would appear to be how best to balance 'informal' and 'formal' learning in professional environments. Data from Year 1 and Year 2 suggests a mixed picture of learning and development experiences, all of which seem to be contingent on multiple factors: individual learning needs, practice settings, available resources, support from managers, support from colleagues, availability of learning opportunities, and time / space to engage in further/deeper learning.

Professional identity

Recognising the importance of professional identity for social work, the project team were interested here in what shapes the professional identity of NQSW at the start of their careers, and how this develops as they progress in practice.

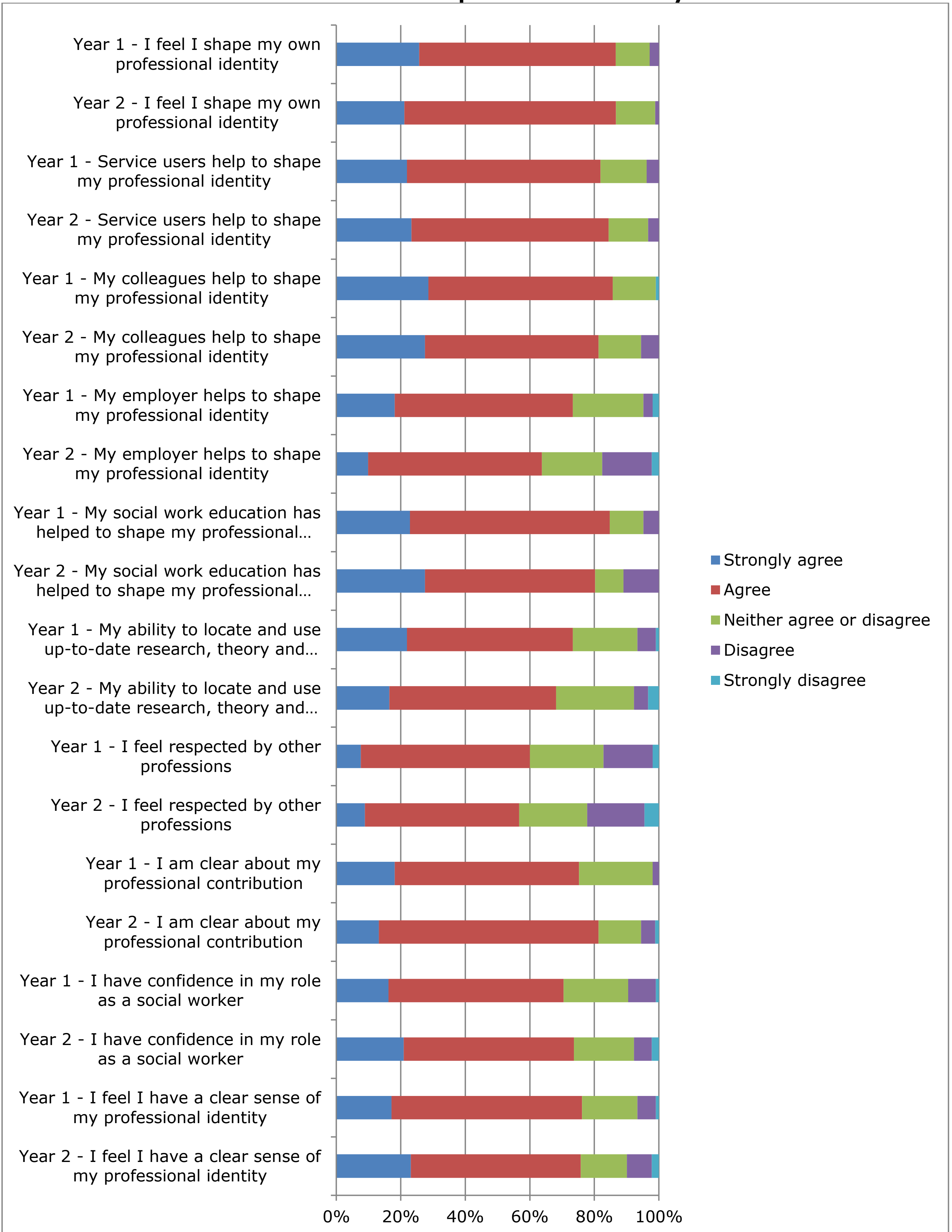
The online survey presented respondents with a series of general statements on professional identity. Participants were invited to rank the extent to which they agreed or not, using a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Table 20 provides data from Year 1 and Year 2 for comparison.

Table 20 shows an increase in Year 2 of those who 'strongly agree' with having a clear sense of professional identity. We noted slight increases in confidence relating to participants' role as social worker, being clear about

professional contribution, and impact of service users on shaping professional identity. However, we noted a significant decrease in agreement with employers' ability to shape professional identity, and a slight decrease in colleagues' ability to do the same.

It should be noted that participants across Years' 1 and 2 expressed more agreement than disagreement with all items presented to them here. It seems that professional identity is something that still appears to be shaped by a number of aspects – not least colleagues, education, service users, employers and participants themselves.

Table 20: General statements on professional identity



Linked to the concept of professional identity, participants were also invited to rank a series of statements from what had the 'most' to 'least' impact on their sense of being a professional. This section was scored from 1 (most impact) to 6 (least impact).

Items that had the most impact on participants' sense of being a professional did not change significantly in Year 2 (please see *Figure 3* in Appendix 2). The top three include:

1. having the ability to make complex judgements and decisions
2. having autonomy over the work I do
3. being able to apply my professional values.

The item ranked as having the least impact on participants' sense of being a professional was 'Being registered with the SSSC'. This item was scored least by 42% in Year 1, increasing to 52% in Year 2.

What does professional identity mean?

In free text boxes, survey participants were asked to comment on what professional identity meant to them. Data from Year 1 had frequent articulations of purpose in responses, referring mostly to the application of skills, knowledge and values in practice. Articulations of purpose still featured in Year 2 data; however, this time responses had more clarity and consistency than Year 1. In contrast to Year 1, Year 2 responses focused more on recognition of role, and how participants are perceived by other professionals and agencies. Many participants emphasised the importance of being part of a collective group of professionals with distinct knowledge, values and skills, and how this combination made them feel part of something tangible. Professional identity emerged more clearly here as something that is brought into being for social workers by who they *are*, and in what they *do.* But it is also relational in that who they are, and what they do, requires accurate and purposeful recognition from other professionals. For many participants, this helps them to see where they fit and matter as a distinct and inter-dependent professional group. The following quotes give a snapshot of the clarity and depth in responses to this question in Year 2:

> '[professional identity is] being viewed by others as having a valid contribution distinct from other professions'.
>
> 'Professional identity is something I carry with me at all times; it is my ethics, my values, and how I approach life. It is how I view the world and how I approach complex situations. It's how I build relationships and how I work with people. It is not in the work I do, but the way I do my work'.
>
> 'It means incorporating my personal and professional strengths, weaknesses, skills, knowledge and values into a practice persona'.

From individual interview data it is evident that questions about professional identity took respondents back to their time as social work students, and many revisited the question they had asked themselves then about what kind of worker they wanted to be. One respondent

described feeling “very lost in the fact that you’re doing so much work that you don’t have time to sit and think, ‘What am I actually doing here?’” She still has the values she had when she first started, and for her it is important to access opportunities “whether it’s a lecture or a seminar… and find like-minded people that have the values that you want to bring to social work”. She reflected on her vision of “the type of social worker I want to be” and the challenge of maintaining that when “you do just get into the way that you come in, you turn your computer on, you reply to your emails, you’re set up for the day, ’what am I doing today, what’s my appointments?’ rather than sitting and kind of thinking”.

Another respondent similarly reflected on “the challenges of not being a corporate, council person”, and commented that she “just remembered actually the other week, I did come into it to change things positively for looked-after children. I could do bits of this better, and that’s what’s brought me into it. So I think I’m in the process of forming that identity”. She feels the first year has been about “technically learning the processes”, and she now knows “the basics enough where I can sort of start to shape how I want to approach that”. These and other accounts might suggest that this is an opportune time for early career social workers to be supported to consider these questions.

