Strategic Adviser for
Social Work and Social Care Research

Main Report
to the

Economic and Social Research Council
Training and Development Board

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October 2009
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</strong></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART I: THE STRATEGIC ADVISER FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH INITIATIVE: CONTEXTS AND OUTLINE</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1 Introduction: Background and design of the initiative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2 Methodology overview</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART II: THE CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3 Research quality and impact</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4 Strengths and deficits of the research base</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 5 Priority research themes</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART III: BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY AND EXCELLENCE</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 6 Researcher engagement</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 7 Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 8 Postgraduate research training</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 9 Mid- and senior career research training</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 10 Research support and development</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 11 Research funding</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 12 Strategic leadership and co-ordination of research capacity development</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART III: CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD</strong></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 13 Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNEXES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 1</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 2</td>
<td>Concurrent initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 3</td>
<td>Methodology: detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 4</td>
<td>Steering group and consultant panel membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 5</td>
<td>Questionnaire for social work consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annex 6</td>
<td>Interview questions for cognate discipline and funder consultants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Strategic Adviser for Social Work and Social Care Research initiative was undertaken by Dr Elaine Sharland, University of Sussex, with the support of Cath Holmstrom, Research Officer, September 2008 - October 2009. This report presents findings from a desktop review and consultation with members of the social work academy, cognate disciplines and research funders.

2. The aim of the initiative was to establish recommendations to the ESRC and co-funders for development of social work and social care research capacity and engagement, to boost excellence and impact. The context was the recognized need for a ‘step change’ in the range and quality of the research base, and its capacity for impact on key fields of policy and practice. The latter are central to addressing significant contemporary social, welfare, health and economic challenges. Despite ‘pockets of excellence’ and signs of growth in social work research, there are significant deficits in the research discipline. Under-engagement in social care research by more established cognate disciplines compromises interdisciplinarity, breadth and rigour. Even those cognate researchers working in the social care research field rarely identify themselves as social care researchers, since this is not a formally recognised discipline but a field of enquiry. It was a challenge throughout this consultation to balance the needs and contributions of distinctive disciplines, particularly social work as a priority area, with the overarching priority of promoting excellence and interdisciplinarity in social work and social care research as a whole.

3. Desktop review and consultant feedback confirmed that high quality social work and social care research should (sometimes does): combine research for knowledge and for use; evaluate what works, how and in what contexts; investigate the interstices between individual and social, public and private, policy and practice, and between social care and related domains; and employ question-led multi-modal methodologies. Judged by these criteria, there were substantial research deficits identified, with insufficient methodological sophistication, rigour or diversity, and substantial gaps.

4. On this basis, and in the light of current and forthcoming challenges, priority research themes for research capacity development and engagement were identified. Substantive themes are: Social work and social care perspectives on and responses to: professionalism and service provision in contemporary management, economic and welfare contexts; demographic change and diversity; health and wellbeing inequalities; risk, decision making and choice; promoting social inclusion and engagement; and practice development and innovation. Methodological themes are: using quantitative methodologies; developing and diversifying qualitative methodologies; mixed methods; evaluation research; developing and using measures; large dataset and service data analysis; analysis of costs, cost benefits and cost effectiveness; and systematic and research review.

5. There is a wide range of stakeholders to be engaged - either in co-sponsorship or support in kind for research capacity development - across higher education, government, non government organisations, employers and professional regulators, as well as the research councils and third sector research funders. There are particular synergies to be developed with health funders and with concurrent government and funding council research and development initiatives. Similarly, there is a wide range of researchers to be engaged, from cognate disciplines and from social work, from the academy and professional practice and at diverse career stages. There are also significant obstacles to be surmounted including structural
and cultural splits between research and practice in social work and, for cognate researchers, the perceived complexity, lack of status, visibility and resource of the social care research.

6. In the context of forthcoming changes to the ESRC postgraduate training framework, particular attention was paid to postgraduate research as a vital career intervention point. There is a need for both HEI/consortia bidders for DTC/DTU status, and for the ESRC through strategic steer, to ensure as far as possible that social work and social care are well represented in DTC/DTU provision, and that appropriate flexibilities in delivery and funding are established. In addition the case is made for some non standard provision – a targeted studentship competition and a pilot stand alone masters to provide dedicated opportunities and incentives to the highest quality candidates. The ESRC is also invited to revisit the status of professional doctorates in due course; these can provide key career transition pathways to academically best qualified social work and social care practitioners and managers.

7. Given the range and diversity of disciplines to be engaged, career stages at which intervention is required, and capacity needs at individual, institutional and cross-institutional levels, combined feedback to this consultation indicates the need for a fixed term, multifaceted and co-funded programme of research capacity development. Piecemeal support for one or two mechanisms is unlikely to pay dividends without complementary mechanisms to maximise benefits. A 3 - 5 year initiative of the sort proposed would catalyse development of capacity, infrastructure and stakeholder engagement sufficiently to provide the springboard for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term. Signs of existing strength (recognised in the RAE 2008) indicate that there is sufficient capacity now to make good use of such investment. The underpinning principle would be to boost social work and social care research quality standards and engagement, and to maximise opportunities for those with highest potential for research excellence to attain it. The ESRC is invited to take a dual role, making some direct (co)investment and taking a proactive strategic role in dialogue with stakeholders to galvanise co-sponsorship and support.

8. In addition to postgraduate training, the diverse range of capacity development mechanisms proposed includes targeted use of existing ESRC provisions – such as interdisciplinary seminar series, post doctoral fellowships for cognate researchers working on social care priority research themes, and fellowships for senior career ‘research leaders’ to advance interdisciplinary collaboration and exchange. Also proposed are some non standard provisions – such as attachment schemes to existing centres of research excellence, networked mentor and buddy schemes, and dedicated provision of specialist (especially technical) expertise to HEI consortia.

9. Some of these provisions might well be made through the DTC/DTU network; others through existing centres of excellence or networks. Also recommended is allocation of some resource for leadership and co-ordination of a research capacity development programme; this would be necessary to provide strategic steer and oversight, and establish during a 3 – 5 year period the infrastructure, leadership and co-funding arrangements for sustainable growth of capacity and excellence in the longer term. Potential for foundation of a self funding learned society – thus far absent – to fulfil this leadership role is also discussed.

10. If, for financial or other reasons, a multi-faceted programme of this sort cannot be considered for social work and social care, further discussion between the ESRC, potential co-funders and other stakeholders is recommended, in order to prioritise for
co-sponsorship the component mechanisms most likely to add value in their own right.

Recommendations

1. An initiative to strengthen capacity for excellence in social work and social care research, organised around priority themes, should promote interdisciplinary engagement and address distinctive disciplinary needs and contributions to research excellence and impact.

2. The ESRC should engage in strategic discussion with stakeholders to consider co-sponsorship of a short term (3-5 year) initiative to catalyse longer term sustainable growth in research capacity and excellence. This would be supported by attention to social work and social care research capacity in ESRC strategic steer, targeting of standard and non standard resources.

3. Training, support and career development opportunities should be established at all career intervention points, with emphasis in the first instance on postgraduate, post-doctoral and senior career engagement of cognate disciplines, and on postgraduate research engagement and mid/senior career researcher/leadership development of high quality candidates in social work.

4. Social work and social care in higher education should develop institutional and cross-institution co-ordinated strategies to maximise high quality input into, and use of, capacity development and research opportunities from all available sources.

5. Short term investment should be made in strategic leadership and infrastructure for research and capacity development as the platform for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term.

6. The ESRC should consider playing a proactive strategic role with key government, health, public and third sector bodies, higher education, employers, professional regulators and research funders, seeking to maximise synergies for co-sponsorship, especially in the short term.
PART I: THE STRATEGIC ADVISER FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH INITIATIVE: CONTEXTS AND OUTLINE

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND DESIGN OF THE INITIATIVE

The Strategic Adviser for Social Work and Social Care Research initiative was commissioned by the ESRC, with funding contribution from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS). This report presents the findings and recommendations of the initiative, undertaken September 2008 - October 2009, by Dr Elaine Sharland, University of Sussex, with the support of Cath Holmstrom, Research Officer.

1.1 Aims and objectives

1.1.1 The aim of the initiative was:

- To make strategic recommendations to the ESRC and co-funders for the development of academic social work and social care research capacity, engagement and excellence.

1.1.2 Objectives were:

- To identify current strengths and deficits in the social work and social care research base, and in capacity to produce research excellence and impact;
- To examine how interdisciplinary approaches may support the development of the research base;
- To establish priority substantive and methodological research themes to be addressed, as the focus for capacity development;
- To identify the most appropriate mechanisms and career intervention points for strengthening research capacity and engagement, and infrastructure to support these;
- To make recommendations for the most appropriate ESRC and stakeholder co-funding arrangements to support research capacity development.

1.2 The argument for high quality social work and social care research

1.2.1 Social work and social care services are central to public welfare systems in the UK and elsewhere. They play key roles in promoting and safeguarding individual and social wellbeing and lie at the heart of core public policy agendas. In the UK in the 21st century, social work and social care service face some distinct challenges, among them meeting the social care needs of an ageing and diverse population, raised expectations of personal choice, standards of care and protection from harm, and the vicissitudes of an unstable economy. Increasingly, social work and social care services are integrated with related provisions in health, education, criminal justice and other welfare sectors. The success or failure of each impacts on the others. The effectiveness of social work and social care services has both direct and indirect impact on economic wellbeing too, increasing capacity for economic participation and productivity, and reducing the costs to the public purse of welfare failures. The state and service providers are publicly accountable for how they are delivered, how well they work and how cost effectively – all
the more so when, as now, the economy is weak and public spending under intense scrutiny. In particular they are held to account when they fail, as witnessed dramatically in cases such as Baby Peter, or endemically with, for example, poor outcomes for looked after children, inadequate standards of residential care or unallocated cases of need on social work files.

1.2.2 A powerful argument in favour of investment in social work and social care research rests on its extrinsic value – its capacity for utility and impact in informing, scrutinising and re-forming evidence based policy and practice, to the benefit of research users and ultimately service users. In the light of the pivotal role and challenges facing social work and social care services, there have been strong policy drivers from all UK governments towards improving the research evidence base (NISCC, 2002; Scottish Executive, 2005; Cabinet Office, 2006; DfES and DH, 2006; Welsh Assembly Government, 2006). However, the extrinsic value of social work and social care research is not, and should not be, restricted to UK contexts. High quality research into social work and social care problems and interventions should be capable of incorporating insights from other contexts and identifying where messages for policy and practice are transferable.

The same imperatives towards research impact are echoed within the wider research community. Impact will be a central criterion for the 2012 Research Excellence Framework (REF). It is also one of the ESRC core principles for social science research set out in the ESRC Strategic Plan 2009-14:

*increasing its non-academic impact and benefits to the UK in public policy, economic prosperity, culture and quality of life* (ESRC, 2008b, p3).

1.2.3 Arguably, social work and social care research have exceptionally high potential to achieve such impact. Realising this potential also demands intrinsic research value – quality, rigour, and the capacity to generate new knowledge and understandings through integration of research evidence, theory, policy and practice. This in turn accords with another of the ‘core values’ of the ESRC Strategic Plan, ‘intrinsic research quality’ (p.3), meaning highest standards of scholarship and scientific excellence. High quality and high impact social work and social care research requires robust and sophisticated examination of the nature and aetiology of the problems faced, and of their outcomes. Most important, it requires rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and practice – whether they work, how, in what contexts and what are their relative benefits and costs.

Part II of this report looks in detail at the case for high quality social work and social care research (section 3), and examines the current strengths and deficits of the research base (section 4). This provides the basis for identifying priority themes for research and capacity development in the short, medium and longer term futures (section 5).

1.2.4 In a period of economic recession, with tight restraints on research funder and stakeholder budgets, and in the context of political uncertainty with an impending general election, the strongest possible case needs to be made for investment in social work and social care research. The case rests not just on the centrality of the policy and practice field to promoting welfare and wellbeing, the need for underpinning research evidence and the need for that evidence to ‘speak to’ the practice and policy communities that need to use it. It also rests on the recognition that, despite some
strengths, both the research base and the capacity to produce excellence and impact are in need of development. It is these deficits that have set the specific context for the strategic advisor initiative.

1.3 Background to the strategic adviser initiative

1.3.1 As described by the commissioning brief for this initiative, there is now the need for:

fundamental step change in breadth, depth and quality of the UK research base in social work and social care..... The knowledge base to underpin existing social care services, to support their improvement and to make judgements about cost-effectiveness in their delivery is currently inadequate. Despite some notable exceptions, social work and social care policy and practice have developed largely without an adequate, closely connected research evidence base. It is essential that a stronger connection is made and that the social work and social care research can then deliver high quality evidence to the policy and practitioner communities. (ESRC, 2008e, pp. 1-3)

The majority of research funding for social work and social care, such as it is, comes from government and some third sector sources. But funding, like the research base, is limited, patchy and fragmented. Arguably, in many research areas and programmes where social work and social care could and should be represented and making high quality contributions, they are not. In addition to policy calls (1.2.2) strong imperatives towards improving intrinsic research quality and extrinsic utility or impact have also been underlined from elsewhere within the discipline and field. An example has been the efforts of SCIE to highlight the importance of research quality to contribute to the social work and social care evidence base, with work commissioned to define and improve quality appraisal and review (Pawson et. al., 2003; Coren and Fisher, 2006).

1.3.2 It not easy in any formal terms to judge the quality or capacity of the social work and social care research field as a whole. Social care is not uniformly defined in policy, let alone in research terms. Unlike social work, social care is not a recognised research category within ESRC management and information systems, nor is it represented as such in any ESRC structures. Likewise, social care has not been an RAE unit of assessment, not explicitly included within one.

The relationship and distinctions between social work and social care are discussed more fully in section 1.4.3. For present purposes, social care can be taken to be a research field to which many cognate disciplines (among them social policy, psychology, sociology, health, economics, demography, criminal justice, anthropology and management), as well as social work, might usefully contribute. Hence it is not possible to appraise the quality of social care research as a whole, nor indeed to assess capacity in the research field. What does seem evident, however, is that the range and level of input from cognate disciplines into the social care research field is limited. Given their established statuses and strengths, this suggests a lack of engagement in this particular field, rather than lack of capacity for excellence. One indicator of this under-engagement from cognate disciplines is that, until now, the main initiatives to address capacity or quality of social work and social care research have come from social work, more recently with support from the ESRC. One primary purpose of the present initiative (distinct from its predecessors, 1.3.5) is to identify ways of increasing engagement of
cognate disciplines in this research field, and maximising interdisciplinary contributions to research excellence (1.4.3; 1.4.4).

1.3.3 Along with its primary interest in promoting social science (in this case social work and social care) research excellence and impact, the ESRC has also had specific concerns about the health of the social work discipline, in line with another of its strategic objectives:

to sustain the long term health of the social science research base.... to involve strategic interventions in those areas where there are particular skills shortages or where there is the need to develop future high quality research capacity. (ESRC, 2009a, p1)

Here the ESRC has noted that the rate of social work applications to its funds for research awards and grants is low, with success rates correspondingly low (4.1.2). Though equivalent data from other funders have not been compiled for this inquiry, the indication is that the health of social work research is less than robust.

1.3.4 For its part, the RAE 2008 subject panel overview (2009) reported a diverse distribution of social work research quality, with clear evidence of excellence in ‘pockets’. Where high quality social work research exists, it is funded primarily by governments and other research foundations, not by the ESRC. The RAE 2008 subject panel report speaks of the:

continuing development of social work research, both in range of methods and sophistication, consonant with its recognised emergence as a research-led subject (RAE, 2009, p.10).

The last point is clear – social work is an emerging research discipline, with recognised signs of strength but significant room for development of research quality and capacity.

1.3.5 The strategic adviser project builds on several predecessors, which, unlike the present initiative, have primarily (though not exclusively) focused on social work, pointing to significant research capacity deficits. Notable precursors have been the development of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee Research Strategy (2006) and the SCIE Research Capacity Consultation (Fisher et. al., 2007). Also significant has been the work of Shaw et. al. (2004) examining ESRC engagement with social work and social care research to date, and the Mills et. al. (2005) review of social science demographics. These and other reports have highlighted that academic social work research suffers from long-term structural weaknesses, and that both social work and social care research capacity and quality need strengthening. The key points are as follows:

- There has been limited investment in social work and social care research or infrastructure. The comparison with health, particular primary care or nursing, is especially unfavourable (Marsh and Fisher, 2005). Research has not been a service provider priority, with employer commitment to research training and investment low. Fragmentation due to devolved governments in the UK, splits between central and local governments and (in England) between adults’ and children’s services, have denied the field overall focus or infrastructure for research and development.
• The social work academic research workforce is small – there are around 750 fte social work academics compared with over 5000 in education (JUCSWEC, 2006; ESRC, 2008a); around 300 researchers were returned under social work to the RAE 2008, among them only around 75 submitting empirical research outputs (RAE 2008 Unit of Assessment 40 Panel Chair, personal communication).

• The social work academic community has an older than average demographic profile, with faculty recruited largely from practice. A majority are in post-1992 universities where in the main research culture is less established. At the same time, the historical divide between research and practice has reinforced a ‘circle of resistance’ to growing skilled practice-minded researchers (as well as research-minded practitioners).

• There are barriers to importing expertise from other disciplines into academic social work, where practice experience is commonly a pre-requisite for teaching and for appointment to core funded posts.

• Conversely, there are insufficient incentives, significant disincentives and institutional barriers discouraging cognate disciplines such as social policy, sociology, psychology, criminal justice and economics, from engaging in this field.

• Co-funding from a range of stakeholders is required to build a sustainable research infrastructure and robust research community to deliver the highest quality research evidence base and policy/practice impact.

1.3.6 The ESRC has already taken a number of steps to address the problems. It awarded disciplinary recognition to social work in 2006, designating it a priority area in 2007. Social work is now represented on Council and in the Virtual College. There is some representation too on grant, fellowship and studentship application review panels, though there are currently no social work members of the Research Grants or Training and Development Boards.1 Two researcher development initiative (RDI) awards have been made to social work, the first focusing on advanced methods, postgraduate researchers and supervisors, and the second on early to mid-career researchers. In 2007 the ESRC commissioned an ‘Audit of baseline resources’ for social work research in UK universities (ESRC, 2008a). And in April 2008 the strategic adviser initiative was commissioned to establish recommendations for research and capacity development in social work and social care.

1.3.7 Some further important contextual developments have occurred during the course of this initiative. Results of the RAE 2008 offered the moderately encouraging picture outlined above (1.3.3). It has not yet been possible, however, to disaggregate social work results from those of other cognate disciplines with which they were assessed.

In England, the establishment of the School for Social Care Research (SSCR) within the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), represents a welcome government commitment to boosting the quality of adult social care research. The Department of Children, Schools and Families’ (DCSF) plans to commission three interdisciplinary research centres on Children and Wellbeing, Youth Development and Transitions, and Understanding Behavioural Change may also provide a welcome boost for social care research. The Children’s Workforce Development Council Research Strategy (2008-10) has brought with it commissioning of intra- and interdisciplinary research to inform policy

1 The extent to which lack of social work success in applications to the ESRC reflects lack of activity and quality or ongoing under-representation within ESRC decision making remains an issue, though Shaw et. al. (2004) pinpointed primarily the former as the nub of the problem.
and practice development in integrated children’s services. Also welcome has been the foundation by the Social Care Trust of the Tilda Goldberg Research Centre for evaluating effectiveness of social care, with capacity building a key strand of its work programme. In England, however, the major review of social work training, effectiveness, organisation and resourcing, being undertaken by the Social Work Taskforce (2009), has yet to articulate the role of research in creating evidence based practice.

1.3.8 One further, very significant development during the course of the strategic adviser project has been the publication of ESRC plans (2009a) to revise its postgraduate training framework (for implementation in 2010, with first intake in 2011). The changes have important implications for the recommendations of this report; these are discussed in principle in section 6 and in detail in section 8 of this report.

In these contexts, JUCSWEC is also currently reviewing and reconfiguring its research strategy for social work, to which this consultation and its outcomes will contribute.

1.3.9 Also by way of context, there have been other substantial initiatives for research capacity development in both social and health science fields. There are dangers with extrapolating from experience of other disciplines, whose nature, contexts, profile and potential resource may be quite different. At the same, however, it can be helpful to ‘think outside the box’, and look for lessons about what has worked well or less well elsewhere. Examples vary from the top level strategic co-ordination activities of the UK Clinical Research Collaboration, through a wide portfolio of initiatives to boost research capacity and quality in nursing, science technology engineering and maths education, and, closest to home for the ESRC, as part of its own Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) in education and another in business and management.

1.3.10 In these contexts, the strategic adviser initiative is now seeking to advance the primary agenda of improving capacity for research excellence in social work and social care. Within this, priorities are to increase engagement of cognate disciplines, to increase research capacity in social work, and to set in place mechanisms and co-sponsorship arrangements to support these.

1.4 Underpinning principles

1.4.1 In the light of existing evidence and ESRC priorities, the distinctive focus of the strategic adviser initiative has been on:

- Achieving excellence in social work and social care research as the end goal;
- Academic rather than practitioner research capacity;
- Capacity to produce rather than to use excellent research;

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2 Not least, in the case of the present initiative and distinct from others, the ESRC are committed to advancing research excellence across an interdisciplinary field (social care) rather in one discipline (social work).

3 The terminology can be confusing and contentious, since many ‘academic’ social work researchers come from practice, and social work is a practice based discipline. For purposes of this report ‘academic’ refers to research which may well be practice based, but is undertaken as part of academic study or under the auspices of an academic/research institution. ‘Practitioner’ research refers to research undertaken in practice settings by practitioners in the course of their professional employment. For brevity, research referred to in the report is academic research, according to this definition, unless otherwise stated.
• Promoting intradisciplinarity to achieve excellence, while addressing distinctive contributions and capacity needs;
• Potential for the ESRC and co-funders to support the development of research capacity and excellence.

Underpinning this focus are four key principles, worth clarifying from the outset.

1.4.2 Promoting academic research excellence

The focus of this initiative is on excellence in research production, rather than knowledge transfer, research use in practice, or practitioner research. Here it is distinct from other concurrent developments (Annex 2). Government led programmes in Wales and Scotland, for example, have focused on practitioner research. In England, government funded research centres of excellence are primarily (though not exclusively) for research production rather than capacity development. The JUCSWEC research strategy focuses on academic and practitioner research and capacity, knowledge production and use, primarily in social work.

In social work, unlike most though not all cognate disciplines, the overlaps between academic and practitioner research are significant. Practice nearness and practice improvement lie at the heart of much social work research, and at the heart of their contribution to social work and social care. Much of the academic research workforce and most research students are drawn from practice. So increasing opportunities for practitioner engagement in, and training and support for, academic research is a key strand of capacity building to be considered here. But the focus and recommendations of this report are about strengthening excellence in the academic research discipline, not in practice as such. Additionally (see 1.4.3) the present focus is equally on engaging academic researchers from cognate disciplines to work in the social care research field. This involves concentrating attention on the mechanisms, structures, resources and leadership required to enable those with the greatest potential, from diverse backgrounds, to contribute to research excellence in social work and social care.

Maintaining the focus on academic research excellence presents challenges which have manifested themselves throughout the strategic adviser consultation and are not easily resolved. In the case of cognate disciplines which have established research capacity but might contribute more than they do to this field, we must assume that promoting excellence is less about building the health of those disciplines than about providing incentives, opportunities and infrastructure for excellent researchers to engage in this particular area. For social work, with its distinctive focus on practice but with less well established research capacity, excellence cannot be built on a sustainable basis without improving the health of the discipline itself. Provision of the highest quality opportunities for the highest quality researchers is essential, and this is the focus of several recommendations of this report. However growing the in-flow of high quality research candidates, and sustaining the development of excellence also requires improvement of research culture and infrastructure more widely. As the audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) confirmed, for example, unless research is better integrated into professional training and more prioritised within HEI social work departments and in practice, the research candidates with the greatest potential for excellence will not present themselves, let alone take advantage of the highest quality research training and support mechanisms to enable them to realise their potential.
Both the opportunity and the challenge for future developments will be to maximise the synergies between the objectives of improving academic research excellence, growing the culture to support it, and in the wider sense dovetailing the objectives of this particular initiative with broader initiatives to democratise research knowledge production, promote practitioner research and knowledge transfer.

1.4.3 Considering social work and social care research in combination:

The relationship and distinctions between social work research and social care research are problematic. Not least this is because there is no agreed definition of social care either in research or in policy and practice terms (see for example ESRC, 2000; Shaw and Norton, 2008; Smith, 2009). Nor is there an institutionally recognised category of social care research. Illustrating the complexity, the RAE 2008 subject panel defines social work research as:

*primarily concerned with developments in professional practice, organisation, pedagogy and knowledge underpinning issues, problems and policies in social care and welfare provision for both adults and children* (RAE, 2009, p.5)

But if social work research is primarily concerned with social care, then what is social care research? The distinctions most commonly made highlight the connectedness of social work research to practice and its claims to a social justice value base. However these distinctions are broadly more apparent to social workers than to members of cognate disciplines. The latter, echoing the North American model where social work as a discipline is more embedded in social sciences, are more likely to consider social work and social care to be combined at three levels: policy, organisation and management, and micro-level interactions. Some argue too that distinguishing between social work and social care research is a) of little value when policy and practice are increasingly interprofessional and integrated, and b) of little academic validity in a post-disciplinary era.

The strategic adviser initiative has not attempted to resolve these conundrums. Instead it has taken a pragmatic approach to addressing research capacity and quality across the board. Social work research is taken here to fit the RAE 2008 definition above in its strong orientation towards practice; it is also taken to be the research done mainly, at present, by those with social work academic and/or professional backgrounds. Social work is also described here as a research ‘discipline’, since it is institutionally recognised as such. Social care research, by contrast, is described as a ‘research field’, to which contributions from a wide range of disciplines – notably social policy, sociology, psychology, criminology, economics – can be brought to questions of social care policy and practice.

Within the broad approach to considering social work and social care research as a whole, it is essential to take account of the different discipline profiles and contributions that may be involved. In the case of academic social work, key challenges for strengthening research capacity and excellence are to engage in research new graduates and the most academically able experienced practitioners, to establish flexible career pathways, and to develop the research skills base, productivity and culture of the social work academy. By contrast, for cognate disciplines, where research skills and culture may be well established, the challenge will be to motivate high quality researchers to engage in the social care research field.
The latter point raises further complexities, which have been a challenge for the strategic adviser initiative throughout. Firstly, since social care is not a formally recognised research category (1.3.4; 1.4.3), and potential disciplinary contributions to it are multiple, it has not been possible in this enquiry either to examine the research capacity status of all potential contributor disciplines, nor to provide any ‘hard’ evidence of their quality or performance in the social care research field. Inevitably, it has been easier to establish the achievements of social work, in, for example, applications for ESRC awards or performance in the RAE (though the latter still requires disaggregation from cognate disciplines submitted to a common panel). There are no equivalent data to inform us about social care. The starting point for this initiative has been to work on the broadest of recognitions that there is insufficient engagement of cognate disciplines in this field. Hence the focus of attention and recommendations for capacity development with respect to cognate disciplines has been on opportunities and incentives to engage; these are highlighted at all possible opportunities in this report. Inevitably, however, there are areas of discussion about capacity development and mechanisms to improve it (such as training and support for mid- and senior career academics (section 9)) that apply solely to social work, where the capacity needs are evident.

The second, and related, challenge stems from the fact that not only is social care not a formally recognised discipline category, but that there is not a research community which self-recognises as ‘social care’. This was apparent throughout the strategic advisor consultation process, where, for example, none of the consultants from cognate disciplines - selected for the relevance of their own research to social care - identified themselves as social care researchers. Instead, they saw themselves as social policy researchers, public health researchers, economists, psychologists, as the case may be. Several explicitly noted that they were uncertain what social care was, let alone what social care research might be. Here, too, there is significant contrast with social work, which is inevitably reflected in this report. Social work academics - though not universally agreed in their views - were clear about who they were, the nature and needs of their discipline and its distinctive contribution to research quality and impact.

Notwithstanding these challenges, given the overarching aim of this initiative (1.1.1), its starting point has been not to ask: 'What do different contributor disciplines need?', but: 'What kinds of research, around which priority social work and social care themes, is most needed?', and: 'What might excellent research around these themes look like?' From there, the objectives have been to establish: ‘Which strategies, mechanisms and infrastructure will best maximise capacity for excellence?’, ‘At which career stages might these best be deployed?’ and ‘How best might the ESRC and co-funders support them?’ To meet these objectives, the contributions of all relevant disciplines, and interdisciplinarity or cross-fertilisation between them are to be maximised. Here it becomes helpful to look at the principle of interdisciplinarity itself.

1.4.4 Strengthening interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity in the purest sense – denoting not just common involvement but integrated engagement of different disciplines, approaches and perspectives in the same research enquiry – may be a counsel of perfection. More achievable within reasonable resources are probably multi- or cross-disciplinarity, involving distinct disciplinary contributions brought to common research problems or topics. For the purposes of this report, the term ‘interdisciplinarity’ will be used generically (rather than in its purest form)
as the default to describe the bringing together of different disciplinary knowledges and skills in a common research field. However specific reference will be made to multi or cross-disciplinarity, collaborative work, import and export, and genericism, when these models in particular are being discussed.

There are those who hold that ‘post-disciplinary’ best describes the current condition of social research, and the way it should be. For example, there is increasing acceptance that certain methodologies formerly associated with one discipline are now generic and core to social science. However among those in social work and social care who value the ongoing status of disciplinarity, most still favour some degree of fertilisation between disciplines, for intellectual, policy/practice and pragmatic reasons. There is broad recognition of common ground and purpose with other applied or professional disciplines, such as education, health and criminal justice, whose fields include practice and whose associated professions increasingly share the same stage in integrated services. Similarly, there is also broad recognition of the value of contributions from, for example, sociology, psychology and epidemiology, for understanding the nature and scope of problems to be addressed, and from social statistics and economics for understanding outcomes, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of services. The potential for interdisciplinarity to enhance both the intrinsic value and the extrinsic utility and impact of social work and social care research is fleshed out more fully in Part II of this report.

This initiative explores possibilities and challenges for all forms of engagement across disciplinary boundaries. Engagement in this case might simply involve (multi-disciplinary) drawing together the contributions of researchers from different disciplines to a common theme or question (for example through multi-discipline research programmes or review). It might involve cross-discipline recruitment (import and export, through training and other engagement mechanisms) of students or established researchers from cognate areas into social work and social care research. And it might be achieved through active collaborative work, either truly integrative or involving discrete but combined efforts.

There are political, cultural and resource implications of following this path, and it should be noted that not all key players are committed to it. Many in social work, though in favour of shared knowledge building, are concerned that the distinctive contribution of social work – its primary focus on practice, problem solving processes and outcomes at micro levels in meso and macro level contexts - be strengthened not occluded in any inter- or multidisciplinary mix or funding alliance (see 4.2.3). For social work research to have genuine impact on practice, it must address key practice concerns, challenges and be meaningful to the practitioners who use it. There is also a strong voice for recognising the contribution that social work research has already made to other applied disciplines and fields – health, education, housing, criminal justice – and keenness that the potential to grow this contribution is realised in the UK as it has been in North America (4.2.4). Clearly, though the aim of this initiative is to recommend strategy for building the research and capacity base for social work and social care as a whole, and within this to address distinct disciplinary needs to ensure that quality of all contributions to the bigger picture is maximized.

1.4.5 Complementarity with funder frameworks and priorities: a programmatic approach
In order to make maximum use of the strategic adviser initiative opportunity, it has been essential to combine: i) scrutiny of what is needed; ii) pragmatism about working towards it now within existing funding and stakeholder contexts; and iii) longer term vision for more expansive developments. Moreover, recommendations from this report need to ensure that the whole of a research capacity building strategy will be greater than the sum of its parts. This means taking a multifaceted programmatic approach, towards shorter and longer term ends. It involves making best use of existing resources, and diversifying and extending these as far as possible. It also involves maximizing potential to target capacity development investment in the directions and at the developmental stages where it can best be absorbed and bear fruit. The intention is to catalyse growth and improvement in the short term to grow self-sustainable development for the longer term.

Hence this report and its recommendations are mindful of, though not straitjacketed by, current funding, policy, political and academic climates. These climates also present some distinct challenges and opportunities in the devolved countries, and variation between higher education sectors. There are lessons to be drawn from research capacity building in other disciplines (notably health and education), but extrapolation must tempered in recognition of the distinctive nature and contexts of social work and social care research.

This report and recommendations are also configured in the context of opportunities and challenges presented by the existing and changing landscape of ESRC training provision. In particular, it is timely to offer suggestions to the ESRC for strategic steer with respect to social work and social care, and to HEIs/consortia in preparing their bids. In addition, where a strong case can be made to the ESRC Training and Development Board (TDB) for a 'non-standard' capacity development mechanism, it is made. Where appropriate synergies are identified, recommendations are also made reaching beyond the remits of the TDB, to those of other ESRC Boards, other research funders and stakeholders.

1.5 Strategic map

1.5.1 In Parts II and III of this report, the body of findings from the strategic adviser initiative are presented under the following section headings:

Part II: The case for development of social work and social care research

- Research quality and impact (section 3);
- Strengths and deficits of the existing research base (section 4);
- Priority research themes (section 5);

Part III: Building research capacity and excellence

- Researcher engagement (section 6);
- Stakeholder engagement (section 7);
- Postgraduate research training (section 8);
- Mid- and senior career research training (section 9);
- Research support and development (section 10);
- Research funding (section 11);
- Strategic infrastructure and leadership (section 12).
1.5.2 These sections correspond broadly with those charted (A to E) on the ‘Strategic Map’ presented below. The map is drawn in line with the objectives of the strategic adviser initiative, and is evidence based - grounded in the findings of the consultation. It is intended to show the discrete elements required for an effective strategy to develop social work and social care research capacity, and how these must come together to achieve a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

The end goal (E, right hand side) is the production of excellent social work and social care research, through inter- and intradisciplinary engagement, supported by robust infrastructure, with strategic leadership and co-ordination, and a sound co-funding base. Leading towards this, from the left hand side, is firstly (A) examination of the quality and impact, strengths and deficits of the research base, and identification of priority research themes for development. This is followed by (B) identification of researchers to be engaged at all career stages and from all relevant disciplines, and stakeholders to support research engagement and development. From there, we move to (C), the range of mechanisms to meet the needs of diverse researchers for training, support and career development, as well as institutional and cross-institutional research capacity, underpinned by stakeholder support and investment. The need for direct investment in research production, itself prompting capacity development, is indicated under (D).

Summary findings at the end of each section of this report correspond with their counterpart boxes on the map, and make specific links to the recommendations of the report presented with conclusions in section 13.
Strategic Map

A) RESEARCH PRIORITIES

i) The case for research quality and impact (Section 3)

ii) Strengths and deficits of the research base (Section 4)

iii) Priority substantive and methodological research themes (Section 5)

B) RESEARCHER/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

i) Researchers without doctorates:
   - social work graduates
   - cognate discipline graduates
   - experienced practitioners/managers
   - social work academics (non doctorate) (Section 6)

ii) Researchers with doctorates:
   - mid-career social work academic researchers
   - early/mid-career cognate researchers
   - senior career researchers from all relevant disciplines (Section 6)

iii) Stakeholders:
   - Governments
   - Non-government agencies/centres
   - Employers
   - Regulators
   - HE funding councils
   - HEIs (DTC/DTUs)
   - Other research funders
   - JUCSWEC, SCIE, IRISS
   - Professional associations (Section 7)

C) MECHANISMS (CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT)

i) Postgraduate and early career researcher training – inter- and intra-discipline

ii) Researcher support and career development mechanisms

iii) Mid- and senior career researcher training

D) MECHANISMS (RESEARCH FUNDING)

Direct research funding of:
   - projects
   - programmes
   - centres and networks of research excellence

E) STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTCOMES

Stakeholder engagement and (co)funding mechanisms

Infrastructure for strategic leadership, dialogue and co-ordination of sustainable research and capacity development (Section 12)

Research capacity:
   - robust research community
   - inter and intradisciplinary engagement
   - practice and policy engagement

EXCELLENT SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH ON PRIORITY THEMES
SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 A brief overview of the methodology for the strategic adviser initiative is presented here. A fuller account is provided in Annex 3. The project consultation was designed to take pre-existing evidence as its starting point, to capture a range of relevant discipline and some funder perspectives, and to establish recommendations best fitting with the post-RAE 2008 and ESRC training framework contexts.

2.1.2 There was consultation throughout with a project Steering Group (4a) which met 5 times with additional contact by email and telephone.

2.2 Overview of methodology

The initiative was conducted in stages, as follows:

| Preliminary consultation and desktop review | A wide range of relevant literature was reviewed and discussed informally with a range of academic and other stakeholders. This informed a Resource Paper for circulation to consultants, and design of consultation tools. (Findings and argument from the Resource Paper are integrated into this Report). |
| Stage 1 consultation (social work academy) | Twenty diverse social work academics were appointed to a consultant panel (Annex 4b) and were provided with the Resource Paper for advance reference. They completed a web-based qualitative questionnaire in response (Annex 5). Additional feedback was obtained from JUCSWEC Research Sub-committee and two other key informants (Annex 4b). |
| Stage 2 consultation (cognate disciplines and funders) | Fifteen senior representatives of cognate (non-social work) disciplines, and 2 research funders were also appointed to the consultant panel. All but two were interviewed face to face; one responded in writing and one by telephone interview. (Annex 6) |
| Analysis and draft recommendations | Qualitative and thematic analysis of Stage 1 and 2 findings was undertaken, generating draft recommendations and report. Reporting was selective, to highlight most common and/or most constructive responses in the light of key objectives. Where issues were most contested, this too was highlighted. |
| Stage 3 consultation (testing recommendations) | All consultants were provided with a copy of the draft report, recommendations and executive summary, and invited to comment further. Twenty-four (65%) provided responses. |
| Final report and recommendations | Stage 3 feedback was incorporated into the final report and recommendations. |
PART II: THE CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH

SECTION 3: RESEARCH QUALITY AND IMPACT

3.1 Significance of social work and social care services

3.1.1 Social work and social care services are a vital component of public services in the UK. They are of central importance in tackling current and future social and economic challenges, and at the heart of core policy agendas. Managing, resourcing, and providing social work and social care services effectively are key policy priorities. Generating high quality research to underpin these priorities is essential.