Another described “enjoying feeling like a professional”, the autonomy, managing her own diary, being trusted to make decisions. She is “really identifying with being a social worker and… enjoying doing what I’m meant to do”. Her identity is also wrapped up in how she dresses, how she presents herself, and how she speaks and conducts herself in meetings and with service users. For another, professional identity has come from working with other professionals and her experience of how she works differently, has different thresholds and views things differently. Other respondents described themselves as “still finding my feet”, and “I wouldn’t say it’s well-formed at the moment. I feel still very new and lots to learn, and more so in terms of procedural stuff, paperwork, all the things that go along with that rather than the direct work and the visiting families and attending meetings… there’s so much”.

Manifold articulations of what professional identity means to respondents suggests that understandings remain fluid and unbounded. It seems to have objective plains in that articulations of purpose can be observed and understood by most (the *doing* of social work). But it also has subjective/relational dimensions by the range of responses referring to the nature of **being** a professional social worker in proximity to other disciplines. This interplay of being and doing seems to feature in the majority of responses.

Restrictions professional identity

In free text responses, survey participants were asked to comment on what might restrict their professional identity. Year 1 and Year 2 data were broadly similar in that two dominant themes emerged in each dataset: (1) lack of respect from other professions; and (2) lack of resources to do effective work.

In both Year 1 and Year 2 data, half of the respondents identified a lack

of respect and value afforded by others (typically other professions: health colleagues in particular) as a key restriction on their sense of professional identity. A lack of respect and value was identified as particular problem experienced by participants who work with NHS staff (typically within integrated health and social care settings). As one participant put it, 'the value of my professional identity is diminished by other professions, e.g. psychiatry and nursing – particularly by being unprofessional in expressing their views about social work'. Other participants referred to experiences in non-health settings, such as the Children's Hearing system: 'If I was a psychologist writing the same assessment/report, my assessment and recommendations would be respected'. Some participants in Year 2 referred to negative public perceptions and a perceived lack of support from the workforce regulator: 'the attitude of the public and lack of understanding of the value of the role. Also the lack of viable support in the media from the SSSC, unlike other professional bodies'. Another added, 'the SSSC who take a punitive approach to social workers, who are often the scapegoat for failings at a higher level'.

Around a third of participants in Year 2 (similar to Year 1) discussed a lack of resources – mostly relating to accessing support for service users. This was felt to be restrictive because professional identity is linked with having autonomy, but this is compromised when social workers are unable to meet the needs of service users because of limited provision.

Strengthening professional identity

Survey participants were asked to comment in free text boxes on what they thought would strengthen their professional identity. Year 1 data focused on three particular areas (with equal weight): improving public perceptions of social work, improving recognition of social work in multi-disciplinary sites, and improving opportunities for professional development. However, whilst Year 2 data showed a similar pattern in responses, it also revealed n more emphasis on improving recognition, understanding and value of social work roles with other professional groups – particularly amongst health staff. Public understanding of social work also emerged as important, as did protecting time for professional development.

During observational analysis, it was observed that professional identity was most vulnerable, yet most powerful, when early career social workers were faced with defending their profession in statutory arenas. For example, the researcher observed a children's hearing session where the early career social worker was faced with 'a barrage of technical and legal questions' (field notes) from a solicitor. The complexity of this particular case meant that the social worker had to be clear about the role and purpose of social work, as well as defending their decision-making and their own subsequent recommendations. The researcher noted that despite the challenges posed to the social worker in this particular situation, it was clear that their ability to articulate role and purpose, as well as demonstrating skills in analysis and advocacy, meant that the 'voice' of this particular social worker was given due recognition in that particular environment. In a de-brief interview after this event, the social worker expressed anger at the 'growing use of solicitors at

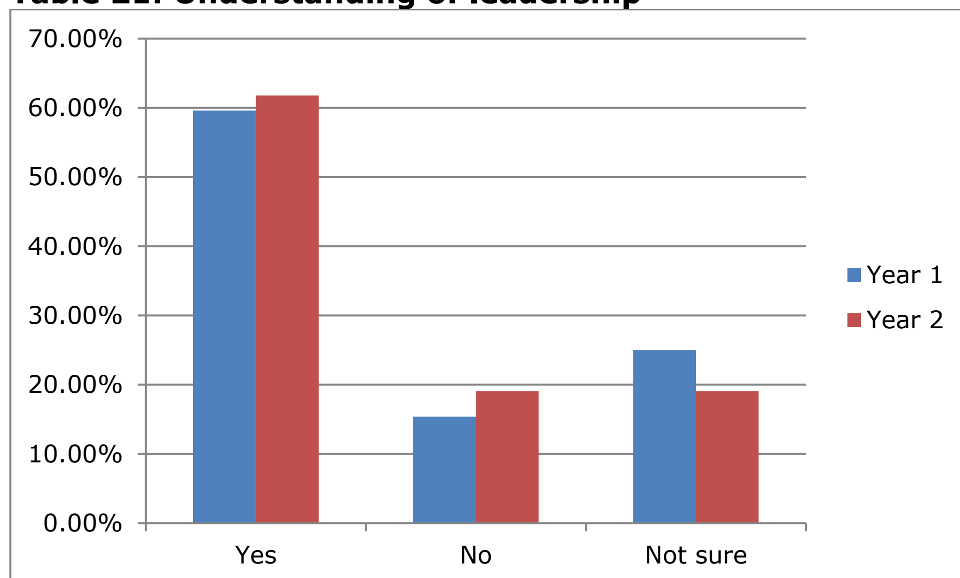
hearings', mostly because 'they just think of the parents and forget there's a child at the centre of all this… they can walk away, but we need to deal with the mess that's left sometimes'. The participant expressed that the adversarial nature of some hearings meant that they had to 'over play' and 'defend' their role as a social worker on most occasions. The participant felt that their knowledge of legislation and procedure helped with their confidence in communicating their role and purpose. Indeed, it could be inferred that exposure to accountability at this level reveals something about professional identity *in action*. We intend to explore this in more depth during our next period of observational analysis in Year 3.

Developing leadership

The SSSC has set out a commitment to enhancing leadership skills across all levels of social service delivery in Scotland. This project provides opportunity to examine this area from the perspective of early career social workers.

Participants were asked if they understood what leadership meant to them at this stage in their careers. Table 21 provides a comparison between Year 1 and Year 1 findings.

Table 21: Understanding of leadership



We suggested in our Year 1 report that the concept of leadership is relatively new to frontline staff in social services, so it could be inferred that many respondents had yet to develop their own understanding of this in their everyday role. Table 21 shows that a small proportion of the workforce is still unclear about what leadership means. However, a small rise in the number of participants who said 'yes' indicates a positive shift; although this seems to be countered by a slight percentage increase in those who answered 'no' in Year 2.

Participants were asked if they had developed any leadership capabilities in the last twelve months. Table 22 provides comparison between Year 1 and Year 2 data.