On framing its Research Strategy (2006) for social work and social care, the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC) highlighted that:

- Over 1.3 million people work in these services with up to £12 billion per annum of public funds spent on them;
- In 2003/4 adult care services alone were in contact with over 3 million people in England;
- Social work and social care services are essential for protecting people from harm, managing social tensions and interpersonal conflict; they are crucial to developing, sustaining and supporting the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and stigmatised in society;
- Service providers and commissioners are publicly accountable for their effectiveness and cost effectiveness; when they go wrong the public is rightly concerned;
- The operation and effectiveness of social work and social care services are increasingly integral to those of other services, including health, education, criminal justice and neighbourhood renewal;
- Social care makes a very substantial contribution to economic prosperity in the UK, directly through impact on employment and productivity, and indirectly through management of social and welfare problems.

3.1.2 Social work and social care services are in the front line for addressing many of the 21st century challenges highlighted by the ESRC:

- Health and wellbeing: both at individual and community levels, social work and social care policies and practice are designed to promote health and wellbeing, particularly of those most disadvantaged through health inequalities and their social antecedents.
- Population dynamics and diversity: social work and social care services must respond to changing population demographics, in particular to meet the needs of an ageing and increasingly multi-cultural society, and to promote inclusion.
- Security, conflict and justice: social work and social care services have key roles in ensuring the safety and security of individuals in their families and communities, in problem solving to address interpersonal conflict, as well as conflict between social groups; at their core lies a commitment to social justice, promoting the rights of all, including the most vulnerable and powerless.
- Understanding individual behaviour: much social work and social care practice is directed to understanding the relational and social structural contexts in which individual behaviour takes place, changing behaviour when it falls short
of safe or acceptable standards, and ameliorating the conditions that produce it.

- **New technology innovation and skills**: ‘modernisation’ of social work and social care services and new public management regimes have brought major opportunities and imperatives for innovative use of new technologies in service provision; these also throw up challenges for professionalism and deployment of professional skills, for confidentiality and communication of information, and for effectiveness of policies and practice.

- **Environment, energy and resilience**: social work and social care work at the cutting edge between individuals and their environment, with the twin purposes of maximizing resilience for living within social and physical environments, and improving environments to foster welfare and wellbeing.

- **Global and economic performance and management**: social work and social care make direct contributions to enabling citizens to be economically and socially productive; they also have significant preventive functions, reducing costs to the public purse of non-productivity, reduced wellbeing and social exclusion.

3.1.3 Many of the most pressing social, political and economic priorities in the UK, along with their associated policy drivers, are ones to which social work and social care have a central contribution to make. The following examples are illustrative:

- The Social Justice Policy Group Report (2006) drew a bleak picture of ‘Breakdown Britain’. It highlighted Britain’s sorry performance in almost every international league table of wellbeing, with unparalleled rates of poverty (especially for children), and family breakdown, addiction and education failure among the key pathways into poverty. Mental ill-health, alcohol and substance misuse rates among Britain’s youth are rising, and teenage pregnancy rates are among the worst in Europe. The English Government, for example, has responded to these ills by introducing a raft of policies, including the Green Papers: *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) and *Youth Matters* (HM Government, 2005), and the 10 year *Children’s Plan* (DCSF, 2007). These place increasing emphasis on prevention and integration of service provision to improve welfare outcomes. Social work and social care services are key elements of this provision.

- Charles Leadbetter’s ‘*Personalisation through Participation*’ report for Demos (2004) ushered in a swathe of government policy developments across the UK promoting ‘personalisation’: offering ‘choice’ to public service users over which services they used and how, and aiming to stimulate consumer-led demand for quality. Service users increasingly participate (or are encouraged to participate) in all aspects of health and social care delivery, planning and professional training. In England, for example, personalisation is now a central plank of the Green Paper ‘*Adult Social Care, Shaping the Future of Care Together*’:

> **Your care and support will be designed and delivered around your individual needs.** As part of your care and support plan, you will have much greater choice over how and where you receive support, and the possibility of controlling your own budget wherever appropriate. (HM Government, 2009, p.10)

For social work and social care services where, along with participation, both safeguarding and ensuring wellbeing are core business, the challenges of personalisation are to the fore. They involve complex decision making about...
the balance of rights, responsibilities, best interests and risk, as well as management of budgets and services within a mixed economy of care, and public accountability for cost-effective expenditure of taxpayers’ money.

- The same Green Paper estimates that, with life expectancy increasing, by 2026 in England there will be 1.7 million more adults who need care and support; a 65-year-old can currently expect to need care costing on average £30,000 during retirement; and rising expectations mean that ‘customers’ will expect more choice and control over their services. At the same time:

Too often our existing system makes poor use of its limited resources. Ever-increasing pressures on local authorities mean that resources are increasingly used to offer care and support when people’s needs are highest. Money could often be better invested in prevention, rehabilitation and keeping people active and healthy. Fundamental reform of the system offers the opportunity to make better use of resources, to keep people independent and well for longer. If the system fails to pick people up early enough, both the NHS and care and support bear the costs. (HM Government, 2009, p.9)

The Green Paper proposes a new National Care Service for England. Social care services, through joined up work with health, housing and the disability benefits system, will lie at the heart of services intended to meet the care needs and choices of the adult population. Their effectiveness will be the key to minimization of further, and greater, costs to the public purse where prevention and welfare promotion have failed.

3.2 Contribution and impact of high quality and interdisciplinary social work and social care research

3.2.1 As argued by way of introduction (1.2.2), in a time of economic stringency the case for investment in high quality social work and social care research rests significantly on its potential for impact on policy and practice. This is not to say that social work and social care research cannot, or should not, have intrinsic value in contributing to knowledge generation in itself, nor that the production of research should be tied inextricably to the policy drivers of the moment. Arguably, indeed, one key facet of excellent applied research is its capacity not merely to legitimate policy and practice, but to expose them to rigorous critical scrutiny. Likewise, the relevance and impact of social work and social care research need not, nor should they, be restricted to the local or national contexts of UK policy and practice. High quality research (whether empirical, directly comparative or review based) can examine how far understandings of social care problems, models of intervention and their effectiveness are context-specific or transferable. The direction of engagement and impact can most fruitfully be mutual, with research evidence as much encouraging UK policy makers and practitioners to critique and innovate in their own spheres as to offer models of good practice elsewhere. A case in point for purposes of this report is the research review component of the ESRC audit of baseline research resources in social work (2008a). It revealed how divergent are approaches to research training in UK and North American social work education. In the latter, social work is firmly rooted in social sciences with strongest emphasis on quantitative research; in the UK there is less emphasis on research training at all, the emphasis where it exists is on qualitative and participative approaches.

3.2.2 Orme and Briar-Lawson (forthcoming), discussing the generation of theory and knowledge about social problems and social policy, sum up well many of the debates about the nature, status and potential contribution of social work and cognate
research to social policy and practice development. These debates are not rehearsed in full here (see for example Williams et. al., 1999; Furlong and Oancea, 2005; Nutley et. al., 2007; Shaw and Norton, 2007). But the following overview synthesizes key points emerging and provides brief examples, to outline how interdisciplinary social work and social care research can, and should, inform policy and practice.

### 3.3 Combining ‘research for knowledge’ and ‘research for use’:

3.3.1 More helpful than the polarization between applied (or practice/policy oriented) and pure (or basic/explanatory) research is recognition that ‘research inspired by considerations of use’ and ‘research seeking fundamental knowledge’ may be distinguished from each other but are also compatible (Shaw and Norton, 2007). In the case of social work and social care research, maximizing synergies between these two types of research purpose, and between the distinct contributions of different disciplines, allows us both to generate explanatory knowledges about social problems and to examine how these knowledges can best be put to use in policy and practice.

3.3.2 To illustrate, an example might be the challenges for care policy and practice presented by an ageing population. Sociology, demography, psychology, anthropology and epidemiology, among others, can help us to understand patterns of needs, etiology, and outcomes for older people over time. Politics and social policy can help us to understand how older people are located in civil society, as citizens, participants, and users/consumers of services, as well as how policies can be configured to meet their needs in contemporary political and resource climates. Social work research, for its part, should be well placed to capture the relationship between older people and their social, familial and community contexts, as well as how they engage with services and experience the impacts of policy, practice and service provision. Economics (or econometrics) can enable us to identify the most cost effective ways of providing services, taking into consideration both costs and benefits, predictable and unpredictable.

3.3.3 Taken together, either through interdisciplinary research or multi-/cross-discipline research collaboration or synthesis, these distinctive contributions can provide the knowledge base for informed policy and practice. To use the typology developed by Williams et. al. (1999), research insights combined in this way can allow us to address at all analytic levels: the contextual dynamics of social and economic change; the welfare subject; the social topography of enablement and constraint; and the contexts of policy formation and implementation.

### 3.4 Evaluation research for evidence based policy and practice:

3.4.1 Though by no means all social work and social care research is, or should be, evaluation research, the need for policy makers to address the major social issues and challenges (3.1) and to demonstrate effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, has created strong drivers towards evidence based policy and practice. This requires rigorous research to scrutiny, in turn to inform further policy and funding decisions.

3.4.2 High quality social work and social care evaluation research demands conceptually sophisticated and methodologically rigorous and sensitive attention to outcomes. Outcomes need to be examined not just in the short term, but longitudinally, and not just at individual but at institutional, community and societal levels. Moreover, the complexity of social work and social care problems and interventions requires that evaluation research attends not just to inputs and outcomes, but to the full picture. Pawson and Tilley (1997) have argued persuasively
that attention must be given to the contexts and mechanisms of change, and to the processes and experiences of participants; these tell us not just whether something works, but in what situations, how and for whom. To do this (returning to the point made in 1.4.2) intervention and evaluation research also demand understanding of the aetiology and epidemiology of the problem at hand if their findings are to be fit for policy and practice purpose or use.

3.4.3 The example of the Integrated Children’s System (ICS) and its effectiveness for helping to ensure children’s safety provides a helpful illustration here. ICS has been designed and introduced to provide a conceptual framework, a method of practice, a business process and an accompanying electronic case record system, to support practitioners and managers in assessment, planning, intervention and review, for all children in need, including those in need of safeguarding from harm. The effectiveness of ICS has been contested, especially in wake of the Baby Peter case, where its capacity to integrate information from multiple sources, and its propensity to waylay practitioners from the field towards their computer screens, have been called into question. Assuming we can take as read the ‘evidence based’ nature of its conceptual framework (confirmed by the DCSF, 2007, to be ‘grounded in research evidence about children’s developmental needs and risks, parental capacity and environment’), evaluating the effectiveness of ICS requires a range of different and combined research approaches. Political, sociological, cultural, organisational, and social policy perspectives, for example, might be brought to the contexts of new public management, performance management, integrated services and public and professional concern with child safety, into which ICS was introduced. Epidemiological and social statistical research would help to establish the scale and pattern of risk requiring safeguarding, as well as patterns of reporting. Perspectives from the study of management and organizations, psychology and social work might be brought to the ways in which ICS has been implemented and associated change managed, within and across agencies. Both qualitative and quantitative research from developmental psychology, health, education, social work and others is needed to establish appropriate and measurable indicators of outcome, by which effectiveness for safeguarding may be judged over time. Rigorous multivariate analysis is required to assess how far outcomes can be attributed to ICS, compared across contexts (if possible, those using and not using the system) and evaluated for cost effectiveness.

Most important too, in order to understand how and why ICS does or does not achieve desired outcomes, we need to understand how the system plays out in practice, how practitioners use or ‘misuse’ it, how it impacts upon the practitioner relationship with children and families, how it enables or disables professionals from working together, and how it is experienced by all key participants. High quality social work research attends to micro level interpersonal relationships in their wider social, organisational, cultural and policy contexts. Without this understanding of how those involved in ICS do or do not make the system work, through different mechanisms and in different contexts, messages for effectiveness will not be transferable, and effectiveness itself compromised.

3.5 Interstitial research

3.5.1 The ICS example brings into focus a broader point to be made about the value of social work and social care research for impact on policy and practice. Butler and Pugh (2004, p.67) have highlighted the ‘interstitial’ nature of the social work profession, working between the public and private, and the necessity for social work research to reflect this. The authors were referring distinctly to social work. But a
wider point can be made about the contribution of social work in combination with cognate disciplines to social work and social care research. In order to inform policy and practice, this research needs to be sited at several key interstices – not only that between public and private, but those between the individual and the social, policy and practice, social work, social care and other professional areas. Arguably, social work research is well placed to investigate these interstices, since they lie at the heart of social work itself. Arguably too, however, the same interstices should be central to the field of social care (both its policies and its practice), and should be much more fully examined in social care research than they have been hitherto. High quality social work and social care research can bring together knowledges and research skills from a wide range of cognate disciplines, to scrutinise these interstices. In doing so, it can address all four analytical levels for welfare research outlined by Williams et al. (1999, see above 3.3.3).

3.5.2 Parton and O’Byrne (2000) and Nutley et al. (2003, 2007), for example, draw attention to the many factors that influence not only the transfer of research into policy, but of policy into practice. Thus, continuing first with the ICS example, research on its effectiveness can tell us how the policy imperatives to use electronic case records are mediated within situated, localised agency contexts, how individual practitioners find spaces for discretionary implementation of the system, and how these may impact on effectiveness (e.g. Peckover et al., 2009). Another example is how research on the use of direct payments with adult and older service users can tell us how and why individuals in different social and individual circumstances, respond differently to the opportunity for control over their own budgets. Such research can also provide lessons for the way service innovation is presented and negotiated (e.g. Glendinning et al., 2008).

3.5.3 On the same theme, there is already some good evidence to how social work and social care research can work productively at the interstices between their own and related policy and practice domains. This is increasingly the case as services become more integrated. The obvious examples here are in health and education, where, for instance, social work research can inform effective strategies for improving education outcomes for care leavers (e.g. Stein and Wade, 2000), or for hospital discharge (e.g. Bywaters, 2008), or more broadly, it can address the care implications of health inequalities (e.g. McLeod and Bywaters, 2000). The same can, and should, apply to related fields such as housing, criminal justice and community development, or to bringing social work research insights about team work, (inter)professional practice and professional culture into the fields of (inter)organisational management and change.

3.6 Multi-modal and question led research

3.6.1 As Pawson et al. (2003) have discussed, social care is informed by a range of knowledges: policy and political, organisational, about and from services users and practitioners, and empirically about the quality, impact and effectiveness of services. Debates about the research approaches and methodologies best suited to substantiate and test these knowledges echo far wider debates in the social sciences (Bryman, 1992; Shaw, 2003; Trinder and Reynolds, 2003). In the light of the characterisation and case made above for high quality social work and social care research, the argument in favour of drawing on diverse research methodologies, and eschewing rigid adherence to 'knowledge hierarchies', seems compelling (Popay and Roen 2003). This is not an argument for compromise of research quality or standards. Social work and social care (like all social science) research is at its best when it deploys to highest standards the methods best fit for purpose to examine the research question at hand.
3.6.2 Thus excellence in quantitative methods is required for social work and social care research examining patterns and outcomes of care problems, policy programmes and services, and testing their effectiveness, costs and benefits. This suggests significant scope, for example, for sophisticated use of existing longitudinal datasets. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) for example could inform our approach to meeting the care needs of older people, through understanding of the processes of ageing, the social, economic and health circumstances of older people, their social networks, support and participation, and their changing in household, family and community structures. More inclusion than currently exists of social work and social care ‘questions’ in these datasets would enable large scale and longitudinal investigation of older people’s access to services and to their impact. All of these data could also provide scope for comparative analysis, between sectors, and even between care and welfare regimes.

Similar quantitative research rigour can usefully be applied to analysis of social work and social care administrative data. This can allow scrutiny of the organisation of care, patterns of service provision and effectiveness over time. Excellent examples to date have been the work of Gibbens et. al. (1995a,b) on the operation of the child protection system and outcomes for registered children, and more recently Biehal et.al.(2010) and Sinclair et. al. (2005) on outcomes for fostered or adopted children.

There are sound arguments for experimental or quasi-experimental testing of programme, service and practice effectiveness. Given the complexity of social work and social care problems and interventions, as well as ethical standards, randomized controlled trials are relatively rarely possible in this field. However, a variety of quasi-experimental approaches can be taken – including pre-test/post-test or non-equivalent group designs – and, where sample sizes allow, multivariate analysis to identify relationships between interventions and their outcomes.

3.6.3 No less significant a contribution to social work and social care can come from high quality qualitative research. In the social work discipline in particular, this point needs little emphasis since it is currently the mainstay and has strong adherents. Since, as proposed in 3.2 -3.5 above, social work and social care research is to capture lived experience of users and practitioners (from their own as well as others’ perspectives), how policies and practice are played out in real contexts, and not just whether but how and where interventions bring about change, robust and diverse qualitative research can help answer these questions. Additionally, longitudinal qualitative research can examine how care needs and/or outcomes change over time – the work of Glendinning and colleagues (ongoing), on changing choice and control over the life course for adults with support needs, is a good example.

The point to emphasize with respect to qualitative, as to quantitative, research, is quality and rigour. While generic standards across the full range of qualitative methodologies may not be achievable (Dixon-Woods et. al., 2004), qualitative social work and social care research can certainly benefit from recent efforts to establish some common quality criteria (Popay and Roen 2003; Boaz and Ashby, 2003; Spencer et.al., 2003). Though many UK examples of excellent qualitative research in social work and social care exist (including many of studies cited in preceding sections), the scope for diversification and development of quantitative methods is also clear and will be discussed in sections 4 and 5.

3.6.4 Most important too, there are compelling cases both for use of mixed methods and for review or synthesis of diverse research approaches, to explore social work and social care problems, policies and practice. There are of course many ways in
which methods may usefully be combined – to triangulate, complement, to validate, and/or contextualise findings, as well as to test and/or to generate explanation. They may combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies, or distinct approaches within each genre. Again there are some fine examples already in social work and social care research. Shaw et. al. (2009) combined quantitative analysis of 10,000 case records with focus groups and interviews of children, family members and social workers, to examine critically the operation of the ICS system. McAuley et. al. (2006) brought a multidisciplinary approach to examining support for young families under stress, gathering in-depth interview data to validate standardized measures of need and outcome. Both the ESRC audit of baseline resources (2008a) and the DH review of the new social work degree (Orme et. al. 2009) set qualitative enquiry with social work educators in the context of wider educator surveys to provide thoroughgoing and critical analysis of the current professional education.

Also noteworthy are the contributions and impact either of programmes of research or research reviews and syntheses, which bring together diverse research approaches, findings and conceptualisations to explore common research questions. Examples of the former have been the series of Department of Health ‘Messages from Research’ programmes, which have successively and directly informed policy and practice. The most recent (co-commissioned with the DCSF) brings together 14 studies, from several disciplines including economics, to explore the costs and effectiveness of services for children in need (Beecham and Sinclair, 2009). Meanwhile notable examples of the use of systematic and research reviews have been those commissioned by SCIE to appraise and synthesise the research evidence base on range of social work and social care issues, to underpin guidance for best practice. With these has come the introduction into this research field of review methodologies designed to incorporate qualitative and quantitative studies (see Sharland and Taylor, 2006). Meanwhile, Gould and Kendall (2007), reviewing dementia care in order to produce guidelines for NICE and SCIE, have demonstrated the value of drawing together research from diverse methodological traditions and disciplines when exploring problems that lie at the interface between professional fields.

3.6.4 In conclusion, the case in favour of high quality social work and social care research is powerful, both for its contribution to knowledge and its impact on policy and practice. There already exists evidence to demonstrate that such work can be done, often (though invariably) through collaboration or synthesis across disciplines, and that it can be influential. But, as set out in introduction to this report (1.3) there is also clear recognition that UK social work and social care research currently fall significantly short of their potential for quality and impact. The two sections to follow report on consultant feedback to the strategic adviser initiative, both on current strengths and weaknesses of the research base, and substantive and methodological themes for development.
3.7 Summary of key findings

A i) RESEARCH QUALITY AND IMPACT

Social work and social care services
- Central to tackling social and economic challenges / priority policy concerns;
- Increasingly integrated with/impacting on related professional areas (e.g. health, education);
- Have direct impact on economic wellbeing and reduce costs of welfare failure;
- Publicly accountable for effectiveness and cost effectiveness.

High quality and interdisciplinary social work and social care research
- High impact potential for policy and practice – informing and evaluate effectiveness;
- Can combine disciplinary knowledges/skills to maximize quality, range and impact;
At its best, it can and should involve:

‘Research for knowledge’ and ‘research for use’
- Explanatory knowledges about social problems, and how these knowledges can most effectively be used in policy/practice;
- Eg. Draw on social work and cognate disciplines to examine patterns, etiology and change in needs and outcomes for older people; their participation in, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of care/welfare services.

Evaluation research for evidence based policy and practice
- Address complexity of social care problems, programmes, interventions;
- Evaluate what works, in what situations, through what mechanisms;
- Eg. Examining effectiveness integrated children’s system (ICS), in (inter)organisational and new public management contexts; negotiation between system requirements and professional discretion; impact on micro-level interactions; on measurable outcomes for child welfare/safeguarding.

Interstitial research
- Draw on social work and cognate research knowledges/skills, to address swsc questions at interstices between: public/private; individual/social; policy/practice; swsc/related professional areas; it must speak to practice, in context;
- Eg. scrutinise how/why direct payments are negotiated/chosen/rejected; how swsc research on outcomes for care leavers informs education and health;

Multi-modal and question led research
- Draw on a wide range of methods -quantitative, qualitative and mixed as appropriate to specific research/policy/practice questions – rigour is key includes:
  - Quantitative and longitudinal analysis of large datasets and administrative data for social care needs, patterns, outcomes, change;
  - Quasi experimental and comparative examination of effectiveness;
  - Diverse, rigorous qualitative analysis of social care processes, experience of needs and change;
  - Mixed methods (within research projects or programmes) and inclusive research review to complement, extend and validate contribution of each.

See Recommendation: 1
SECTION 4: STRENGTHS AND DEFICITS OF THE RESEARCH BASE

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 As discussed (1.3.2), there is no formal or comprehensive mechanism for assessing the range or quality of the current social work and social care research base. Even social work, a distinct RAE unit of assessment, was reported by RAE 2008 sub-panel 40 in combination with social policy and criminology. At the same time, outputs crossing social work and other disciplinary boundaries may well have been submitted other panels, notably nursing and allied health. Current work (by SCIE and JUCSWEC) to disaggregate findings for social work is under way but not complete.

4.1.2 What we do know is that social work does not appear to be taking full advantage of the various opportunities offered by the ESRC for research training, development and research awards. For postgraduate training, social work currently has 41 quota studentships (at 10 outlets) all of them awarded by 2008/9. However for all competitive schemes the social work application rates are low. Success rates, though on a par with other disciplines in relative terms (ESRC 2007a, 2008d, 2009 personal communication), in absolute terms are nonetheless low. In 2009, for example, there were just 11 social work applications for the studentship open competition, with 2 successes (18% success rate compared with a 16.7% social science average). For CASE awards, which in principle should lend themselves well to social work, in 2008 there were just 5 social work applications (well below the median), with 1 success. None of the 4 social work applications for project linked studentships was successful in 2008, and there were no social work applications for interdisciplinary awards, where for example Medical Research Council co-funding for research on the social/health care interface might be especially relevant.

The picture is no better for ESRC fellowships. Between 1st January and 4th August 2009, there was just 1 (unsuccessful) social work application for a post-doctoral fellowship. By way of comparison, sociology, with 14 applications and social policy with 3 had no more success, but psychology gained 3 awards out of 14 applications, and anthropology 5 out of 8. Until the current year, the same story has been true of research grant applications. Across the range of ESRC grant schemes in 2007-8, for example, the 27% social work success rate was very respectable by comparison with other disciplines. But in absolute terms there were just 11 applications in total, with 3 awarded. The figures from 2008-9, however, are an exception, for reasons it is not easy to explain. The absolute number of applications has increased slightly to 17, but disappointingly none of them successful. Whether or not something should be made of this shift is unclear, since the overriding feature is that numbers are too low to draw reliable inferences.

5 Data are not yet available for the new mid-career fellowship scheme, through which experienced practitioners could be eligible to undertake doctoral research, or those with doctorates to do further research.

6 The figures from 2008-9, however, are an exception, for reasons it is not easy to explain. The absolute number of applications has increased slightly to 17, but disappointingly none of them successful. Meanwhile relatively few proposals from cognate disciplines appear to address social care topics, though this may not always be visible due to the absence of social care as a category from data management systems.

4 There may well be under-representation of social work in these data. Postgraduate research students training jointly across disciplines, such as social work and social policy, may be registered under the latter, more established discipline.

5 Data are not yet available for the new mid-career fellowship scheme, through which experienced practitioners could be eligible to undertake doctoral research, or those with doctorates to do further research.

6 The figures from 2008-9, however, are an exception, for reasons it is not easy to explain. The absolute number of applications has increased slightly to 17, but disappointingly none of them successful. Whether or not something should be made of this shift is unclear, since the overriding feature is that numbers are too low to draw reliable inferences.
4.1.3 The wider picture may be more encouraging than ESRC data suggest. The RAE 2008 panel overview report (2009) drew attention to the increasing methodological range and sophistication of social work research, along with the range of disciplinary models drawn upon. Endorsing the evidence for examples of high quality research provided in section 3, this suggests signs of achievement against several of the quality benchmarks for social work research proposed by Shaw (2007). However, as one consultant put it:

*We can not make our mark as an emergent discipline without some kind of focussing of our efforts. We need some intellectual momentum behind our ambitions that is not just tied to the concerns of the moment or the present configuration of stakeholder interests.*

4.1.4 In these contexts, all consultants to the strategic adviser initiative were invited to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of existing social work and social care research. The difficulty of distinguishing what constitutes social care research presented challenges. Most respondents effectively dealt with this by distinguishing between work produced by social work academics, and contributions to the social care field made by others. Their comments are therefore reported that way, though implications for the extent of and potential for interdisciplinarity are also clearly apparent.

Overall there was a readiness to acknowledge weaknesses in the research base. But there was keenness to avoid a deficit-led approach, to emphasise strengths as well as weaknesses, and the potential to capitalise further on the former. These strengths and weaknesses can be considered in the light of the case for social work and social care research set out in section 3, especially the characteristics and impact that might, and should be, aspired to (3.2 – 3.6).

4.2 Substantive strengths and deficits

4.2.1 Practice nearness

Most social work respondents, and some cognate discipline and research funder representatives, were clear that a distinctive strength in social work research is ‘practice nearness’. This is not necessarily used to mean that research explores practice directly; it refers also to its connectedness to, relevance for and communicability to practice, and its commitment to practice improvement:

*A lot of the strengths are the converse of those that other disciplines bring really. In that the researchers do tend to be from the profession, most of us came that practice route before recruitment into academia, so often it’s very action oriented research, I think it informs practice very quickly and can be very participatory and inclusive of practitioners in how research is designed and validated and then disseminated.* (Social work consultant)

*What social work research does that others don’t is understanding practice on the ground, appreciation of the face to face aspects of delivery of service, and capacity to write meaningfully to practitioners.* (Research funder)

Often too, ‘practice nearness’ is aligned with a social work value base, orientation towards social justice, inclusivity and participation, and a focus on relations of power between professionals and services users, and vulnerable or marginalised groups. These preoccupations are reflected in the nature of research questions asked and processes of finding out. As one consultant put it:
Reflexive social work research uses an explicit understanding of social justice values. It seeks to contribute to more equitable social arrangements, and seeks to be empowering and participatory. It aims to contribute to relevant social changes - based on a critical analysis of the operation of power in professional practice and social relations. (Social work consultant)

4.2.2 Interstitial focus

At its best, social work and social care research can and does combine critical interstitial focus (as outlined in 3.5) on process and outcome, structural and personal change, interface between public and private, policy and practice. It can and sometimes does, focus on micro-level interaction, meso and macro level contexts, addressing the complexities of social work and social care practice with direct potential for impact:

There are some very good examples. Look at all the work on outcomes of child care and children’s services. Not necessarily each piece of work on its own, in some cases you have to look at the whole picture. But the really good stuff about leaving care, for example, tells us what actually happens to young people when they’re out there, whether they actually get a job, if not why not, what happens to housing, to health, to relationships, drugs, prostitution. But I think because it’s social work, they tend to look at what happens from the inside as well as the outside, the psychosocial side I suppose, and in a way that lets young people speak for themselves. And they look at what processes are actually going on as well. What happens when you’re on your own out there? How does it work when you’re trying to get a job or somewhere to live? On the policy side we need to hear that, we’re not going to hear it from anywhere else. (Cognate consultant)

With respect to the interface between policy and practice, however, many consultants referred primarily to the contributions from social policy, and sometimes from economics, rather than social work. Several drew attention in particular to the work of relatively few high profile centres of excellence in social policy research, including those now ‘intramural members’ of the NIHR School of Social Care Research (SSCR):

PSSRU and now the new School, of course they’ve made a phenomenal contribution. What they do is tell us about how social care is shaped in policy contexts or should be. How can we develop policies to reduce social care needs, for example? What about the relationship between commissioning and delivery, how do we get that right? How can we provide more choice, empower people and safeguard them? How can we keep social care users in paid work? How much is it going to cost? Those are the sorts of questions they ask, and they need asking. In social work we look at what it means at the front end, what’s it like in there, on the ground, in the lives people live. If we do a better job of joining up the dots, we’d be doing well.

However, social policy was also criticised by social work, for insufficient engagement with the realities and complexities of practice:

Social work practice can be colonised by other disciplines with little acknowledgment of the culture of practice - as happened with the introduction of care management on the advice of social policy researchers with little or no consultation with social work. (Social work consultant)
The converse is also very much the case. Social work research can be seen by other cognate disciplines as insular, needing to engage more critically with ‘the bigger picture’ – policy, public and political environments, as well as with empirical and conceptual research from relevant disciplines:

*If you stick with the practice based research you’re always going to be operating in a pretty narrow area aren’t you? And you’re always going to be struggling to have a take on context that’s not just superficial, it’s what drives the way in which people practise and how people respond to that practice seems to me ... You have to look at the wider context in which things are placed.* (Cognate consultant)

*It’s not just how you get other disciplines interested in the subject matter of social care. But it’s also how do you get social workers to engage with other research that’s going on, which is arguably relevant to what they’re interested in and I’m not sure how much of that strong cross goes on. So how far is social work, people strongly working in child protection for example, looking to the family policy work to inform their research?* (Cognate consultant)

A few social work consultants made the same point, as the following illustrates:

*Social work research often betrays an absence of understanding of the way in which governments operate and how decisions get made, therefore the point in the process at which you can be influential in decisions being made. It’s about understanding the way that processes happen and how ideas get translated into policies and how policies are attempted to be turned into practice. It’s about how people who are looking to advocate on behalf of particular groups or users can be more effective in making sure people get things to which they’re entitled. If you don't know the basics of how the system is working, you don't know how effective you can be. I think it's not just social policy but public policy.* (Social work consultant)

### 4.2.3 Integration of disciplinary perspectives

Beyond the question of ‘addressing the policy picture’, consultants from cognate disciplines and social work reflected more widely on the extent to which social work research in particular integrates broader disciplinary perspectives. There were good examples provided (most less obviously the product of active collaboration between disciplines than of social work ‘reaching out’ to incorporate research findings, concepts and insights from elsewhere). These examples included: the use of theories of attachment, identity, development and social networks in social work research on looked after children and adoption; some use of standardized instruments from psychology and health to assess, for example, strengths and difficulties or psychological state as the outcomes of social work interventions; and use of criminal justice, health and policy research in work on adult mental health care.

On occasion, integrative research described was explicitly the product of active research collaboration:

*I'll give you an example of a piece of work we’ve done which is a series of outcome measurement tools for [ ] carers, psychometric instruments. This is the first time I’ve worked with a psychologist, a professor of psychology and health and social care and he’s been doing these kinds of things for years. But bringing together social work, social policy and [ ] carers and all of that psychological experience, has helped us develop these measures for the first time. So there’s a positive and negative outcomes of caring measure and a multidimensional assessment of caring activities measure. There’s been nothing like it to use until now.* (Cognate consultant)
Nonetheless several consultants from social work and elsewhere observed that, by comparison with North America, Australia and Europe, there is less cross-fertilisation in the UK between social sciences in this research area. There are numerous research questions in social care to which other applied and non-applied research disciplines could contribute, but in the main do not:

We need much more research knowledge use of theory from other disciplines: stress theory, family systems theory, social ecological theory of human development, risk and protective factors theory, group theory, community development theory, etc. And we need knowledge of current and past research in journals across cognate disciplines. The areas of possibility are numerous. Everything from new brain research to research on social exclusion or social capital. (Social work consultant)

We need collaborative research with social work, health, education, and sociology, anthropology, psychology. Using mixed methodologies with quantitative and qualitative data, including standardized instruments with established validity and reliability, and willingness to include bio-markers, e.g. stress (cortisol). We need to examine in depth the social care systems of vulnerable adults and children, as they enter care, are in care, transition out of care into the community, and re-enter care, or switch between care settings. This is central social work responsibility. It needs in-depth complex examination of psycho social, economic and race and poverty characteristics, which contribute to child abuse and neglect and to serious mental illness, causing entry into care, and which manifest in the care settings. (Social work consultant)

4.2.4 Contribution to other research, policy and practice fields

As recognised by the RAE (2009, p.5) social work research already makes distinctive contributions to other fields, increasingly so with the integration of services. Among examples given by consultants were: work on health and social inequalities of care leavers, enhancing the efficiency and quality of hospital admissions and discharges, and effectiveness of parenting programmes for improving the health of teenage parents and their children. Social work researchers have also shown themselves well placed to investigate multidisciplinary or integrated services and teams, (inter)professional education and knowledge transfer. Research impact can spread well beyond the immediate sphere of social work services. Again, however, there is more potential than is realized for social work research expertise on professional relationships, systems and change to be applied to other domains. Some of the more impressive examples cited came from North America, rather than the UK. One consultant described some USA research on the role of welfare to work personal advisors as follows:

What you had was the social workers making the connections and saying, “There’s a similar thing going on here, this is an issue about professional relationships.” So it was the social workers who were carrying out the research and looking at what was happening in these welfare to work programmes and so on. It struck me that that was nice, it was social work coming out and saying “There’s another area that we’re good and we know about. We should look at this; we should be the people understanding this.” So it’s another example I suppose of the way in which social work could use the expertise and the focus that they’ve got, but taking that to other areas. (Cognate consultant)
4.2.5 Critical and theoretical interrogation

Some respondents from social work and cognate disciplines reflected on the need for more robust linkage between theory and research, and between these two and policy and practice. In part this concerned a perceived lack of explanatory sophistication, particularly that research findings were often described rather than explained, or explained but in an unsophisticated way:

For instance, if you really want to understand not just if something works but why, it helps to have some theory of change, some concept of the nature of the problem and some idea of how it shifts. I’m not saying your research should necessarily be theory driven, though it can be. But I think we’re not so good at reaching beneath what we see and conceptualising it. (Social work consultant)

Some respondents argued that the obstacle here is not necessarily that researchers are incapable of such critique, but that since their research is often government funded, or they are otherwise indebted to their sponsors, they lack independent license for criticism, or indeed license to ask the questions they might prefer to ask. This can compromise both intellectual quality and critical impact:

We need to be able to rise to the challenge of being not just responsive to government policy agendas, but to critique them in order to critically inform policy initiatives and implementation. (Cognate consultant)

We do need to re-negotiate this relationship however. We can not continue with the current immature relationship whereby the tail is wagging the dog as far as I am concerned. It should not be tied to employer, regulator or government interests but should derive its status from its academic credentials. I despair when I see us trying to prove our utilitarian credentials to the point that is to the detriment of any claims we might make to intellectual and scientific potential. We need some intellectual momentum behind our ambitions for social work research that is not tied just to the concerns of the moment or the present policy configuration and stakeholder interest. (Social work consultant)

4.2.6 Scope, scale and comparative reach

The RAE 2008 subject panel report (2009) observed that the fragmented and often policy driven research funding base for social work research generates:

the accumulation of knowledge of short-term use, above the development and testing of material relevant to knowledge-base of the disciplines and to theoretical development and methodological innovation (RAE, 2009).