Table 22: Developing leadership capabilities

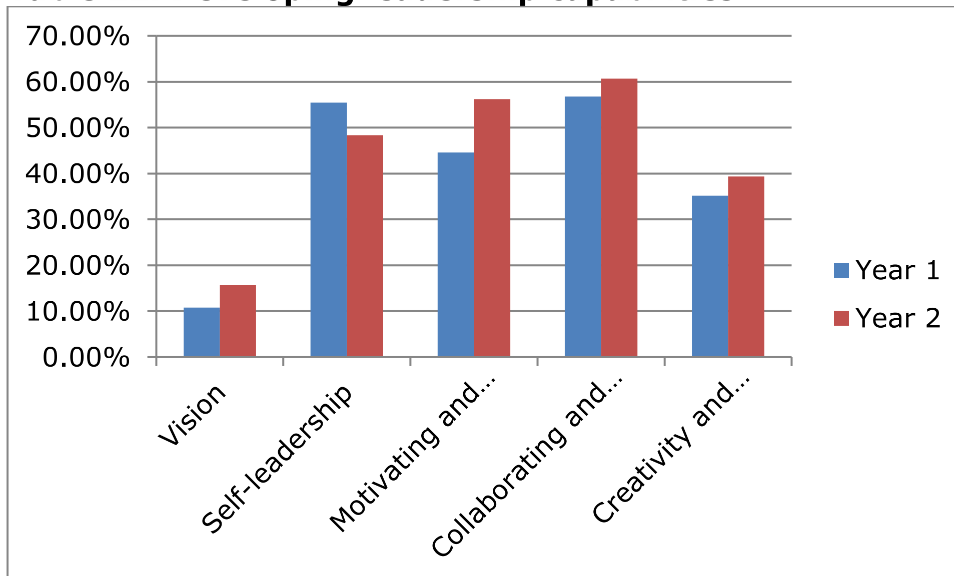
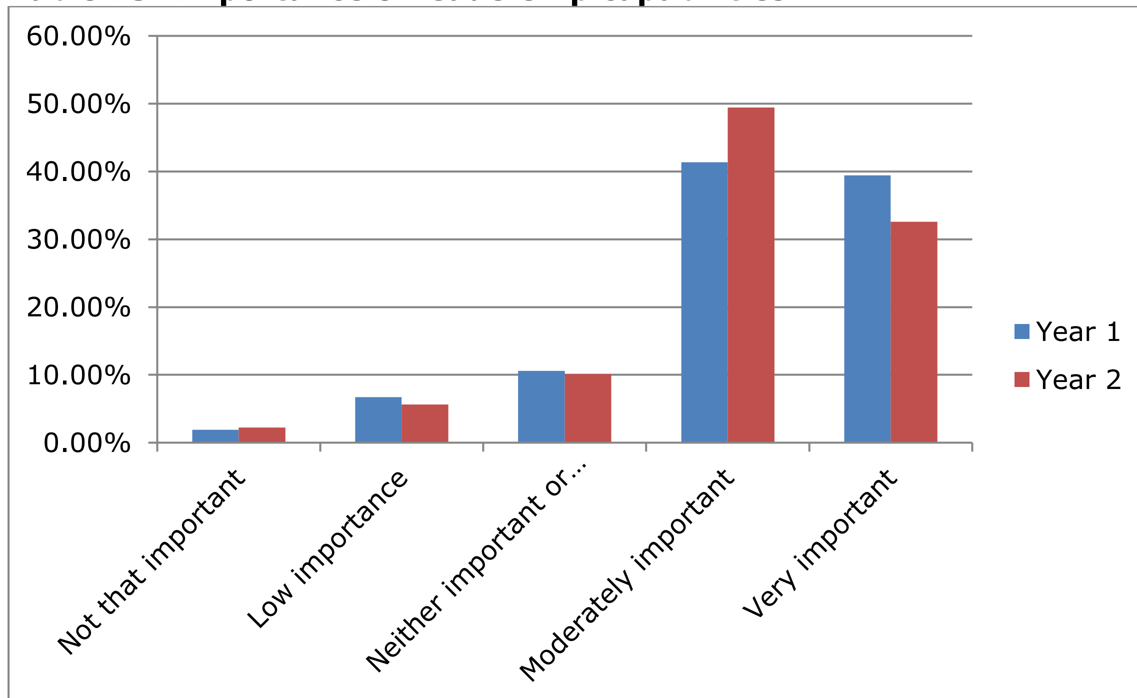


Table 22 shows some degree of development across all leadership capabilities, except 'self-leadership' (with a decrease of approximately 7%). Indeed, the findings may suggest that early-career social workers are starting to recognise what leadership means in a broader sense. However, qualitative data is needed to unpack this hypothesis further.

When asked if employers had provided support to develop leadership skills in the last twelve months, we noted an increase in those who said 'yes' from 27% in Year 1 to 36% in Year 2. This suggests that employers may be providing staff with greater opportunities to demonstrate these qualities in practice.

Indeed, whilst the meaning of leadership and the development of leadership capabilities appear to resonate slightly more with participants in Year 2, when asked again about the importance of developing leadership capabilities in current roles, we noted slight variation in levels of importance. Table 23 provides a comparison of Year 1 and Year 2 data.

Table 23: Importance of leadership capabilities



Broadly speaking however, Table 23 does show that the majority of participants do see leadership capabilities as important to their current role. More participants see leadership capabilities as 'moderately important' in Year 2 than Year 1, but fewer see this as 'very important'.

When asked if participants had engaged in any formal leadership development activity in the last twelve months, we noted a decrease in those who said 'no' from 93% in Year 1 to 90% in Year 2. Indeed, whilst a small reduction is evident, it must be emphasized that a significant majority of participants are still not exposed to any structured activities relating to leadership capabilities.

In free text boxes, survey participants were asked to comment on what employers or others could do to help them develop leadership skills. Year 1 and Year 2 responses were similar in that more than half in each case said that employers could do more to support this area of professional development by helping them to identify leadership skills, and to make more opportunities available in this area. Training featured strongly in Year 1 and Year 2 as a key route to developing these skills.

Anything else?

Similar to Year 1 responses, many Year 2 survey participants chose to provide a concluding reflection on their experience of being an early-career social worker in Scotland today. These reflections cut across project themes and findings, and highlight the diversity and nuances of participant experience. Broadly speaking, findings reveal a range of highs and lows of being a social worker within challenging and changing contexts.

Year 1 responses were generally optimistic, with emphasis on the sense of 'pride' or 'worth' in being a social worker. Many participants referred to

having a sense of purpose, with some reflecting positively on what their career might bring them in the future. Year 2 responses paint a less positive picture of current experiences. Out of 58 responses to this particular question, only 9 positive comments were noted. All nine refer to the fulfilling and rewarding aspects of their jobs, but nearly all provide negative undertones by using phrases, such as, 'it's a difficult job, but…', or 'it's stressful, but manageable…' One common theme in these positive responses is the importance given to the 'luck' of being in a supportive team with a supportive manager. As one participant put it, 'I feel extremely lucky to be part of such a supportive and skilled team. I feel supported by my manager and feel valued'. The perceived rarity of such a conducive environment is captured by another participant: 'fab team and good manager are worth their weight in gold'.

Turning to more negative reflections on experience, a number of responses referred to multiple issues. In most cases, participants mentioned a lack of resources (mostly funding and time); heavy workloads; a lack of respect and recognition from other professionals; too much administration and bureaucracy; and thoughts about leaving the profession altogether. On the last point, one lengthy response caught our attention in so far as it seemed to reflect other responses:

> 'It's much more than the casework; the physical set-up in offices; the lack of supervision; poor morale; high turnover of staff; significant case reviews with no feedback; use of agency workers with no consistency in decision making;… lack of resources to enable families to become self-sufficient: all of the above have made the job much harder, and made me seriously think about leaving the profession after only 2 years of qualification'.

Other free text comments also suggest that some participants have initiated the process of existing statutory social work:

> 'I've handed my notice in, effectively meaning my first [qualified] post lasted 18 months. The bureaucratic nature of the post and administration tasks are what I've struggled with'

> 'I am leaving after 20 months to work in the voluntary sector for less pay. The job leaves you emotionally drained…I have lost sleep, been anxious and stressed'.

For one participant, the pressure of accountability is crushing:

> 'I regret my choice of profession. The level of responsibility and stress in the job is overwhelming. I work a huge number of unpaid hours… The media and the SSSC add to the stress by public name and shame approach when colleagues make mistakes or can't cope… management are not held accountable'.

Looking to the future however, some participants expressed a pragmatic view that whilst services are stretched, the role remains a fulfilling one.

Many participants acknowledged that social work is a complex and difficult field at times, but many are hopeful that future development opportunities will come their way. Participants overwhelmingly value good management, access to quality learning opportunities, proximity to team members, and better promotion of their role in public and multi-disciplinary contexts.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This report presents Year 2 findings from a five-year study which aims to develop an incremental national picture of how social workers in Scotland experience and navigate their first years in practice. Comparisons with Year 1 findings are made throughout. Year 2 findings draw on 118 participant responses to a second national online questionnaire, 14 in-depth interviews, 3 focus groups, and 10 days of participant observation. A key challenge of reporting on this volume and range of data is giving sufficient attention to the breadth and depth of the research findings. Reflecting this challenge, the findings presented here are necessarily an overview.

Employment

In common with Year 1 respondents, almost all of the Year 2 respondents were employed in statutory settings. The majority were situated in children's services (59%), followed by adult services (32%) and criminal justice (6%). 24% of respondents reported a change in job in the preceding 12 months. Just under 90% of the survey respondents were employed on permanent contracts, a 15% increase on Year 1 data. Over 60% described working 'extra unpaid hours', an increase of 15% on Year 1 data.

Just under 60% of respondents described working within an agile working environment; for two thirds of this group, this was described in mostly negative terms. Discussion of agile working across the data sets highlighted challenges including: time inefficiencies, obstacles to concentration and concentrated work, negative impacts on health and wellbeing, and reduced access to peer and team support.

Respondents continue to describe varied caseloads in terms of volume and content, as might be expected from a workforce working across different services and settings. Wider discussion in this area suggests a workforce engaged in, and stimulated by, appropriately complex work. There were some dips in confidence levels relating to workload, with less than half of the respondents describing their workload as manageable; a similar number expressed that their workload made them 'feel anxious'. Notwithstanding, Year 2 survey respondents continue to report reasonable and developing levels of confidence and competence across four broad domains: skills, knowledge, self-efficacy and professional values. Qualitative data in this area presents a more nuanced picture.

Similar to Year 1 findings: participants describe spending the majority of their working time on report writing and case recording, with least time spent on 'reading, analysing and using research knowledge and evidence'. Reported time spent with service users has increased slightly from Year 1 data.

Supervision and support

Many Year 2 respondents continue to report regular experiences of supervision, occurring typically on a monthly basis. One third of respondents described less frequent experiences of supervision. Respondents continue to value supervision and many described positive experiences. However, satisfaction levels reported in the survey were lower than those reported in Year 1. In common with Year 1 findings, a significant number of respondents highlighted a desire for a more balanced approach to supervision - extending beyond 'case management', and greater opportunities for critical reflection and discussion.

As per Year 1 findings, informal support emerged as a critical feature of professional growth and development. Respondents continue to rely on their colleagues for timely advice, guidance and support with a slightly increased emphasis on emotional support. Issues of access, proximity and distance to and from supports – affected by agile working practices – also surfaced here.

Professional learning and development

Quantitative data indicates that respondents continue to be 'satisfied' with formal learning and development opportunities – many of which appear to be delivered 'in-house' or via partner agencies. Qualitative data presents a more complex picture, with respondents expressing a desire for 'deeper and richer' learning and more responsive, structured and joined up learning opportunities. Respondents also underlined the richness and potential of informal learning, arising from day to day practice and relationships, and the need to better nurture and support these important mechanisms.

Professional identity

Year 2 respondents continue to report a reasonably clear sense of professional identity, supported by a strong sense of professional purpose, values, and contribution. Recognition and respect from others (or lack of) continues to be significant, indicating a strong relational dynamic to developing professional identity. Relatedly, the findings point to the limited and sometimes limiting impact of organisations that we might expect to support professional identity – including the SSSC and employing organisations. Here, some respondents described the challenge of negotiating a transformative professional identity and practice amidst pressures towards a more technical and/or procedural practice. As per the Year 1 findings, perceived lack of respect from others - in particular health colleagues, and a lack of resources to do the job well, emerged as significant restrictions to professional identity and confidence.

Leadership

The findings suggest moderate progress in how participants understand the role of leadership within their professional practice, as well as increased opportunities to 'informally' demonstrate leadership

capabilities. Findings suggest that formal leadership development opportunities remain rare.

What else matters?

Similar to Year 1 findings, closing survey reflections offer a more nuanced picture of respondents' experiences than typically emerges from the quantitative data. This year, positive concluding reflections were few, but when offered they highlighted the fulfilling nature of social work and a sense of being 'lucky' to be part of a supportive team. More critical reflections tended to highlight the interactive effects of earlier discussed challenges, including: lack of resources, demanding caseloads, high levels of administration and bureaucracy, and a perceived lack of respect, support and recognition from others.

Conclusion

Year 2 findings make a significant contribution to our developing knowledge and understanding of the early experiences of professional social workers in Scotland. Broadly, the findings suggest a committed and capable workforce, motivated by making a difference in the lives of those with whom they work. They also suggest a workforce struggling to deliver on this identity and duty within changing organisational structures, demands and fiscal frameworks. The findings underscore the significance of formal and informal learning and support mechanisms, and the need to review, refresh and maximise the ways in which these mechanisms more consistently support professional learning and development. Crucially, the findings point to the relational nature of professional development and the ways in which professional relationships, organisations and communities can aid and obstruct professional identity, confidence and morale. Finally, the findings suggest a workforce committed to improvement yet, perhaps, struggling to innovate within established and changing professional patterns. The findings need to be considered critically and alongside connecting national and international research findings on the experiences of early career social workers.

Appendix 1

THE EXPERIENCES OF NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS IN SCOTLAND: A LITERATURE REVIEW

David M Clarke and Trish McCulloch
September 2018

INTRODUCTION

This summary literature review has been prepared as part of a longitudinal research study that explores how NQSWs experience and navigate their early careers. This review has been undertaken systematically, with methods explicit within. The overarching aim of the review aligns to the purpose of the larger study in so far as it seeks to summarise existing knowledge and understanding of how NQSWs' experience and navigate their early careers, and what factors influence this experience.

METHODS

The researchers utilised Glasgow Caledonian University's "Discover" facility to systematically search for studies relevant to the topic. This online service enables access to multiple online databases including, but not limited to, Web of Science, Social Care Online and Proquest.

The inclusion criteria for the review were:

1. studies published within the last 20 years.
2. texts which have a specific focus on newly qualified social workers.
3. have local relevance (Scottish and/or UK-based).
4. studies written in English.
5. texts which have been peer-reviewed.

This review initially conducted a search of the term "NQSW" which yielded 376 results. The inclusion criteria filters were then applied, which narrowed the return to 45 studies. Abstracts were then checked for relevance and most results were discarded, mainly due to the lack of focus on NQSW-specific issues within. 9 articles were retained. This process was repeated using the search term "Newly Qualified Social Worker". While this produced 401 results, no further articles were retained beyond those captured in the initial search.

The lead reviewer read each article in depth, and findings within were analysed to draw out key points and themes. A bespoke spreadsheet was created to enable key findings to be presented logically, allowing for a more robust meta-summary.

LIMITATIONS

This review is limited by the lack of research relating to the experiences of NQSWs. Consequently, themes and findings presented are drawn from a narrow range of literature. This review relies heavily on findings that originate from English-based studies. The author acknowledges that cultural norms, professional regulation and national approaches to social work differ significantly across Scotland and England, and results herein should be considered within the context in which they were originally presented. Further, there is a strong weighting towards the experiences of those working in child services / children and families settings within the available research. As such, the experiences of those working with other client groups (particularly criminal justice and hospital-based social work) are relatively unrepresented. This, naturally, alludes to a need for further

research in order to better capture the early career experiences of all NQSWs.

The majority of studies cited adopt qualitative methods, which limits the generalisability of findings (Ryan et al, 2007). Notably, the lead reviewer is a newly qualified social worker. Whilst familiarity with a research topic is advantageous (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), we acknowledge the impact of insider status bias within research. We have attempted to negate this by devoting attention to the findings of studies cited, by co-authorship and robust peer review.

FINDINGS

This review contends that it is unsatisfactory to rely on the findings of more generalised social work research in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of NQSWs. In respecting the distinct nature of this group, and although drawing from a small pool of research, the findings presented originate from studies that have a specific focus on NQSWs.

The key themes arising from the meta-summary have been used as a means of structuring the main body of this review. These are:

- education and preparedness for practice
- early career support: induction; supervision; informal support
- early experiences: NQSW confidence and impact of role; caseloads; job satisfaction.