Several consultants reflected that much of the social work and social care research base – like its funding - is piecemeal, local and short term. Little of it too is comparative, within or beyond the UK contexts. So it is difficult to establish transferability of findings from one site to another, or over time, and international reach is often limited. This in turn reduces potential for research impact. It also, as one consultant observed, reduces potential to inspire students towards research:

Unlike other social science disciplines, social work is quite a way off the pace in terms of international, comparative work. That’s also what’s attractive to students in the 21st century. Much of ours continues to have a ‘parochial’ feel. (Social work consultant)
We need comparative approaches particularly to long term care policy, long term care funding and I wonder again where they are? ... There's a lot that's written at a policy level but it's actually looking at how those policies play out and beginning to compare outcomes across cultures and across different kinds of welfare regimes. (Cognate consultant)

4.2.7 Visibility

Several consultants from cognate disciplines commented on the lack of visibility to others of both social work and social care research, whatever their quality. The discipline and field need to announce their own ‘big questions’ to the wider research community, to stimulate their engagement:

Maybe one of the biggest things you've got to do is actually communicate to the rest of the world. You need to ensure the issues get written large you flag up the issues, you give big, big clear status to the questions and you at the same time try and persuade people who are in social work or social care and others who don't define themselves that way, to take them on board and get involved. (Cognate consultant)

4.3 Methodological strengths and deficits

4.3.1 Social science base

Discussion of the methodological quality of the social work and social care research base reflected quite strong distinctions made by consultants, between the contributions of social work and those of other disciplines. Hence it is difficult to avoid presenting their arguments in this polarised way, although at times distinctions became blurred, not least because there is no formally demarcated body of work that can be identified as social care research. As will be highlighted below, there was evidence of cross-disciplinary fertilisation of methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and strengths in both. However the overriding message from most consultants was that disciplines such as social policy, sociology, psychology, and demography are more firmly grounded than social work in social science methodologies. Health disciplines are correspondingly more grounded in scientific methods. Here the issue of interdisciplinarity or import of skills from cognate disciplines arises as it does when considering substantive strengths and weaknesses (4.2.4).

4.3.2 Qualitative, ‘sensitive’ and participatory research

Most social work academics and some other consultants recognised methodological strengths of social work research to be qualitative, sound ethics, inclusion of ‘hard to reach’ groups, action research and participative methods with service users and carers:

I wonder why it is that in social work we aren't better at celebrating what we actually do rather well. Shouldn't we be playing to our (qualitative) strengths? We have skilled, effective social work researchers who communicate and work with ‘hard to reach’ individuals and groups. We are good at dealing with sensitive issues and tricky subjects.... Similarly, one of the greatest changes in the training and education of social work and social care professionals has been understanding how much must be learned from the people who use services. This same principle should be applied to the design and delivery of research, with an emphasis placed on participatory and action research led by service users. (Social work consultant)
There are also notable exemplars where qualitative approaches and skills from cognate disciplines have been ‘imported’ to social work research. Examples given included: ethnographic participant observation and use of narrative methods and thematic documentary analysis, brought from anthropology, sociology, history or cultural studies:

*I can think of one example that I quote repeatedly which was tremendously helpful it’s a bit of work from an ethnographer, almost an ethnography of sitting with social workers, about direct payment and it was a hugely insightful piece of work.* (Cognate consultant)

*There isn’t as much documentary analysis as we could so with. But I can think of some examples of some fantastic narrative analyses of exchanges between professionals at case conference, taking apart what was said and showing up the nuances that lie between the lines and showing how stories unfold and decisions end up getting made.* (Social work consultant)

Nonetheless there was criticism, both from social work and from cognate disciplines, of the relatively narrow repertoire of qualitative (especially innovative qualitative) methods deployed, with relatively little use of the approaches mentioned above, or of visual methods or discourse analysis:

*The problem is with people doing qualitative research not by choice but because it’s the only thing they feel safe in. And that’s a disservice to good qualitative research because people are doing it for the wrong reasons. You do need good qualitative work just as we do good quantitative work. That means developing confidence and the repertoire of qualitative skills too, and being prepared to learn new ones, be innovative. I’m talking about using visual approaches for example, or autobiographical and biographical narrative methods. I’m also very keen on qualitative longitudinal qualitative work that looks at how processes and subjective experiences change over time in response to life experience, not instead of but alongside ‘hard’ outcomes.* (Cognate consultant)

*Ethnographies of practice, using participant observation, mobile research methods, drawing on psycho-social theory and methods - concepts such as transference and counter-transference, projective identification, containment, to make sense of social work/service user encounters.* (Social work consultant)

There is also too little qualitative examination of change over time, in social care problems experienced, service responses, and outcomes.

4.3.3 **Quantitative research**

The RAE 2008 confirmed that:

*Quantitative research in social work is small in volume but of high quality. This is an area which would benefit from continued investment and development (RAE, 2009, p.11).*

Consultants to this initiative cited a range of exemplars where quantitative methods have been used effectively and well in social work research, either where undertaken by social work researchers alone or, more commonly, in collaboration with others. Among them were: quantitative analysis of prevalence of abuse; use of birth cohort studies to examine child care outcomes; use of child protection registers to trace protection outcomes; use of standardised instruments to assess attachment or...
needs; large scale programme evaluations such as Sure Start; quasi-experimental comparisons of treatment outcomes; and analyses of cost effectiveness of children’s social care, or hospital, residential or community based services:

It’s been ignored much too long. But there’s now been some very good social work, social care and economic analysis of practice and policy, e.g. on child care costs. We’re also beginning to get much better statistical analyses relating to risk and outcomes of risk. It’s a very important area and we could see major progress here. (Social work consultant)

Comparative studies of the sort of the cross-national comparison of parenting programmes with relevance for social work (Ghate). That study is genuinely relevant to what social workers do and can realistically do. It has an economic component, uses research literature from many professional disciplines, it is international in scope and incorporates experimental methods including randomized controlled trials, or at least controlled trials. (Social work consultant)

However, most consultants agreed that good examples are few and far between. There is relatively little of the following (most of which, of course, could be combined with qualitative approaches):

- use of large-scale survey methods (cross sectional or longitudinal);
- input into or use of existing large datasets or administrative data (cross sectional or longitudinal);
- cross-national or cross-context comparison;
- use of experimental or quasi-experimental design;
- robust evaluation, measurement or analysis of outcomes;
- economic analysis of cost benefits or cost effectiveness.

Consultants from both social work and cognate disciplines emphasised that these gaps need redressing. They seriously diminish the quality and utility of much research to examine outcomes over time, evaluate effectiveness of policies, programmes or services, or to establish representativeness of findings. The following quotes give the flavour of responses, fleshing out the deficits listed above:

We need to diversify to experimental methods to test the effectiveness of interventions, particularly therapeutic interventions, with individuals and families, in order to support the profession in the challenges that it faces in justifying public expenditure on social work and social care services and building up professional credibility and confidence. We also need more rigorous studies on the prevalence and correlates of social problems by utilising methods more familiar in public health and epidemiology, such as longitudinal cohort studies and evaluation of complex programmes of intervention. (Social work consultant)

There’s quite a lot of research in social care that looks at an initiative that’s been tried in a care home or something which could have legs and merit and people like it. But there tends for a whole host of reasons to be much less of really robust evaluation in this area, really understanding what works, rather than things that look promising to draw a conclusion that isn’t there. (Research funder)

We need to develop much better conceptualisation and operationalisation of outcome measures for social work and social care users. There are continuing issues and debates about how the effectiveness of social work and social care services are measured. In particular there is the need for more sophistication in how outcomes
are measured, especially in relation to the complexity of interventions and use of services over time. (Social work consultant)

I don't think we're very strong on cost analysis of why services cost what they do but also the perverse outcomes of some services, the unintended consequences of some services which again become even more costly. I don't think we've weighed that up particularly well at all. If people make perverse decisions then you get unintended consequences of very well intended policies that cost you a lot of money. It's like that with the personalisation and individualisation agenda. Often people don't do the best for themselves because they cannot work the system well enough. Further down the line that can lead to more negative outcomes like more people die too soon or it ends up costing the system a lot more money because more remedial action is required. Really sound cost analysis needs to look at the whole picture. Simple it isn't. (Social work consultant)

One particular deficit highlighted is the lack of social care input into, and the under-use of, large and longitudinal datasets (many of them supported through the ESRC National Strategy for Data Resources (ESRC, 2007b)). Examples mentioned include: Birth Cohort Studies, the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, the Youth Cohort Study, and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. There are also vast amounts of service data accumulating – on, for example, looked after children and children in need, or vulnerable adults and residential care provision. These are collected for administrative, performance and quality assurance purposes in the field, but not mined for research.

Longitudinal research (qualitative and quantitative) is a priority for developing the knowledge base of problem development, aetiology, need for intervention, effectiveness of interventions, natural recovery/informal coping etc. Current longitudinal databases (e.g. UKHLS, ALSPAC, YCS, LSYPE) identify demographics, risk factors etc but do not gather data on need - this is assumed from demographics, characteristics such as disability and risk factors etc. (Social work consultant)

There's not enough link up between people with a social care interest and longitudinal studies that are going on at the moment, like the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. We've looked at the Household Panel Survey in terms of informal care but I don't think that there have been any other social care questions included in the survey. (Cognate consultant)

Another concern especially highlighted by some, was the minimal use in social work and social care research of experimental or quasi-experimental methods. These are often ethically and practically difficult to achieve in this field, and (unlike in health) funding for experimental intervention itself, let alone evaluation, is not commonly available. However, there are missed opportunities, especially for naturally occurring experiments, or manipulations of intervention sequence.

Also emphasised were the lack of use complex methods, such as multi-level or structural equation modelling used, and the relative absence of comparative research methods. These deficits, and the need to redress them, were as much highlighted by members of the social work academy as they were by cognate disciplines:

Comparative approaches particularly to long term care policy, long term care funding…. There's a lot of stuff that's written at a policy level. But it's actually looking at how those policies play out and beginning to compare outcomes across cultures and across different kinds of welfare regimes that's what's needed. (Cognate consultant)
Some of what’s interesting right now is the work that’s coming from Europe where they do social pedagogy, different from what social work is or certainly what it’s looking like now. It’s conceived as an educator role, different mandate, different functions. It may or may not make sense here, some people are very keen. Good to compare, whether it is or it isn’t for us we can learn. (Social work consultant)

4.3.4 Multi-modal or mixed methods

Respondents from social work and cognate disciplines also draw attention to far greater potential for use of mixed methods than is currently realised. In particular, these would help to capture the complexity characteristic of social work and social care problems and interventions. They would help to evaluate service processes and outcomes, and to situate specific problems and interventions in wider contexts:

We need mixed methods using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data - to capture the complexity of social work’s response to societal problems. Mixed method designs are not often adopted and where they are, they are often ill-thought out and fundamentally flawed. Yet good quality mixed method designs potentially offer a route out of many of the pitfalls associated with the so-called ‘epistemological divide’ in the social sciences in general and in social care research in particular. (Social work consultant)

We need to develop ways of identifying change over time- e.g. use of pre- and post-testing using a variety of methodological tools, qualitative and quantitative and in combination. Social work needs to be able to demonstrate and explain its role in bringing about positive change. We do need more effective use and analysis of existing large scale data sets to provide explanatory backdrops to more qualitative studies. Social work needs to be able to situate its work in wider social and economic trends. Using current datasets might also demonstrate the limitations of these data and help develop more focused and useful data for social work interventions and about social work interventions. These also require methods for researching sensitive topics such as abuse, in ways that do more than describe, but attempt to understand and explain and inform practice interventions. (Social work consultant)

There is a variety and range of skills you need to deploy to answer any research question, you need qualitative skills, quantitative skills, you need economics, statistics and you need to be able to deploy the battery of skills in different ways to answer different questions. Most of all, you need to be able to mix them to answer the right question in the right ways. (Cognate consultant)

4.3.5 Integration of theory and method

Finally, echoing an earlier point of substantive weakness (4.2.6), consultants, especially from social work, commented on the scope for more sophisticated integration of theory and method in social work and social care research, to guide design, analysis and interpretation of findings. In relation to a proposed priority theme of evaluation research, for example, one consultant argued:

‘Why does it work?’, This would be a theme that is explicitly linked to developing theory around the individual in society and how/why the range of social work practices produce effects. This theme would be ‘theory building’, seeking to extrapolate and generalise from evidence of ‘what works?’. A further theme would be ‘Why does this work here and now?’. This is concerned with the social scientific, policy and political context in which social work is practised. … This would set the
knowledges derived of and for practice in a broader context, building bridges to
grander theories of the 'social'. (Social work consultant)

Another put the point more broadly:

We need to focus on how research makes a direct contribution to theory and
knowledge which can be practically applied. This includes an ability to formulate
transferable principles for analysis and action from contextually specific studies; it
incorporates an appreciation of what constitutes distinctive social work practice
theory or knowledge. (Social work consultant)

These strengths and weaknesses, along with identification of forthcoming challenges
for social work and social care research, policy and practice, set the baseline for
identifying priority substantive and methodological research themes. These in turn,
might provide the thematic framework around which to build research capacity,
develop research excellence and impact.
4.4 Summary of key findings

A ii) STRENGTHS AND DEFICITS OF THE RESEARCH BASE

No formal mechanism (e.g. RAE) for identifying nature/quality of swsc research. SW has low application (hence success) rate to ESRC awards. RAE 2008 results are more encouraging: pockets of excellence but discipline is emerging. Consultants tended to comment on strengths/deficits of social work research, or cognate research in this field – few conceived of swsc field as a whole.

Substantive strengths and deficits
- **Practice nearness**: connectedness, relevance and communicability to practice is sw strength; cognate disciplines less so.
- **Interstitial focus**: at its best swsc research combines critical focus on process and outcome, structural and personal; public and private; policy/practice interface. But sw research is not fully engaged policy picture; social policy not sufficiently engaged with practice complexities or realities.
- **Integration of disciplinary perspectives**: good examples of sw research incorporating concepts, tools and empirical evidence from other disciplines (especially psychology). But insufficient integration of disciplinary perspectives in swsc research overall, especially by comparison with North America.
- **Contribution to other research, policy and practice fields**: good examples of swsc research contribution especially to health; but sw expertise on professional relationships, systems, change could be more applied to other domains.
- **Critical and theoretical interrogation**: swsc research could improve on theory/research integration, especially critical stance on policy and practice.
- **Scope, scale and comparative reach**: swsc research base fragmented, piecemeal, often short term (insufficient for outcomes/evaluation), and limited cross-national or cross-context comparison.
- **Visibility**: swsc research and ‘big questions’ lack visibility to other disciplines.

Methodological strengths and deficits
- **Social science base**: strong overall distinctions made between sw and cognate research in sc; sw seen as strong in parts but less robust social science base.
- **Qualitative and participatory research**: some significant sw strengths, especially participative, sensitive and action research; but qualitative methods repertoire needs diversifying and development.
- **Quantitative methods**: deficient in sw, and insufficiently applied by cognate disciplines to sc field. Deficits highlighted: large-scale survey, use of large datasets or service data (cross sectional or longitudinal); cross-national or cross-context comparison; experimental/quasi-experimental design; robust evaluation and outcome measurement; cost benefit/effectiveness analysis.
- **Multi-modal or mixed methods**: some good examples, but much more scope to capture complexity of swsc problems, interventions, outcomes.
- **Integration of theory and method**: more sophistication needed for integration of theory with research design, analysis, interpretation of findings and messages.

See Recommendation: 1
SECTION 5  PRIORITY RESEARCH THEMES

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Early consultation with the Steering Group for the strategic adviser initiative confirmed as a starting position that social work and social care research excellence and impact would be best served if both research and capacity building were organised around forward-looking, cross-disciplinary research themes, embracing key questions for the discipline and field, and engaging a wide range of researchers and users alike. Preceding sections, reporting on findings from the desktop review and the consultation, have set out the groundwork for this. They have identified in broad terms where there is most potential for policy and practice impact and knowledge generation, what the characteristics and contribution of high quality social work and social care research might be, and where current strengths and deficits lie.

5.1.2 Not all consultants to this initiative agreed with the principle of establishing priority research themes. A few resisted thematisation on grounds that it can exclude, stymie originality and tend towards policy driven utilitarianism to the detriment of intellectual merit and critical edge. Several consultants from cognate disciplines were keen to establish thematic priorities, but envisaged these much more as the framework for direct research funding than for capacity development. Nonetheless, most consultants were happy enough to identify priority substantive and methodological research themes for social work and social care, based on where they saw most intrinsic and extrinsic value to be gained, what most excited them, and where they saw the biggest gaps.

5.2.1 There is no one agreed typology for categorising substantive themes (or kinds) of social work and social care research. Such themes could be service sector led – for example adults, children and families, criminal justice - or otherwise service focused – for example new public management, integrated services, service or practice development and innovation. Nonetheless, most consultants were happy enough to identify priority substantive and methodological research themes for social work and social care, based on where they saw most intrinsic and extrinsic value to be gained, what most excited them, and where they saw the biggest gaps.

5.2.2 Consultants were asked to nominate up to three priority substantive research themes for the next 5 to 10 years, to justify their selection, and to identify the kinds of high quality research required to address their themes. They were asked to do the same with respect to methodological themes. Unsurprisingly, several acknowledged that their choices were guided by their own areas of research interest. In the event there was reasonable congruity between the priority themes identified by social work respondents and by members of cognate disciplines and research funders.

5.1.3 Discussion below sets out firstly the six priority substantive research themes arrived at through synthesis of consultant responses, and, secondly, eight priority methodological themes in support of them. Much of the broad evidence supporting the choice of methodological themes has been discussed in sections 3 and 4; some more specific points of evidence are added here. Thirdly, to illustrate how particular substantive and methodological themes can brought together to achieve excellent research with high policy and practice impact, two specific exemplars are provided.

5.2 Priority substantive research themes

5.2.1 There is no one agreed typology for categorising substantive themes (or kinds) of social work and social care research. Such themes could be service sector led – for example adults, children and families, criminal justice - or otherwise service focused – for example new public management, integrated services, service or practice development and innovation. Cross-cutting these, substantive themes could

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8 Drawing lines between support for research capacity development (which is the primary focus of the strategic adviser project and the TDB remit), and direct funding for research (which lies outside these remits) was difficult throughout the consultation, since they are mutually reinforcing. As one consultant put it: 'You’re not going to get people training unless there’s a purpose for it, like there’s a job at the end, so what you need to be doing is funding the research'.
also be societal, addressing issues, contexts and problems to which social work and social care respond may respond – such as ageing and demographic change, health inequalities, social justice, risk, globalisation and migration. Shaw and Norton (2008) have developed a helpful, if complex, classification distinguishing between the primary focus of social work research (service user/carer groups; citizen and community populations, professional and policy communities) and primary problems addressed (e.g. equality and diversity, interdisciplinary services, workforce management and development). The challenge for the present initiative has been to identify how these different ways of formulating research themes best converged to address current and forthcoming social work and social care priorities, and best captured what consultants (using quite diverse typologies) were expressing.

5.2.2 The six priority substantive themes arrived at are not mutually exclusive. They were selected and framed:

- to be broad enough to be inclusive but sufficiently defined to have identity;
- to be forward looking, addressing not just current policy issues but future concerns, and intellectual as well as utilitarian challenges;
- to integrate rather than separate service and societal research questions, and focus areas, groups and sectors;
- to provide fertile ground for interdisciplinarity and disciplinary exchange, integration and collaboration – for example allowing social work to bring distinctive knowledges and expertise to topics that are staples of other disciplines, and vice versa;
- to maximise utility and appeal to diverse funding sources;
- to complement as far as possible the ESRC’s 7 thematic ‘interdisciplinary challenges’ (ESRC, 2008b): health and well being, social diversity and population dynamics, understanding individual behaviour, new technology innovation and skills, environment energy and resilience, security conflict and justice, and global economic performance and management.\(^9\)

5.2.3 Each theme is set out in sections 5.2.4 – 5.2.9 below. There is not space in this report to flesh out each fully. Were these themes to be adopted, this would be a matter for further consultation. What follows indicates, under each thematic heading, some key issues to be addressed by social work and social care research. For each theme this is complemented by extracts from consultant feedback, illustrating what is meant and, in most cases, potential for inter- or multi-disciplinary contributions that might be made.

5.2.4 Theme 1: Professionalism and service provision in social work and social care, in contemporary management, economic and welfare contexts

Includes:

- Challenges to social work and social care ‘professionalism’, professional authority and judgement under new public management, marketisation and performance management.
- Impact of ‘personalisation’ on professional decision-making and choice.
- Impact of both the above on processes, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of practice, and front line engagement with service users.

\(^9\) At the time of writing, the NIHR School for Social Care Research is consulting to identify priority research questions for adult social care; establishing synergies between those and some of the themes identified here would benefit capacity and co-funding potential.
• Impact of economic and welfare contexts on patterns and rationing of social work and social care service provisions.
• Impact of the organisational split between adults and children’s services on practice, effectiveness and cost effectiveness;
• Impact of new technologies on social work and social care practice and its effectiveness.
• Changing patterns of service organisation, including integrated services, and interprofessional practice: management of change, impact on professional culture, practice, processes, service user experience and effectiveness.
• Comparative social work and social care welfare models, including in developing countries and new global economies.

**Indicative comments:**

Whole systems approaches to services for older people and somehow that’s gone off the policy agenda. Individual budget requirements are recreating the Berlin Wall. It’s forgetting that for an awful lot of people, effective good support is inter agency. It involves collaboration, it involves joint commissioning, it involves joint service delivery – if social care is going to be effective it cannot be silo. So how do we develop? (Cognate consultant)

I think it’s about interprofessional and inter agency working, - particularly in relation to transitions, e.g. disabled children from child to adult services. It's about the intersection of health and social care, and way agencies work together at these critical moments of time… It includes looking at models from business, from management, leadership, mandated and non mandated forms of interdisciplinary working. That kind of a theme could draw on a lot of different disciplines, and it's an area where the government has tried using its usual approach to shove things together, but it doesn’t really deal with the underlying problems. (Cognate consultant)

Managerialism and professionalism. The drive has been endlessly to take responsibility away from frontline social workers and put it up the hierarchy. Understandably in some ways because that’s a reaction to the media vilification of social workers and the desperate risk aversion of local authorities. But it's not clear it’s led to better decision making with respect to children…. And as a result it’s led to a downgrading of social work as a profession. Social workers are at the bottom of the hierarchy the social worker nowadays has no control over her caseload, over her budget, over her decisions other than the most trivial decisions, just about everything is referred upwards…. [How can we] give them back a profession, turn them back into a professional status?…. I think there might well be a theme there. It would bring in organisation theorists, sociologists, economists too, it would bring in quite a wide range. (Cognate consultant)

More detailed evaluative studies of policy developments in relation to interprofessional/ inter-agency working which addresses the relationship of professional identities and roles and organisational and agency issues. Further study also of the education and training of the professions and its role in the development of effective practice - including the role of inter-professional training and education. (Social work consultant)
5.2.5 **Theme 2: Demographic change and diversity: the contribution of social work and social care:**

*Includes:*

- Changing patterns of social care and social work needs in older age, and relationship between social care and health needs.
- Changing patterns of policy and service response, and implications for practice;
- Critical examination of policy assumptions about older people and their relationship to lived experience and practice.
- Challenges and costs of providing integrated care for an ageing population;
- Relationship between and outcomes of formal and informal social care for older people.
- Social work and social care contributions to ‘quality of life’ for older people.

*Indicative comments:*

We need to be incorporating social gerontology, health economics, specialists in the psychiatry of old age, sociology of health/mental health in research in this area. And social work and social care which are in the front line. Robust and rigorous qualitative studies are required in this field to test out some of the assumptions which currently underpin thinking and policy-development. (Social work consultant)

It is a field where the relationship between relevant theoretical developments in the social sciences and what happens ‘on the ground’ could be much more fruitfully explored. The social benefits would be significant. There are a large number of epidemiological studies in this field, and it is dominated by medical studies (rightly so, given the nature of dementia and the need to find a cure). However, there is also an urgent need for more social research which can address some of the problems associated with providing appropriate care for older adults. (Social work consultant)

We need to develop much better links between demographic research and research focused on the health and social care needs of the increasing older population. There’s not enough link up between people with a social care interest and longitudinal studies that are going on at the moment, particularly the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing comes to mind. I don’t know that there have been any questions about social care, formal or informal, included in the survey. (Cognate consultant)

It’s interesting to compare Ed Balls’ response to the latest Laming report and the emphasis on training good quality in children’s social work. And yet I know local authorities that are basically making all their care managers redundant in adult services because they say “everybody’s had their personal budgets, we don’t need all these qualified professional staff anymore.” There’s something there about the different status of adults and children and I think that is completely, arguably completely contradictory to the demographic trends and actually if you need to be investing, it’s in people who will work with older people. (Cognate consultant)

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10 Note: Examples provided for illustration here concern ageing. Many others apply.
5.2.6 Theme 3: Tackling health and wellbeing inequalities: the contribution of social work and social care

**Includes:**

- The role of social work and social care services in addressing social and economic inequalities that underlie health inequalities.
- Organisation of social work, social care and health services and practice to fulfil the policy mandate of tackling health inequalities together.
- Effectiveness of social work and social care services in reducing health inequalities.
- (Re)configuring social work and social care services towards proactive prevention of health inequalities, rather than reactive, targeted response.

**Indicative comments:**

DH and DCSF have a strategy [2009] out now after the Children's Plan, which gives us the government's vision for health and wellbeing. It's all about how the primary care trusts and children’s health services and local authorities will work together, in partnership, to put all the right support in place to improve the quality of children’s health, not to repair it when it's damaged. Health and wellbeing go together, and so do poverty, exclusion with poor health and poor wellbeing. But it seems to me that's not what social workers are doing any more. Maybe unqualified social care people, I don't know. But in social work you've become very targeted to the heavy end stuff. We need to take a look at this – what's that policy going to mean in practice if not just rhetoric? (Cognate consultant)

This is a research area that is, rightly, I think, in the main for epidemiologists, health economists and the like. But social work should be in the picture too, shouldn't it? It's social care type problems that come with no qualifications, joblessness, unemployment, demoralisation all those things that we know come together to make some people iller let's face it and die sooner than others, cost a lot more to the health service in the end if something better doesn't happen sooner. I thought that's what social workers did? (Cognate consultant)

5.2.7 Theme 4: Risk, decision making and choice in social work and social care

**Includes:**

- Risk rationalities and processes of risk related decision making in social work and social care – calculation and professional judgement.
- Risk minimization and risk taking in practice; managing risk to service users and organisational risk.
- Balancing risk and safeguarding with personalisation and choice.
- Effectiveness of social work and social care in preventing, reducing and managing risk to vulnerable children and adults.
- Risk regulation in an unregulated social care market.

**Indicative comments:**

This theme offers a wide range of opportunities for mutually beneficial cross-fertilisation between disciplines. In particular, (and this is simplifying things) between disciplines which have strengths in terms of theorising 'risk' at the 'macro' level (sociology and social policy); those that represent the practice domains in which
theories relating to 'risk' and decision-making are operationalised (social work, social care and health); and those disciplines that look at research decision making about risk at the micro/group level (psychology and social psychology). ii) Given the above, and the fact that this theme reaches across the epistemological divide, it is not hard to imagine that research in this field lends itself particularly well to the use of mixed methods. Well planned and well-executed mixed method designs would be ideal in this field. (Social work consultant)

I think there is a very big question about choice or control and all the kind of positive things that are supposed to accrue. There’s major issues about risk at all levels and transferring risk and whether or not the net balance of those, the balance sheet of those positive and negative risks, actually results in better outcomes than what we had previously. There are corporate issues too. It won’t be long I suspect before individual budgets and personal budgets produce a Baby P type situation and so there’s issues about how organisations deal with risk and government procedures manage that. And there’s the personal balance sheet in terms of the wellbeing for users, carers. You can obviously link it to much bigger bodies of theory around risk individualisation, so I think that is a big research theme. And the role of families and carers as the people who are now responsible for managing risks on behalf of service users, who might lack capacity, and those who purchase care privately through residential but also domiciliary services as well. They’re taking risks in a totally and relatively unregulated private market and we don't know anything about them. (Cognate consultant)

You need to look at decision making in its broadest sense, decision making in the light of understanding about how social factors and environment actually interact. So for example, resilience in children, how is resilience in children actually produced in the face of risk, and what of that is about the context and the circumstances and their environment? I think we have a lot of research which is often about one or the other but we don't always have research which is able to bring a broader understanding of how those factors interact. It’s not just about decision making but rationality of decision making and understanding that better. Whether the economic models of understanding decisions actually do bear fruit here or whether we need to have some revision of how those are actually operating for real as it were, in practice. (Social work consultant)

5.2.8 Theme 5: Promoting social inclusion and engagement through social work and social care

Includes:

- Processes and outcomes of engaging service users from marginalised, stigmatised or otherwise excluded groups in social work and social care services; longer term effectiveness for inclusion.
- Improving accessibility and acceptability of social work and social care services to excluded groups.
- Social work and social care contributions to wider public services intended to prevent social exclusion.
- Translating policies into practice in social work and social care with excluded groups, including challenges and contradictions (e.g. children in need/asylum seekers).
We know quite a bit about the meaning and experience of social exclusion. Relational aspects of poverty are not just consequences of material poverty but can have a dynamic of their own, one that may have a particular resonance for children. What are the implications of these findings for children in the care system and how do you address that in practice? And also for children in families, where family poverty and restricted social and economic integration of parents may also have an impact on children's capacity for developing social relationships and wider social networks. How do you go about making a difference there, not just in policy but in real every day terms? (Cognate consultant)

Longitudinal studies of the impact of poverty on the life chances of vulnerable groups, particularly at points of life transition; and the nature of intervention of social work and social care services. Further consideration of the relationship of concepts of poverty, inequality, social exclusion, social inclusion, and how these articulate themselves in the lived experience of social work service users. (Social work consultant)

It’s about engaging service users from socially marginalized and diverse groups to work in partnership with professional social workers to create, plan, implement, and evaluate socially inclusive, social interventions in social work, health and education, across settings which can address race/religion disparities. (Social work consultant)

5.2.9 Theme 6: Practice development and innovation in social work and social care

Includes:

- Nature, opportunities and challenges for social work and social care practice in contemporary (organisational, economic, policy) contexts.
- Evaluation of practice processes and effectiveness.
- Practice development and learning organisations.
- Practice innovation.
- Developing practice theory.
- Improving research mindedness, knowledge exchange, critical and ethical practice.

I would start by trying to fund research that understood the job of social work, the activities, the practices of social work and what it consists of, what’s it like to do this thing we call social work day by day. There seems to be a case to have some more analytical understanding of what this thing is. (Cognate consultant)

The role of the research leader in practice can be an interesting one. They've done it in nursing and occupational therapy. It’s about looking at how research leaders can enhance the use of evidence based practice, in practice settings. You need to look at the strategies and support needed to invest in evidence based practice. (Cognate consultant)

Research for developing theory based social work interventions, implementing them, evaluating them in the community, refining them with service user input, evaluating and implementing in co-production with practitioners. (Social work consultant)
5.3 Priority methodological research themes

5.3.1 The large majority of consultants, among cognate and social work disciplines alike, were agreed that no one methodological approach or paradigm should be valued above all others in order to address these substantive themes. Methods used should be fit for purpose, led by the research questions at hand and congruent with the concepts or theories in use. Nor necessarily need all social work and social care researchers develop highly specialised technical methodological skills. Rather they need all-round competence, some specialism, and sufficient understanding of alternative strategies to seek specialist input where appropriate. They should also incorporate diverse skill sets within research teams, around common understandings of the research problem.

*Most of all you need to be able to deploy the battery of skills in different ways to answer different questions, and you may need specialist help for some questions sometimes. We need to do what we do very well and we need to be rigorous. That’s it - good, all round basic skills. We need to demystify. It ain’t rocket science. (Cognate consultant)*

With this in mind, the priority methodological research themes set out in sections 5.3.2 – 5.3.9 were selected from the suggestions made. They are not mutually exclusive, but should provide sufficient focus for research capacity development to complement substantive thematic priorities. The first two themes – use of quantitative and development/diversification of qualitative methodologies – are broadly cast; the rest highlight particular applications or their combination. Themes echo strongly the methodological strengths and deficits already outlined (4.3), so are not listed in detail here. However, some illustrative quotes from consultant are presented, to show how particular methodological themes might serve the substantive themes described above.

5.3.2 Theme 1: Using quantitative methodologies

*Includes:*

- Developing basic skills in and understanding of quantitative research design, data collection and statistical analysis.
- Design and development of randomized and other case control comparative studies to examine interventions and outcomes.
- Design, development and use of surveys, to include multiple stakeholder perspectives, on social and health care needs, service provision, impact and outcomes.
- Comparative techniques, cross-national and cross-context.
- Specialist/advanced quantitative methods: developing specialist expertise e.g. in input into/ use and analysis of large datasets, multi-variate analysis, longitudinal and path analysis, structural equation modelling, for complex examination of patterns of need, service, outcomes and effectiveness.

*Indicative comments:*

*Policy makers need quantitative research because it tells them how frequently certain problems happen, how widespread they are, whether something specific makes a difference. They’re not the only part of the equation at all because we need to know about processes that lead to results. But they do concentrate the mind on outcomes. (Cognate consultant)*
Familiarity with use of well known standardized instruments which evaluate child or adult functioning: e.g. SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire). Knowing the literature behind the development of the instruments, its strengths and weaknesses, where it has been used, what it can tell you when you use it in practice; use of it with data collection; reporting its use in publications; teaching its use to social work students. Reading results of its use. Being able to conduct a simple evaluation study of a social work intervention, e.g. a time limited group, 6 weeks of individual counselling; evaluation of adjustment to placement in a new foster home. Being able to collect data and compare the pre and post tests using a t-test. Knowing what probability of .05 means. This competence should be required of all masters and PhD social work students. Social work researchers must have fundamental basic skills in research design and quantitative data analysis. This should include randomized controlled trials, and quasi-experimental methods. They do not need to know how to do everything, as they can collaborate with statisticians, or hire statisticians for research projects. However, an understanding is required to upgrade our knowledge and our research. (Social work consultant).

There is a range of contemporary quantitative methods’ friendly’ to social work, such as Structural Equation Modelling. Use of latest techniques from attachment-based research. (Social work consultant)

5.3.3 Theme 2: Developing and diversifying qualitative methodologies

Indicates:

- Development, diversification and critical use of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, to explore multiple stakeholder perceptions, experience of social work and social care needs, service processes and outcomes.
- To include e.g. biographical narrative, visual methods, hermeneutic case based comparison and longitudinal qualitative approaches;
- Use of qualitative data analysis packages.
- Continued development of existing strengths – inclusive/participatory methodologies, in-depth research in sensitive areas, action research.
- Use and development of innovative qualitative methods.

Indicative comments:

Qualitative methodologies need to improve: there is too much of too low a quality. Participatory research, action research, ethnography etc. all need to be conducted to high standards and we need agreement about those standards (much as Cochrane did for RCTs). SCIE has started this but there’s a lot more to be done. (Social work consultant)

Widen people’s understanding of the range of different qualitative approaches. There are a lot of more interesting and innovative ways in which qualitative research methods can be applied. Social work tends to have a relatively narrow repertoire of what’s meant by qualitative. For example you could draw much more on narrative analysis, and comparative approaches using ethnomethodology. (Cognate consultant)

I saw something recently where people had been given little electronic notepads where they literally kept daily diaries of decision making about various things. I thought that’s quite innovatory but you don’t see that sort of thing very often. You see
interviews, focus groups; you see repetition of tried and tested ways. (Social work consultant)

If you take the key questions in social work about change and how people relate to social workers over time for example would be an interesting one. Then having a well designed qualitative longitudinal study could be really good. There’s quite a lot, there’s a few around youth transitions, that’s another area where there’ve been studies. (Cognate consultant)

Skills and knowledge with regard to highly sensitive participant observation, and actually all forms of highly sensitive research, are particularly important. This is the meat and drink of social work; the methods need to be fit for purpose for what we do and who we do it with. (Social work consultant)

User led research has been a big theme (especially in disability) and some of it’s okay and some of it's good and some of wouldn't really pass any tests by any systematic review of any kind. But there is something which I don't think any area, not just social care has properly cracked, about how to do good user led research, the role of user led research in multidisciplinary team. I think user led research can be useful as a component but actually there’s something beyond user led research, as part of users being part of a team... there is something there that needs developing and thinking through, both to improve the quality of user led research but also where it fits alongside all the other perspectives. (Cognate consultant)

5.3.4 Theme 3: Using and developing mixed methods

Includes:

• Development and use of mixed methodologies and methods; to capture complexity and interstices of: social work and social care problems and outcomes, policy, practice, and effectiveness - from multiple perspectives.
• Use of mixed methods to complement, verify, triangulate, facilitate each other; e.g. qualitative analysis of social care process and quantitative of outcomes; quantitative prevalence of need and qualitative of experience; qualitative and quantitative analysis of change over time.
• Development of epistemological and methodological fit, and theory/method relationship in mixed methods research.

Indicative comments:

Theoretically informed applied research - methodological sophistication, including multi-epistemological approaches to research design. Based on the principle of understanding how personal and social domains are linked - based on the principle of understanding "problems" in the broader context of "experience", and a recognition that there may be many different and contradictory perspectives on what constitutes a problem. (Social work consultant)

Particularly if we want to evaluate processes of as well as outcomes. So what happens when direct payments are handed out: How much of it is negotiated, how much is chosen? What makes it work for some people not others? How often is it risky, does something bad come out of it? How do people manage, do they see themselves as service users or commissioners? Do they get any help or is it “that’s it you’re on your own”? Do we count it as an intervention, if so what outcomes are we looking for? (Social work consultant)
Much stronger multi modal and innovative research approaches. I think a lot of people would probably say that. That’s a big training agenda, to get people actually well able and comfortable, not only just to know about them but to be able to combine them well and to get the best from them. (Cognate consultant)

5.3.5 Theme 4: Evaluation research

Includes:

- Development of diverse evaluative methodologies, to test process and effectiveness of models of welfare and complex social work and social care programmes and interventions - examining what works, how, in what context, for whom.
- Application to wide range of problems, contexts and interventions, including specialist, targeted and community-wide.
- Testing specificity and generalisability through comparative studies within UK and cross-nationally.
- Includes evaluation of cost effectiveness and cost benefits (see 5.3.8).

Indicative comments:

So a theme for me would be evaluating interventions…. [There was] a set of reviews for the Children’s National Service Framework, and a major finding out of that review, was that we had a lot of research which looked at what need was but there wasn’t much, or there wasn’t sufficient good quality research looking at what you did about it…. It’s the interplay in a way, between targeted short terms or time limited interventions and more general support, how they support and complement one another? (Research funder)

I suppose in terms of the generic social work issue, I suppose the kind of research we’d want to look at is effectiveness. Is it at the end of the day more effective to have a family based social worker or specialised social worker? In the end that’s the fundamental question. In which case we’re trying to look at outcomes under different systems. And there you will want to include economists and management because they’re the people have done a lot of work on these things. But also they desperately need social work practitioners themselves; for both of them of course you need the experience of the other. (Cognate consultant)

Critical evaluation to test out notions of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘welfare’. It needs to be on the sort of scale and with the sort of rigour that you can look at not just this or that but the model itself, the welfare model. Right down to the level of what’s going on on the ground, the sort of work you deal with. And right up to the top. For that you need a very multi-discipline approach indeed. We rarely come anywhere near that. (Cognate consultant)

5.3.6 Theme 5: Developing and using measurement

Includes:

- Critical use of existing standardized measures of outcome (e.g. attachment, strengths and difficulties, mental health).
- Recognising complexity: Critical conceptualisation and development of outcome measures, at individual and social levels, objective and subjective.
• Similar with measures of input, service performance and quality measures and development of practitioner assessment tools.
• Use of all the above in cross-sectional, longitudinal and comparative evaluation.

Indicative comments:

Make more use of a number of existing measures (such as measures of authoritarianism) to 'test' social work values and intentions in practice. And indicators that can 'measure' attitudinal change in those involved in behaviour such as abuse.*

We don't have measures of constructs that are useful in social work. I'm sure you know the Robert Goodman's strengths and difficulties questionnaire, which is jolly good but it isn't the only thing you might want to do. One of the skills you need is to have an awareness of a range of measures and their pros and cons and what you might be wanting in this setting, and what would be good if you're looking at outcomes of anything. What would be good and what would make sense and it isn't going to be perfect. (Cognate consultant)

It's extraordinarily difficult, outcomes research, quite what the outcome is.....Now in preventative healthcare you can say what you're trying to do basically is prevent the onset of disease. But try to convert that to preventive social care, what are we trying to do there? You're not trying to prevent the onset of some social disease, you're trying to promote independence, trying to promote wellbeing and independence. How do you measure those? (Cognate consultant)

Methodological innovation in measuring harm, vulnerability, resilience, wellbeing. The same with measuring practice, care and processes of consultation and involvement. (Social work consultant)

5.3.7 Theme 6: Use of large datasets and service data

Includes:

• Social work and social care input into, and use of, large longitudinal datasets, including panel surveys and cohort studies, to explore changing prevalence, correlates, patterns and outcomes of need and support, access to/use of social work and social care services, and service outcomes.
• Application of quantitative analytic and meta-analytic techniques to service data, for analysis of policy implementation, service provision, social work and social care needs, decision making, service/practice effectiveness and outcomes.

Indicative comments:

There's both quantitative and qualitative panel research. Let's take quantitative first. Those data sets are out there, people are analysing them and they come to them from a range of different disciplines. Are people coming to them from social work and asking their sort of questions to them? Now they may or may not be, I don't know, they may not be. If they are doing it and they're not being able to answer the sorts of questions they need then there is a big need for social work to be getting into the design of these and saying, “Why aren't you answering the questions that we need in order to be able to address the sorts of issues that we want to be able to address?”. And of course qualitative panel data has been one of the big stories of recent years.
It’s transformed quite a lot of social policy research in terms of thinking about transitions, poverty, movement, drivers for change. (Cognate consultant)

There’s a new panel study coming, so it’s important that social work has capacity to get in there as well. If you think about social care and the whole longitudinal set of questions about care needs and how they change and the impact of caring on employment afterwards, on wellbeing and a whole set of things. So that’s a whole big area which I think has been so important in social science and social care should be using it. (Cognate consultant)

Better data sets need to be established and archived. For example, there is a vast amount of service data accumulating in the field which is not matched by expertise, theory or capacity to use this data for knowledge development. The process is reflexive. Better understanding of the knowledge development potential of service data will lead to better service data as new questions and demands emerge from that analysis. (Social work consultant)

For quite a long time I’ve thought it would be very interesting to follow up a cohort of young people who’ve gone through the care system, criminal justice has been done much more really. We know a lot about that one but the care system I don’t think we do terribly much. (Cognate consultant)

Maybe what you need is not to try and train people in the quantitative data analysis skills but sufficient knowledge of what’s in the data sets and sufficient knowledge of how you might approach those sorts of data. So it’s secondary data analysis but it’s not about techniques, it’s about ways of thinking about the data, and thinking about what needs to go into such data sets. If you’re going to design a birth cohort study and you want to address some key questions in social work, what would you put into that birth cohort? Doing it that way, you’d also build capacity because you’re bringing in say someone, a statistician or an economist at post doctoral level. (Cognate consultant)

5.3.8 Theme 7: Analysis of costs, cost benefits and cost effectiveness

Includes:

- Development of social welfare economics to evaluate costs, cost effectiveness and cost benefits of social work and social care policies, programmes and services.
- Comparative analyses of these with other welfare and service regimes, and sectors.
- Analysis of anticipated and perverse cost outcomes.

Indicative comments:

When we go to Treasury, that is their first question every single time, not even cost effectiveness but cost. So you do need to have an economist to do this. But it may be that they don’t need to be pure economic projects, but they’re a component within the project. (Research funder)

You have to look at sustainability of the social care system, and with interprofessional services demonstrate the added value. So you include economic modelling. We do need more economists helping with the thinking and analysis. There are health
economists doing this sort of thing, so you’d have to adapt that for social care. (Social work consultant)

Models of service delivery for older people, for example, with increasing numbers of older people, differing demands on services, developments in service delivery through technological advances, issues of cost are extremely important. It has to be worked out. (Cognate consultant)

5.3.9 Theme 8: Systematic and research review

Includes:

- Systematic review of diverse and mixed research methodologies, suitable for the range of research in social work and social care.
- Development of quality appraisal and synthesis methods for non-empirical data.
- Exploration of utility and validity of other review methodologies, including rapid evidence assessment.

Indicative comments:

Meta-analytic approaches like systematic review are essential to help us make the best use of the data that we have, and expose the gaps. Reviews that are inclusive of qualitative research, and appraise qualitative not just qualitative rigour. (Social work consultant)

The other methodological issue is systematic reviews. There’s a lot of interest in these. At one end there’s a very hard and tight and narrow definition that always tends to let through about five studies, if that, and then there is a more open approach or concept of systematic reviewing. It seems to me that there’s quite a lot that social work research has to offer in terms of thinking about process especially. It means opening up systematic reviews in a particular sort of way to enable this, not to end up with a narrow little world that tells you nothing much that you need to know. (Social work consultant)

5.5 Research exemplars

5.5.1 The final section of Part II of this report offers two research exemplars, to illustrate in a more composite way how two of the substantive priority research themes suggested can be addressed by high quality, interdisciplinary research, using some of the methodological approaches also recommended. Both are research projects or programmes with which the author is directly familiar. The first, on risk and child protection, is less recent and example, but very relevant; here social work is central, cognate discipline contributions valuable. In the second, on interprofessional education, social work and social care contributions are in the minority, but significant for research relevance and impact.
5.5.2 RESEARCH EXEMPLAR 1

CHILD PROTECTION (Priority Theme: Risk and decision making)

The overriding need to protect children, while minimizing damaging consequences for the family can involve agonizing decisions for those working in child protection. A number of inquiries raised questions about the way agencies arrived at decisions on when to act, the nature of interventions, and when to start and to stop providing services. (DH, 1995, p.i).

In the wake of the Children Act (CA) 1989 and notorious child protection failures, public and policy concern was that child protection services did too little too late, too much too soon, more harm than good. Acknowledging that ‘actions taken by child protection services can never guarantee that parents will not harm their children’ (p.i) the Department of Health commissioned a programme of 20 research studies, using a wide range of methodologies to ask distinct but related questions, to investigate: what is being done? how? where? with whom? how effective is it? what could be done better?

One study (conducted by this author and colleagues, Sharland et. al., 1995) examined decision-making, processes and outcomes of routine professional interventions in response to child sexual abuse referrals. It used quantitative methods to survey all referrals in one region over a 9 month period, tracking their progress for 1 month. Among these a small sample was selected for in-depth interview of all key participants, 3 months and 1 year after referral. Standardized measures of outcome (mental health, for example) were also used. Only through the combination of methods did this reveal powerful policy and practice messages not previously exposed. Among them: over half of referrals and confirmed sexual abuse cases involved abuse outside the family/household. 45% of confirmed abuse cases were closed after 1 month. Why? Because referrals at that time were streamed either as cases of significant harm (CA, s47) or of need (CA, s17). If children were confirmed to be at risk, their names were placed on the child protection register and further intervention ensued. If no longer thought to be at risk – for example where abuse was outside the family and parents now alerted were protective), cases were closed; there was no transfer route into the ‘child in need’ stream. Interviewed and assessed in depth, 70% of parents and children expressed significant unmet need; over half the children were clinically depressed at 3 months, rising to two-thirds at 1 year.

The study was one piece of a bigger jigsaw, ultimately synthesized in review (DH, 1996). The complementary strategies of companion studies (mainly social work but also from researchers in sociology, social policy, psychology and psychiatry), brought messages for ‘reframing’ and integrating children’s services. These fed directly into revised policy and guidance for ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (DH, 1998a), and latterly into the ‘Every Child Matters’ Green Paper (DfES, 2003), the integrated ‘Assessment Framework for Children in Need and their Families (DfES, 2004a) and a Common Assessment Framework (DfES, 2004b).

There is no question but that the quality and impact of this research were high. Whether the resulting policy, service and practice reconfigurations have ‘worked’, and their relative costs, is of course a moot point. It has been, and needs on continuing basis to be, the subject of further scrutiny (e.g. Beecham and Sinclair, 2007; Shaw et. al., 2009).
5.5.3 RESEARCH EXEMPLAR 2

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION FOR INTERPROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
(Priority Theme: Professionalism and service provision in contemporary contexts)

Under New Labour there have been powerful policy drivers towards integrating public services – especially health, social work, social care and education, and with these policy thrusts to educating professionals to work together. These thrusts been led by health (DH, 2000, 2001), but with increasing integration of children’s services, education has also entered the picture (CWDC, 2006). Housing, criminal justice and related professional areas are still less well represented. Given the centrality of social work and social care to integrated services, and since team, interpersonal and group work are core social work business, social work research should be contributing to the knowledge base.

A recent systematic review of education for interprofessional practice (Sharland and Taylor, 2006) revealed the quality and deficits of the research field. One strong study provides a useful exemplar. Pollard et al (2005, 2006, 2007) conducted an evaluation of 852 qualifying students (mainly from nursing and allied health, a few social work) undertaking a multi-faceted, pre-test/post-test interprofessional education (IPE) programme. The compared outcomes at several time points with 250 controls. Quantitative analysis identified a mixed picture of success – different from the very positive, small scale ‘insider’ evaluations often published. Despite improvements in students’ perceptions of their own interprofessional relationships following IPE, many were more sceptical after than before about how far genuine shared understandings or practice could be achieved. The overriding influence over student attitudes and behaviour remained disciplinary not interdisciplinary. Complementing the larger study, Miers et al. 2005 interviewed and observed smaller groups. This unravelled some of complexities: that it was easier to change students’ attitudes than behaviour, that students earlier in their professional education and less confident of their own professional identity found it harder to engage with IPE, that in order to be effective IPE requires very skilled facilitation, safe learning space, and (hard to achieve) compatible professional curricula and timetables.

The systematic review looked at this study along with 41 others, worldwide, of IPE which included qualifying social work education. Most were conducted by health or psychology researchers, a few from social work. Substantively, their synthesised findings told us some but not all of what we need to know. Social work was a minority part of the IPE picture; education (for teachers) still less involved. At the level of scrutinizing how professionals can learn together to change attitudes and perceptions of each other, and to understand how to work together, there were plenty of messages for professional education practice. At the level of examining the impact of IPE on behaviour and practice, there were far too few – just 13 studies looked with any rigour at outcomes at all, and then in the short term only. Also missing, for the most part, was thoroughgoing interrogation of the interstices between individuals or groups, on the one hand, and professional organisations, systems, cultures, or for that matter, budgets.

The abiding messages to emerge from review were: the value, but scarcity, of rigorous research addressing the quality, experiences, contexts and outcomes of (inter)professional education, the various potential disciplinary contributions to advancing this field, and the value of rigorous research review to expose both strengths and gaps in the evidence base.
A iii) PRIORITY RESEARCH THEMES FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CARE

Priority interdisciplinary themes for SWSC research were identified, as potential focus for research capacity development, growth of excellence. Themes addressed key SWSC research characteristics and impact potential, current strengths and deficits, and forthcoming challenges for discipline and field.

Substantive research themes

- Demographic change and diversity: the contribution of social work and social care.
- Professionalism and service provision in social work and social care, in contemporary management, economic and welfare contexts.
- Tackling health and wellbeing inequalities: the contribution of social work and social care.
- Risk, decision making and choice in social work and social care.
- Promoting social inclusion and engagement through social work and social care.
- Practice development and innovation in social work and social care.

Methodological research themes

- Using quantitative methodologies.
- Developing and diversifying qualitative methodologies.
- Using and developing mixed methods.
- Evaluation research.
- Developing and using measurement.
- Use of large datasets and service data.
- Analysis of costs, cost benefits and cost effectiveness.
- Systematic and research review.

See Recommendation: 1
PART III: BUILDING RESEARCH CAPACITY AND EXCELLENCE

SECTION 6: RESEARCHER ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Having set out the case for social work and social care research, the potential for research excellence and impact, current strengths and deficits and priority themes for development, Part III of this report progresses to examine strategies for building research capacity and engagement in order to achieve potential.

Discussion begins, in this section, with considering the range of potential and existing researchers to be targeted. Section 7 then looks at the range of stakeholders to be enlisted either to create the climate promoting; research engagement or directly to invest in supporting it.

6.1.2 Two issues are worth raising at the outset. The first is to remind ourselves that social care is not a recognised discipline. Though some members of cognate disciplines might contribute to social care research, few would identify themselves or can readily be identified as ‘belonging’ to it. Hence it is not possible to establish the current size, capacity or profile of a social care research community as such. In social work, by contrast, there is little question that critical mass and capacity need boosting. To summarise: membership of the social work academy is small by comparison with cognate and practice based disciplines and the age profile older than average since they are commonly recruited from practice (Mills et. al., 2005; Scourfield, 2008a). Seventy per cent of social work departments are in post-1992 universities where research culture is commonly be less embedded (JUCSWEC, 2006) - though post RAE 2001 capability funds may have helped here. Teaching workloads to support demanding professional training curricula are high. Though the recent audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) found that increasing numbers of social work academics now have doctorates (56%), supervise doctoral students (38%) and are research active (82%), levels of activity are often low and some cases nil. Despite some recent improvements, the vicious circle persists whereby lack of training, support, experience, confidence, resource and productivity generate more of the same.

Though ‘social care researchers’ cannot readily be profiled as a group, it is unlikely that the same capacity problems afflict relevant researchers from cognate disciplines. The problem here is lack of proactive and informed engagement with this particular research field.

6.1.3 This raises the second issue that needs to be confronted: whether, rather than just how, such engagement should be encouraged. The question of interdisciplinarity was discussed by way of introduction (1.4.4), and the case for it developed in sections 3 and 4. However, since inevitably the matter raised strong and to some degree conflicting responses among the consultants to this initiative, their primary concerns are addressed in brief below.

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11 The JUCSWEC research strategy (2006) estimated 800 fte social work academics, by contrast with 5,000 in education
6.2 Researcher engagement across and between disciplines

6.2.1 All consultants recognised the value of bringing diverse disciplinary perspectives to social work and social care problems. Many also highlighted present and future contributions of social work research to cognate fields. Where differences emerged, however, was in the feared costs, rather than benefits of import and export between disciplines, of collaboration, to some extent, and of colonisation of one discipline (social work) by others.

6.2.2 On the side of ‘colonisation’ one cognate discipline consultant did not so much argue in favour of it, but took it as a sine qua non:

_I suppose I would see research into the activities of social workers as a subset of the social care research. I wouldn't see them as in some sense a different discipline. I just see social work as just part of social care….. If you're a social worker, you're not a researcher and academic research has its own ways of working, its own style, its own peculiarities and so on, that are just simply different from being a social worker. ..... One doesn’t see an enormous number of research applications coming from the social work academics. You get some from social policy dealing with social care issues but you don't get people whose prime activity is as a social work academic training social workers. So I think that statement is correct._ (Cognate consultant)

However, this view was not widely shared. Cognate consultants more commonly argued that, given the right incentives, their own discipline might usefully contribute with (rather than instead of) social work, to high quality research capable of addressing social care problems, and of impact upon practice and policy:

_I think if ESRC want to have an impact, they've got to recognise and win over the social work profession to the notion that research is important to proven practice. And therefore you can’t get round it by using people from other disciplines..... The best people who can connect with getting the research out there are those who talk the same language and can speak from experience as well as authority._ (Research funder)

_Let me give you an example. They've got a big problem in chemistry, that the chemists don't have the maths, and they need the maths to do good chemistry. The answer doesn't take a genius. It's not to say “Let’s get the mathematicians to do the chemistry instead.” That's daft. It's “Let’s skill up the chemists with a bit more maths so they know enough to get on with. And let’s get more of the mathematicians working alongside them to do the specialist stuff.” It’s exactly the same where you’re coming from. Why on earth would you say that the good bright social workers, who’ve got high class degrees or usually higher degrees these days as far as I can see, and all that insider experience, why on earth wouldn’t you want to skill them up to do research? Most of them spend half their time doing budgets anyway with care management. So why couldn’t they ask an economist the really hard cost effectiveness questions and get them to chip in on that side?.... I know there’s always the risk that you train up some of them with doctorates and they go straight go back into practice and up the management ladder. But that’s never stopped the MRC training up doctors to do research – in fact we expect them to stay clinicians as well. And it hasn't stopped the EPSRC training up post docs who go straight off to industry. Isn't that the way the knowledge economy works?_ (Cognate consultant)

6.2.3 From their perspective, social work consultants, though broadly in favour of interdisciplinary engagement and collaboration, expressed a range of concerns about the following:
• Concern that the disciplinary integrity of social work research and its proximity to practice and service users would be lost through ‘import’:

We are looking for disciplinary coherence and distinctiveness. We do need to make sure that students are grounded in the habitus of social work (habits of thought, professional socialisation and practice location). How could they be described as engaging in social work research if they were not social workers? (Social work consultant)

The most significant challenge is ensuring the student is sensitive to the culture, ethics and values of practice. It is possible that non-social work students should concentrate on theoretical or policy research rather than researching micro-practices. (Social work consultant)

• Concern that credibility to practitioners and users of social work research would be compromised through ‘import’. Here the key issue is impact. Social work research is grounded in, and concerns itself with, the realities and complexities of practice; this is what makes it credible to and usable by practitioners, and of benefit to service users:

If we’re going to develop a research informed profession and practice, you’ve got to satisfy a whole range of different audiences. The practitioner audience is very important and that means that we have to find ways of drawing into social work research, people who have some standing and credibility amongst practitioners, which generally means people who can show that they’ve been there and done it a bit. (Research funder)

• Perceived threat to the development of social work research, whose case for capacity development investment has been hard fought:

The only disadvantage is where research COULD be conducted by social work and social care researchers but ISN’T because we lack the skill base or the funding or where other disciplines are regarded more highly, and so the same old pattern goes on. (Social work consultant)

I think we need to get our own house in order first before we prioritise interdisciplinary research. (Social work consultant)

• Wariness that social work would become marginalised and the ‘poor relation’ in any collaborative research partnership:

Social work researchers not being robust enough to defend their position as equal partners… All sides need to recognize that it is not a competition, there are benefits in collaboration recognizing the contribution of all….. As equal partners in interdisciplinary or interprofessional research, rather than social work being the ‘subject’ or ‘object’ of research by other disciplines. (Social work consultant)

6.2.4 These caveats, with the disciplinary orientations, histories and status differentials underlying them, should not be ignored. Nor need they be. This report argues that when we consider whom to engage in the research discipline and field, and how to nurture quality and capacity, we need to be as heterogeneous and inclusive of potential for highest quality research as serves the goal of achieving excellence in social work and social care. This throws up political challenges, since
the needs, contributions and credibility of different disciplines vary and the resource climate is tight. Nonetheless, this inclusive approach is in keeping with the objectives of this initiative, and with the characterisation and priority themes for high quality research developed in sections 3, 4 and 5. This approach was endorsed by most consultants, irrespective of discipline, as the following recommendations illustrate:

[Achieving] a dignified collaboration in which it is acknowledged that the social work academic is more applied, but that is seen as an important contribution. Thus it is a win-win knowledge transfer, not one in which the social work academic is seen as deficient in research skills. By working collaboratively [all] disciplines begin to co-produce knowledge, while social work academics acquire more research sophistication. (Social work consultant)

A balance between the disciplinary contributions from other areas of social sciences (and other professions) and from the emerging discipline of social work. It's avoiding the 'either/or' type of arguments and recognizing that all disciplines have blurred and overlapping boundaries, some more closely guarded than others. (Social work consultant)

Social work and social care research needs to draw on a range of discipline inputs and needs to keep at the forefront of new and emerging methodologies and research technologies in order to innovate and expand the current knowledge base. (Social work consultant)

6.2.5 Sections below examine the range of existing and potential researchers to be engaged, both from cognate disciplines as a whole, and from social work, profiling their distinctive characteristics, career requirements, training and support needs. A strategic approach to research capacity development needs not only to open up heterogeneous pathways into research, but to provide the range of opportunities to sustain this heterogeneity throughout. As one consultant put it:

It isn't a case of just bringing them in but we need to grow them and keep them. Engagement means not just drawing in good researchers to the field, but creating and maintaining the right training, the right support, the right career pathways and the right research opportunities to make it worth their while. For those who discipline hop [we need] to equip them with skills and opportunities to stay within the discipline. (Social work consultant)

6.3 Candidates for postgraduate and early research career development

6.3.1 Graduates from cognate disciplines

There are no data to tell us how many graduates from cognate disciplines embark on postgraduate research training in the field of social care, but little to suggest that many do. Consultants in favour of 'import' from cognate disciplines particularly supported the principle of attracting candidates early in their research career:

I do think it’s important that that foundation is laid at doctoral level and it’s then a matter of persuading people to do research on topics that are important in the social work arena. And then of course to follow that with postdoctoral opportunities. Over a long period of time I think that’s the thing that’s going to actually change things most. (Cognate consultant)

In part the rationale is that if social work and social care research questions and career options can be made more visible and attractive to cognate social scientists
earlier in their research life course, the appeal of engaging in these areas will be greater than when discipline specific affiliations and aspirations have become more embedded. However the disincentives to ‘discipline hopping’ into, or even to collaborating in, social work and social care research can be many and can become quickly entrenched; they are discussed fully in 6.4.1. Dismantling these longstanding obstacles will be a long term and ambitious project. In the short and medium term, investment and effort might best be placed in exposing students from cognate disciplines to social work and social care questions and debate, encouraging them to apply their own thinking and skills to examining these issues, and providing targeted doctoral and post doctoral opportunities by way of catalyst for them to do so (7.3.4; 7.10.3).

6.3.2 Social work graduates

As suggested by the low application rate of social work graduates for ESRC studentships (4.1.2), relatively few newly qualified social work graduates who are eligible to progress directly to high quality research training, actually do so. Of primary concern here are social work graduates with the same level of proven academic ability and research potential as their equivalents in other disciplines – those with high class first degrees and/or good masters degrees in social work. The General Social Care Council (2009) confirms that 24% of social work students in England are now on masters qualifying programmes, commonly following undergraduate degrees undertaken in cognate disciplines.

Reasons for high quality social work graduates’ lack of direct engagement in postgraduate research training are several. Most have undertaken their qualifying degrees with the intention of becoming practitioners; research would be a diversion from their chosen path. Many consultants also concurred with the findings of the ESRC audit (2008a) that despite improvements since the introduction of the new social work qualifying degrees in 2003, research methods, skills and critical appraisal remain insufficiently integrated into crowded qualifying social work curricula. As a consequence, the cycle of separation between research and practice begins at the qualifying stage:

Clear career pathways are not always visible. Most come on a qualifying course with the intention of becoming practitioners. Research opportunities need to be integral and visible from the start of courses just as in other disciplines. (Social work consultant)

We don't teach our [qualifying] students enough about research and why research is important, and we don't inspire them enough to make them hungry for answers and for interesting questions, unfortunately. (Social work consultant)

Research is currently conceptualised too narrowly and not seen as applicable to social work practice - The primary emphasis in UK SW training appears to be on a narrow set of skills required by bureaucracies - this does not encourage research-mindedness. (Social work consultant)

By contrast with the USA, few UK few social work graduates emerge with substantially developed social science methodological knowledge or skills, and fewer of the latter will be quantitative. Depending on their first degree subject, some of the social work masters graduates will have had undergraduate research training, but without much opportunity to consolidate or develop their research skills since. Without sufficient experience or confidence to pursue research, even those most interested and academically able may not consider doing so, and the option may not
be brought to their attention. Even if the option of high quality postgraduate research training is introduced and considered, entry routes are relatively few (there are currently just 25 ESRC recognised outlets for social work), and academic support to develop high quality research proposals may not be available. In addition, the incentives to enter into research may not appear great. Many new graduates are already in debt, many are mature students; practitioner salaries look more attractive than postgraduate stipends, jobs more accessible and career progression prospects more obvious:

Each year, we might only have one or two students who gain a first class honours degree, and show potential and interest in doing further research. Even with them there is nowhere (locally) where they can go. They are usually pressed for cash by the end of their training and are keen to embark on a paid career. The thought of further study - and more hardship - is not a winning combination. (Social work consultant)

There are a limited number of social work specific postgraduate training outlets. From the evidence of the ESRC recognition exercises, those that are interdisciplinary have little acknowledgement of social work specific methods and issues. (Social work consultant)

Most consultants were agreed that a key strand of research capacity building in social work must be to ‘catch them young’, something we are clearly failing to do at present.

6.3.3 Practitioners and managers

Here we are referring mainly to those who are social work qualified, experienced in practice and sometimes management, who presently constitute the majority of those recruited into research degrees and academic social work (Scourfield and Smalley, 2007; Scourfield, 2008a; ESRC, 2008a). For purposes of this report, we are specifically concerned with those who have the appropriately high quality academic qualifications to be eligible for high quality research training, and who are in need of this if they are to make significant contributions to research capacity and excellence. As many social work consultants argued, these experienced practitioners and managers are the potential researchers best placed to bring the ‘practice nearness’, credibility and commitment to social justice that is both an existing strength and an ongoing priority to support future research themes. They face several obstacles.

Despite the rhetoric of ‘evidence informed practice’, many practitioners work in professional contexts that may demand of them data gathering, even small service evaluations, but neither value nor promote research. Managerialist culture, resource constraints and the favouring of practice and management proficiency over intellectual or research excellence, mean that employers commonly offer little support for research training either in cash or in kind through workload relief. The same priorities are mirrored by professional regulatory bodies. The Care Councils, for example, recognise post-qualifying practice and management qualifications, but not research qualifications. Nor is research incorporated to any noticeable degree in post qualifying frameworks. All this contrasts poorly with, for example, the culture of integration of research and practice in medicine, as the following comments illustrate:

For them there’s got to be some focus or purpose to drive it. So how do you get that kind of motivational interest element into it? If you said to a whole load of practitioners “you can go on a course about how to critically appraise research”, let alone do it, they’re not going to be terribly interested, are they? (Cognate consultant)
In public health we have an advantage that there’s such a long historical association between medicine on the one hand and the academy generally on the other hand, that there’s always at least some kind of supply of doctors who want to be academics, or do both. (Cognate consultant)

There are also practicalities. A majority of practitioners who do undertake postgraduate research training, and likewise those that might, are mature students, in full or part-time employment, with salaries to match, domestic and financial responsibilities and limited geographical mobility. Combined with the professional and cultural disincentives, it is unsurprising that practitioners often lack the motivation let alone confidence to enter into research training, and a credit to the small, though apparently growing, numbers that do (Scourfield and Smalley, 2007; ESRC, 2008a):

Funding is a key issue - practitioners can earn far more in work than on studentships. There is not much incentive at present to do doctoral research unless following an academic career as research is still not sufficiently prioritised in practice and service delivery by managers. Pressure on completion targets works against part time study and the balancing of full time work with families and other demands. The ESRC must consider this especially in applied subjects such as social work. (Social work consultant)

Most, though not all, consultants agreed that academically well qualified practitioners were among the priority resources to be tapped for engagement in social work and social care research. To maximise the potential for the best research-minded practitioners to make the move into academic research, a range of incentives and supports needs to be in place. In the shorter term, flexible, accessible and appropriately funded mechanisms are required to attract these professionals into high quality postgraduate research training and/or into mid-career fellowship or exchange schemes. From the perspective of academic research capacity development (though not for knowledge transfer and impact), these strategies will inevitably involve ‘loss leaders’ – some practitioner/managers will choose to pursue further academic research and some will return to practice. In the medium and longer terms, progressive career transition pathways need to be opened up, including options to straddle academic research and practice. At the same time, there needs to be continuing work with employers, regulators, HEIs and funding councils to establish the climate and cultures in which research is promoted, supported and integrated with practice.

6.3.4 ‘Early career’ social work academics

Here we are referring to those with masters degrees who are already in academic social work posts, but who have not undertaken significant research training and do not have doctorates. Commonly they have considerable practice experience but little, or not yet well developed, research experience. Given RAE drivers, and as suggested by the ESRC audit (2008a), patterns of recruitment to academic social work posts may well be changing, with more emphasis on research qualification and track record. Nonetheless, consultants to this initiative confirmed that significant proportions of academic social work staff remain in these ‘early career’ shoes. Some of the challenges faced by this group are generic to those facing social work

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12 Scourfield’s (2008a) survey, for example, indicated that 60% of current doctoral students were studying part-time while also in full-time employment. Increasing numbers are also undertaking professional doctorates (see 6.6).
academics at all career stages, who may have strong potential for high quality research but little opportunity to realise it

Teaching and managing social work education programmes is resource intensive, with complex prescribed curricula, heavy demands of liaison with practice agencies and regulators, departments commonly small and staff student ratios unfavourable. The major inhibitor to research activity and productivity reported to the ESRC audit (2008a) was time and workload. There are also infrastructure deficits in many HEIs, with little by way of life-long learning for staff, and, where it exists, continuing professional development is teaching not research focused. Social work departments are predominantly (70%) located in post-1992 HEIs, for many (though by no means all) of which teaching, rather than research, is their business. In some HEIs, new and old, in order to meet the competing demands of teaching and research performance, departments are increasingly resorting to two-tier systems, with teaching-only posts for some, research for others.

Within this broad picture, several commentators highlighted how early career staff, including those with highest academic potential and motivation for research engagement, can become overloaded with teaching and administration (many of them trying, with insufficient support, to maintain practice credibility at the same time). Though clearly some are encouraged to pursue doctoral training, for many barriers of geography and accessibility add to those of time and workload to prohibit this, and research potential and aspirations become stifled. One consultant described the conundrums for a senior manager faced with these challenges:

*Doctoral courses are not that accessible to early career staff already. Because you’ve got these people appointed, usually to teaching .... How do you take the sort of actions you need to take with those people if you’ve got nothing within the institution that you can draw on to fill in the gaps? Even here, we’ve tried to put early career people on an MRes; you go once a week and it’s a day course. Okay it’s just down the corridor but if you’re teaching and you’ve got placements you can’t go. We’ve got modules that repeat, repeat, repeat throughout the year, but you’ve got people who’ve missed two and they can’t move on. You’ve got staff struggling to do part-time PhDs which is atrocious because they have neither the time nor the learning to do that. So it’s very, very problematic. And that’s just to get people started.* (Social work consultant)

A sound research strategy for social work and social care must include improving opportunities for the most able of early career researchers already within the academic community to develop further their research skills, productivity and capacity for excellence. This must also include research funder and HEI commitment to consolidating early career status as a developmental stage along a research life course trajectory. Likewise it must include improved access to the highest quality training for the highest quality candidates.

6.4 Candidates for post-doctoral, mid- and senior research career development

6.4.1 Post-doctoral, mid- and senior career academics from cognate disciplines

Some consultants from social work (despite their caveats outlined in 6.2), and all from cognate disciplines, gave thought to how members of cognate disciplines – from post doctoral to highly established levels - might become more engaged in social care research. Feedback from cognate disciplines in particular highlighted significant obstacles.
Structural and administrative barriers within and between HEIs often inhibit cross-disciplinary engagement, let alone genuine interdisciplinarity or ‘discipline hopping’. Successful collaboration or exchange between disciplines depends on the development of informal relationships, which require structures that can facilitate them:

You certainly can’t decree collaborative relationships to develop …. It’s an obvious point, I’m not just talking about putting people into a research active culture or environment, but putting them in a place where they can make some friends and some connections, so the social end is as important. Maybe even more important than the technical end. But added to that is the administrative nightmare at many HEIs of applying across more than one discipline. We all too easily get trapped in bureaucratic straightjackets that stop us creating informal environments for interdisciplinary connection. (Cognate consultant)

Research funders too can reinforce disciplinary silos by requiring just one, or at most two, principal investigator names on grant applications.

For individuals, career progression pathways do not generally favour lateral movement across discipline boundaries, still less in the direction of social work and social care. Here disciplinary status and prestige is key. Consultants from, for example, psychology and economics raised the distinction between pure and applied research, indicating that research reputations in their own discipline are built on ‘focusing on a scientific issue’, not on policy or practice. The latter they see as of less international relevance, less publishable in high impact journals and in future less likely to feature well in REF metrics where those will apply:

If somebody came and said “we want to look at social work contribution to x or y” or “what’s good provision?”, it wouldn’t get me Brownie points to do that. I think if it was strongly policy oriented and particularly strongly practice oriented, you’re not likely to publish in a high impact journal which is what people here are expected to do. And you’re also expected to be focusing on a scientific issue, rather than necessarily a policy based one. And you’d be expected to have an international presence and that’s difficult to do in areas where it’s actually practice, because it doesn’t work like that somewhere else. (Cognate consultant)

If you come up with a policy solution or a practice you do need to put the beans against it in terms of how much will it cost and it’s not necessarily using a cost benefit analysis, it is how much does it cost. It’s really hard to find an economist to do this…. because they come from a pure discipline so they have that kind of superiority and the coherence that means they all want to publish in journal x and journal y. So there’s the competitive thing that they’re all doing…. It’s a discipline that knows how to find new food, answer new questions, find the best questions to fit their purpose. (Research funder)

Several consultants from closely associated disciplines had not, until invited to do so for this consultation, previously considered the relevance of their skills and interests to social care questions, nor vice versa. They argued that social work and social care research have a ‘selling job’ to do, to articulate to the wider research community clear questions of their own that have currency, relevance and intellectual appeal to others:

You need to capture the imagination or the feeling that they’re going to be extended in some way, or a different perspective on an old problem for them….. It’s got to be
something that lights the fire a little bit. Else why would they put themselves out? (Cognate consultant)

Even where social work and social care were recognized by consultants from cognate disciplines to be potential fields of research enquiry, several saw the field as too complex, too difficult to conduct effectively, too messy and intractable to yield clear answers:

If you think about how difficult it is with some of the kind of groups you’re talking about…. vulnerable groups, really, really difficult to follow people, maybe there are more unstable settings, maybe they have more difficulty or fear of engaging with this kind of thing…. maybe they’ve got associated mental health issues…… They’re hard to get in in the first place, hard to keep in, hard to find if they move, maybe they’ve only got short spells of being in the relevant group, they float in and out…… Also there’s a perception of this as a short term, very political, very problematic kind of field which actually does the opposite of attract you, it makes you think, “It’s really intricately difficult and how would we measure it? I don't understand it, run away, run away, run away”. (Cognate consultant)

The sort of progress towards answering evaluation questions would be painfully slow. Somebody dreams up an idea, they try it four times themselves in a kind of protected setting, then somebody else tries it in a protected setting because they might be in love with it, so it might be working because they’re enthusiastic about it. Does it translate out into the muddy world and can we have four replications of that please and then I might be able to recommend something? (Cognate consultant)

I think it has been suggested that there’d be some equivalent in social care to what there is in health, some quality adjusted life years for trying to measure the outcomes of social care but obviously jolly difficult, so that might be another factor too, the research questions maybe interesting and maybe important but jolly difficult to answer and we haven't really developed a critical mass of methodologists to deal with it. (Cognate consultant)

In the face of all this, some consultants were convinced that direct research funding would go much of the way towards overcoming these problems:

People need rewards for coming out of silos…. People follow money. It’s as simple as that. (Cognate consultant)

If there was a tender for social care with an economic component we would go for it. It's only because there are not tenders like that, or very few…. We would love to do more. If there was the funding we'd go for it and we would bring an economist and also the people who are in other relevant disciplines and had some interest would come in too. (Cognate consultant)

However others were more measured:

Money is some incentive, but it’s also profile and it's interest in the issue/area, in exchanging skills/knowledge to collaborate and develop a creative partnership to create something good and make a difference. (Cognate consultant)

It seems clear that if researchers at all career stages are to be attracted towards social work and social care, there is a vicious circle of disincentives to be interrupted. Developing a virtuous circle in its place will take a multi-faceted strategy to raise the profile and status of the field, and the infrastructure to create formal and informal
sites for cross-discipline learning and exchange. In the longer term this involves significant cultural and structural change. In the shorter term, we need to look at distinctive mechanisms that can capitalise on change where it is already happening, and catalyse more.