Education and preparedness for practice

Over the past two decades, the UK government and social work regulators have made explicit links between social work education and practice ‘readiness’ and ‘preparedness’. Concerns about the calibre of social work students and the effectiveness of the degree curriculum have led to a number of significant policy responses in the UK. In Scotland, the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003) overhauled the structure and content of social work education with the creation of a new honours degree. In her ministerial foreword, Cathy Jamieson (Minister for Education and Young People) indicated that there was a need for social workers to be “properly trained and equipped to carry out the increasingly challenging and complicated tasks we expect of them” (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 2), indicating a need for improvement in training and education for the mutual benefit of social workers, and those whom they support. More recently, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) conducted a root and branch review of Social Work Education in Scotland, resulting in a series of reports and recommendations (SSSC, 2016, 2015). In England, a Social Work Task Force (SWTF) representing the government produced a number of key documents that outlined inadequacies within social work education. In their final report (SWTF, 2009), no less than 15 recommendations were issued, which included the need for the calibre of social work student entrants to be more robustly scrutinised, to revamp the social work degree programme, and the creation of an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) to offer NQSWs additional support and training in their first year. Beyond this, further

reviews of social work education by Narey (2014) and Croisdale-Appleby (2014) offered robust overviews of the state of pre-qualifying training at that time, although with arguably lesser impact than the SWTF report. It is apt to note that governmental motivation to audit and transform social work education tends to intensify following serious incidents, such as 'preventable child deaths'. For example, the SWTF (2009) report was written partly in response to the death of Peter Connolly in 2007, and the implementation of Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection (Scottish Executive, 2006) within the Scottish social work degree programme was influenced by recommendations from the Serious Case Review of Caleb Ness, who died in Edinburgh in 2001. While there is no scope within this review to fully explore the associations between the government, publics, controversy and social work education, it is important to acknowledge the existence of these interrelationships and that the educational pathway from student to qualified social worker is ever-changing. Further, although there may be a clear rationale for change e.g. systemic failures in child protection protocols or mental health procedures, it remains a very difficult task to chart whether widespread change has been positive. This review acknowledges the complexities in attempting to make links between curriculum, teaching and learning methods and professional performance. Further, to ask: how does one accurately measure competence? Such questions can lead to endless semantic dialogue that offers little learning for the profession. Despite the complexity of quantifying the impact of education, there are a few recent studies that have gathered the testimonies of NQSWs, and how they feel their degree programme prepared them for practice. This offers educators and policy makers a crucial insight into what is valued by early career social workers, and what has been less effective.

Overall, it appears that the majority of NQSWs believe that their educational experience has had a positive impact on their readiness for practice. In Scotland, three-quarters of NQSW participants made links between the content and delivery of degree courses and feeling prepared for practice (Grant et al, 2017). In England, roughly the same proportion of respondents reported feeling 'very' or 'fairly' well prepared by their degree programme for their current job (Hussein et al, 2013). This result echoed the findings of an early study by Bates et al (2010). Beyond the relative positivity of these findings, the importance of perceived preparedness was also considered within the Hussein et al (2013) study. They found a correlation between the extent to which participants felt prepared for practice at a very early stage, to job satisfaction as time went on. Those who felt more prepared were more likely to report: an ability and capacity to integrate their values into practice, feeling involved in operational matters, considering their workload to be manageable and perceiving their employer to offer adequate support and good working conditions. These findings are significant for social work education. If it is to be concluded that perceived preparedness is directly linked to job satisfaction then more needs to be learned about what areas of practice NQSWs feel most prepared for and what factors culminate to influence perceptions.

Despite the narrow range of research in this area, the few key studies cited above offer a nuanced exploration of exactly what areas of practice NQSWs feel ready for, or not, as a result of their educational experience. In Scotland, NQSWs reported feeling prepared in the areas of statutory interventions, assessment, integration of anti-discriminatory/oppressive

values and understanding risk (Grant et al, 2017). Similarly positive, from an English perspective, over three-quarters of participants felt well prepared across a broad range of key social work competencies such as communication skills, navigation of the law, integration of social work values to practice, working with other professions and managing the responsibilities of the social work role (Bates et al, 2010). Further, 68% of NQSW participants from Grant et al's (2017) study reported feeling well prepared by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to practice using research/evidence-informed methods. However, as with most studies in this subject area, Grant et al's findings represent the perceptions of participants at that particular moment in time. Given the emphasis placed on evidence-based practice in social work over the past few decades, it would be useful if research could be undertaken to explore NQSW perceptions of their capacity to keep abreast of, and utilise, up-to-date research within their practice over time. Does the use of research in social work peak on graduation and decline from there? What are the key differences between those who feel able to maintain this approach to practice, and those who do not? What are the barriers to ensuring that practice is evidence-informed, and how can the profession address this?

Practice learning placements were cited as being very influential in supporting students' understanding of assessment, risk and report writing (Bates et al, 2010). This strengthens findings from the broad range of literature which highlight the cruciality of practice to student learning (see, for example, Kadushin 1992; Healey & Spencer, 2008; Smith et al., 2015). However, while practice-based and classroom-based learning are relatively distinct learning environments, studies appear to consider both concurrently when considering NQSW preparedness or readiness for practice. It is important to question the extent to which practice based learning opportunities, in their own right, impact on NQSW perceptions. Does practice-based learning offer a sense of reality unavailable within a lecture theatre or classroom? Are there conflicts between what is 'taught' in HEIs and what is 'learned' in placement, and what is the impact of this on perceived readiness to practice? The limited ability to distinguish the difference between the impacts of two very different learning formats, impedes the ability to audit, transform and evaluate social work education in a meaningful way.

There is also research available to explain what areas of practice NQSWs feel less prepared for. While in most cases, findings have been positive, this review has noted a number of areas where a significant minority of participants from studies have reported feeling unsatisfied with how ready they feel across a number of key social work tasks. For example, around a quarter of NQSWs felt unprepared in areas of assessment (contradicting Grant et al's study), report writing, time management and managing conflict (Bates et al, 2010). Over a half of participants from the same study felt they were not provided adequate court skills training, and this lack of confidence appeared to continue from the very early stages of their career, to nearly a year later. Further, Grant et al (2017) found a marked lack of confidence in a significant number of NQSWs in relation to Self-Directed Support, integrated care models and the provision of personalised support. Further, and perhaps connectedly, many NQSWs remarked on a lack of emphasis on the integration of health and social care services across the social work degree programme. These findings are significant given the

speed at which Scotland continues to drive forward an integration agenda across the profession, and with the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 being established for some time now. They have particular implications for those responsible for the design and delivery of social work degree programmes. However, it is unlikely that this perceived lack of confidence is unique to NQSWs. Such a momentous shift in policy and service delivery has resulted in experienced social workers having to familiarise themselves with a brand new way of supporting service users, and there is evidence that progress in this area has been slow (Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, 2017).

Grant et al's (2017) study indicates that 30% of NQSWs felt they received 'good' preparation for making "difficult and complex judgements" (p. 494), with 57% reporting that training offered in this regard was 'adequate'. The authors report this finding with a marked sense of positivity. However, this review contends that the authors may be overly optimistic in their analysis. The management of risk via sound decision-making is a "central dimension in most areas of social work practice" (O'Connor & Leonard, 2014:1806). Given the cruciality of this aspect of practice, this review argues that the provision of 'adequate' training in this area is insufficient. These findings indicate a need for HEIs to consider how they can improve student confidence in making difficult and complex decisions, and for employers to also consider how they can support NQSW competency in this area.

Early Career Support

Induction

A common theme within NQSW research is the importance and impact of employer induction processes. While the term 'induction' is used within various studies with a sense of familiarity and comfort, there appears to be no consensus on what 'induction' actually is. Particularly, induction is both considered as a means of acquainting new employees with workplace processes over a few weeks (Manthorpe et al, 2014) and a structured, longitudinal, packaged form of support for NQSWs (Carpenter et al, 2015). Grant et al (2017) note that, in Scotland, there is no agreed NQSW induction framework. This goes some way to explain the difficulty in defining what social work induction is, or should be.