6.4.2 Mid- and senior career social work academics:

Here we are considering the most academically able social work academics who have some research track record; they may or may not have doctorates, but if not are unlikely to undertake them at this career stage. The generic structural and cultural obstacles to research activity discussed in relation to early career academics (6.3) apply equally here. In addition, social work consultants raised some distinctive capacity challenges facing mid- and more senior career academics.

Firstly, the demands of managing complex professional education programmes and small, over-worked staff teams, can be especially onerous, with no dedicated resource in-house to support research bidding alongside:

*Even when we are aware of research opportunities coming up, ones we really could respond to, we’re all too often not able to. We’ve got our noses to the grindstone.* (Social work consultant)

Second, in terms of their capability for producing excellent research, many have the academic quality but still lack the specialist research skills, and with them the confidence, required. The obvious examples given were capability in quantitative methods, use of data analysis packages, and familiarity with innovative qualitative methods. It is often hard, too, for mid- and senior career academics to retain methodological knowledge and skills that they have used in the past but not recently; refresher training opportunities even if on offer are often not available at the right time. Conversely, if research skills are learned through training but not quickly applied they are soon lost. Several respondents also reflected on the need for dedicated training for mid- and senior career academics, who may not feel comfortable exposing their own learning needs alongside more junior colleagues:

*Teaching an old dog new tricks has to have rewards and supports and must feel dignified.* (Social work consultant)

A third inhibitor, particular to engaging in bids to research councils, is lack of confidence in the likelihood of success, less on grounds of quality than of past evidence, perceived structural barriers and lack of receptivity to social work and social care research. In social work there is a common perception that, despite discipline recognition, reviewers are often unfamiliar with social work research and unreceptive to it, judging it by criteria which are not too exacting but are inappropriate to the subject area. Whether this remains true or perceived, there is a vicious circle at play. The fact that there is no social work or social care presence on some ESRC boards reinforces it. This may go some way to explaining low application rates from social work to the ESRC (rather than success rates, which are proportionally on a par with other disciplines). It may also help explain the choices commonly made instead to seek less prestigious, often small scale and local research commissions, where funder interest in social work research (for impact) can be relied upon, but which in turn provide limited scope for excellence, innovation or profile.

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13 Given the traditional recruitment pattern into academic social work, there are likely to be many currently fitting this profile, but increasingly fewer as recruitment and early career training policies change.
A further issue raised by social work consultants is the ongoing need for mid- and senior career social work academics to increase their skills as research trainers and research leaders, and to foster capacity of academically able but less research experienced colleagues and students. This includes not only research supervision, mentoring and examination, but also management of research teams or programmes, and of research budgets. Crucially too, it involves mid- and senior academics developing systems within and beyond their own HEIs and their own discipline, for growing and sustaining research support, networks and culture. The last point was at times put most strongly:

*Even in research-intensive institutions, social work can exist in silos where there is little penetration in terms of the learning that takes place elsewhere. Much of the learning that is required might be defined as ‘remedial’. It constitutes learning that ordinarily would have taken place at a much earlier stage in an academic’s career, but in the absence of appropriate support and resources, often informal and subtle in nature, and often between junior and senior colleagues, has not. The confidence that is so often spoken of as being lacking in the social work academic community is primarily derived, so far as other disciplines are concerned, from such a culture. (Social work consultant)*

All of the above need addressing if a strategy is to be effective in strengthening social work and social care research capacity and excellence. ‘Training the trainers’ was, for example, one strand of the ESRC Researcher Development Initiative (RDI phase 2) that has already been undertaken. However, mechanisms need to be put in place to continue and sustain this impetus.
6.5 Summary of key findings and recommendations

B. RESEARCHER ENGAGEMENT

- Involves developing capability and critical mass among academic social work researchers, and motivating cognate researchers to engage with social care.
- There is broad support for cross-discipline fertilisation. But the integrity of each discipline contribution needs to be upheld, and the distinctive contribution and capacity needs of social work should be addressed.

i) CANDIDATES FOR POSTGRADUATE AND EARLY RESEARCH CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Graduates from cognate disciplines
- Lack of disciplinary status, research resources, and institutional barriers, discourage engagement of cognate disciplines in social care research.
- Dedicated training, support, development and investment needed to overcome these in longer term.
- Engagement of cognate disciplines is best started early, familiarising undergraduates with social care issues to attract them to the field.

Social work graduates
- Qualifying social work education pays insufficient attention to research relevance or skills to attract the most academically able students, including those with masters, towards research as well as practice.
- Targeted incentives, guidance and support are required to engage academically best qualified and research-minded graduates in research training.

Practitioners and managers (mainly social work)
- Are best placed to bring ‘practice nearness’ to the research field.
- Work in professional cultures and contexts often not conducive to research training; few career incentives and insufficient employer support.
- Eligible candidates have high class undergraduate and/or masters degrees but limited research training; commonly mature professionals, with salaries and responsibilities and little geographical mobility.
- Flexible mechanisms to attract them into academic research would include: permeable career pathways, part-time/distance routes and flexible stipends.

‘Early career’ social work academics
- Commonly recruited from practice with good masters degrees but not doctorates.
- May have especially heavy teaching/administration loads; even where encouraged to undertake doctoral training, often little time or access.
- Targeted opportunities and increased HEI support would allow the most able to undertake doctoral research training.

See Recommendations: 1,3,4
B. RESEARCHER ENGAGEMENT

(ii) CANDIDATES FOR POSTDOCTORAL, MID- AND SENIOR RESEARCH CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Post-doctoral, mid- and senior career academics from cognate disciplines

- Structural and cultural inhibitors limit cross- or interdisciplinary engagement in social care research by post-doctoral and established researchers from cognate discipline.
- HEI structures and sometimes research funders can reinforce disciplinary boundaries, reducing scope for formal or informal exchange.
- For individual career progression, disciplinary status disparities, lower perceived potential for international profile and publication prestige are disincentives to engagement in this field.
- Social work and social care questions and research are insufficiently visible to attract cognate attention. Where visible, they can be unappealing, seen as complex, messy, hard to do and hard to yield clear transferable answers.
- Targeted research funding should attract cognate disciplines. But a ‘selling job’ is also required to ‘light the fire’ of others’ imagination and curiosity.
- A multi-faceted strategy is needed to promote cultural and structural change in the longer term. In the shorter term this requires dedicated mechanisms to raise profile, motivation, opportunity and reward for engagement in the field.

Mid- and senior career social work academics

- Managing complex professional education programmes is onerous, especially in HEIs where teaching is the mainstay, research culture minimal and no additional support for research.
- Many established social work academics with or without doctorates have strong academic capacity but lack specialist and quantitative research skills or need refreshers.
- Many also need formal or informal training and support in research leadership and management, to nurture the next generation of researchers through supervision, mentoring and growing research culture.
- Improvement will require long term commitment from a range of stakeholders, as well as distinct mechanisms to grow existing potential and resource among established, high quality academics.

See Recommendations: 1; 3; 4
SECTION 7: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Having identified priority research themes for development, and the range of researchers to be engaged, we turn to the range of stakeholders to be enlisted, before discussing the particular mechanisms they might support. For present purposes, discussion focuses on stakeholder investment in research capacity development, rather than in direct sponsorship of research and research infrastructure; the latter are addressed in Section 11. As discussed (1.2.4; 3.1) the significant context for discussion of stakeholder sponsorship is that we are currently in the midst of economic recession, with restraints on public spending and likely to become tighter in the wake of a general election. The case for investment in social work and social care research, resting primarily on its potential for impact on policy and practice contribution to social and economic wellbeing, needs to be made in the strongest terms. It will be essential to maximize and target most effectively current and potential stakeholder sponsorship and engagement.

7.1.2 Stakeholder investment in growing research excellence in social work and social care through capacity building may be in cash or kind, and on the demand or supply side. In some cases, it should involve direct funding or co-funding with the ESRC of research and capacity development activities and infrastructure. Equally, it should include creating the conditions whereby social work and social care researchers can take advantage of training and research development opportunities available. On both sides, consultants to this initiative were clear that the ESRC can play a key role – actively as co-funder, and proactively to catalyze collaborative stakeholder engagement and investment that in the longer term should extend further and endure longer than the present initiative.

7.1.3 The ESRC has played similar roles with respect, for example, to education and business and management. In the case of social work and social care, there is added complexity of engaging a range of disciplines in a common field, and ensuring fit with the policy and research contexts of the four country administrations.

7.2 Government funders and non government departments/agencies

7.2.1 Government funding – central, regional or local – provides a mainstay income stream for social work and social care research, though on a far lesser scale than in health, more piecemeal and in the main supporting projects rather than programmes or infrastructure.

In addition, central governments in all four UK countries have developed initiatives to improve social care research (NISCC, 2002; Scottish Executive, 2005; Cabinet Office, 2006; DfES and DH, 2006; Welsh Assembly Government, 2007). As shown in Annex 2, major emphases among these are on practitioner workforce development and knowledge transfer, rather than on concentrating academic research excellence. However all four country governments have taken steps giving increasing priority to social care research, including academic research and training, until now significantly overshadowed by health. Within the English NIHR, for example, the School for Social Care Research (SSCR) was established in 2008; its brief is primarily production of adult social care research, but includes elements of…

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14 There is of course no equivalent of the National Health Services in social work and social care.
15 Though the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government have also recently commissioned reviews of academic social care research capacity, neither is yet in the public domain.
capacity development.\textsuperscript{16} The Wales Office of Research and Development (WORD) has recently given higher profile to social care in the (newly named) National Institute of Health and Social Research, among whose provisions are small research grants and fellowship schemes. The Northern Ireland Research and Development Office has established a programme of learning sets and fellowships for social care staff wishing to undertake doctorates. Consultants to this initiative also confirmed that the smaller size of devolved nations allows for closer dialogue between policy makers and the academy, and Scotland and Wales fund schemes for mid- or senior career social work academics to join government departments for fixed periods, contributing to policy development, research commissioning and management.

7.2.2 The above suggests potential for growth of central government support for social work and social care research capacity development, either directly or through funded centres and agencies. In particular, given increasing service integration, there may be scope for drawing on public funding sources in health. In the health sector, for example, there are models of good practice in government sponsorship of doctoral research, including the National Coordinating Centre for Research Capacity Development doctoral fellowships, and the Scottish Chief Scientist's Office research training and clinical academic fellowships. There are also the beginnings of ESRC co-funding with non-government agencies in health: the Council is currently establishing with the NIHR a studentship and fellowship scheme for experienced allied health practitioners. Similar opportunities would be appropriate in social work and social care, especially for those researching at the interface with health.

7.2.3 Nonetheless, added to the uncertainties of the economic and political climates, government preoccupations with social work practice standards and workforce development, rather than with research, are strong (not least in response to tragedies such as Baby P). This risks overshadowing the attention that is required to the role of research in improving practice (see for example the interim report of the Social Work Taskforce in England, 2009). Proposals from the strategic adviser initiative to enlist government co-funding will need to be carefully targeted and negotiated; it may well be that bespoke arrangements will be needed with each nation. The experience of the UK Social Care Research Collaboration has been that individual governments are more ready to invest in their own vehicles for promoting social work and social care research than on a UK-wide basis.

7.3 Employing agencies and regulators

7.3.1 Employing agencies across all social work and social care sectors fund much of the academic research currently undertaken. Though welcome, research commissions are commonly for short term, local and small scale research or evaluation. Thus their outputs feature some of the strengths and deficits described earlier (4.3; 4.4). Important for the growth and improvement of the research base will be developing initiatives that integrate research commissioning by employing agencies, particularly across health and social care sectors, to allow for more robust research and greater impact. As one consultant put it:

\textit{Employers need to adjust their sights and timescales, beyond home and hearth and beyond quick and dirty.} (Social work consultant)

\textsuperscript{16} As yet there is no English equivalent for children's social work or care. Both the DCSF and the Children's Workforce and Development Council (CWDC) are funding some research to develop and inform integrated children's services. The DCSF is currently commissioning three new interdisciplinary research centres, though the emphasis here is on research production not capacity development.
7.3.2 Essential too will be increasing the low levels of employer engagement in research capacity development. As discussed (6.3.3), social work in particular and social care more broadly do not share the culture of connectedness between research and practice that exists in medicine; traditionally there has been a ‘circle of resistance’ militating against it. Research has not been high priority for employer bodies such as the Associations for Directors of Adults or Children’s Services in England, nor their devolved nation counterparts. It also features little with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW). Nor, crucially, is research embedded in any significant way in current Social Care Council regulatory frameworks for social work education, at qualifying or post-qualifying levels.

For those on the qualifying degree, research is not seen as an option. There is not enough attention to teaching research methods or motivating students to engage with research on the qualifying degree, especially not in the practice learning component. This is not helped by the emphasis on practice and the current initiatives to increase the amount of practice in the degree. (Social work consultant)

Social work post-qualifying frameworks, for example, vary across the 4 countries, but nowhere are there distinct research pathways, nor research components or standards embedded throughout.¹⁷ Hence, as described in 6.3.3, there are few career incentives for academically best qualified and experienced practitioners to undertake research training if they wish to remain in practice; the disincentives are coupled with the absence of mechanisms for career transition into the academy. A significant opportunity to grow excellent academic social work researchers from a practitioner base is being lost.

7.3.3 Persuading employers and regulators to engage with research capacity development for excellence will continue to be an uphill struggle. Ultimately, this will involve significant culture shift (Orme and Powell, 2008). For the present initiative, medium and longer term objectives must be dialogue with employers and regulators to work towards greater inclusion of research in professional training, professional recognition of research qualifications, and creation of flexible career pathways between the academy and practice. In the short term, it is important to establish specific mechanisms whereby the investment costs of researcher development to employers and regulators compare favourably and self-evidently with added value for practice and service development.

7.4 Higher education institutions and funders

7.4.1 Higher education institutions and funders have significant roles to play both in fostering demand for research capacity development and supplying the means to meet it and grow research excellence.

Higher education funding councils have already given some dedicated support to social work research, with capability funding following RAE 2001. According to the RAE 2008 subject panel report (2009) this has already shown benefits. However, the post-RAE 2008 environment looks less promising, with research intensive universities seeing drops in QR income, and, as one consultant listed, the following challenges faced by most social work departments in particular:

¹⁷ In Scotland, for example (following the Crerar review, 2007) the devolvement of social services budgets from central to local government and of responsibility for determining both requirements and provision of post-qualifying social work training to employers and HEIs, may leave research and research training with little steer, let alone funding
The vicious circle of having to build a research base within the current arrangements for distributing QR funding. No real capacity building funding now. Hence lack of protection for research time. Pressure to recruit funded student numbers to the detriment of research activity. Vagaries of policy decisions on social work education add to this. (Social work consultant)

7.4.2 There are nonetheless some useful models to draw upon, and some encouraging signs. The ESRC has already developed some inter-institutional research capacity development networks in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The Scottish Funding Council (SFC), having made collaborative investments in research capacity building in disciplines including education, allied health and nursing and economics, is considering similar co-sponsorship in social work and social care. Their primary focus would be on knowledge transfer, but with it building quality of the research and researcher base. This may provide fertile grounds for partnership investment with government, HEIs and research councils in a centre or centres for research and capacity development in this field. Centre development might, for example, dovetail with ESRC support for doctoral training centres and units (DTCs and DTUs) under the revised postgraduate training framework (section 8). This could well incorporate mechanisms to encourage interdisciplinarity, and movement of individual researchers across disciplinary boundaries. It might also provide a model for collaborative investment elsewhere in the UK.

7.4.3 Generically for all disciplines, higher education funding councils and universities have yet to develop clear, secure and well supported research career pathways (as advocated by the UK Concordat, RCUK, 2008). With social work an emerging research discipline, and social care not an institutionally recognised discipline at all, the problem is magnified. Here we must look not only to higher education funders, but to what HEIs themselves can do. This may be an apposite moment to do so, since there are welcome signs of interest from Universities UK (UUK) in social work education and research particularly.

7.4.4 First, the standing of social work as a research discipline (and social care where it has any institutional recognition) needs to be strengthened within HEIs. Even in research intensive universities, where research infrastructure and resource may be better developed, these are commonly not deployed sympathetically to social work:

At individual institutional level social work should not be seen as a ‘cash cow’ due to additional funded student numbers. Research should be seen as an equally important activity and QR funding and capacity funding be targeted towards it. Where funding is limited, social work should be incorporated in [wider] institutional research development work. (Social work consultant)

7.4.5 Further, if diverse disciplinary perspectives are to be brought to social work and social care research, institutional barriers within and between HEIs - both structural and cultural - need to be reduced (5.4.1). REF driven incentives to generate research impact should work in favour of promoting the disciplinary mix. For those HEIs or consortia successful in attaining ESRC DTC or DTU status, similar drivers towards interdisciplinarity should have an impact.

7.4.6 However, for social work and social care the challenge will be ensuring their status, representation, coverage and resource within the disciplinary mix. Again, since social care has no disciplinary representation, it will be difficult to ensure this. For social work, with respect to DTC and DTU applications, it will be essential that
university social work departments with low critical mass but high quality research and expertise ensure that they are included in their own institutional or consortia bids. These should include strategies for encouraging students to cross discipline boundaries, and, in the case DTCs, for opening up training to other institutions. Conversely, social work departments not included in DTC or DTU bids will need to enlist institutional support for their own access to these provisions, to complement what they themselves can provide. The specifics are discussed in section 8.2.

7.4.7 Whether or not under the auspices of ESRC DTC/DTU network, there are many ways in which HEIs collectively and individually could be encouraged to strengthen research capacity in social work and social care. Some mechanisms, such as direct sponsorship of studentships or joint practice/academic research posts, or visiting fellowship schemes, are costly; for these it will make sense for HEIs to seek collaborative funding (8.9.4; 10.2; 10.8; 10.9). Others, including formal and informal mechanisms such as in-house research appraisal, mentoring and provision of study leave require commitment and leadership but should be less costly (10.10). Within and possibly across their institutions academic social work departments need, as Orme and Powell have argued (2008), to grow research culture not through top-down managerialism but through processes of genuine engagement within communities of research learning. As experience from the TLRP in education has confirmed, and as underlined by consultants to this initiative, such communities require both formal and informal mechanisms to stimulate research learning and collaboration, especially across disciplines, and across the academy/practice divide.

7.4.8 Here too this report and its recommendations focus primarily on how the ESRC and co-funders might invest directly in building capacity for research excellence. However there is also a galvanising role to be played through this initiative in promoting wider higher education support, through liaison with funding councils, JUCSWEC and UUK, for developing social work and social care research. It must be recognised, nonetheless, this will be a more achievable aspiration in some higher education sectors than others. For example, one salutary contribution - from a consultant with a doctorate in a cognate discipline from a Russell Group university, now working in a social work department at post 1992 HEI - illustrated powerfully the difference between institutions where research productivity per se is highly valued, and others where it is not:

_It is terribly hard being in a research group of one. Just to be clear, individuals can be promoted to principal lecturer if they take on senior management duties - become a head of school for example. But there is no way of developing your career pathway by way of research or publications. So what we have in our faculty is a flat hierarchy, and the only real ‘incentive’ for an individual to progress her career and maintain her scholarly output by way of research and publications is to make sure she is attractive on paper when applying for other posts in other HEIs. Of course, this becomes harder to do the longer you are in this situation._ (Social work consultant)

7.5 Other research funders

7.5.1 Though potential for private sector sponsorship is limited, there is a range of other funders that might effectively become engaged in a strategy to strengthen social work and social care research capacity and quality. The range widens as we envisage increasingly interdisciplinary research with reach across wider professional and applied domains.

7.5.2 The ESRC and MRC have already established co-sponsorship schemes for interdisciplinary studentships. Few in number and highly competitive, the Councils
nonetheless reported in 2008 a relative shortage of fundable applications. These, especially if flexibly provided and resourced and some targeted for researchers at the health and social care interface, would provide a fertile opportunity for high quality applicants.

7.5.3 In addition, there are several research fellowship schemes offered by, for example, the Nuffield and Leverhulme Foundations, the British Academy and the European Union. Exact data have not been available, but there is little to indicate significant uptake from social work, nor by others working on social care topics. In the cases of Leverhulme and Nuffield early career fellowships, prerequisites that candidates have prior doctoral qualification will preclude many social work constituents (with the typical profile described in 6.3) from applying. But this is not true for all schemes. The EU Training and Mobility of Researchers Programme, for example, funds opportunities for overseas research for those at all, including postgraduate, stages of the research career life course. Closer to home, the ESRC’s recently introduced mid-career fellowships could provide to others an exemplar opportunity for experienced professionals to undertake either doctoral or post-doctoral research. Fellowship schemes are available from the same bodies for more established researchers, but again, under-used by social work and social care. Here there may not only be scope for collaborative sponsorship with the ESRC, but also for wider proactive work to promote or even target these towards social work and social care researchers. Section 9 considers these in more detail.

7.5.4 Though the focus of the strategic adviser initiative is not primarily on direct funding of research and research programmes, the link between such investment and capacity development is powerful. At this point it is useful simply to highlight the link and to point to the potential for collaborative funding between the ESRC and other research funders third sector as well as public sector, to grow interdisciplinary research in social work, social care and across related domains. Possibilities will be discussed further in section 11.

7.6 JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS

7.6.1 The synergies (as well as distinctions) between the strategic adviser initiative and the work of JUCSWEC research strategy (2006) implementation, as well as the work of SCIE and IRISS have already been highlighted (1.4). JUCSWEC is one of three committees of the Joint Universities Council, the learned society representing social work, social policy and public administration. Alongside the Association of Professors of Social Work, JUCSWEC currently acts as the main voice of the social work academic community with regard to research capacity development both in the academy and practice. Section 12.6 discusses potential in the near future to establish an independent and self funding learned society for social work and social care, to develop and extend the mechanisms for leadership of the discipline and field. JUCSWEC in the short term, and a learned society established to take forward its work, should be key strategic players in advancing the research capacity building agenda.

7.6.2 So too will SCIE and IRISS, as significant stakeholders. While funding small amounts of primary research, their major priorities are promoting the development and use of high quality social care knowledges (including research) and raising the profile of social care issues on a range of wider funding and policy agendas. JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS should make significant contributions to a strategic initiative arising from the present report and recommendations. In particular they might take lead roles in galvanising stakeholder support for research capacity
development, and helping to represent the discipline and field to research funding bodies.

7.7 Associations and networks

7.7.1 Dialogue will also be useful to engage in different capacities the variety of professional and research associations and groupings, virtual or real, that already exist and bring together research, practice and user communities in social work, social care and related fields. Here, for example, there are many existing research networks and fora – some, such as Making Research Count and Research, social work and social care specific, others, such as the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, and the UK Ageing Research Forum, interdisciplinary around common themes – whose activities and resources might add to the researcher support and development opportunities to be maximised.

7.7.2 There are also bodies such as the Social Research Association and the Social Services Research Group, which might complement provision through ESRC mechanisms of specialist or generic research training. These might, for example, fill some gaps that may be left when the new arrangements for postgraduate training and researcher development take shape.

7.7.2 Finally, there are the learned societies in cognate disciplines, such as the British Psychological Society, the Social Policy Association and the British Sociological Association, as well as others in health and education, with which constructive links should be made. Here the purpose would be two fold. Firstly, to increase the level of interdisciplinary engagement around common research themes. Secondly, if, as suggested in section 12, social work and social care are to establish a learned society of their own, there will be synergies to maximise and lessons to be learned from other learned societies that have thrived and serve their communities well.
7.8 Summary of key findings and recommendations

**B iii) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

**Government departments and non-government agencies/centres**
- Provide some mainstay research funding, but much less than in health.
- Each country government is giving some increased priority to social work and social care research and capacity, with preference for using own vehicles; much is focused on practitioner research but some on academic research centres of excellence, and on doctoral and fellowship schemes.
- Collaboration of ESRC with NIHR is a positive sign of linkage with health.
- Public spending and policy climates challenging, but potential for synergy and co-funding with government and non-government bodies to be explored.

**Employing agencies and regulators**
- Employing agencies are key research funders, but piecemeal and small.
- Low levels of employer engagement in research capacity development agendas is reinforced by low profile of research in regulator frameworks for post qualifying training. Employers need to see direct added value of researcher development to service and practice development.
- Enhanced efforts required to maximise employer engagement and regulator commitment to inclusion and professional recognition of research training.

**Higher education institutions and funders**
- QR funding climate post RAE 2008 is not favourable.
- Embryonic Scottish Funding Council plan to co-fund swsc research capacity development may dovetail with ESRC framework and provide a model.
- Status of sw discipline and sc field within HEIs needs raising; institutional barriers to cross-discipline engagement need lowering.
- SW representation in HEI or consortia bids for DTC/DTU status is vital, as is sw training provision from DTCs to other centres.
- ESRC with JUCSWEC should have a wider galvanising role in promoting funding council, UUK and HEI support.

**Other research funders**
- Opportunities for increased and collaborative support from MRC, third sector and other research funders need to be maximised, especially to promote engagement across disciplines.

**JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS**
- There are strong synergies with the work of SCIE and IRISS, and the implementation of the JUCSWEC research strategy, for further development.

**Associations, networks and learned societies**
- Productive links can be made with existing research networks and fora, in social work and social care and with related disciplines around common substantive themes. Also for researcher training and development.
- Links with cognate learned societies to be developed, around common themes and to explore possibilities for a learned society of swsc.

See Recommendations: 5; 6
SECTION 8: POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH TRAINING

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 It is clear from previous discussion that postgraduate research training constitutes a key intervention point in the researcher life-course to improve capacity and quality for the longer term. For social work and social care we must look at training pathways sufficiently heterogeneous that they can both attract and meet the needs of the diverse potential candidates (6.3) involved.

8.1.2 This report outlines first some of the more contested questions that have surrounded the development of the new ESRC postgraduate training framework (ESRC, 2009a,b,c), from the social work and social care perspective. The main body of discussion, however, examines how researcher engagement and capacity needs can best be met within the framework, with some attention to the wider galvanising role that the ESRC might play.

8.2 Doctoral training centres and units: excellence and capacity development

8.2.1 Currently there are 25 ESRC recognised social work outlets, 10 with quota award allocations. Replacing the accreditation of individual outlets, the new framework will bring institutional or consortium recognition for around 25 doctoral training centres (DTCs), and an unrestricted number of smaller doctoral training units (DTUs). The goal is: ‘supporting excellence in the provision of postgraduate training’ (2009a, p1), to be achieved through capitalising to the maximum on existing excellence in research training. Hence key criteria for DTC/DTU selection will be proven strengths, including RAE profiles, research income, critical mass of studentships and PhD thesis submission rates. DTCs (eligible for quota awards) will need to demonstrate the ability to offer high quality discipline specific and interdisciplinary training across a significant range of social science disciplines. Smaller DTUs will concentrate on areas where they have strong training provision embedded within an established high quality research environment.

8.2.2 The broader implications for social sciences of this reconfiguration have been aired through an extensive consultation process. As will be discussed below, consultants to this initiative have highlighted significant implications for social work in particular, rather than for contributor disciplines to social care (since none see themselves as representing social care). This is worth noting because it may in fact place at risk the representation of social care in the DTC/DTU disciplinary mix. Marginalisation of social care (unlike that of social work) could result from the fact that it has no formal discipline recognition with the ESRC or in most HEIs, so there will be no mechanism for planning or steer to ensure its representation. The gap may ultimately be avoided if, as may be likely, some of the strongest existing social care research centres which are themselves located in centres of wider excellence social science training, are selected for inclusion in the DTC/DTU network.

Likewise, a minority of consultant feedback to this initiative focused on any distinctive provisions within the framework for the needs of candidates from cognate disciplines undertaking social care research. This is too is unsurprising, firstly because cognate postgraduates are more likely to have ‘traditional’ candidate profiles (6.3.1), so their

\[18\] Other outlets, for example in social policy, may well train postgraduate researchers in social care but ESRC administrative data do not record this.
needs are more likely to be met through mechanisms designed with mainstream profiles in mind. Secondly, since cognate discipline respondents to this initiative did not regard themselves as ‘social care researchers’ (see 4.4 above), in the main they did not feel well placed to judge what the postgraduate training needs of such researchers might be. The exceptions, however, were suggestions for targeted incentives for engagement, including earmarked studentships for those making the move across or between disciplines, and tailored opportunities for familiarisation with social work and social care (8.7; 8.8; 8.10)).

8.2.3 Among social work consultants, a primary cause for concern (both for the health of the discipline and growth of excellence), has been that concentration of training under the new framework in well established centres of social science excellence risks marginalising an emergent discipline like social work from the array of discipline specific research training available. Related is the concern that if social work is not well represented across the network, accessibility of training for a candidate group (6.3) for whom accessibility is typically a problem, will worsen:

It's not clear how recognised training opportunities for ALL social science disciplines, including emerging ones like social work, will be ensured regionally and nationally, or whether the allocation of studentship quotas within DTCs will be steered towards the capacity building needs of priority disciplines. For social work and social care, it will be vital that these needs are not occluded through the workings of an excellence based model that by default favours more established research disciplines and institutions. (Social work consultant)

8.2.4 A further concern involves prioritising excellence over health of the discipline, exclusivity over inclusivity:

managing the tension between (on the one hand) developing an inclusive approach for all social work researchers and educators to develop their research capability, and (on the other) promoting high quality research in particular areas, often seen as exclusive and elitist. (Social work consultant)

On this question social work consultants expressed divergent views:

[There is] the notion that all should be made welcome to the feast. I do not share this view. We should concentrate research training in centres of excellence - I do not accept that democratising social work research training or practice (spreading what little we have thinly) is a sensible way forward….. But social work needs to be as fully as possible represented in the excellence mix. In order to ensure access, these would need to be developed for delivery in more flexible ways than are currently used. In particular, it should be recognized that part-time will be the norm for social work PGRs for the foreseeable future. (Social work consultant)

At present research training is not flexible enough to practitioners to pursue part-time study - this will worsen given the ESRC doctoral training initiatives to centralise. Don't pursue the ESRC DTC and DTU plans! (Social work consultant)

The ESRC’s primary commitment, however, is to promoting research excellence; hence consolidation – with likely centralisation - of excellence lie at the heart of the new training framework. It is essential that both social work and social care are best able to benefit from the mechanisms that will be in place.

8.2.5 An additional challenge is the risk that existing pockets of excellence (as recognised by RAE 2008 and including social work training outlets currently ESRC
recognized) may be precluded from contributing to the DTC/DTU network. Valuable social work research expertise may exist in centres otherwise not eligible or not selected for DTC or DTU status. Conversely, social work with its low critical mass and often marginal status in individual HEIs (7.4), may be judged insufficiently cost effective to be included as a distinctive strand in institutional DTC/DTU bids. Moreover, exclusion from the network of excellence may discourage HEIs from aspiring to provide social work research training to ESRC standards.

8.2.6 Several of the ESRC proposals for training delivery within the new framework are intended to deal with some of these risks, to both promote excellence and secure the long term health of the social science research base.... [including] areas where there are particular shortages or where there is the need to develop future high quality research capacity' (2009a, pt 4). These proposals centre around two models:

- Inter-institutional collaboration through DTC or DTU consortia, to design and deliver optimal range and quality of research training and supervision, at core and advanced levels, generic and specialist. Incentives to do this are the accumulation of critical mass sufficient for recognition, and allocation of additional quota awards. Disincentives are the bureaucratic and financial vicissitudes of working across institutions, but there are already good examples in Scotland and Wales where such pooling of resource has worked (ESRC, 2009c).

- Collaboration between centres to provide improved access to advanced and specialist training, facilities and resources - a requirement of DTCs that might be particularly helpful for priority disciplines:


A DTC will also be expected directly to support national capacity building priorities. These may be in specific disciplines or national shortage areas where the Council is looking to strengthen capacity as part of its strategy to support the long term health of the social science research base. (2009a, pt 14)

8.2.7 In this light, it is essential that members of the social work academy think creatively and laterally to ensure that the optimum possible use of existing resource, as well as optimal geographical spread of high quality training opportunities, are achieved.19 The options seem to be:

- Existing sites of excellence in social work research and training which are included in DTC (and possibly DTU) application should highlight within their bids the provision of specialist and advanced social work and interdisciplinary research training to other centres regionally and preferably nationally with flexible delivery modes (8.6).

- There will be clear advantages to those social work departments capable of providing high quality training but without sufficient critical mass or support in their own HEIs, to combine forces with other centres to form regional consortia.

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19 One option informally considered by JUCSWEC was to develop a national training centre, perhaps administered through the SSCR, but pooling expertise across the UK to provide high quality social work research training made widely geographically accessible. However this has not been feasible, since under the ESRC framework requirements contributor centres could not then participate in their own institutional bids as well.
• Departments not able to provide high quality subject specific training (but able for example, to offer high quality co-supervision of research students and some core/interdisciplinary training) should actively seek links with DTCs able to provide specialist and advanced training.

8.2.9 Concentration of excellence, regional access and promoting rather than marginalising social work and social care as priority areas, were key issues underpinning consultant proposals to the ESRC. The first is that they ensure to include social work representation on the peer review college assessing DTC and DTU applications. Secondly, that within the range of excellence on offer - the college ensure that social work, as a priority area, and social care as a field not formally recognised, are adequately represented in the overall array of accredited training, as well as in the regional and institutional mix. Thirdly, that the ESRC exercise its strategic steer in the allocation of quota awards both to and within DTCs to ensure that social work and social care capacity for excellence is fostered.

How can the ESRC help? Making use of its strategic steer to ensure at regional and institutional level that social work is not squeezed out, either in the selection of DTCs/DTUs or in the allocation or funding levels of studentships within in particular institutions, ensuring geographical spread of core training facilities and reasonable access to advanced and specialist training. (Social work consultant)

8.3 Disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in structure and delivery of postgraduate research training

8.3.1 ‘Purposeful interdisciplinary training’ (ESRC, 2009a, pts 5; 9) is to be firmly embedded within the new framework. In structural terms, institutional rather than programme level accreditation should offer greater opportunity for coherent, integrated provision of core and some advanced training across social sciences. Those undertaking interdisciplinary work will be able to follow interdisciplinary pathways, or discipline specific pathways with generic core modules. The model promises increased scope for synergy between diverse students and educators.

8.3.2 In the light of the strengths and weaknesses of the social work and social care research base (4.2; 4.3), priority themes to be pursued (5.2; 5.3), and candidates to be engaged (6.3), consultants to this initiative saw many advantages to the interdisciplinary structure and delivery envisaged in the new framework. However, enthusiasm was predicated on the understanding (now confirmed by the ESRC, 2009a,b,c) that interdisciplinarity should not come at the expense of disciplinarity:

Early career research training has to be ‘fit for purpose’ and this may be quite specific to a particular context or setting and/or substantive interest. (Social work consultant)

In this regard, several respondents were disappointed to see the end of discipline specific training guidelines, in favour of individual DTC/DTU responsibility for developing their own. Concern here echoed the arguments raised earlier (1.4.3; 1.4.4; 4.2.1) about the distinctiveness and credibility of social work as a practice based discipline,20 and the standing of ESRC guidelines as the kite mark for others:

ESRC postgraduate guidelines for social work provide a clear basis for the development of specific social work modules within an interdisciplinary framework; their relevance goes beyond ESRC sponsored research. (Social work consultant)

20This was the argument of the ESRC Subject Area Panel Report for Social Work (Butler, 2007).
In the case of social work, the preference for centrally agreed discipline guidelines was underlined by recognition that social work candidates typically have distinctive research capability needs to be addressed in order to take advantage of interdisciplinary opportunities:

Social workers need to be confident in their own research knowledge and skills in order to engage on a more equal footing with those from more established disciplines. This means that the development of inter-disciplinarity needs to be done in tandem with the development of social work and social care research training which highlights inter-disciplinary research knowledge and skills. (Social work consultant)

8.3.3 The majority support for interdisciplinary structures and delivery of training was two-fold:

- Consultants from all disciplines highlighted the likelihood of improving quality of core social science training, acquainting students with concepts and strategies from other disciplines, and modelling collaborative and interdisciplinary engagement:

  Delivering common core social science research training alongside other disciplines would help drive up standards and help social work students locate themselves in the broader currents of social scientific discourse. Personally, I am a great fan of HEI wide graduate schools. (Social work consultant)

  Research training should be a mixture of disciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching and learning where contributors to the programme are modelling interdisciplinary collaboration and institution-wide and cross-institution partnerships can be developed. This is more common in the context of inter-professional learning but should be transferable. (Social work consultant)

- Consultants from cognate disciplines saw postgraduate training as a key mechanism for engaging researchers from other disciplines in social work and social care, because at this early research career intervention point resistance to crossing disciplinary boundaries should be less entrenched, and openness to new areas of discovery greater:

  I do think it’s important that the foundation is laid there at doctoral level and it’s then a matter of persuading people over and above that to do research on topics that are important in the social work or the education arena. Over a long period of time I think that’s the thing that’s going to actually change things most. (Cognate consultant)

Nonetheless, given the disincentives to movement across disciplines, particularly in the direction of social work and social care (6.3.1; 6.4.1), several respondents argued that additional incentives for postgraduate students may well be needed, at least in the short term:

  You need to create the right conditions especially for doctoral students from other disciplines to come into social care research. There’s got to be a carrot, so that it’s not just possible but desirable. (Cognate consultant)

8.3.4 Here too consultants gave strong endorsement to a proposal that the ESRC exercise its strategic steer in the allocation of quota awards to and within DTCs
8.4 Disciplinary and interdisciplinary content of research training

8.4.1 Consultant recommendations on the content of postgraduate research training were very much in line with the perceived strengths and deficits of social work and social care research currently (4.2; 4.3), and with the substantive and methodological priority themes identified for the future (5.2; 5.3). There was broad consensus on all the following points:

- Postgraduate training should ensure the development of sound generic researcher and transferable skills (as embedded in previous ESRC guidelines, the latter now including knowledge transfer, communication and impact).

- Core generic training needs to ensure development of a sound social science research knowledge and skills base. This must include basic quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies and methods:

  I’m broadly in favour of the current ESRC regime that requires people to do at least a minimal amount of everything. Certainly what they’re going to get in an MRes is not going to equip them to actually go and do very much by the way of sophisticated quantitative or qualitative research. But that’s not the point: the point is what it means to be a professional social scientist and having the sufficient knowledge to know what kinds of methodologies are appropriate to what kinds of questions. It may well be that given certain kinds of specialism, you would never, ever use many of those things. But it still seems to me to be important to have that kind of foundational knowledge. (Cognate consultant)

- Core specialist training should include the application of diverse methodological approaches directly to social work and social care research questions. It should also highlight methodological issues central to researching practice, such as research ethics and participatory methods.

  Shouldn’t the hallmarks of good, sound, high quality social work research training (and research) be exactly the same as the standards applied to other kinds of social research? In other words, I would expect to see an appropriate research design/methods used, careful adherence to research ethics, findings or claims that were substantiated by the empirical data, be they quantitative or qualitative, and some intimation of the usefulness and applicability of the data to policy or practice. The only difference being that along with all these key indicators, you would also expect researchers to learn the importance for a high quality piece of social work research to strongly integrate the service user’s perspective and be committed to a view of democracy / social justice / equality. (Social work consultant)

- Advanced training in particular should support the broad range of methodological priority themes outlined in section 5. It should build on existing strengths, redeem current deficits in range and sophistication, and extend and diversify new approaches in the field.
Quantitative research capabilities must be improved and extended to all academic social workers (even if they opt not to use them), much as psychology does. Beyond that specialist training for some is needed in multivariate, logistic regression and longitudinal analytic techniques. (Social work consultant)

Beyond the basics, much depends on what research they’re wanting to do. So if they want to be observing, say, what goes on in a multi-professional team meeting, then there are very approaches to observing they could learn about. You can count what you see, like psychologists do, or use much more fluid visual methods. That’s when you need to develop the repertoire even if you only use part of it, as you probably will.

• It is not necessary for all social work and social care researchers to develop advanced technical skills in, for example, statistics or economic analysis. Instead they need sufficient understanding to recognise and seek what’s needed from appropriate sources:

What you need is not to try and train people in all the complex quantitative data analysis skills but in sufficient knowledge of what’s involved and sufficient knowledge of how you might approach those sorts of data. Then you bring in someone, say an economist, who has got good skills in that area. That’s capacity building. (Cognate consultant)

• At core and advanced levels, training needs to ensure that students develop sound subject knowledge and theoretical understanding relevant to social work and social care and drawn from a wide range of disciplines. They need to be able to integrate these with the research approaches and techniques used.

• High quality training must be underpinned by highest possible standards of supervision, individual training needs analysis, and regular review. Co-supervision across disciplines will encourage cross-fertilisation and collaboration.

• Flexible and heterogeneous training pathways will be essential; what constitutes core and advanced content will need to vary with pathways offered.

8.4.2 All of the above recommendations apply as much to social care as to social work research, and should provide useful indicators for those planning DTC or DTU bids. However the consultation did not yield blueprints for the specialist content of a joint social work and social care research training pathway. Since social care is by definition a field to which many can contribute, a social work and social care pathway was considered by most to be interdisciplinary also by definition.

Nonetheless, consultants from social work in particular were clear about the specialist content of a social work discipline specific pathway, in line with the distinctive practice base and commitments of the discipline:

Social work does have and does need distinctive training in relation to its practice oriented approaches and participatory research. This is crucial for other disciplines to learn about particularly if they are to value social work research. (Social work consultant)
8.4.3 From those in favour of importing postgraduates from cognate disciplines into social work there was the suggestion that some elements of core training should be designed to familiarise such students with social work practice, priorities and research issues. This might usefully be complemented by fixed period internships in practice settings (8.7).

8.5 Flexible training structures

8.5.1 Increased flexibilities in training structures to be introduced with the revised ESRC framework – diversifying the 1+3 and +3 models - was welcome where mentioned, but not much mentioned. Nonetheless, it is likely that a more diverse range of training structures will allow doctoral study better to be tailored to the needs of individual candidates in this as in other fields. Many social workers, for example, will already have a masters degree; they will benefit from structured research training but some may be disinclined to undertake a second masters en route to doctoral qualification.

8.5.2 Where the flexible structures might be especially helpful is for those from cognate disciplines, who will have diverse training needs depending on their background and familiarity with social care. DTC and DTU applicants are encouraged to allow as much scope as possible for flexible pathways to accommodate those who reach across disciplines in this way.

8.6 Flexible and part-time modes of delivery

8.6.1 Butler, in 2005, noted a ‘depressing tendency’ in ESRC recognised training provision to treat part-time doctoral students as the exception, not the norm that in reality they are in practice based disciplines. By 2007, Spencer et. al. (2007) in their review of the 1+3 training model, noted that part-time routes (along with professional doctorates) remained the ‘poor relatives’ in the family of training provision.

8.6.2 The new Guidelines do not give high profile to this issue, but do state that ‘the ESRC continues to be committed to supporting students at post-doctoral level’ and that ‘DTCs and DTUs will be required to set out how their strategy and provision for postgraduate training meets the needs and circumstances of part-time students’ (ESRC, 2009c, p9). While this may or may not be significant for candidates from cognate disciplines researching social care themes, it is an essential criterion to be addressed for typical social work candidates (6.3.2; 6.3.3). As one consultant, from another practice based discipline, reflected:

When you read the data that come out of HEFCE or the other research councils, there are probably far more scientists and social scientists doing part-time doctorates than ESRC recognise. Certainly the Australian research supports that. But in relation to social sciences and humanities, the funders don't have a sense of how important part-time routes are to the vocational disciplines. (Cognate consultant)

Consultants from social work argued strongly that the case for part-time provision becomes all the stronger with the likelihood that, under the new framework, accredited training will become more concentrated in existing centres of excellence in social science, which may or may not include social work, requiring social work candidates to register from a distance.

8.6.3 Here, within the overarching selection of DTCs and DTUs on grounds of excellence, an ESRC steer towards ensuring regional coverage of priority subject
areas in particular, dovetailed with one towards part-time provision, will be important for capacity development. For centres or consortia making either DTC or DTU bids, it will be essential to ensure that part-time provision is included, not as ‘poor relative’ but as an integral strand of delivery. For DTCs planning to provide workshops, short courses and masters programmes to other centres, the imperative is even stronger.

8.6.4 The same arguments hold for other flexible modes of delivery suggested within the new training guidelines (p9) and endorsed by consultants to this initiative. These should include blended learning approaches, with on-line training materials and wide-ranging use of e-technologies, as well as distributed delivery of face-to-face teaching and supervision. Where DTCs make such provision to other centres, the costs will need to be incorporated into the funding model.

8.7 Internships and project or centre attachments

8.7.1 Internships:

The ESRC encourages the use, where appropriate, of short term internships for doctoral students in public, private or third sector organisations. For social work and social care, consultants favoured two distinct models.

The first, most suitable for candidates from cognate disciplines, is provision of opportunities to spend periods of time within social work and/or social care agencies, to familiarise them with the field, enable them to ‘get a feel for the realities of practice’, and test out their research ideas in context. The second model, appropriate for all, involves placement for short to medium periods in ‘specialist’ centres, where candidates could gain specialist knowledge and experience. Suggestions included placements in government departments, where students get a taste of policy decision making processes and priorities, or in established centres of excellence for research in priority substantive or methodological thematic areas. Examples of the latter included SCIE or the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI) for expertise in systematic review, the National Centre for Social Research (NATCEN) for longitudinal analysis of large datasets, or the National School for Social Care Research (SSCR) for a wide range of substantive and methodological expertise. Equally, placements could be in centres of excellence to be accredited within the DTC/DTU network. These arrangements would of course need to be funded, where possible co-funded, but could have pay-offs for both students and centres:

For instance we now do extensive observational research... It's a skill and you may learn it best by sticking next to people and watching them do it and playing a part and discussing the analysis. That gaining of experience, from my point of view, is much more important than the formal training that some people can get. (Cognate consultant)

Good idea. This happened under the NCRM grant. People were paid to do it, to come and learn, and we paid them the full rates..... It could be on primary research as well secondary and we train them. But they would help us so it would be quid pro quo. (Cognate consultant)

8.7.2 Project and centre attachments

More expansive is the proposal for fully fledged attachment of studentships to high quality research projects or programmes, to centres of research excellence, or both.
Literature reviewed in the audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) highlighted the effective use of the ‘apprenticeship’ training model in North America for capacity development in social work research. The ESRC supports project based studentships of this kind, attached to research grants, but reported in 2008 that the opportunities were under-used (ESRC, 2008c). Several consultants were strongly in favour of a steer towards incorporating studentships on future applications for research grants of sufficient size, some recommending that this might be a requirement not an option, especially if projects are collaborative and interdisciplinary:

*The ESRC could require that all collaborative large scale grants in social work and social care requiring 1-2 social work academics have 2 fully funded studentships who would work as research assistants on the project.* (Social work consultant)

*This is the best way by far to learn the trade. From start to finish you are working with others who know their business. You’re completely involved at all stages, or if not all stages whichever ones give the best fit for the project’s needs and the student’s. You get your hands dirty, really dirty but the difference is there are others in there getting mucky too. And they know how to do or if they don’t know you’re in there together and working it through. It has to be combined with formal training of course. But the student gets the hands on support and makes a genuine contribution to something bigger. They do it in the States all the time. I don’t know why we don’t do it here. Money, I suppose.* (Social work consultant)

Closely related is the proposal that studentships be formally linked to established centres of research excellence, whether or not they are conducting ESRC funded or co-funded research projects at the time. Here too the emphasis is on short and medium term benefits to students and to centres:

*One model is giving studentships to centres of research excellence and people could get a fantastic learning experience. What could we get out of it? We’d get nice bright committed young people who we might then offer jobs to and if we’ve got a new job coming up, frankly they’d be in the frontline for it because recruitment can be an issue. Students would have access to high quality of research methods training…. but also be engaged in an active research centre, so that they can be tagged into projects, learn about dealing with real data as opposed to perfect data…. We could do some of what I would call tailor made training using different staff members and e could so some purchasing particular skills training.* (Cognate consultant)

The suggestion is that project or centre attached studentships in social work and social care should be actively promoted, especially if they provide the opportunity for interdisciplinary collaborative work. However this raises the question of how such arrangements will best fit within existing and forthcoming ESRC frameworks and (co)funding mechanisms. Based on the evidence of this review, and on ESRC priorities, a provisional proposal is that individual training packages with project or centre attachments be incorporated within the network of DTC and DTU provision, but with bespoke links to centres or projects elsewhere where ESRC quality standards are met. Thus a student undertaking formal training at one DTC might be attached to a research project at another; they might also be linked to an ESRC (co)funded project or programme at a centre outside the DTC/DTU network. Those applying for DTC or DTU accreditation to include social work and social care might include in their bids potential for such arrangements.
8.8 Funding flexibilities: allocation of studentships

8.8.1 The new framework places strong emphasis on funding flexibilities – both in the allocation and sourcing of studentship funds. For social work and social care it will be vital to use and develop these flexibilities to the maximum.

8.8.2 The proposal for ESRC strategic steer in the allocation of DTC quota studentships for social work and social care has already been highlighted (8.2.9; 8.3.4). Beyond this, there are further flexibilities identified in guidelines for the new framework which, if appropriately exploited, could be of significant benefit. In addition to part-time stipends, there should be:

*flexibility to increase stipend levels to help recruit/retain students in national shortage areas… particularly important in the recruitment of mature students, common in practice based disciplines such as social work, management and business studies or education where there is a recognised need to strengthen research capacity.* (ESRC, 2009a, pt 49)

For candidates with typical social work profiles (6.3.3; 6.3.4), consultants from social work and some from elsewhere endorsed this message strongly, some drawing parallels with health and medicine where doctoral research is supported at full salary levels:

*It’s actually trying to get the people who are a bit more senior, the good ones with experience who want to do research. So [it’s] what the doctoral fellowships do that the DH have. You take someone who is a manager or a senior practitioner like you do with nurses and you pay their salary for three years to do a piece of work and everything else. You skill them up and they do a piece of work. They probably have a job to go back to. Of course in their line of work they can do both.* (Cognate consultant)

The last point made by the consultant above is also key. It echoes the ESRC’s concern to build and retain academic research capability rather than ‘lose’ it with the transfer of doctoral qualified researchers back into practice. This raises the related question of flexible career development opportunities between or combining research and practice, to be discussed in section 10.21

While flexible stipend levels may be less crucial to meet the circumstances of postgraduates from cognate disciplines who fit the ‘traditional’ PhD candidate profile, higher than standard stipends may well provide an added incentive to them to cross over into social care research.

8.8.3 Also strongly featured in the new training framework are plans to encourage part funding of studentships:

*This means that institutions can add their own funding to support studentships or secure co-funding from public, private or third sector sources. This will provide a leverage function helping to increase the volume of studentships.* (ESRC, 2008a, pt 46)

21 Meanwhile it is worth noting that any risk to DTCs of allocating awards to mature professionals who might for other reasons return to practice midway are mitigated by the option of ‘recycling’ awards now being introduced (2009a, pt 45).
8.8.4 One further opportunity, not highlighted as a ‘funding flexibility’ in the new framework documentation but relevant for social work and social care, is the potential to use ESRC mid-career development fellowships to support doctoral research. Relatively recently introduced, these are targeted not only to traditional post-doctoral researchers, but also to those in mid-professional career who might use the sponsorship to undertake doctoral research. Better funded than student stipends, these fellowships would suit either early career social work academics or experienced practitioners/managers in social work and social care.

8.9 Funding flexibilities: co-investment

This section examines some specific possibilities for mixed funding of postgraduate research training, at national, regional or local levels.

8.9.1 Cross-council sponsorship

Jointly the ESRC and MRC already have an interdisciplinary competition award scheme for doctoral and postdoctoral researchers working in areas that cross-cut medical and social sciences. As earlier discussion has highlighted, the interface between health, social work and social care research (mirroring practice), with potential for each to impact on the other, is already significant and growing (3.1; 3.5) Recognition of this is also firmly embedded within the priority themes for research and capacity development identified (5.2; 5.3).

The ESRC/MRC interdisciplinary scheme requires both an academic and a ‘clinical’ partner, and there is no obvious reason why agencies providing integrated health and social care services should not fit the latter category. However though the scheme is well used by, for example, clinical psychology, it has been not all used by social work or social care; the problem, once again, appears to lie with lack of applications, not lack of success. This is clearly an opportunity missed, one to which DTCs and DTUs could well turn their attention. The ESRC might also publicise more the applicability of the scheme to social work and social care as a priority area.

8.9.2 National government and public health funders

Social work consultants were well aware of the unfavourable comparison between sponsorship of postgraduate research training in health, with that in their own discipline. They also argued that similar opportunities should be available in social work and social care, especially, though not exclusively, where linked to health care research. Specific comparators used were nursing and allied health, which have suffered from similar research capacity deficits. There, consultants were able to cite, for example, doctoral fellowships made available under the auspices of the National Coordinating Centre for Research Capacity Development, and through the Scottish Chief Scientist’s Office:
The Department of Health did talk about making available to social care people some of those doctoral fellowships that nurses can get. Occupational therapists can get them too if they're NHS. And in Northern Ireland they can go to social care people because of the integrated trust. (Cognate consultant)

In all 4 UK countries, central government responsibility for social work and social care (including research) is closely tied in with health, historically the ‘poor relation’ but recently foregrounded slightly more than before (7.2). Despite the disappointing results of the UK Social Care Research Collaboration efforts to bring together a UK-wide funders’ forum, there is a clear strategic case for the ESRC work with national governments and their research and development bodies, to boost collaborative investment in social work and social care research, including postgraduate, capacity development. In partnership with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), for example, the ESRC is already developing a studentship and postdoctoral fellowship scheme intended mainly for nurses and allied health professionals, with NIHR paying their full salaries. The same opportunities might well be opened up for social work and social care, which sits within the NIHR remit. In the first instance, such doctoral training opportunities might be channelled through any of the (NIHR funded) SSCR centres that may become part of accredited DTCs. Synergies along similar lines might be developed with the existing health and social care research and development initiatives of the Welsh and Northern Irish governments outlined in 7.2.

8.9.3 Employers and regulators

Until now, the primary mechanism for ESRC co-funding of studentships with public, third or voluntary sector partners has been the competitive CASE (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering) scheme, with doctoral research undertaken to the mutual benefit of agency and academy. In theory CASE has been highly suitable for social work and social care, but in practice little exploited (ESRC, 2008c). The ESRC intends to continue with CASE, but with more flexibility for DTCs and DTUs to determine the funding arrangement with partners. This may go some way to answering the concerns of social work consultants to this project, who, confirming Shaw et. al. (2004), have found the scheme insufficiently flexible or resourced to work:

Some outlets for postgraduate research training have been able to develop effective partnerships around CASE studentships. If these could be properly funded and organized to enable graduate social workers to take up employment which included research this might help. (Social work consultant)

Several pointed to a mismatch between employer and research capacity development priorities here:

The timing of the CASE model is bad because the employer tends to want the kind of contribution in kind back soonish which doesn't fit very well with the timing for doing the doctorate... Three or four years, in the context of the average employing organisation is a century. Bits of quick and dirty research will be quick and dirty. We've done enough of that. (Cognate consultant)

As discussed in 7.3, it will be an uphill struggle to engage employers in cosponsorship of research capacity development, whether along CASE lines or through

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22 This holds despite the fact that in England children’s social care services are the responsibility of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, not the Department of Health.
other part funding arrangements now encouraged by the ESRC. One significant motivator would be a shift in the position of the Care Councils, towards incorporating postgraduate research within professional postqualifying frameworks (7.3.2). Consultants from social work confirmed that there is clear scope for accrediting masters level research training at higher specialist and advanced professional social work award levels. Social work consultants to this initiative underlined the importance of mobilising the ESRC (alongside key stakeholders such as JUCSWEC and SCIE) to continue lobbying the Care Councils and employers organisations in all 4 countries, to move forward the research capacity development agenda.

Despite all the above, some consultants were able to name examples where social work or social care employers had provided fellowship or bursary funding for senior practitioners or managers to undertake doctoral research. The key ingredient seemed to be clear added value to the service as well as the employee:

_The idea is that we help [the employing agency] turn the problem into a research problem. They fund the person to do the research and to do it really well and then they’re winners because they get a decent piece of work on a problem they’ve been grappling with. The person is motivated because they get their PhD, and we get somebody doing something good here._ (Cognate consultant)

Whether these candidates had continued with academic research subsequently is not known. But lessons from these exemplars will be worth finding out.

8.9.4 Higher education funders (funding councils) and HEIs

Potential for collaborative investment in research capacity development between the ESRC and higher education funders in Wales and (embryonically) Scotland was pinpointed in 7.4.2. There may be scope for dovetailing capacity building centre or network provision supported by HEFCW and SFC, with DTC/DTU provision. It will be helpful for those applying for DTC or DTU status in both countries to explore this potential, and for the ESRC peer review college to consider it in making their selection and allocating resource. Whether or not there is further scope for higher education funder support for social work and social care research in England or Northern Ireland remains to be explored. Here too, the ESRC could usefully take a lead in strategic discussions with HEFCE and the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning

The other key potential part funders for postgraduate research under the new framework are HEIs themselves, whether as DTC/DTU host institutions, or as purchasers of their training provision. Again, a few consultants were able to give examples of where this had been achieved, sometimes through residues from other funded research, sometimes through departmental, sometimes central HEI resources. One model was the provision of part funding for PhD students from departmental residues, as a ‘merit award’ for highest achieving new graduates. Another is borrowed from the USA:

_Funding of full time PhD students, who are giving back by being research assistants or teaching assistants, is common in the US. The teaching assistants then work on collaborative research teams on large projects. This is common in the US, and enables a learning by doing approach to research, within a socially supportive group._ (Social work consultant)

Important in addition to direct investment in studentships, is indirect HEI investment, including workload relief and buy-out for early career staff to undertake doctorates,
and dedicated support for those developing doctoral proposals and studentship applications. In the longer term, as social work and social care research capacity, productivity and evidence of excellence grow, HEIs (especially the research intensive) may be more willing to invest in these ways. In the shorter term, strategic intervention from UUK, encouraged by the ESRC and JUCSWEC, would help to kick-start the process.

8.10 Non standard initiatives

8.10.1 All the above proposals have focused on possibilities for stimulating social work and social care postgraduate research within the standard arrangements planned under new ESRC postgraduate training framework.

On the evidence of this consultation and desktop review, this report also makes two further proposals, for non standard initiatives. The first is put forward provisionally, pending further consultation. The second is recommended, as a catalyst to improvement.

8.10.2 Stand alone funded research masters

While there do exist a wide range of one year masters programmes, in for example child or adult welfare studies, which could provide orientation to postgraduate researchers from cognate disciplines, there are not at present funded equivalents for academically excellent social work graduates and/or practitioners who lack research training. Given the profile of these students (6.3.2; 6.3.3; 6.3.4), coupled with employer reluctance to invest from the outset in doctoral training over 3-4 years full time, longer part time, four consultants advocated that, in order to attract the best of candidates:

We need to decouple the masters and doctorate in the 1+3 model to enable shorter duration for research training. Doctoral training is viewed as too long particularly if one masters has been completed (Social work consultant)

Decoupling funding for masters and doctoral training is a good idea for social work - it would mean that students could move between institutions depending on their specialism. [This mechanism] could initiate and maintain pro-active engagement strategies with employers, including HEIs, to encourage development of research skills in academics and practice staff. (Social work consultant)

Though this argument was put forward by just a few, in the light of the wider evidence it is an important one. The model proposed is similar to that supported by the English NIHR/Chief Nursing Officer, supporting nurses, midwives and allied health practitioners in undertaking a masters in clinical research. For a stand alone research masters, the opportunity costs of engagement for all parties would not be great, and the potential gain significant. New social work graduates showing the most research promise and interest are more likely to divert from the path directly into practice if committing themselves in the first instance to 1 year (fte) of funded research training, rather than 4 years or more of doctoral research towards uncertain career prospects. For some too, 1 year masters training followed by a period in practice would provide the preferred platform for embarking on a practice based research doctorate subsequently. For experienced, academically well qualified professionals, appropriately funded masters training would offer the prospect of exploring research, and developing their skills and confidence, before making a longer term commitment to research. Correspondingly, the cost to employers would be less onerous and the potential knowledge/skills transfer gains quicker. For the ESRC and employers
respectively, such a training route would be a ‘loss leader’ – some social workers will take the ‘fork in the road’ into (or returning to) practice; others will progress to doctoral research and beyond. However, without such an opportunity, the chances of the latter are slimmer.

Provision for stand alone masters would be non standard for the ESRC, but not unique. A similar scheme is currently being piloted in demography with co-funding from the Population Investigation Committee. An equivalent scheme for social work and social care would also require co-funding, hence the provisional nature of this proposal pending further consultation. If in the longer term research masters and their components achieve professional recognition from the Social Care Councils, co-funding from employers may well be forthcoming. In the interim, the suggestion from this report is, firstly, that DTC/DTU applications which include social work and social care flag the potential for stand alone masters. Secondly, that the ESRC and other stakeholders actively explore whether there is potential for co-funding of a pilot at this stage.

8.10.3 Targeted studentship competition

All the evidence indicates that postgraduate training is a key career intervention point at which to engage and grow research capacity among candidates from social work and cognate disciplines in social work and social care research. It also indicates that existing opportunities are not well used, for lack of applications from social work and lack of incentives for others to engage. A targeted studentship competition would provide a welcome boost for this priority area in the short term, with knock-on benefits in the longer term.

There is a precedent. The ESRC has run 2 such targeted competitions in macroeconomics in 2009, using 20 studentships ring-fenced from the open competition. Distinct from ring-fencing alone, a targeted scheme is actively promoted, advertised through a specific call; applications must meet the same high standards as for the open competition. The macroeconomics scheme was very successful, with applications high in quality (rather than quantity) and a 56% success rate much higher than the 16.7% open competition average.

A well advertised targeted competition for social work and social care could be linked to the priority research themes identified in sections 5.2 and 5.3. It could prioritise also interdisciplinary work, and could encourage applicants from cognate disciplines and social work. Though it should not be dependent on co-funding from other sources, this might well be an opportunity for short term co-investment by, for example, the NIHR or government research and development departments. This would extend the number of studentships available and/or allow 2 such schemes to run in consecutive years. There might also be linked mid-career development fellowships for doctoral research. If introduced in 2010, the scheme would need to be run through existing recognized outlets; if 2011, then through the DTC/DTU network. In both cases, there would need to be clear flexible delivery options, particularly part time routes.

A targeted initiative of this sort would provide a welcome boost in opportunity and incentive for both cognate discipline and social work candidates to engage in this research field, helping to generate a cohort of next generation researchers and the

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23 At present, the only link between professional and academic accreditation exists within the English postqualifying framework, where masters dissertations for projects relevant to the sponsoring body may be jointly accredited for the Advanced Award.
platform for sustainable growth. Without such an initiative to act as a catalyst, the potential for excellence that already exists among high quality candidates is not realised. Cognate discipline postgraduates have no incentive to prompt a move in the direction of social work and social care. Strongest social work candidates have little confidence or encouragement that, however highly rated their applications may be, these can succeed, nor that there are training opportunities deliverable accessibly to them.

**8.11 Professional doctorates**

8.11.1 One research training route explicitly excluded from the flexibilities of the new framework is the professional doctorate. The position until now has been that professional doctorates may be accredited by the ESRC (there are 3 such in the UK), but studentships not funded. Under the new framework, professional doctorate training pathways will be neither funded nor accredited. This report recognises the decision, but invites further scrutiny of the case in due course.

8.11.2 Professional doctorates have increasingly provided an entry route for practitioners and managers in various professions, into research. In nursing, for example, with funding support from the Royal College of Nursing, they have contributed significantly to research capacity building in practice and in the academy. In social work they are a growing feature on the research training map. Scourfield and Smalley (2007) identified that there were 14 such programmes dedicated to or including social work, in the UK in 2006-7. More have come to light since, and a full 36% of respondents to Scourfield’s survey of postgraduate research students in social work were registered on professional doctorate programmes (Scourfield, 2008a, 2008b). Distinct from PhD programmes, professional doctorates aim both to produce knowledge for professional practice (that is, for impact) and to advance the academic research base. Commonly they provide fertile ground for cross-disciplinary learning and exchange since they are often run in parallel with, or integrated with, counterparts in education or nursing.

8.11.3 Social work professional doctorates are not currently professionally accredited, nor formally linked to career progression pathways. Nonetheless, they can carry distinctive appeal to committed, research minded practitioners or managers and in some cases to employer sponsors. The substantive attractions are: that the research produced is grounded in practice, can bring direct added value for service and practice improvement, and the practitioner/researcher can champion knowledge transfer within the organisation. Practical attractions are very significant too; professional doctorates are delivered through part-time and flexible routes, providing structured frameworks for mature professionals to work with HEI and often peer support.

8.11.4 ESRC reservations about professional doctorates seem to be based on two counts: that their academic quality is questionable, and that they are primarily vehicles for continuing professional development and knowledge transfer in practice, rather than for growing academic research excellence. Both the desktop review and consultant feedback to this consultation challenged these understandings.

On the first count, there may be legitimate questions about quality of professional doctorate programmes in some cases.\(^{24}\) However, these reservations should not, by

\(^{24}\) As Scourfield and Smalley (2007) have shown, PDs are more common in post- than pre-1992 universities, with possible implications for quality of the research environment. Some include taught
definition, apply to professional doctorate routes judged to have met the standards for ESRC recognition. For the latter, the academic entry criterion (high quality masters degree) would be (as they already are) exactly as they are for PhD programmes; likewise the standard of scholarship, rigour and originality required for doctoral award. Candidates undertaking professional doctorates would be no less academically able than their ‘traditional route’ counterparts. Through their connectedness to service management and practice, however, their potential for contribution to research excellence in this field is high, and for research impact and knowledge transfer higher than many.

On the second count, consultants from both from social work and other practice based disciplines argued from knowledge and experience that professional doctorates provide one of the few effective transition pathways from practice into academic research. They are increasingly the research training route of choice for early career academics (6.3.4), in many cases both academically very accomplished and professionally experienced. For these researchers, the same substantive and practical attractions of professional doctorates appeal more than traditional PhD routes:

*With the professional doctorate, there’s a real potential for people coming in with interesting questions from their work situations and thinking that they would like to move into academic work, or they’re people who’ve already got academic jobs in academia and need the doctorate. The mode of delivery and the focus on researching professional practice and organisations is the right route for them. There has to be a change in thinking here. Professional doctorates are not just CPD for managers, they’re a route into research for academics in a practice discipline.* (Cognate consultant)

*I certainly think that ESRC ought to revisit the issue of funding professional doctorates. On the one hand it does seem to me that a professional doctorate is a different animal from a PhD. It’s about taking what social science can do in order to help you understand better your professional area. I would want to preserve some notion of difference between the two kinds of doctorate But certainly here, a very substantial proportion of people who are doing professional doctorates are actually academics and are doing it in order to get the doctorate. And if you look at the North American situation, that’s definitely been the case in education and it’s worked well.* (Cognate consultant)

8.11.5 On this basis, this report invites the ESRC to reconsider the status of professional doctorates during the first 5 year period of framework implementation. In parallel, there needs to be further dialogue with the UK Social Care Councils to push for professional accreditation of masters and professional doctorate research training at masters level, which would add incentive to candidates and employers (8.10.2). For the ESRC, professional doctorates would be ‘loss leaders’ in terms of developing academic research capacity, since (as with research masters) some candidates will return to practice. But others will not; or, given the right career development opportunities, will combine the two to high standards over a career lifetime:

*I’m quite sure there is a fork in the road for people who do doctoral research in this way, some people will take the fork that says “stay in full time practice or management”. There’ll be another fork in the road and there definitely will be those components accredited at masters level, with the rationale that students will develop in academic sophistication as they progress. These are quality standards issues and need to be ironed out.*
who will go on to the academic research side of their career. That's how it happens already. (Cognate consultant)

8.12 Wider training opportunities for postgraduate and early career researchers

8.12.1 Though the major part of this section has focused on postgraduate training for doctorates and research masters, it is important to take a more inclusive view of training provision by the ESRC and beyond, for two reasons:

- A significant amount of additional training suitable for postgraduate and early career researchers takes place through other ESRC supported mechanisms (such as NCRM and RDI).
- A majority of doctoral research training in this field takes place outside ESRC outlets or frameworks and will continue so. The ESRC can play a strategic role in driving up capacity and standards more widely.

8.12.2 Researcher development initiative (RDI), National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) and sustainability

Most consultants from social work and some from elsewhere spoke favourably about training provisions made through the NCRM and RDI, among them some suitable for early career and postgraduate researchers; only two consultants also mentioned the Research Methods Festival. These provide training different from and beyond that required in ESRC postgraduate training guidelines. Importantly, they provide it to researchers without as well as within ESRC recognised postgraduate training programmes.

NCRM generic social science training was not frequently mentioned by consultants, but positively except for some criticism along the following lines:

It could be made more relevant to social work. Some of these methods are exciting but without examples it’s hard to see how it applies…. The other thing is publicity, I just don't think they market these things so we know that they're happening, when they're happening and they're relevant. (Social work consultant)

RDI initiatives were mentioned more, and were highly valued. In particular, the second of the two awarded to social work ‘Increasing the confidence and capability of academic social work researchers’ focused on training and supporting early career researchers to develop grant proposals. These comments are illustrative:

RDI gives us the chance to make the best use of existing opportunities within the ESRC, to provide training and support to help develop social work academics of the future. (Social work consultant)

RDI3 is a good example of a successful strategy to increase knowledge in research methods. More initiative like these are needed in my opinion. (Social work consultant)

The effectiveness of RDI initiatives has yet to be evaluated systematically by the ESRC; the first of the two social work rounds is currently being evaluated by its coordinators, the second not yet. However the two key concerns expressed to this consultation were not about quality but sustainability. The first is simply that the future configuration of NCRM and RDI activities is not clear. If, as might happen, their functions become rolled in with DTC and DTU provision, wider accessibility and coverage will need to be ensured.
The second concern is that RDI initiatives need to be more sustained in order to reap full benefits for individual participants, let alone for the academic research community. The JUCSWEC research sub-committee, for example, has proposed to this consultation that an RDI initiative should:

*be funded over 5 years in order to ensure a more sustained change in social work research capacity could be achieved than through individual initiatives.* (Social work consultant)

However, for the ESRC, the RDI scheme is intended to be short term and catalytic, not the prop for longer term dependency:

*A key aspect of the scheme is that, through it, the ESRC can act in a catalytic role to complement and promote more effective researcher development practice provided by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Learned Societies..... By funding such advanced training and development activity, the ESRC is able to work alongside institutions and Learned Societies*\(^{25}\) *to build their capacity to manage and provide advanced researcher development activity more effectively in the future, thereby helping to create a robust and sustainable national training infrastructure in the social sciences.* (ESRC, 2009e, p3).

8.12.3 For social work and social care, however, more sustained research and researcher training is required for the short term. Ultimately, whether through establishment of their own learned society or through another mechanism, the capacity within the research community needs to be sufficient to provide such training for itself. One step towards this in the short term could be collaboration with other existing providers of relevant training, either country based (such as the Welsh Clinical Research Collaboration), or wider (such as the Social Research Association or the Social Services Research Group).

8.13 Towards a programme of capacity development for research excellence

8.13.1 As later sections of this discussion will show, the challenge of sustainability extends well beyond the question of postgraduate and early career researcher training and development. It affects capacity development for research excellence throughout the career life course, and at research community, institutional as well as individual levels. Additional or enhanced training mechanisms need to be part of a programme of capacity building work extending beyond the mainstream provision of postgraduate research training under the new ESRC framework. In some cases such a programme would be able draw other existing provisions (as suggested in 8.12.3 above). In others, it would require fresh endeavours dedicated to growing excellence in social work and social care specifically.

8.13.2 The argument of this report – based on synthesis of the evidence provided by cognate discipline and social work consultants, especially by those with direct experience of capacity building elsewhere - is that the 'step change' proposed for social work and social care in the strategic advisor brief requires a whole much greater than the sum of its parts. While it may be possible (and in the short term financially attractive) to single out discrete mechanisms for improvement, these will need to be complemented by others in if their benefits are to be maximised. A proposed 3 -5 year, co-sponsored, programme, with mechanisms targeted to the constituencies and career stages most capable of absorbing them, would provide the

\(^{25}\) At this point it is worth noting that there currently is no learned society for social work and/or social care, a point returned to in section 12.
catalyst for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term. The evidence in support of this argument will be further discussed in the sections to follow.
C i) CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS:
POSTGRADUATE TRAINING

Postgraduate research training is a key career intervention point to engage and develop social work and cognate researchers in swsc. Present priority is to identify how best this can be achieved within and complementing the new postgraduate training framework.

Concentration of excellence and capacity building
- Concentration of established excellence risks marginalising swsc, excluding pockets of excellence and reducing access to high quality training.
- Inter-institutional collaboration can help mitigate this. DTC/DTU applications incorporating swsc should: maximise inclusion of pockets of excellence and highlight specialist provision to other centres; swsc in non accredited centres should seek links.
- Swsc representation on peer review college is needed; ensure both sw and sc are adequately represented in overall mix and regional spread. Strategic steer in allocation of awards to and within DTCs could ensure swsc capacity is fostered.

Disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity of training structure, delivery and content
- ‘Purposeful interdisciplinarity’ is welcomed, along with disciplinary fitness for purpose; flexible pathways are needed to suit different discipline and experience backgrounds.
- Interdisciplinarity can improve core social science training, familiarisation with other research, concepts, skills, and help engage cognate researchers in social care.
- Core training content should provide sound social science base, with application of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods and concepts from diverse disciplines to swsc questions; focus is also needed on distinctive practice orientation of sw.
- Advanced and specialist training in particular should directly support substantive and methodological thematic priorities.
- ESRC steer towards allocation of some quota awards to and in DTCs, towards sw & sc research, including engagement of cognate disciplines would promote excellence.

Flexible and part-time modes of delivery
- DTC/DTUs (if possible with ESRC steer) need to maximise flexible delivery modes to cater to part-time and often long distance norm for social work candidates.
- other blended learning approaches also to be developed, including on-line, e-technologies and distributed teaching.

Internships and attachments
- Internships: short placements in swsc settings or in specialist centres of excellence to be encouraged - the former especially for orientation of cognate researchers to swsc.
- Project and centre attachments: also to be encouraged, involving research apprenticeship to large projects or centres of excellence; with flexibilities between DTC/DTU network and high quality projects or centres elsewhere.
C i) POSTGRADUATE TRAINING Cont.

Funding flexibilities: allocation of studentships
- Flexible stipends are crucial to meet needs of mature sw candidates.
- May also provide effective incentives for 'discipline hopping' postgraduates.
- Part funding may also stimulate co-sponsorship.
- Mid-career development fellowships could also be used for experienced professionals.

Funding flexibilities: co-investment
There is a wide range of co-investment potential to be explored:
- ESRC/MRC interdisciplinary awards are underutilized by swsc.
- Synergies with national government research and development initiatives to be explored.
- Health sources for research at interface with swsc; NIHR/ESRC scheme could be extended to swsc.
- Employer and regulator engagement to be further developed – plus lobby for professional accreditation of research training.
- Synergies with higher education funding council initiatives to be developed, and UUK to encourage HEI support for swsc researcher development in cash and kind.