NQSWs in England, particularly those working within children's services, have been exposed to more structured induction programmes over the past decade. In 2008, the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) established a programme to support NQSWs in their first year of practice. This included the provision of high quality supervision, professional guidance, a professional development plan, and training. In a robust review of this programme, Carpenter et al (2015) reported that, in the main, NQSWs found this be positive and beneficial. Prior to commencing this programme, around half of participants were confident about their ability to meet the requirements of the social work role. By the end of induction, the proportion had increased to over three-quarters. Further, while a small number felt unconfident in their abilities at the start of the programme, there were almost none by the end. Confidence tended to be high in practice areas of undertaking assessments, working within formal settings,

communicating with children, case recording, and working within a multi-disciplinary team. However, there appeared to be a lack of confidence in delivering and reviewing interventions. Notwithstanding the significance of the above findings, the extent to which the induction programme affected NQSW confidence is unclear. While participants valued and welcomed structured support, it is apt to consider the possibility that, after a year of working within a fast-paced social work setting, that NQSWs will have learned a lot from experience and exposure, which has a natural capacity to enhance professional efficacy, as practitioners negotiate and manage complex situations. While the CWDC closed in 2012, England's emphasis on the need for structured induction was maintained, with the implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for NQSWs working within children and adult services settings. The ASYE offers NQSWs a 'supported and protected year to find your feet in the social work setting' (Skills for Care, 2015, p. 5), and outlines what NQSWs can expect in terms of supervision and support, and what is expected of them as early career social workers. Prior to this, research by Bates et al (2010) found that carers and people who use services were surprised at the lack of standardised induction within social work in England. Participants commented that it was important for NQSWs to build on their skills and knowledge, and be supported to become familiar with local issues. It would be useful to gain an understanding of the views of people who use social work services in Scotland as this may play a part in shaping the content and structure of induction locally. In terms of comparison, NQSWs in Scotland are required, as a condition of continued registration with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), to undertake 24 days (or equivalent) of post registration training and learning (PRTL) within their first year of registration. However, currently the onus for meeting this condition is placed on NQSWs, who, alongside their line managers have indicated a lack of understanding of PRTL requirements (Grant et al, 2017). The development of a supported and assessed year is one of the 5 recommendations arising from the recent review of Social Work Education in Scotland (SSSC, 2016).

While ASYE in England, and PRTL in Scotland can be considered as a long-term form of induction for NQSWs undertaking their first post, local induction processes also exist, which research indicates vary widely in terms of content and quality. In Scotland, two-thirds of participants appraised their employers' induction process as between 'satisfactory' and 'poor' (Grant et al, 2017). In England, workplace induction appears to be tailored to the needs of individuals, rather than being presented as a standardised package (Manthorpe et al, 2014). While such individualistic approaches to training delivery are encouraging, there is also evidence that NQSWs are, at least in some way, in charge of their own induction, and are required to identify training opportunities for themselves (Bates et al, 2010). Policies, procedures and local guidelines appear to be central to workplace inductions (Manthorpe et al, 2014). While there is no indication that this overshadows the identification of learning opportunities for NQSWs, it does imply that induction is, in some part, a function of integrating NQSWs to the culture of the work environment. This may be necessary to ensure that employers meet their duty to ensure that social workers practice in a safe and legal way, but an empirical exploration of any tensions between employer and NQSW priorities during induction would be useful.

Workplace induction appears to be valued by NQSWs. Hussein et al (2013) report a positive correlation between the receipt of induction and NQSWs' satisfaction with support offered by line managers. Specifically, this study found that 85% of participants who had received induction gave the highest scores for how supportive their manager is, while only 65% of those who received no induction gave the same score. This is an important finding, as it highlights the potential cruciality of induction in shaping the professional relationship between NQSWs and their supervisors, alluding to a benefit beyond the professional development of early stage social workers. Bates et al's (2010) small-scale study found that around three-quarters of NQSWs received a workplace induction. Those who did not were reported to have a prior connection to their employer, having either been seconded to complete a social work degree, or having previously completed a placement within the organisation. Given the potential links between induction and job satisfaction (in relation to managerial support), it would be beneficial to investigate and broaden understanding of how NQSWs experience workplace induction within a Scottish context. This review has been able to report generally on the importance of induction, what forms this can take and overall satisfaction with provisions. However, there is a lack of nuanced exploration of exactly what it is NQSWs want in terms of workplace induction, what works well or not, and how empowered they feel to be an active participant in the design and implementation of this key process. Further research in this area, from a qualitative slant, would broaden knowledge of NQSW's experiences of their first stage of practice.

Supervision

The roots of social work supervision can be charted back to the 19th Century in the US (Tsui, 1997), although research in this area attracted little attention, particularly within the UK, until the 1970s. Since this time, scholars have been in agreement that supervision is a key component of social work, is valued by employees as a means of scrutinising and improving practice, and aids employers to ensure that staff are performing in line with organisational aims and protocols (Munro, 2010; Wonnacott, 2012; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014). However, within research, the content, frequency and function of supervision has, generally, been considered through a broad lens. Variables such as staff length of experience, client group / team role and organisational factors have not been adequately considered when attempting to explore this phenomenon. While published literature investigating NQSW experiences offers a reasonable overview of the provision of supervision, there is a lack of depth and focus into this vital area of practice.

From the research available, it is understood that NQSWs value supervision, much like their more experienced counterparts. Around three-quarters of Scottish-based NQSWs reported feeling positive about the receipt and impact of supervision (Grant et al, 2017). However, there is clear evidence that case management issues dominate the agenda within supervision sessions (Manthorpe et al, 2015; Grant et al, 2017). Despite this, 67% of participants in Grant et al's (2017) study recognised that supervision offered them space for critical reflection. While this is encouraging, there is evidence to suggest that general encouragement, personal support, the identification of training needs and theoretical discussions become less

prominent within supervision sessions over time (Manthorpe et al, 2015). This is an interesting finding for a number of reasons. For example, it indicates that supervision is a process that changes over time, in line with the accumulation of 'time served' by NQSWs. Moreover, it raises concerns over arguably misplaced priorities within supervision sessions, where inexperienced social workers are being denied the full extent of emotional and professional support available to them, with no evidence of alternative provisions of support being offered. Research suggests that managers acknowledge that supervision can fail to address the emotional needs of NQSWs (see, for example, Jack & Donnellan, 2010). As a means to address gaps in NQSW support, White (2015), acting as a Practice Educator, offered supervision sessions to NQSWs in one English local authority, with a focus on the emotional impact of the role, particularly around crises of confidence and feeling 'out of control'. This enabled the emotional needs to early career social workers to be met, whilst enabling managers to deliver supervision that centred on case management issues. Participants valued supplementary sessions and this example of research in practice offers a useful suggestion for how employers could promote the emotional wellbeing of NQSWs, with consequential positive effects on retention and morale.

The frequency of NQSW supervision also appears to vary, and, similar to the content of sessions, appears to change over time. Hussein et al (2013) report that 29% of NQSWs received supervision on a fortnightly basis, with 70% receiving this monthly or less frequently. Manthorpe et al (2015) found that 26% of NQSWs received supervision fortnightly, however, this figure dropped to 14% by the end of their second year in employment. 28% were offered sessions on a monthly basis. A notable minority (14%) of NQSWs received supervision less than once a month, but this number increased to 20% in their second year of employment. While on face-value, these figures are somewhat troubling, particularly given how valued supervision is to NQSWs, Hussein et al (2013) report that NQSWs are more concerned about the quality of supervision with their line manager, rather than how often it occurs. Tellingly, according to this study, the frequency of supervision did not impact on overall job satisfaction and staff retention, but the quality of support did. This indicates the importance of getting supervision 'right' for NQSWs, with an emphasis on support and the individual needs of the practitioner, blended with organisational matters. While responsible for the delivery of support, many mangers cite the demands of their own caseloads and role as impeding scope for providing structured, planned and effective supervision sessions (Manthorpe et al, 2014). However, despite this, most managers appear to have a desire to offer a supportive environment for NQSWs. Motivation to do so is strongest in those whom themselves received supportive supervision in their early careers (ibid). However, if there is desire without results, this indicates the presence of barriers to effective supervision, and it would be useful, to pinpoint exactly what these are, so that employers can attempt to address these methodically. Further, it would be useful if the apparent changing content and frequency of supervision could be charted longitudinally in Scotland, given how central this process is within social work practice, and because these encounters are more often considered to be static, with research offering in-situ snapshots of the perceptions of social workers.