Non standard initiatives
- Pilot stand alone research masters, with co-funding, would merit further discussion; 'loss leader' with greater potential to engage sw candidates and employers support.
- Targeted studentship competition – around priority substantive themes, would provide incentives for cognate discipline engagement and interdisciplinarity.
- Would raise sw confidence in ESRC valuing swsc research, and generate high quality application rate;

Professional doctorates
- PDs can provide key career pathway to academic research for sw practitioners and early career sw academics; focus on practice/service improvement and flexible delivery appeal to typical sw candidates; also more appealing to employer sponsors than PhD.
- Highest quality PD training has same standards of excellence and academic eligibility as PhD.
- ESRC is invited to reconsider its position on PDs within DTC/DTU framework during next 3 years.

Wider training opportunities for postgraduate and early career researchers
- RDI and NCRM offer different provision from postgraduate training, and wider participation; RDI is highly valued, but catalyst too short-lived for lasting impact yet.
- ESRC and key stakeholder co-investment in 3 - 5 year researcher development programme is more likely to grow self-sustaining capacity and excellence thereafter.
- Leadership role for ESRC (alongside JUCSWEC) to play in indirect support for wider development of research capacity and standards in swsc.

See Recommendations: 1; 2; 3; 4; 6
SECTION 9: MID- AND SENIOR CAREER RESEARCH TRAINING

9.1 Introduction

9.1.1 Postgraduate and early career stages are key intervention points at which to provide the training opportunities required to grow a strong, multi and interdisciplinary researcher community capable of producing excellent social work and social care research in future. However, this is not the only career stage at which intervention needs to happen.

9.1.2 For obvious reasons, it was not possible for this consultation to identify training needs of the diverse mid- or senior career cognate academics who might contribute to social work and social care research (and to research training). These will vary widely with background and experience. Consultants did, however, hazard guesses that economists or psychologists, for example, would have difficulty with undertaking, or understanding the value of, qualitative research, and vice versa for others. The important point here, however, is the need to grow cross-disciplinary familiarisation, stimulus and respect. This is unlikely to be a matter for formal training at mid- and senior career levels. It is more likely to be fostered through the increasing interdisciplinarity within and between institutions, including through DTCs and DTUs, and further social work and social care research development mechanisms which will be discussed in section 10.

9.1.3 By contrast, the current the profile of mid- and senior career social work academics means that they too can have significant training needs. As discussed (6.4.2), there is a range of reasons to explain the lack of social work grant applications from this group to the ESRC (and indeed to other major funders) – not all of them are about capability or quality deficits. Nonetheless, social work consultants highlighted three areas in which mid- and senior career social work academics need training (and other support): to improve and diversify their own research skills and confidence, to train and supervise others, and, at senior levels, for research leadership and management in order to establish and grow the culture of research excellence. In the longer term when, as capacity grows, better trained and more confident postgraduates and early career researchers themselves become mid- and senior career academics, and better infrastructure has been developed, these needs will diminish. In the short and medium terms, however, they need to be addressed so that longer term benefits may be reaped.

9.2 Content of training for mid- and senior career social work academics

9.2.1 Research methods and researcher skills

Given the profile of mid- and senior career social work academics (6.4.2) many will not have undertaken accredited research training as part of a doctorate. Even for many who have, the lack of sound embedded social science research methods base in many doctoral programmes will have left them with gaps in their knowledge and skills base. Consultants acknowledged that the methodological strengths and deficits

26 The audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) identified that 56% of academic respondents had doctorates, and 66% of them were over the age of 50. Though age does not necessarily correlate with career stage, it may be assumed that the PhD rate among mid- and senior career academics is slightly higher than the 56% average. Nonetheless, the rate is low relative to non practice based disciplines, and some doctorates will have been undertaken without formal research training.
identified in section 4 are often no less characteristic of the work of mid- and senior career social work researchers than that of their earlier career colleagues.

In line with some of the methodological priorities highlighted in 5.3, many consultants underlined the need for quantitative methods training in particular, as well as for mixed methods. Among the most highly accomplished social work researchers are several whose skills base, though excellent in parts, is relatively narrow and in need of diversification in order to address priority substantive research themes (5.2). These observations resonate with, for example, the finding of the ESRC audit of baseline resources (2008a) that among the 39% of academic social work respondents receiving some research training in the previous 2 years, only 12% was in quantitative methods.

In addition, some consultants pointed to the need for refresher and update training, to return to methods and skills learned but not used for some time. Others pointed too to the need to learn about new techniques or innovative methodologies:

So much training including the methods festival is still focused on new early researchers and I want to say “Hey, what about us?” Interactive technology, visual forms of research, I would like some training on that. Lifelong learning is what I'm trying to get at, especially if one's trying to promote interdisciplinary research, one needs to have capacity for interdisciplinary lifelong learning, to really facilitate that. (Cognate consultant)

A further skills area highlighted for mid-career training was writing proposals and grant applications, especially for large, complex projects to be supported by prestigious funders. Here the spotlight fell not just on excellence of the work proposed, but on capacity to formulate it most effectively for peer review.

9.2.2 Training the trainers

Without adequate range and sophistication of their research methods and knowledge base, several consultants questioned the capacity of some mid- and senior career social work academics to train others:

Training programmes often draw on a fairly limited set of skills in terms of social work researchers….. At mid/senior career level - there's a need to build methods and capacity for research and research training… Some of the people who set themselves up as trainers have put in dreadful applications. So there is a real need to develop capacity at this career stage too. (Social work consultant)

Skills in writing proposals are equally necessary for those guiding others to do the same. One particular focus here was on the need to support new social work graduates in making the strongest possible applications for studentship awards.

Additionally, several respondents drew attention to the need for mid-career social work academics to learn the generic skills required of research supervisors, mentors and examiners:

If we're going to be training up more and more new researchers to be really good researchers, and that's what we want don't we, then we need to make sure we give them the quality of service they deserve. They need excellent supervision, they need us to look very hard at what they need and keep reviewing it, and in the end examine it fairly and rigorously. Co-supervision with other disciplines can be great idea, but social work's also got to provide the best. If they're colleagues, they need research
mentoring, research appraisal, someone to keep a watching eye over how their profile is developing, advise them about where it might go next and help them find ways of getting there. (Social work consultant)

9.2.3 Research management and leadership

A third significant area of training need for senior social work academics is the development of research management and leadership skills. These stretch from management of large research grants and intra- or interdisciplinary (sometimes multi-site) research teams, to the skills involved in high level research liaison with funders, agency, practitioner and user partners. Here there may be particular challenges for senior social work academics:

I would support with training and resourcing the development of research leadership and management - essential to supporting large interdisciplinary initiatives. Research managers/leaders themselves are often without higher degrees/research training and lack confidence and competence to lead. (Social work consultant)

Added to this, even in research intensive universities there are distinctive challenges of developing research culture and systems to support it, in contexts where these are not well established (1.3.5; 7.4). In the short term, the benefits of providing high quality formal research training provision for the most promising social work postgraduates may not be reaped if there is not the surrounding culture of research excellence, along with high quality supervision, to nurture them.

9.3 Capacity to use training

9.3.1 Several respondents echoed the wider argument of the UK Concordat (RCUK, 2008) that mechanisms for research career development are insufficiently developed in universities. The generic point for mid- and senior career academics was well expressed by the following:

There is very little by way of life-long learning built into the infrastructure of many HEIs. There is some CPD in relation to teaching these days but that tends to be orientated towards probationers. I think that many HEIs would regard themselves as having made the investment in research training by investing in PGR education….. In other words, I think that the difficulties are systemic rather than social work specific. (Cognate consultant)

9.3.2 Against this backdrop, there are distinctive needs for mid- and senior career academics in social work. Both the audit of baseline resources (2008a) and feedback from consultants to this project confirmed that the exceptional workload demands of managing social work education (6.4.2) produce twin challenges. When and where the right training is available, mid- and senior career academics in this discipline are often not in a position to take advantage of it; conversely, since ‘most of us learn on the basis of needing to know’, the provision is often not available when and where needed. This is impossible to resolve completely. But from the ESRC and potential co-providers of training, modes of delivery as flexible as possible are needed. And from HEIs, with the steer of UUK, institutional support for uptake.

9.4 Provision of training

9.4.1 Within the present ESRC supported training portfolio there is no mechanism for meeting the needs of mid- and senior career social work academics in the short to medium term, to enable them to meet their own and others’ in the longer term. The
major sources of current provision have been through NCRM, the Methods Festival, and RDI. Consultants recognised the value of the first two for methods training, though perceived limitations are their lack of direct relevance or accessibility to this particular research discipline or field. There is certainly a case for more prominent badging of their relevance to social work and social care. However, consultants also observed that dedicated training events for more established academics would be helpful, since 'it might be difficult to have staff and students participating in the same RT classes.’ There may be some potential here to combine forces with other training providers, as suggested in 8.12.2.

9.4.2 Since, by definition, NCRM and the Festival address research methods, they do not provide the mechanism for addressing the other key research development challenges currently facing mid- and senior career social work academics (9.2.1 - 9.2.3). This is the sort of provision that could be, and to a limited extent has been, made through RDI. The RDI (phase 2) social work programme did include a strand for 'training the trainers'; which, though not yet formally evaluated, was nonetheless well regarded by consultants to the strategic adviser initiative. However this programme covered only part of the agenda - it had no significant emphasis on writing grant proposals, research management, leadership or development of research culture. Most important, it set a precedent but was ‘a one off’.

9.4.3 Here too, it becomes apparent that academic social work research requires more sustained training provision in the short term in order to build the capacity to sustain itself (supported by standard provisions) in the longer term. The boost that could be provided to mid- and senior career researchers through RDI-type mechanisms needs to be sufficiently sustained to enable them both to enhance their own capabilities and to develop the research cultures that can grow critical mass and excellence in others. As part of the wider package of capacity building mechanisms recommended, this would be a 3 - 5 year catalyst not a long term crutch. It would provide the opportunity for academic social work to grow its own confidence and leadership, in order to develop its own capacity strengthening systems and to engage more effectively in future with cognate disciplines to produce excellence in social work and social care research.

9.4.3 For the ESRC and potential co-sponsors the implications are:

- If RDI functions do become rolled in with those of the DTC/DTU network, distinct provisions need to be made for the capacity needs of senior and mid-career social work academics. These should extend beyond the need to provide high quality training and supervision to postgraduates, to the full range of needs discussed above.
- Training provision for mid- and senior career social work academics needs to be provided with as much geographical range and flexibility of delivery modes as possible, to make it accessible.
- As 'non-standard' provision, there may well be the need to seek co-sponsorship from stakeholder partners. Here too there may be scope for collaboration with key government departments, with the funding councils and with HEIs themselves.
9.5 Summary of key findings

C iii) CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS: MID- AND SENIOR CAREER RESEARCH TRAINING

Short term to medium term key training interventions are needed for mid- and senior career social work academics: to improve their own research skills and confidence; to train and supervise others; for research leadership and management. In the longer term as institutional and individual capacity develops these training needs will diminish. The same training is unlikely to be needed for cognate disciplines.

Content of training
- Research methods: new and refresher training on quantitative, qualitative and mixed and innovative methods, as required for thematic priorities.
- Researcher skills: particularly in proposal/bid writing for large, complex, and interdisciplinary projects.
- Supervision and support of postgraduates and other colleagues.
- Research management and leadership: of large grants and teams, development of intra- and inter- institutional research culture and systems.

Capacity to use training
- Greater steer from HEIs, JUCSWEC and UUK towards continuing professional development in research would provide impetus to uptake of training opportunities.
- Greater flexibility and accessibility of training delivery, and improved HEI support for workload flexibilities would help mid- and senior career social work academics to take up key research and leadership training opportunities.

Provision of training
- There is currently no ESRC supported mechanism to meet the short to medium term training needs of mid- and senior career social work academics.
- NCRM and the Methods Festival provide valuable methods training, though relevance for social work could be highlighted and accessibility/delivery flexibilities increased.
- RDI for training the trainers was much welcomed, but did not covered all training needs and on a ‘one off’ basis was not sufficient to have lasting impact.
- A more sustained, 3 – 5 year training initiative is needed to enable current mid- and senior career academics to build research capacity, culture and infrastructure in social work. Training might be provided through the DTC/DTU network and other centres of excellence, but should be accessible to all. This catalyst should enable the discipline to engage productively with cognate disciplines and further strengthen its own capacity for excellence in the longer term.

See Recommendations: 1; 2; 3; 4; 6
SECTION 10: RESEARCHER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS

10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 Research training at all career stages is one vital strand of developing research capacity and engagement in social work and social care research. However, consultants to this initiative confirmed the messages from earlier enquiries (e.g. JUCSWEC, 2006; ESRC, 2008a), and from other priority disciplines (e.g. Rees et al., 2007), that achieving a step change in research quality requires a more diverse package of support and development to strengthen capacity at individual, institutional, disciplinary and cross-disciplinary levels.

In the case of social work and social care and the strategic adviser initiative, the picture is complicated since we are:

- focusing on promoting academic research excellence but the linkage with practice is fundamental;
- seeking to promote cross-discipline engagement and interdisciplinarity, but the capacity needs of different contributor disciplines are significant and distinct;
- addressing the problem across 4 home countries, whose research, policy and practice configurations vary;
- looking at capacity for excellence in the round, but focusing primarily on capacity building strategies compatible with ESRC and potential co-sponsor priorities.

On the last point, there is further complexity. Some support and development mechanisms – such as fellowships – recommended by consultants fall squarely within the remit of the ESRC. Others are non-standard and would require short term, dedicated investment in research capacity building.

10.1.2 Several of the mechanisms discussed in previous sections, and those to follow, point to the case for development of a 3 -5 year programme to catalyse research capacity development for social work and social care. Mechanisms already discussed include:

- measures outlined in section 8 to boost postgraduate training and recruitment from social work and cognate disciplines;
- training opportunities for mid- and senior career researchers beyond those provided through one-off RDI initiatives (8.12.2; 9.4).

In order achieve maximum effect, however, these mechanisms need to be complemented by a range of others, including targeted career development opportunities, both formal and informal researcher support and development activities, and infrastructure to support them, for sustainable effect. A capacity building programme of this sort would follow the precedents of education and business and management, but in this case would be dedicated not just to one discipline but to a wider research field to which social work and cognate disciplines can contribute.

10.1.3 As with training (sections 8 and 9), for the ESRC this would involve both targeted deployment of existing, standard mechanisms and dedicated support for others in addition At present it is not certain whether there will be any ESRC resource to support the latter (as has been the case for other priority disciplines), or whether investment limits lie within funds already committed to standard schemes.
Hence the approach taken in this report is to look first at standard ESRC mechanisms for career development and capacity strengthening, with suggestions for priority deployment and co-funder partnerships (sections 10.2 - 10.6). Secondly, discussion turns to additional mechanisms and infrastructure to meet the particular needs of social work and social care in the short term, with suggestions for co-sponsorship. (10.7 – 10.15) In the latter case, with or without direct co-funding support from the ESRC, there is a strategic role for the Council to play in dialogue with stakeholders to help galvanise support and investment.

10.2 Fellowship schemes

10.2.1 Fellowship schemes could provide a valuable mechanism both for career development of those already producing high quality research in social work or social care, and career transition for those moving into the research field. In addition to funded research time, training and resource, fellowships can provide stepping stones along what are otherwise poorly developed career progression pathways. Fellowship opportunities, particularly those targeted to fast-track able early career researchers have featured strongly in capacity development initiatives in cognate disciplines, especially those funded by governments and health. Commonly cited examples are in primary care, clinical medicine and nursing, with some in education and STEM subjects (Marsh and Fisher, 2005; ESRC, 2008a). To date there have been no similar dedicated schemes for social work or social care.

10.2.3 At present ESRC fellowship opportunities are underused in this field, with social work application rates low and success in absolute terms correspondingly low (4.1). At early career stages, where arguably research career development opportunities matter most for engagement and capacity building, the problem may have been exacerbated by ineligibility of many social work candidates (typically without doctorates) for ESRC post doctoral fellowships configured with traditional candidates in mind. Though it is not possible to identify from administrative data applicants from cognate disciplines who might be researching social care topics, there is no reason to believe that significant hidden capacity exists there either.

10.2.3 Consultants to this initiative suggested several possibilities for deployment of fellowships to boost capacity for excellence and productivity among the highest quality social work and social care researchers. All fellowships could be targeted towards researchers working on priority research themes (5.2; 5.3). Here, as with studentships, what is proposed is that the research quality standards required for award of fellowships would be no lower here than for any other discipline or field. The difference would be that these opportunities were badged for excellence in social work and social care research, around priority research themes.

Recognising that fellowship schemes (covering salary costs) are expensive, co-funding potential for of the possibilities suggested is considered alongside:

- The interdisciplinary ESRC/MRC scheme (8.9.1) and the co-sponsorship scheme with NIHR (8.9.2) include support for postdoctoral fellowships as well as postgraduate studentships. Postdoctoral fellowships could provide an ideal opportunity for appropriately qualified candidates from cognate disciplines and from social work to undertake research on the priority themes (such as health inequalities, demographic change, service provision in contemporary contexts).

27 The same problem applies to fellowships from other sources, such as Leverhulme, though interestingly not to the EU Training and Mobility of Researchers Programme; the latter will also fund postgraduate students to undertake research overseas, but is little used by social work.
that closely explore questions at the health and social care interface. Co-funding could likewise be sought from government health funders, and possibly third sector health organisations, such as the Mental Health Foundation and National Autistic Society).

- Other co-funded postdoctoral fellowships might be also targeted towards this field. Research on children’s services, safeguarding and risk, for example, might be co-sponsored by the DCSF, the Home Office, and third sector agencies such as the NSPCC and Barnardos. There might also be tie-in with government social care research and development initiatives in the 4 countries, and with the higher education funding council investments discussed in 7.4.2.

- Recently introduced ESRC mid-career development fellowships could be especially useful, since they target either those in mid- research career or those mid- professional career making the transition into research. These could provide appropriate level funding for practitioners or early career researchers to undertake doctorates (at, or linked to, DTCs and DTUs), and could attract part funding from employers.\(^{28}\) For doctoral qualified social work researchers in mid-career, mid-career development fellowships could provide the time and space to further their research and publication profiles, and for those from cognate disciplines the incentive to work on social care topics. These fellowships too could attract part funding from public and possibly third sector sources suggested above.

- The ESRC currently offers placement fellowships, joint funded with host partners, allowing researchers (usually mid-career) to work in government departments and organisations for up to one year. Some consultants cited the value of existing government funded opportunities of this sort in Scotland and Wales, and potential for further ESRC support of this kind for promoting research policy relevance and impact:

> It is fantastic for them to be able to work in the Assembly let’s say for a year or two years, in the social work policy section, or spend a year in the inspectorate and do some work there And for that to be regarded as an asset in terms of their own careers. I would think in some ways social work by its nature is an area which would benefit even more than others from people in mid- career having moved between different parts of the way that government operates, which forms the context in which social work happens and our research matters. (Social work consultant)

- At the more senior end of the spectrum, professorial fellowships might be most relevant for researchers leading the field in advancing substantive and methodological priority themes in social work and social care. Such fellowships might well be attached to centres of excellence such as DTCs and DTUs, but should also be capable of attracting the highest quality researchers in pockets of excellence elsewhere. They could be linked to major research projects or programmes (10.8) or to research exchange and leadership schemes (10.9). These too could receive part funding from government, health and third sector sources.

10.2.4 As with research studentships (8.10.3), to have maximum impact on research improvement and researcher development, any or all of the above would best be

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\(^{28}\) This may be all the more likely if mid- career fellowships were linked to stand alone research masters, as recommended for pilot (8.10.2)
offered as part of targeted competitive schemes over one or two years, to engage social work and cognate discipline researchers in interdisciplinary social work and social care research. There would be synergies between these and other specific mechanisms outlined below. Fellowships for researchers from cognate disciplines could best be targeted to postdoctoral and mid/senior career researchers. Given the current demographic profile of social work, it may be best to target fellowships in the first instance towards mid-career development and senior/professorial levels, with postdoctoral fellowships introduced once improved doctoral training mechanisms have generated a cohort of high quality candidates with demonstrated capacity for excellence.

10.3 Research seminars

10.3.1 Consultants also pointed to scope for more effective deployment of a range of other standard ESRC mechanisms for researcher support and development in particular to provide opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross-discipline engagement and collaboration in social work and social care research.

Several drew attention to the value of ESRC seminar series. Relatively inexpensive to the Council, these can stimulate engagement of a range of researchers from diverse disciplines in collective exchange around cutting edge ideas, new research agendas and capacity building itself. Among those from which social work and social care have already benefited, most often cited by social work respondents was the ‘Theorising Social Work Research’ series in 1999/2000. Others praised were ‘Evolving Theory in Interprofessional Education’ (2008/9) and ‘Practitioner Research and Practice-near Methods’ (2006/8). These have also provided the seedbed for networks of research exchange, further events and research collaborations that have endured well beyond the lifetime of the series:

The series brought together different networks of people from different disciplines around shared interest….. That generated a lot of interest and excitement, it immediately becomes an interdisciplinary or a cross-disciplinary preoccupation. We had to cap numbers at 80, now we’ve had a second conference and there’s a third being planned and there’s a vigorous network. (Social work consultant)

10.3.2 As a standard, ESRC seminar series are awarded on a yearly competition basis, not targeted towards particular fields or priorities. However, as part of a wider capacity building initiative in social work and social care, it would be productive to incorporate support for similar series around priority research themes, perhaps commissioned on a targeted competition basis, to stimulate high level exchange between diverse disciplines and catalyse collaborative work. Interdisciplinary research capacity building itself might very productively be a seminar series theme. Seminars might also provide scope for international cross-fertilisation and networking, including scrutiny of models of research capacity development successful elsewhere. Co-funding might be sought from the same stakeholders as suggested in 10.2.3.

10.4 International engagement and networking

10.4.1 Among the deficits of current UK social work and social care research identified by consultants to this project was the relative lack of engagement with international research and contexts, and dearth of cross-national comparative research (4.2.6; 4.3.2). Respondents from some cognate disciplines also identified that perceived lack of international relevance of applied research is a disincentive to engagement in social work and social care research (6.4.1). As discussed in 3.2.1,
this perception may be true to an extent of existing research, but is not, and should not be, a necessary and defining truth. There is far more potential, for example, for comparing effectiveness of interventions in different social, political and policy contexts, and for engaging critically with concepts and models of social work and social care developed elsewhere, than is currently exploited.

10.4.2 The International Activities for Early Career Researchers scheme recently introduced by the ESRC may be useful here, particularly since it is intended for postgraduate and early career researchers, the generation that social work and social care most need to grow. This scheme can provide support for participation in international conferences and networking activities, including workshops, summer schools and development of virtual networks across nations, around common substantive and methodological research interests. Here as elsewhere, there is a case both for marketing the scheme (none of the consultants to this initiative referred to it) and for the ESRC and HEIs to encourage applications from social work and social care.

10.5 Research Methods Festival

10.5.1 The annual Research Methods Festival, run under the auspices of NCRM, is intended as a forum for a wide range of social scientists, at all career stages, to inform and stimulate interest in research methods issues and in new developments. The Festival was surprisingly little mentioned as a resource by consultants to this initiative. This finding is underlined by the observation from two consultants that among the groups of relevant researchers mentioned on the Festival website, policy researchers, sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists, for example, do appear, but social work and social care do not.

10.5.2 As with NCRM activities more broadly, the relevance of the Festival to social work and social care researchers could be more prominently badged and marketed. Among the substantive themes included in its programmes might also be some of the priority themes identified in section 5.

10.6 VITAE

Similar arguments may apply to the VITAE programme, sponsored by the Research Councils (RCUK), which provides a networked forum for supporting personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education. Few consultants mentioned this as a resource for social work or social care researchers. Those who did advocated for better publicity to prompt awareness of the programme within HEIs, and better badging of its relevance:

_They have regional hubs and people run interesting things but those aren’t advertised within the universities unless the dean of graduate school decides to do it and people aren’t then given time to go to them. So you get this sub group, they do seem to have time to go to it but it means that they’re neither knowledgeable about specific academic disciplines nor research areas._ (Cognate consultant)

10.7 Additional support and development mechanisms and infrastructure

10.7.1 Discussion so far has limited itself to how existing ESRC researcher support and researcher development mechanisms might be better deployed and co-funded to promote capacity in social work and social care. Recommendations have been for targeted schemes for some, improved badging and marketing of others.
Beyond improved deployment of existing mechanisms, consultants made a range of proposals for further mechanisms and infrastructure to promote capacity and excellence in social work and social care research. Some would be at national or UK wide levels, some regional or institutional but nonetheless requiring wider strategic steer and in some cases investment. One of the key messages to emerge from similar initiatives in North American initiatives (e.g. Cooke and Green, 2000; Shera, 2008), is that strategies to advance research capacity in social work and social care, as for other practice based disciplines, must be multi-faceted. In order for social work and social care to take best advantage of the opportunities outlined above, others should be in place to maximize benefits from each.

10.7.2 Discussion below looks at the range of researcher support and development provisions recommended by consultants that would complement and extend those already considered. As explained (10.1.2) optimally, these would receive direct support from the ESRC with stakeholder co-sponsorship for a 3 - 5 year period. If direct ESRC support cannot be considered, there remains a strong case for indirect support through high level strategic engagement with other stakeholders to help mobilize sponsorship. Discussion begins with support and development mechanisms targeted towards individual researchers and groups, and progresses towards infrastructure for the research community.

10.8 Attachment schemes to research projects and centres of excellence

10.8.1 In addition to the attachments to established research projects and/or centres recommended for postgraduates (8.7.2), several consultants favoured similar opportunities for researchers at other (including senior) career levels. These could include short term opportunities to develop specialist expertise, such as in systematic review or longitudinal analysis of large datasets, in existing centres of excellence, or participation in established, high quality research projects and teams. Referring to similar schemes offered within the Teaching and Learning Research Programme in education, one consultant reported:

They said what they got most out of was working on their projects and the interaction with both more experienced researchers within their project and also with peer researchers. It also gave them opportunities to meet with equivalent researchers from other TLRP projects, to talk about methodologies and other things. Of course that shouldn't be surprising because there’s a whole body of research in things like sociology of science that says that this is the case. (Cognate consultant)

10.8.2 More ambitiously, some consultants suggested that longer research attachment opportunities might routinely be sewn into (even required for) substantial research on priority social work and social care themes. In particular, this would encourage cross-institutional and cross-discipline engagement in specific areas of research enquiry, and stimulate capacity development through exchange of methodological expertise at the same time. There are examples from health where the (not insignificant) costs can be shared between home and host institutions and research funders, to mutual benefit. Such a scheme might also be combined with one of the fellowship mechanisms outlined above (10.2). One suggestion, for co-funding with government and in particular possibly health, was:

to initiate something like a UK version of the EU Marie Curie scheme where postgraduate and early career researchers can move between institutions and work with different departments. (Social work consultant)
10.8.3 A variation of the attachment scheme might provide an additional route to attract experienced practitioners into academic research. Attachments for up to 1 year with established research teams might afford the opportunity for research engagement and learning that could appeal to employer sponsors if the skills acquired are seen to be useful, and may encourage practitioners into formal research training. The knowledge transfer and research impact pay-offs might also capture the support of government and public health funders, and of higher education funders committed to capacity development. For host HEI departments there could be added advantage to their own investment in such arrangements, increasing the engagement between academy and practice. Several consultants gave examples from North America, where in return for such research attachments (or indeed studentships or fellowships) practitioners contributed to social work teaching and learning, and opened doors giving access to social work agencies for ‘practice near’ research.

10.9 Exchange and collaboration schemes

10.9.1 Consultants drew on knowledge and experience of other research council practices to borrow models of ‘discipline hopping’ schemes; these can provide incentives for established researchers from different disciplines to apply themselves jointly to a chosen question of shared research interest:

One of the things the research councils have used reasonably well is discipline hopping. MRC put up about £40,000 to pay for the courtship between two disciplines, a chemist and a biologist and it could pay for a series of visits or it could pay for a shared post between them. The application process, four sheets of A4, two CVs, one sheet about the area of study and one sheet about the potential but not trying to pin them down to what they’re going to be doing next March in the lab. It’s a bit of a loss leader. The idea is if 1 in 10 of them results in long term collaboration, it’s worked. There were other sorts of models where you entice people from a number of disciplines into a room, get them exposed to different problems and have a prize at the end for the best proposal. (Cognate consultant)

Such schemes could readily be focused around priority research themes for social work and social care. They have the advantage of providing fora for quick and creative exchange, at little cost to researcher time and with significant potential gain. Again, costs to funders might be shared between the ESRC and government stakeholders, with contribution according to the substantive research area from health and other sectors.

10.9.3 One further model suggested for promoting researcher exchange, was variously referred to as a ‘visiting professor’ or ‘research leader’ scheme. This would be explicitly targeted at mid- or senior career researchers from cognate fields and institutions, with the brief of building research capacity in social work and social care university departments while also advancing their own, preferably collaborative, research. This might:

Help promote the research of the visitor and build research capacity at the host institution. The visiting professor would complete their own project but also mentor at the host HEI. (Social work consultant)

A specific version of the model was:

In order to encourage interdisciplinary research training, funding for a limited number of ‘research leader’ positions to be provided. Research leaders would either be mid-career researchers from other disciplines who would be employed within social work
or social care university departments to provide leadership in particular research methodologies as applied to social care. For example these positions might be aimed at a health economist or epidemiologist or other expert interested in applying their expertise in social care. The funding would require a plan to show how their expertise would be used to develop capacity both within their institution and across the field of social care. (Social work consultant)

Reciprocally, the same ‘research leadership’ scheme might support leading mid- or senior career social work academics to engage in the kind of attachment outlined in 10.8:

*Alternatively they might provide for a mid- or late-career social work academic with a proposal to develop a new area of methodological expertise through work with an established centre of excellence.* (Cognate consultant)

Again, such schemes would be costly, requiring salary replacement. In addition to other stakeholders, the case might be made for support from the funding councils.

10.9.4 One further mechanism for exchange, in this case drawing senior practitioners into academic research, is the proposal supported by JUCSWEC (2006) and the ESRC audit of baseline resources (2008a) for employer and HEI sponsorship of joint practitioner-researcher roles, with secondments and careful integration either of practitioners into the academy or vice versa. This proposal received strong support from several social work consultants. Though not in itself a scheme that might receive direct funding from the ESRC, this could be compatible with mid-career fellowship and attachment mechanisms outlined above (10.2; 10.8), as well as with postgraduate research training opportunities discussed in section 8.

10.10 Buddying, mentoring, peer and dedicated support schemes

10.10.1 Much of the day-to-day support for research capacity development needs to be grown within HEIs and departments themselves, in the context of structural, cultural and resource challenges (particularly for social work) which will take time and effort to overcome (7.4; 9.7.2). Few of the training and development opportunities that might be provided to current or potential researchers will be of much value if the chance to take advantage of them within their own institutions is denied. Academic departments (and their leaders) hold much of the intra-institutional responsibility for establishing internal mechanisms to support and incentivize research development. Consultants recommended that these mechanisms should include: appraisal schemes and progression policies that highlight research, study leave and workload relief to free up research space, discussion and seminar fora to encourage debate and collaboration within and between disciplines.

10.10.2 Beyond this, there were some distinctive suggestions for provision on a UK wide level (with networked country and regional hubs) of tailored mechanisms to enhance those at institutional level. Among these was establishment of dedicated buddying or mentoring schemes, to boost the flow of support and guidance from those more to those less research experienced, either generically or in specific priority areas/methodologies. Relationships envisaged could be between teams, institutions or individuals, the latter in senior as well as less established positions, and both within and between disciplines. The focus of mentoring or buddying might be on research design and methods, research planning, career development, and/or research leadership. Among the range of suggestions were:
Buddy systems with appropriate structures for support from senior academics from cognate sciences with quantitative skills. (Social work consultant)

Buddy research relationships with cognate disciplines, in which the social work academic poses the research question, say about which intervention study will benefit social work practice, and how to engage service users, and then is active in designing dissemination strategies. And the cognate discipline formulates which methodology to use, supervises the data collection and data analysis. Such partnerships would benefit many levels of the economy and society. (Social work consultant)

Schemes like these would require network organisation and resource. The provision of mentoring and buddying might in the first instance be linked to the ‘outreach’ work of DTCs or DTUs. However it should not be restricted to research methods support for postgraduates, and should also draw on the expertise of other centres and pockets of research excellence that may not be represented within the DTC/DTU network. In addition to the range of potential co-sponsors already identified, HEIs themselves, perhaps with some support from funding council capacity development initiatives, might provide some subscription sponsorship.

10.10.3 A different model of support, drawn from health service and MRC examples in clinical medicine, might be especially beneficial for social work and social care research, in the light of current deficits (4.3), and priority methodological themes to be developed (5.2; 5.3). This involves ring-fenced funding to provide dedicated specialist, often technical, methodological guidance and input from cognate experts (especially statisticians and economists) to networked groups or consortia of researchers who need it. The investment could be very cost effective in social work and social care, with the added benefit of drawing young cognate researchers into the discipline and field:

What you want on your application or your project is the best methodologists you can to advise you. These people are thin on the ground… Ideally you want as many of them as possible sitting within your new centres of excellence for social care research, but that’s going to take years to build up… So, for now you get to the stage when nobody’s applied for grants, then you encourage people and they apply, then they don’t get funded because the ESRC says “we’re not accepting them because they’re not methodologically rigorous”. So how do you fix that? I think what you need is a two-track approach. You need to build up your methodological base so you build for the future as part of your strategy….. While you’re doing that you also need dedicated and ring fenced methodology support. You’re probably not going to get the biggest cheese. But your bait is you get your top methodologist in this area and you offer them a post doc to do this…. If you can pay for a young statistician surrounded by some big methodological brains, who 50% of their time is to provide support to any members of your consortium, that’s one good model. (Cognate consultant)

10.10.4 In addition to the model of expert support suggested above, several consultants from social work made the point that peer support, whether through formal or informal mechanisms, can at times be highly effective for researcher development. One model could be grown from action learning sets, already used with early career researchers in the second of the two social work RDI initiatives, but in need of more sustained support to bring shared learning to fruition. Another suggestion was that mid- to senior career academics in particular might benefit from informal exchange with others to share experience of good practice:
We could do with some sort of peer mentoring schemes or some other informal basis for mid-senior academics to develop their bidding skills, large project management, working with sponsors, dissemination skills and their experience of research leadership, building up research culture in their own institutions. Formal training might help with some of this, but for many of us it’s the informal support in safe spaces that really could make the difference. (Social work consultant)

10.11 Dedicated research events and resources

10.11.1 The potential for high profile research seminar series to stimulate high level exchange and collaboration around priority themes has been made above (10.3). Added to this are proposals for a range of other networked events – workshops, colloquia, day conferences, akin to those offered through the TLRP research capacity development initiative. Organised around priority substantive or methodological research themes, these could effectively form part of an RDI type programme for researchers from a range of relevant disciplines, to learn and explore together challenges in researching those themes. Such events might also provide the fora for peer support and exchange as discussed above (10.10.4).

10.11.2 Under the auspices of JUCSWEC, and with pump priming funds from SCIE, plans are now under way to hold a first European Social Work Research Conference, in 2011. Though social work led, the conference aims are to advance high level innovatory, interdisciplinary policy and practice-relevant social work research across Europe, to integrate methods and approaches from a wide range of social science and other disciplines, and to build capacity for excellence. The ESRC does not directly sponsor such events, but support for such a conference in principle may be helpful in attracting national and international sponsorship and participation.

10.11.3 Several consultants drew on other examples (notably the Welsh capacity building strand of TLRP) to highlight the value of initiatives to develop a range of resources, especially electronic, to inform and support researchers. These could include portals and dedicated databases for information about, and access to, research and training events, funding opportunities, research networks and registers. SCIE and IRISS have been developing a social work research register; enhancement of this, for example to organise entries around priority research themes, with indicators of research quality would be a valuable addition. In particular, this might help with the problem articulated by several respondents from cognate disciplines, that if they want to find a collaborator, or to identify the best social work and social care research in a particular area, they must often rely on ad hoc information. Development and upkeep of such resources is costly. In the long run they might be supported by user/HEI subscription, perhaps through a professional association/learned society. In the short term, they might be rolled into a dedicated research capacity development initiative, with co-sponsorship from several stakeholders and further dedicated input from SCIE and IRISS.

10.12 Infrastructure for research support and capacity development

10.12.1 The remainder of discussion in this section moves from specific mechanisms to the question of infrastructure to underpin provision of support and development for research and capacity building. For present purposes, the focus is not on overarching strategic infrastructure to lead and co-ordinate research capacity development in the

29 Until now, there has been no such forum, the nearest equivalent being a research strand of the UK JSWEC conference whose focus until recently was on social work education.
discipline and field as a whole; that is the subject of section 12. Here we are looking at the operational level of research networks, associations and/or centres of excellence to strengthen the research and researcher base.

10.12.2 On the question of operational infrastructure, there was less consensus among consultants than on other issues, with the following tensions evident:

- **Between academic inclusivity and exclusivity:** These have already been discussed with respect to ESRC plans to concentrate postgraduate research training in centres of excellence (8.2). The same concerns apply with respect to research capacity building in the round, with some consultants emphasising the need to build research capacity widely (especially in social work), others to nurture excellence among those who will lead the field.

- **Between academic and practice research focus:** Some, though not all, social work consultants favoured development of research capacity building networks focused as much on growing practitioner research capacity as on academic research excellence.