Informal support

Literature relating to the experiences of NQSWs offers a reasonable overview of induction and supervision processes. Beyond this, there is some evidence that NQSWs benefit from informal support networks, where team members and peers play a crucial role. Grant et al (2017) found that NQSWs valued the team and other colleagues' support more than managers' in the first few weeks of employment. This is perhaps unsurprising as the very early stages of employment involves new members of staff 'getting a feel' for their new environment, learning where everything (e.g. printers, paperwork, toilets, local eateries, community services etc.) is, with colleagues offering an expertise in this area, as well as being in close proximity to be asked. These important procedural curiosities may take precedence over caseload, and other, concerns. Again, it would be valuable to more fully investigate the role of informal support in NQSW's early experiences, including the impact of 'the team' on them, and them on 'the team'. This would help to better understand how best to support NQSWs, and where this support is best located. For example, is there value in 'the team' having an official role in supporting their new colleague? There certainly appears to be an unofficial expectation of more experienced members of staff to support NQSWs. For example, NQSWs are often offered the opportunity to co-work cases with seasoned staff, through which a mentoring role is assumed (Manthorpe et al, 2014). However, NQSWs indicate a preference for critical discussions about local and wider social work issues with peers, over shadowing (Grant et al, 2017). Within research, there has been no indication of how managers or employers can attempt to harness team support to maximise NQSWs' ease of transition into professional social work practice. Further empirical enquiry would be useful, particularly because supportive teams are strongly linked to NQSW intentions to remain in post (Hussein et al, 2013). Furthermore, Bates et al (2010) found that managers were more optimistic than NQSWs about the range of support available. From the same study, there was evidence that some managers believed their own team to be much more effective than the organisation overall, in offering support to new colleagues. This may suggest a disconnect between the lived experiences of NQSWs and their supervisors. Again, further research is needed to draw out implications for enhancing NQSW support.

While the impact of positive teams has been explored, it is also interesting to consider how negative teams affect NQSWs. Manthorpe et al (2014) found that NQSWs placed within a team with poor morale, negativity and questionable ethics in relation to how members communicate, were adversely affected in their early careers. Again, these findings indicate the importance of team culture, ethos and dynamics on the early experiences of new members of staff.

Beyond the support offered informally by colleagues and managers, and formally during supervision, the friends and families of NQSWs were recognised as important members within their support network (Grant et al, 2017). It appears that friends and family support the emotional wellbeing of early career workers (Hussein et al, 2013). As this review will continue to explore, the early experiences of NQSWs can be extremely challenging, demanding and draining. Jack and Donnellan (2010) make repeated

references to the emotional demands of social work, with pressures impacting on the personal lives of NQSWs. This alludes to the need for investigation of the purpose and function of 'offsite support' (friends, families and associates) in supporting the emotional wellbeing of NQSWs as a result of secondary trauma and work-related stress. To what extent does social work practice enter the homes of NQSWs, and how is this managed? How does this impact on those comprising the offsite support network? To what extent does this network exist as a result of gaps in office-based support? This review identifies a need for further empirical enquiry to aid the understanding of the lived experiences of NQSWs beyond office hours.

Early Experiences

NQSW confidence and impact of role

The first year after qualifying is, naturally, a significant one for NQSWs. Notwithstanding the fact that this group move away from the relative comfort of their student status, they have to negotiate a tricky job market, from application to interview stage. Once NQSWs gain employment, most begin a fast-paced journey, which greatly impacts on their professional and personal lives. However, there is agreement across a narrow range of studies that NQSWs are generally confident in their capabilities before commencing employment, and that their confidence changes, generally for the better, after their first year in post. For example, around 60% NQSWs felt clear about their role and responsibilities, and had a strong sense of what is expected of them before starting work (Carpenter et al, 2015). This figure increased to 70% after Year 1 (ibid). NQSWs identified feeling most confident in building relationships with service users, colleagues and other professionals (Jack & Donnellan, 2010).

While the growth of NQSW confidence is encouraging, there was evidence of NQSWs developing a sense of "role conflict" (Carpetner et al, 2015, p.153); indicating that their role requires them to carry out tasks that should be done differently, operating with insufficient resources, and undertaking assignments that they deem to be unnecessary. Further, many NQSWs working in child services found their first year to be extremely challenging, bordering on traumatic (Jack & Donnellan, 2010). The result of this was that the majority did not envisage a long career working with this client group. One participant stated: "You do your two years in the trenches… and then move out" (p. 309).

This review contends that it is important to replicate and build on these studies, particularly within a Scottish context. Nonetheless, existing findings offer some demonstration of the extent to which the first year of practice has a profound effect on NQSWs. This transformational process requires greater attention from researchers and employers to ensure that the pace and demands of the first year in practice does negatively affect future career choices and pathways.

Caseloads

There are inconsistencies across reported findings within relevant studies in relation to the amount, and complexity of work NQSWs are expected to carry out in the early stages of their careers. While managers within Manthorpe et al's (2014) study reported a desire to give NQSWs reduced caseloads, due to budget constraints and poor levels of staff turnover, this was not always possible. Consequently, experienced staff are required to manage the most complex cases, leaving NQSWs to 'pick up the slack'. From the same study, managers also acknowledge that whilst intentions exist to protect NQSWs from overly complex cases, that the nature of the human condition means that complexity is indeterminable over time. The findings in Jack and Donnellan's (2010) study were more clear-cut in respect of NQSW experiences of caseloads. All NQSWs reported holding large caseloads, almost from the first few days in post. This resulted in many feeling overburdened, unable to critically reflect on practice, or keep up to speed with current policy and research developments. IT systems, case recording and record keeping were considered as being particularly burdensome (ibid). Responses from Scottish-based NQSWs have been inconsistent in relation to the nature of the workload. Some participants understood their caseload to be 'protected' (restricted in both number and complexity), others not, and others were unsure (Grant et al, 2017). Some NQSWs reported having involvement in child protection cases, while, others did not. Considering the above, while this review acknowledges that it would be impractical for all NQSWs to have the same expectations in terms of protected caseload, there are concerns that some NQSWs, especially within child services, are being expected to manage too many, and/or complex cases at too early a stage in their careers. There is general agreement that organisation need to balance their duty to deliver statutory services with attention to the professional wellbeing of social workers in the infancy of their careers, however, in Scotland, there appears to be no mechanism to ensure such a balance.

Much of the findings outlined within this review relate to studies concerned with NQSWs working within children and families / child services settings. It is important that the issues explored in relation to caseloads are considered across a more diverse range of social work roles, for example, Adult Care, Community and Criminal Justice, Mental Health, and others. For now, the impression is that NQSWs working within local authority children's departments give lower scores than colleagues working with other service user groups, in relation to how manageable they found their workload (Hussein et al, 2013).

Job satisfaction

Overall, and positively, findings indicate that the majority of NQSWs are settled and content in their new jobs. Carpenter et al (2015) found that 80% of NQSWs (one year qualified) were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' in general. Job security, flexibility of hours and management support were particularly cited as being satisfactory (ibid). Hussein et al's (2013) study produced similar results, with 40% of NQSWs (18 months qualified) 'quite enjoying the job' and 47.8% 'enjoying the job very much'. These findings are significant and may point to aspects of social work practice that negate

the pressures and stresses inherent in the role. In the interests of enhancing staff wellbeing and retention, it would be valuable to have a greater understanding of how NQSWs balance the 'good with the bad', before appraising their jobs as being enjoyable. Are NQSWs entering their first posts with a strong sense of the realities of practice, and does this function as a protective factor in early career pathways? Do practice placements help in this regard and if so in what ways? Do NQSWs experience the benefits of offering support making a difference and do these positives outweigh the challenges and pains of practice? Or, does the impact of working within sometimes saddening, traumatic and stressful situations have a delayed effect, impacting on the second year of employment or beyond? (Smith et al, 2017). While there is limited scope for exploration here, it is important that research is undertaken to consider the factors which protect and harm NQSWs, and exactly what underpins the broadly positive levels of early career job satisfaction.

While the majority of NQSWs appraise their early experiences to be positive, a significant minority are less enthusiastic about their jobs. 13% of NQSWs reported not enjoying their job 'much' or 'at all' (Hussein et al, 2013). Further, 16.2% shared that they were, at the point of being employed for around 18 months, already looking for another social work job, or expected to leave the profession completely within the next few years. For many, including those satisfied with their jobs in general, there was dissatisfaction with pay, the number of hours worked, and opportunities for career progression (Carpenter et al, 2015). Further, between 70 and 80% of NQSWs felt that the public did not respect their work, which was a source of tension for this group. Subsequent research in this area has shown that it is likely that the public's perception of the profession is more positive than social services workers perceive (McCulloch et al, 2017). These findings indicate that employers face significant challenge in retaining NQSWs, in addition to more experienced staff. While those who plan to leave their jobs are in the minority, an organisation cannot feasibly manage staff turnover at a rate of 16.2% or above without disruption to service delivery and staff morale. This validates the need for research into NQSW experiences, with a broad scope to capture the intricacies of what life is like for this distinct group, and how to best to support them, as they negotiate the complex, sometimes arduous, yet satisfying journey presented by the social work role.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) have drawn minimal research attention. Findings from the narrow range of studies in this area rarely delve beyond surface-level overviews. Consequently, researchers are left to rely on findings from social work studies that do not make the crucial distinction between NQSWs and their more experienced colleagues. As argued within this review, this approach should be undertaken with great caution. This review found that the content, structure and delivery of social work education across the UK are frequently subject to scrutiny and enforced change by policy-makers and respective governments. In the main, NQSWs value their education and believe that their degree programme has adequately prepared them for practice. NQSWs are able to identify feeling more prepared for some aspects of

practice (such as assessment and relationship building), over others (for example, conflict management and Self-Directed Support). These and related findings suggest that NQSWs require ongoing support from their employers to develop a number of key professional competencies. Induction is a crucial and valued provision for NQSWs. However, there are stark differences between induction and post-qualifying support across Scotland and England. Further, the provision of workplace-based induction appears to be inconsistent, both in terms of content, length and structure. A significant proportion of Scottish-based NQSWs report being dissatisfied with current provision in this regard. The receipt of induction positively correlates to satisfaction with managerial support. Consequently, this review has called for further research to aid understanding of how to advance knowledge of this crucial process. Similarly, supervision was valued by NQSWs, and the quality of these encounters are also linked to job satisfaction. Around 75% of Scottish-based NQSWs are positive about the receipt and impact of supervision sessions. However, case management matters dominate the supervision agenda which impedes scope for discussions in relation to professional development and emotional wellbeing. Supervision is a process that changes in content and frequency over time. Generally, the frequency of sessions will decline over the first two years of practice, with case management increasingly allocated the main focus within encounters. This has led to one researcher proposing that NQSWs should be offered additional supervision sessions with a focus on critical reflection and the development of emotional intelligence. NQSWs are also supported by an informal network, generally comprising of team members and other social work colleagues. In the very early stages of employment, this network is valued more than line managers in providing support. While the impact of 'the team' appears to be significant, little is known about how organisations and line managers attempt to harness the positive attributes of this network to enhance NQSWs' transition into professional practice. Further research in this area would be welcomed. NQSWs affected by the pressures of their role receive vital emotional support from friends and family. An enhanced understanding of this 'offsite support network' would broaden understanding of NQSWs' lived experiences outside of office hours. In the main, NQSWs appear quite confident in their abilities to manage the responsibilities of their role upon commencement of employment. However, evidence suggests that NQSWs become acutely aware of bureaucracy in their role over time, acknowledging that they sometimes undertake tasks that are unnecessary. Further, many NQSWs working within child services settings reported finding their first year in practice extremely challenging. A large proportion of this group did not contemplate remaining in their post beyond a few years. This review found inconsistencies in the amount, and complexity of cases that NQSWs were expected to manage in their early careers. Some studies found that a large percentage of NQSWs were offered a degree of protection, whilst others reported that most were given large caseloads from almost day one. Further, some NQSWs were expected to manage challenging cases (including child protection), while others were not. This review calls for further investigation of NQSW experiences in this regard, in order to highlight the extent and reasons for inconsistencies in workload allocation. Despite significant variability of support provisions, workload and educational experiences, it would appear that the large majority of NQSWs are satisfied with their jobs. These findings are consistent across Scotland and England. This indicates that NQSWs find fulfilment in key elements of their work, to an extent that work-related

stress and pressure has no significant impact on early appraisals of job satisfaction.

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Appendix 2 – Data Sets

Fig 1: Time spent on Tasks (as % score 1-7)

Social work tasks	T1: 1	T2: 1	T1: 2	T2: 2	T1: 3	T2: 3	T1: 4	T2: 4	T1: 5	T2: 5	T1: 6	T2: 6	T1: 7	T2: 7
Service user and/or carer contact	10.6	**13.6**	10.6	**13.6**	23.8	**20**	19.4	**20.9**	16.8	**20**	15	**9**	3.5	**2.7**
Report writing	35.5	**40.9**	20.6	**22.7**	8.2	**13.6**	10.7	**7.2**	6.6	**4.5**	6.6	**2.7**	11.5	**8.1**
Case recording	21.5	**23.4**	31	**33.3**	14.6	**9.9**	11.2	**10.8**	8.6	**16.2**	6.9	**5.4**	6	**0.9**
Responding to crisis	9.7	**8.7**	10.5	**13.1**	17.8	**17.5**	17	**16.6**	22.7	**21.9**	17	**16.6**	4.8	**5.2**
Liaising with other professionals	6.5	**8.1**	10.5	**8.1**	17	**26.1**	30	**27.9**	25.2	**19.8**	8.9	**9.9**	1.6	**0**
Using current research, knowledge and evidence	11.6	**3.5**	5.4	**2.6**	5.4	**2.6**	3.8	**2.6**	5.4	**3.5**	14.7	**23.6**	53.4	**61.4**
General admin	6.1	**2.5**	12.2	**5.1**	16	**14.6**	10.6	**14.6**	17.5	**13.7**	25.9	**32.7**	11.4	**19.8**

Fig 2: Time spent on learning and development (as % score 1-6)

Learning and development	T1: 1	T2: 1	T1: 2	T2: 2	T1: 3	T2: 3	T1: 4	T2: 4	T1: 5	T2: 5	T1: 6	T2: 6
Shadowing other social workers/ professionals	35.7	**20**	27.3	**17.7**	10.5	**14.4**	8.4	**14.4**	10.5	**25.5**	7.3	**7.7**
Learning/ professional development provided by employer	28.4	**52.2**	33.6	**21.1**	18.9	**13.3**	7.3	**5.5**	5.2	**4.4**	6.3	**3.3**
Learning/ professional development provided by university	10.1	**5.6**	2	**3.3**	12.1	**5.6**	10.1	**1.1**	11.1	**17.9**	54.5	**66.2**
Learning/ professional development provided by outside organisation	3.2	**5.6**	10.7	**29.5**	22.5	**21.5**	29.4	**28.4**	23.5	**11.3**	9.8	**3.4**
Self-directed learning at work (eg reading books/ journal articles/ research evidence)	6	**7.5**	17	**10.7**	20	**24.7**	27	**26.8**	21	**20.4**	9	**9.6**
Self-directed learning at home (eg reading books/ journal articles/ research evidence)	13	**8.5**	10.2	**15.9**	14.9	**21.2**	20.5	**21.2**	24.3	**19.1**	16.8	**13.8**

Fig 3: Sense of being a professional: what matters (as % score 1-6)

Impact on sense of being a professional	T1: 1	T2: 1	T1: 2	T2: 2	T1: 3	T2: 3	T1: 4	T2: 4	T1: 5	T2: 5	T1: 6	T2: 6
Being registered with the SSSC	18.5	**10.1**	6.1	**4.7**	5.1	**9.4**	7.2	**14.1**	20.6	**9.4**	42.2	**51.7**
Having autonomy over the work I do	30.3	**21.6**	15.1	**32.5**	20.2	**13.2**	20.2	**15.6**	8	**14.6**	6	**2.4**
Having access to continuous professional development opportunities	8.2	**6**	14.4	**6**	14.4	**21.6**	25.7	**16.8**	21.6	**30.1**	15.4	**19.2**
Having a clear boundary between social work and other professions	6	**6.9**	7	**15.1**	16	**15.1**	24	**24.4**	28	**23.2**	19	**15.1**
Having the ability to make complex judgements and decisions	20.4	**30.5**	32.6	**22.3**	23.4	**18.8**	8.1	**17.6**	9.1	**8.2**	6.1	**2.3**
Being able to apply my professional values	18.1	**23.6**	25.7	**20.2**	22.8	**19.1**	13.3	**12.3**	11.4	**15.7**	8.5	**8.9**