- **Between disciplinarity and inter- or multidisciplinarity:** Though most consultants favoured growth of interdisciplinarity in social work and social care research, there were varying degrees of concern about the extent to which social work needs to develop distinctive infrastructure to support capacity in the discipline. Associated with this were varying degrees of emphasis on promotion of practice nearness, in particular engagement with service users and carers as researchers and ‘experts by experience’.

The strategic adviser consultation did not set out, and would not be in a position, to resolve these tensions. As argued by JUCSWEC (2006), the overall strategy for social work and social care research must be multifaceted: to promote excellence and democratize capacity, to embrace academy and practice, and to advance intra- and interdisciplinary agendas. However, for purposes of the strategic adviser initiative and its recommendations, the priorities outlined in section 1.4 are to the fore: promoting academic research capacity for excellence, strengthening interdisciplinary research and distinct discipline contributions, and complementarity with ESRC and co-funder priorities.

**10.13 Co-ordination of existing research networks**

10.13.1 Consultants to this project confirmed the findings of exploratory work undertaken for JUCSWEC by SCIE (2007, unpublished), that there already exists a plethora of inclusive research networks relevant for social work and social care research. With the exception of a few, notably the Social Services Research Group, they centre on substantive rather than methodological interests. Making Research Count and Research in Practice are most commonly mentioned. Besides these, many others are interdisciplinary and focused on specific themes or service user groups of common interest. Networks vary widely in range, purpose and activities; they may operate virtually or in physical space and through a variety of central and regional structures. Their reach may be international, national or regional, often combining activities at more than one of these levels. They may be academic or practitioner oriented, may provide bridges between the two and/or between different disciplines and practice/policy areas. Examples highlighted include: the Older People and Aging Research and Development Network, the National Children’s Bureau Research Network, the British Association for the Study, Prevention and Care of
Child Abuse and Neglect, the Mental Health Research Network, and (associated with service user/carer participation in research) INVOLVE.

In addition there are networks associated with learned societies of cognate disciplines sufficiently relevant and inclusive for social work and social care researchers to participate – most often mentioned research interest groups within the Social Policy Association and the British Sociological Association.

10.13.2 Thus there seems no shortage of inclusive research networks already capable of contributing to research capacity development in social work and social care. With the notable exception made for development of a professional association (10.14), there seems no strong case for investment in new research networks as such. However, the finding of the audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) that one third of academic social work respondents made no use of such networks, and many more used them little, raises some questions. In the audit, time and lack of opportunity were cited as key barriers. However, since potentially valuable networks are so many and diverse, there may also be a good case for investment in an electronic database to signpost, cross-reference and provide links to them. This too could usefully be organised around priority research themes (5.2; 5.3).

10.13.3 The same resource could also inform researchers about innovative models of network development to improve research and capacity. In particular, several consultants from social work drew attention to the following model, originally developed in Norway, for promoting ‘practice nearness’, practitioner and service user engagement in research:

[These are] networks/partnerships between universities and practitioners/local services for the support of practice-related research, now being developed in Australia, and in several positions here in the UK and in Norway. In Norway we are developing a national level partnership between service users, researchers/teachers and practitioners. The program is part of a Nordic program which also extends across Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Experience in Norway shows that a major hurdle for everyone is developing a concept of research which does not threaten research standards, but which also enables practitioners and service users to engage in a meaningful way. One major aspect of my work there is to help them do this. (Social work consultant)

10.14 Professional association or learned society for social work (and social care?)

10.14.1 Several consultants underlined the point that networks are most effective when they have a distinctive focus, bringing together diverse researchers around common shared interests, sometimes for specific purposes, programmes or periods sometimes more extended, and including fora for face to face not just virtual contact:

Face to face contact is the engine that makes those things work. Also they need to be focused around something relatively specific and time limited (like ESRC seminar series), I think then they can work especially well when people are getting together for a particular reason and know that there’s a job to be done and then it will be done. Longer term and people tend to drift in and out, there are other priorities that get in the way of keeping it up unless it’s serving a particular purpose for you. (Social work consultant)
10.14.2 The point is valid, but need not undermine the case to be made (in addition, rather than instead) for a broader based professional association or learned society, to which researchers with a wide range of relevant substantive and methodological interests might belong.

Unlike most cognate (including practice based) disciplines, there is no professional association for the discipline of social work, or for social work and social care, nor an independent learned society to represent either one or both. The Social Work Research Association fulfilled the former function for social work to some degree, but no longer exists. JUCSWEC is one committee of a joint learned society, JUC, alongside separate committees for public administration and social policy. JUCSWEC’s title also reflects its focus on *profession* (with the emphasis on learning and teaching) rather than *discipline* (with the emphasis on research), and its membership is institutional rather than individual.

There are two corollaries to this. The first is that neither the social work discipline nor the social care academic field has the full weight or funding resource of an independent organisation to represent them in wider fora. Nor, as yet, is there such a body to provide sustainable leadership for, among other things, research and development strategies. This is discussed in section 12, and in the context of concurrent developments such as the National College proposed by the Social Work Taskforce in England.

The second corollary is that both social work and social care lack an overarching association or network (on a par with, for example, the SPA or BSA) to which individual researchers could belong, and through which they could develop common identity. A professional association could provide a forum for research events and exchange, associated journals to read, and themed special interest groups in which to participate:

> Whether it's possible to invent something like [SPA] from scratch I'm not sure because obviously it runs on a long history and people contribute in the way they do because it's come to be just part of what people do. So it's able to draw on a big reservoir that the history brings with it which we wouldn't have. But there's no equivalent here to National Association of Social Work in the USA – a network involving people, something they're part of, letting people know what is going on including what research is happening where, about what, etc. We need a professional organisation for identity and visibility, to develop ourselves. (Cognate consultant)

10.14.3 More challenging a question is whether such a professional association should be social work specific or inclusive of social care and other cognate contributors. Here the dilemmas outlined in 1.4.3 and 1.4.4 come into play, and consultants came down on different sides. On the one hand, other professional associations/learned societies are currently configured on disciplinary lines. Social care is not a discipline but a field; cognate contributors have their own discipline associations to belong to and (especially if they do not define themselves as social care researchers) may feel no need of another one. Social work does not have an equivalent ‘home of its own’. The discipline has a distinctive contribution to make to excellent, high impact research with practice relevance and credibility, but also has distinctive capacity needs to address and an emergent research identity to develop. On the other hand, disciplinary boundaries increasingly blurred and the professional domains of social work and social care are increasingly integrated. And despite recognisable strengths of some existing interdisciplinary work in these areas, the scope for improving the inter- or cross-discipline research range, quality and impact
is huge. A shared professional association might provide the cultural home for this, and that platform for representation in wider fora.

10.14.4 On balance, this report recommends that the potential for developing a professional association with priority social work and social care themes at its core should be further explored. The discipline of social work would be likely to be central, but participation of all members of cognate disciplines interested in these themes could be encouraged. Special interest groups could be organised around priority themes, with links as appropriate to other networks and centres with common interest. There could be links made with relevant sub-groups in cognate discipline associations, and affiliations to professional (practice) associations, such as the British Association of Social Work, and, in England, the National College for Social Work currently proposed by the Taskforce (2009).

10.14.5 A professional association for social work and social care would take time to develop, but, like its counterparts, would be self-funding and have charity status. It would be unlikely to require significant external resource, and would not be a candidate for direct investment by the ESRC. However ESRC support for such an association in principle would add weight to a strategic initiative from key stakeholders, primarily JUCSWEC but also SCIE and IRISS, to bring such an association into being. Some of the work involved in establishing it might well be sponsored through the broader research capacity development initiative recommended by this report, with co-funding from the wider range of government and other sponsors.

10.15 Dedicated research capacity building network, and networked centres of excellence

10.15.1 Discussion so far has focused on research networks and a professional association, and on the role that these might play in contributing to social work and social care research capacity in the medium to longer term. More immediately, there is the need to develop a dedicated research capacity building network with operational responsibility for providing the range of training, support and development opportunities discussed (as well as co-ordinating them with provision from generic sources such as NCRM), over a 3-5 year period.

10.15.2 Strategic planning and co-ordination of such a network will be discussed in section 12. Where consultants considered operational infrastructure for such a network, they made the obvious case for geographical spread and accessibility, favouring hub and spokes or noded models with coverage in all 4 countries. The underpinning assumption was that providers of training events, workshops and seminars, co-ordinators of resources, buddyng or research support schemes, would be based in real or virtual centres of research excellence with specific remits for research capacity development. One option would be to configure these within centres included in the DTC/DTU network, on the twin assumptions that some attention will have been paid in their selection to the coverage of social work and social care, and that their brief can extend beyond postgraduate training.

10.15.3 Here, however, the same concerns arise as were as expressed with respect to training (8.2): that pockets or even centres of excellence in social work and/or social care could be prevented from contributing their expertise to capacity development if not included within the DTC/DTU network. An approach better tailored towards providing support (beyond postgraduate training) for capacity and quality development in this field might involve including additional existing centres of excellence among the providers. Examples suggested by consultants included the
NIHR School for Social Care Research at a national level (its component centres may well be included in institutional DTCs or DTUs), and the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Social Care. There may also be centres outside the DTU/DTC network that become the focal points for SFC or HEFCW capacity development funding. All centres could in turn be eligible for co-funding support from government research and development sources, as discussed in previous sections.

10.15.4 The question of support for a ‘network of research excellence’ goes beyond that of direct investment in capacity building initiatives, to the wider question of investment in research and research infrastructure as a whole. This is the subject of section 11.
C ii) CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS:
RESEARCHER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

In addition to training, a ‘step change’ in research capacity and excellence requires mechanisms for researcher support and development. Maximum benefits from any one strand of capacity development will be reaped and sustainable if complemented by others. The case is made for co-sponsorship of 3-5 year programme, to catalyse development of swsc capacity for research excellence, to the point of self- sustainable growth thereafter. This should include targeted deployment of standard ESRC mechanisms, and dedicated others mechanisms, with supporting infrastructure.

Targeted use of standard ESRC mechanisms

Fellowship schemes
- Targeted fellowship competitions could provide valuable mechanism for career transition for cognate researchers or practitioners, and career development of those already researching in swsc.
- Opportunities for co-sponsorship, especially with MRC and NIHR should be developed
- For cognate disciplines, targeted post doctoral fellowships will be key, and fellowships for senior research leaders.
- Demographic profile of sw suggests targeting fellowships in the first instance towards mid- and senior career researchers, and mid- career practitioners.

Other support and development mechanisms
- Research seminar series focused on priority theme(s) would provide catalyst for high level cross-discipline engagement.
- Comparative and international research focus among early career researchers could be stimulated by targeted support for international activities.
- Relevance and utility of Research Methods Festival, NCRM provisions and VITAE need better badging and marketing to demonstrate applicability to swsc research.

Additional support and development mechanisms

Complementary support and development opportunities required could be co-sponsored by HEIs, funding councils, MRC, NIHR, government and third sectors as appropriate:

- Attachment schemes: fixed period attachments for researchers at all career stages, to established centres of excellence and/or research projects.
- Exchange and collaboration schemes: ‘discipline hopping’ and ‘prize’ schemes could borrow models from MRC; ‘research leader’ exchange schemes could support senior level cross-discipline engagement and collaboration.
- Buddying, mentoring, peer and dedicated research support schemes: needed for formal and informal guidance between more and less experienced researchers and institutions; dedicated support scheme for specialist/technical cognate input to swsc consortia would be helpful and cost effective.

Cont.
Summary of key findings

C ii) RESEARCHER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT Cont.

- **Dedicated research events**: workshops, seminars and exchange fora could be provided on a national and networked basis as part of a badged capacity development programme.
- **Development of on-line portals and resources**: needed to provide links and information to sw and cognate researchers about existing research, researchers, networks, events and funding opportunities.

Operational infrastructure for research support and capacity development

- **Co-ordination of existing research networks**: Plethora of networks relevant for swsc exists; but online resource organised around priority themes, to signpost, cross reference and provide links to networks is needed.
- **Professional association and/or learned society**: Sw and sc lack professional association and/or independent learned society to champion the discipline and field, provide forum for researchers to belong, participate and develop common identity. ESRC support in principle and strategic discussion with JUCSWEC and stakeholders is needed to explore potential development of association, if possible for sw and sc.
- **Dedicated research capacity building network**: On a par with those established for other RCD initiatives, capacity building network would provide range of support and development opportunities discussed (beyond postgraduate training) for 3 -5 year period. Existing centres of excellence, including but not limited to DTC/DTU network to be involved (eg. include SSCR and Tilda Goldberg Centre for evaluation research).

See Recommendations: 1; 2; 3; 4; 6
SECTION 11: RESEARCH FUNDING

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 Though the primary focus of this initiative has been on strategies for research capacity development - specifically, strategies that might fall within the remit of the ESRC Training and Development Board and co-sponsors - consultants were clear that direct investment in research and research infrastructure too are vital pieces of the jigsaw for strengthening research capacity and excellence in social work and social care. As one respondent put it:

You need parallel research investment – i.e. funded demand as well as supply. The real thing is you’re not going to get people training unless there’s a purpose for it, like there’s a job at the end. So what you need to be doing is funding the research. You need to fund the research which is multi-disciplinary, multi-method and question-led. And not just the research but the centres where that can be done. (Cognate consultant)

11.1.2 To recap, discussion in previous sections has pointed to:

• significant potential for impact of high quality social work and social care research, to inform policy and practice development and effectiveness in response to key contemporary social, welfare and economic challenges (3.1 – 3.6);
• historic under-funding of social work and social care research (especially by comparison with health), with much funding piecemeal, local and short term (1.3.5);
• concomitant lack of funding for research infrastructure (1.3.5);
• contribution of both the above to a vicious circle of lack of research capacity and engagement, deficits in research range and quality (4.2; 4.3);
• low rates of social work application and success for ESRC research grants (4.1);
• significant scope for increase of cognate discipline contributions to social work and social care research, and both social work and social care contributions to cognate research and related professional fields and vice versa (3.1 – 3.6; 4.2; 4.3);
• potential for increased research funding to act as one incentive for those from cognate disciplines to engage in social work and social care research (6.3.1. 6.4.1);
• identification of cross-discipline priority research themes with potential to attract funding from a wide range of sources (section 5).

11.1.3 In this context, this section examines:

• the range of funders who might (co)invest further in social work and social care research;
• strategies for maximising funding potential for high quality social work and social care (especially interdisciplinary) research;
• strategies to maximise contribution of direct research funding to capacity building;
• funding of research infrastructure in social work and social care.
11.2 Research funders

11.2.1 Both the JUCSWEC research strategy (2006) and the audit of baseline resources (ESRC, 2008a) highlighted not only the need for social work research to attract more funding, but the potential for greater funding diversity. Not least, high quality social work and social care research is costly, particularly if it involves larger scale study, longitudinal evaluation or multi-modal evaluation. Diversifying the range of potential research funding sources will be necessary to meet those costs; the more so when the funding climate, as now, is tight.

The focus of the present initiative on both social work and social care research, and on cross, multi and interdisciplinary contributions, should extend further the range of public, third and even private sector funding streams to be tapped – in addition to increasing the potential for direct funding from the ESRC.

11.2.3 Brief return to some of the priority substantive themes identified in section 5.2 illustrates this point. Many consultants were struck by the potential of research on health and wellbeing inequalities, changing demographics and social/health care needs, public service integration, and health and social risks and decision making, to attract either project or programme funding from government departments and public sector health sources (including NIHR and NICE), as well as the MRC. Their comments with regard to health funding in particular highlighted as yet unrealised synergies:

*In the health field, the NHS spends upwards of £400m, and there is money for infrastructure for research too. And if they want to do some kind of innovative intervention and then evaluate it, there is funding for setting up the intervention and that’s completely absent in our field. For us it’s down to inventive practitioners who are enthusiasts rather than there being any kind funding or recognition.* (Cognate consultant)

*There is so much connection now between health and social care in practice that this distinction is getting more and more absurd, and self-fulfilling. It means that when there’s real work to be done about social AND health care needs and the interface at the cutting edge of services, all that happens is social care gets lost because the health people are just funding health research and that’s what health researchers do.* (Cognate consultant)

11.2.3 Besides health, high quality research on identified priority research themes would in principle attract a spectrum of other significant funders. Promoting social inclusion and engagement should appeal to the (English) Departments of Health (DH), Children Schools and Families (DCSF), Work and Pensions (DWP), Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and to the Home Office (HO), along with their devolved nations’ equivalents. The same theme should also resonate with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Big Lottery and Michael Young Foundation – to name but a few third sector funders. Employers as well as governments and bodies such as the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) could be interested in research on service provision in contemporary contexts; the Nuffield Foundation on demographic change and diversity. Consultants offered many more examples.

11.2.3 While different funders will have some different priorities (governments, for example, are most concerned with policy drivers, research councils with science, innovation and impact), there are already strong precedents for joint research funding initiatives, with the emphasis on inter- or multidisciplinarity, several of them relevant
for social work and social care. The ‘New Dynamics of Ageing Research Programme’, for example, is co-funded by the ESRC and four other research councils, with collaborative engagement of universities abroad, private and voluntary sector providers and service users. The ‘Third Sector Research Centre’ is funded by the ESRC and Barrow Cadbury Trust, with potential contributions from others such as the Big Lottery, Barnardos and JRF. The current call for a research centre and programme on ‘Subjective Wellbeing and Public Policy’ is a joint initiative funded by the ESRC, MRC, DH, DWP, DCSF and DCLG.

11.2.4 Whether with individual or joint research sponsors, there is a clear case for strategic social work and social care research leadership to engage in proactive discussion with key research sponsors, to establish synergies between their priorities and the thematic priorities of social work and social care. Similar synergies should be sought with those of centres of excellence such as SSCR, who commission as well as produce high quality research. This would help to ensure social work and social care input into the framing of research funding calls as well as responses to them; it should also raise awareness of the potential for research impact.

11.3 Maximising funding potential for high quality social work and social care research

11.3.1 Clearly, it is not sufficient for research funding initiatives to be relevant for social work and social care. Researchers from social work and cognate disciplines need the capacity and engagement to respond to calls with excellent quality proposals. However, respondents were clear that several strategies could be developed to maximise social work and social care inclusion in such programmes, encourage interdisciplinarity and/or cross-discipline collaboration, and minimize barriers to both.

11.3.2 An obvious issue raised by consultants was the need for more substantial research funding, over longer periods, to enable high quality longitudinal outcome, evaluation and comparative research to be done.

_I think there’s too much short term funding… It simply doesn’t give us a chance even to ask many of the right questions, let alone to answer them._ (Social work consultant)

11.3.3 As mentioned in 6.4.1, several respondents also reflected that although many research funders (in active and responsive modes) are keen to support interdisciplinary research, their own mechanisms can inhibit this:

_The way research grants and applications are framed fosters silo thinking. Funders often want one or at most two PIs, so one discipline and one institution predominates. Added to that is the administrative nightmare at many HEIs of applying across more than one discipline. We all too easily get trapped in bureaucratic straightjackets._ (Cognate consultant)

11.3.4 Further, consultants from social work and cognate disciplines underlined quite strongly the view that if the ESRC (and co-funders) are keen to support excellent and interdisciplinary social work and social care research, they should do so actively, with funding calls making these priorities explicit. Such calls could readily address themselves to identified priority social work and social care themes and/or integrate these themes within wider programme development in line with funders’ strategic
priorities.\textsuperscript{30} This would provide not only funding boost, but the mark of status and recognition required for visibility and appeal to cognate disciplines:

\begin{quote}
It would require ESRC and other research councils clearly signalling that this is an area of research where we want psychologists, social policy academics and others, as well as social work, to be involved because of the skills and knowledges that you are bringing “We will pay you and your university for doing that, full economic cost etc”, that it carries status to do that, selling it not just as income in but as an important opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of knowledge and that the perspectives of others and the methodologies they use, are not only valued but they are actively encouraged for this next phase in the development of social work and social care as a research led, certainly research informed discipline or field. (Cognate consultant)
\end{quote}

I think the funders need to make a real stand on that, they need to announce major programmes of work and people will be attracted. They’re always attracted by money, they’re always attracted by status and some of us are attracted by making a difference and hopefully that will also be in there. So I would have thought major government initiatives, major research council initiatives, some of the third sector organisations and the charities, Rowntree, the Big Lottery Fund and all that, saying “we want a programme of research around social work and social care.” (Cognate consultant)

11.3.5 Social work consultants, while in favour of full participation in interdisciplinary research, expressed particular concerns that social work agendas and practice focused priorities do not become marginalised within the mix. Here there were specific calls for social work specialists to be included on review panels, and for the ESRC, when judging proposals, to widen the definition of ‘end users’ in order to capture the full meaning of ‘impact’ with respect to social work research:

\begin{quote}
They need to broaden their approach beyond ‘policy relevant’ to see that this encompasses not only policy development and implementation but also the context specific practice of social work…. impact in the full sense, on those who provide and receive services. (Social work consultant)
\end{quote}

11.3.6 One interesting suggestion, in view of the ESRC commitments to interdisciplinarity, was that a productive investment might be made in research that takes interdisciplinary social science research itself as the object of inquiry, and generates models of effective practice – that is:

\begin{quote}
to fund research examining the process and context of interdisciplinary research across the social sciences – including social work and social care. (Social work consultant)
\end{quote}

\textbf{11.4 Maximising contribution of direct research funding to capacity building}

11.4.1 Some consultants made specific suggestions for how funded research might bring with it direct opportunities for research capacity building. These extend beyond the financial and status incentives to researchers from cognate disciplines. Primary among them was the proposal that funding calls should not just welcome, but should require cross-discipline contributions, with social work consultants keen that their own discipline be included:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{30} The current call for a research programme on Subjective Wellbeing and Public Policy would be an obvious candidate.
\end{quote}
In fact you can even require it, that only programmes that have truly interdisciplinary teams or social workers and at least one other discipline, be it social policy, anthropology, sociologists or whatever, only those teams will be funded. I think that making cross-fertilisation a must will be really important. (Cognate consultant)

…other social science disciplines being required to incorporate a 'social work' dimension into developing interdisciplinary proposals and approaches, where what’s being researched is something that clearly needs a focus on practice and service users too. (Social work consultant)

11.4.2 Further, several consultants drew attention to the potential for research programmes and projects to provide attachment based learning opportunities, in particular to postgraduate students (8.7.2) but also to researchers at more advanced career stages (10.8), with potential links to studentship and fellowship schemes respectively. More proactively, such attachments could also be required, not just optional, for relevant projects and programmes:

ESRC could require funding for large research grants on social work and social care themes to include collaboration with senior social work academics, PhD students, and service users. (Social work consultant)

They could ring fence funding in social work and social care relevant programmes or themes for training of mid-career/senior social work academics linked to specific projects/programme areas. (Cognate consultant)

11.4.3 An additional suggestion was that more provision and more use be made of pump priming funding, allowing researchers time and resource to ‘get the work off the ground’ and try out innovative research approaches and collaborations, as the basis for more substantial funding bids subsequently.

11.4.3 From all of the above consultant feedback the clear recommendation to emerge is that the ESRC be encouraged actively to seek synergies with a range of co-funders for sponsoring social work and social care research according to priority themes, and that these themes also be foregrounded in wider calls. Interdisciplinarity could be more actively encouraged, even required, along with specific strategies to promote social work research capacity and engage cognate researchers.

11.5 Funding of research infrastructure in social work and social care

11.5.1 Helpful as would be a thrust towards co-funding of social work and social care research, the challenge remains that as yet there is relatively little infrastructure to underpin it. As discussed (1.3.7), in England the foundation in 2008 of the NIHR School for Social Care Research (SSCR) has been a welcome development, as has the establishment of the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Social Care. Also encouraging are DCSF plans to set up three interdisciplinary research centres on Children and Wellbeing, Youth Development and Transitions, and Understanding Behavioural Change. Among other existing centres or networks of excellence, the Social Care Workforce Research Unit has core funding from the DH, the Institute for Child Care Research has sponsorship from the Northern Ireland Government, and SCIE funds a group of ‘registered provider’ centres on a project by project basis for social care practice inquiries and reviews.

11.5.2 Nonetheless, and especially in comparison with health, there are relatively few centres of excellence funded to conduct social work and social care research on a
sustained basis. Several consultants pointed to the need for such infrastructure to concentrate critical mass, provide secure foundations for the production of excellent research, and incubators for capacity development:

There aren’t really centres of security for people to develop their career, and there are very few pockets of excellence where people know they can develop their careers. (Research funder)

Here tensions between the concentration of excellence and the democratisation of research capacity (10.12.2) were again voiced. Likewise there were divergent views about the balance of representation in such centres, of social work and of cognate disciplines contributing to social care research. But there was nonetheless consensus that centres of excellence with secure funding and lifespan at least for 3-5 years are key to promoting excellence in any discipline, particularly emerging disciplines for which concentration of critical mass can be crucial. Most respondents also agreed that social work research, with the emphasis on practice, needs to be better represented in research centres of excellence than currently it is; at present, given social work capacity deficits, the balance is strongly in favour of cognate disciplines.

While some consultants argued for one overarching centre of excellence in social work and social care research, with distributed or virtual member centres, others advocated for more heterogeneity - to ensure range of focus and research approach, and to make certain that centres were not all driven by the same stakeholder (especially policy) priorities:

At this precise stage in the development of the discipline, I think we need to recognize that we need some beacon centres and some beacon research. Hence, I think that we need a UK wide centre for social work research (this could be virtual, distributed or whatever) but it does need to be substantial and to have the potential for undertaking some significant research. It should not be tied to employer, regulator or government interests but should derive its status from its academic credentials. (Social work consultant)

If you don’t want the research base to be flaccid, you’ve got to have enough different such places for people to move around, so I think there’s a lack of funded centres which have got secure longish term funding which enables them to invest in developing new researchers, and it means that there isn’t room for people to develop their careers in an environment where they can see some future really. (Research funder)

So if you’re asking me what funding structures, it would be several centres rather than one, for them to be question-led rather than discipline-led, question-led in relation to issues of social care and that they should encourage, and require multidisciplinarity. You don’t want a central command because putting all your eggs in one basket is too dangerous. (Cognate consultant)

11.5.3 Recommendations for direct investment in research, and particularly in research infrastructure, fall outside the brief of this initiative. Nonetheless, there was consensus that such investment should go hand in hand with capacity building. Consultants were keen to encourage high level strategic engagement between the ESRC, government, non government departments including health, and other research and higher education funders to explore potential for medium term co-sponsorship of social work and social care research infrastructure. Centres could be configured around selected priority themes, to complement and extend the range of
centres already in place. Whether there might be some linkage between these and DTCs or DTUs, and/or provider centres as proposed for a 3-5 research capacity building initiative (10.15) remains to be explored.
11.6 Summary of key findings

D) RESEARCH FUNDING MECHANISMS

Direct investment in research and research infrastructure must go hand-in-hand with strategies to strengthening capacity, engagement and research excellence.

Research funders
- There is significant scope for extending and diversifying the (co)funding base for sw & sc work research.
- Priority substantive research themes of: i) health and wellbeing inequalities, ii) professionalism and (integrated) service provision in contemporary contexts, iii) risk and decision making should attract government and public sector health funding (including NIHR and NICE), and MRC.
- Research on other priority themes such as promoting social inclusion, response to demographic change and new technologies should appeal to central government departments, non government departments and agencies, other research funders (eg. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Nuffield Foundation, Big Lottery) and other research councils (eg. AHRC, EPSRC).
- Good examples of collaborative funding partnerships for interdisciplinary research already exist; they need developing for social work and social care.

Maximising funding potential for high quality social work and social care research
- Co-funding could resource larger scale and longitudinal research currently lacking
- Funders should foster interdisciplinarity more pro-actively and consistently.
- ESRC and co-funders should pro-actively seek synergies for investment in social work and social care research, on priority themes.
- The same priority themes to be integrated within wider research funding programmes.

Maximising contribution of direct research funding to capacity building
- Potential for research funding directly to strengthen capacity should be maximised.
- This includes: requiring social work and social care input in relevant bids; encouraging or requiring researcher attachments to funded projects/programmes; targeted provision of pump priming funds.

Funding research infrastructure
- Despite recent positive developments (eg. SSCR), there is relatively little research infrastructure to concentrate critical mass, incubate research capacity and excellence.
- More centres or networks of excellence are needed, with funding sufficiently secure to provide continuity and support, and centres sufficiently diverse to allow heterogeneous research foci, approaches and career opportunities.
- High level strategic engagement between ESRC and co-funders will be welcome, to explore potential for infrastructure development. Linkage with DTCs/DTUs may be considered, but not to the exclusion of other existing centres or pockets of excellence.

See Recommendations: 1; 5; 6
SECTION 12: STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CO-ORDINATION OF RESEARCH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

12.1 Introduction

12.1.1 Research capacity development for social work and social care over the next 3-5 year requires not only operational infrastructure to support it, but strategic leadership and co-ordination. This is especially true since there are distinctive complexities associated with the needs:

- to promote cross-disciplinary engagement among a range of disciplines at different stages in their own research development;
- to maximise links with and impact on practice and practice;
- to ensure fit with the policy, research and higher education contexts of each of the devolved nations.

12.1.2 The level of strategic steer, co-ordination and supporting infrastructure required has until now been largely missing from the social work and social care research field (Marsh and Fisher, 2005; JUCSWEC, 2006; Orme, 2006; ESRC, 2008a). There are obvious exemplars in other fields, notably the establishment of the NIHR in England, the UK Clinical Research Collaboration, and infrastructure developed for the ESRC research capacity building initiatives in education (TLRP) and business and management.

12.1.3 The strategic adviser consultation identified several proposals for strategic leadership in the short and longer terms, but also a range of questions yet to be resolved. In the first instance, further consultation with the ESRC and other stakeholders will be needed to agree how best to address these in the short term.

12.2 Case for strategic leadership and co-ordination of a short term initiative

12.2.1 Combined feedback from consultants to this initiative, along with the findings of previous enquiries, suggests the need for strategic leadership and co-ordination of a short term (3 -5 years) and coherent research capacity development programme for social work and social care. This would provide the platform not only for delivering the programme effectively, but also for establishing longer term infrastructure for continued growth of capacity and research excellence in the future.

The purpose and mandate for short term leadership would be:

- to develop a work programme to advance the consensus agenda of priorities emerging from the strategic adviser for social work and social care research initiative – to promote research capacity, cross discipline engagement, and excellence;
- to establish infrastructure to operationalise these priorities, at UK-wide, national and regional levels;
- to establish synergies with concurrent frameworks and initiatives - in particular ESRC training frameworks, the JUCSWEC research strategy implementation, government, health and higher education funded research capacity development initiatives and the work of established centres of research excellence;
- to engage in dialogue at highest levels with the identified range of stakeholders to maximise shared priorities and support (stakeholders to include, in addition
to the above, policy makers, employers, regulators, professional and service user/carer organisations);

- to maximise use of existing funding streams and diversify funding sources for research capacity development and investment in research and infrastructure.
- to liaise at highest level with JUCSWEC and cognate learned societies to promote engagement in social care research, cross-disciplinary fertilisation and interdisciplinarity;
- to oversee operational implementation of a 3-5 year research capacity development programme;
- to develop and disseminate models of good practice for social work and social care research capacity development;
- to monitor, review and evaluate the progress and impact of a 3-5 year research capacity development programme against measurable outcomes.

And, most important:

- to steer development of a strategic body (or bodies) to lead and co-ordinate continued and self sustaining growth of social work and social care research, capacity, and excellence in the longer term.

12.2.2 This vision was mirrored in the comments of many consultants, particularly those from cognate disciplines with experience of research capacity development in their own fields. Consultants also recognised that it would require considerable resource.

I can tell you from experience you absolutely need some sort of dedicated resource and energy in the middle to get heads together and give quick wins. That's how these things worked for us. It certainly takes something like this to bang all the stakeholder and funder heads together.... So you need this sort of direction and energy at the centre. It's the only way to get the funders to work in partnership. (Cognate consultant)

You need political leadership of course, but resources are needed to make it happen. You need something central and networked – hub and spokes probably. You need a director with deputies for different strands of activity and a steering/management group that represents different stakeholders and has a 4 country perspective. (Social work consultant)

12.3 Resourcing short term strategic leadership and co-ordination

12.3.1 Several consultants drew on specific exemplars from cognate disciplines to illustrate how resource for strategic leadership and co-ordination in the short term will be essential, to catalyse development of collaborative sponsorship and infrastructure for long-term health of the discipline and field, excellence and impact. The example of the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC) is a case in point. Established in 2005, the UKCRC successfully brought together health funders, academia, professional and patient groups to promote high quality research and capacity (UKCRC, 2007). Strategic leadership and adequate resource have been among the keys to success:

“Funders’ fora” are often synonymous with talking shops that don’t do anything. Where UKCRC was different is that they got people together and they do things. It has a dedicated secretariat, some resources in the middle to do shuttling, and a chief executive to go round to talk to all the lead funders to say, “What do you want to do, what are the issues?” and then come back and reflect them to the partners and then
focus on areas where they’re all concerned and get some commitments to shared investments for shared wins on the table. You need direction and resource to develop the forum for a new way of working, so the organisations themselves have ownership in it and can make it grow together. (Cognate consultant)

12.3.2 By contrast, the UK Social Care Research Collaboration (UKSCRC), established in 2007 with representation from central governments, SCIE, IRISS and research funders (including ESRC), had similar goals, but thus far has been less successful. A sticking point has been that each government has been more willing to invest in its own, country-specific research and capacity development endeavours than to do so collectively across the UK. Without shared investment, it has not been possible to establish leadership or infrastructure for the UKSCRC, which in turn is needed to galvanise co-sponsorship of medium and longer term sustainable growth.

While the focus of both the UKCRC and the UKSCRC has been wider than academic research capacity development, the same message applies here. On the basis of evidence from the strategic adviser consultation, this report has argued that a 3-5 year multi-strand research capacity development initiative in social work and social care is needed. This would provide a catalyst of sufficient duration and scope to stimulate diverse and cross-discipline engagement in the research field, and begin to grow the critical mass, diverse research skills base and enhanced productivity required for research excellence and impact. If a short term initiative such as this is to be effective in generating longer term benefits, it requires strategic steer and co-ordination; these in turn require some resource. During its course, a major priority for the leadership of the short term initiative will be to work at highest levels, with key stakeholders, to develop longer term infrastructure – including leadership bodies – as the basis for sustainable growth and excellence in future.

12.3.3 Though recognised by many consultants to be necessary, this vision is also ambitious. The ESRC will respond in due course to the recommendations of this report. But there is no certainty about the extent to which the Council might, under present circumstances, co-sponsor a dedicated 3-5 year initiative (as opposed to discrete capacity strengthening mechanisms), still less co-sponsor strategic infrastructure and leadership to support it.

12.3.4 If the ESRC is not able to co-invest either in a 3-5 year initiative or in leadership and infrastructure to steer it, the need for both remains. There would then be a strong case for seeking ESRC support at highest level to engage key stakeholders in underwriting the initiative in the short term, and developing collaborative mechanisms to invest in sustainable growth in future.

12.4 Interface with other initiatives and wider agendas

12.4.1 Beyond questions of resource, this consultation shed light on further complexities to be resolved when planning both for the steer of a 3-5 year research capacity development initiative, and for a body or bodies to take forward developments in the longer term. Not all of these complexities can yet be resolved. They concern compatibility with wider agendas and initiatives for social work and social care research, and revolve around key issues identified earlier in this report (1.3; 1.4) – namely:

- how far direction, organisation and sponsorship of research capacity development should be UK wide, country or regionally specific;
• how far social work and social care should be addressed in combination or distinctly, and how far the need for cognate disciplines to engage in social care research should be combined with that for social work to increase capacity for excellence;
• how far efforts to improve academic research capacity and excellence should be dovetailed with those to improve practitioner (and user) research, and, most important, knowledge transfer and impact on policy and practice;
• whether leadership of a research capacity development initiative should be incorporated into the remits of one or more existing bodies (such as JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS) or centres of excellence (such as the SSCR, or relevant DTCs/DTUs), or whether a new distinctive body is needed to work in partnership with them.

12.4.2 UK and country wide reach:

There was broad agreement among respondents to this consultation that any overarching strategic body or bodies to steer research capacity development must address different country priorities and contexts. This finding echoes that of an earlier SCIE consultation (Fisher et. al., 2007) and the recent experience of the UKSCRC (12.3.2):

There are substantial differences in policy and political frameworks for social work and higher education in the four countries of the UK. There are also differing national priorities, especially in relation to workforce development and skills building. And differing approaches to the knowledge economies of the four countries. All of these have to be taken into consideration. (Social work consultant)

There are more opportunities in the devolved countries for direct dialogue with policy makers, because of their small size it’s a closer community. But there is also less funding for social work and social care research and development. There may be a perception of research based outside England as somehow ‘parochial’. Opportunities need to be developed for comparative research based on the diverging models of social work and social care policy and practice across the UK. (Social work consultant)

There need to be regional/country based bodies which come together in an overarching body with suitable representation from across the UK. It should be staffed at both regional/country levels as well as at UK wide level. (Cognate consultant)

Hub and nodes taking account of geographical spread is one way of providing a multi-dimensional and broadly inclusive approach. This does, however, require strong collegial leadership and significant resources. (Social work consultant)

12.4.3 Social work, cognate disciplines and social care:

More contentious may be the question of how far leadership and strategic steer of research capacity development should (as this consultation has sought to do) focus on social work and social care in combination, or separately. As discussed (6.2), all respondents recognised the value of bringing diverse perspectives to social work and social care problems, of interdisciplinarity and collaborative research across discipline boundaries. However, there was some lack of interest among cognate discipline respondents in combined leadership and representation under the banner of social work and social care, since, as discussed (1.4.3), most do not see this as
their primary affiliation; they are content instead to respond to formal incentives or informal opportunities to engage or collaborate in this field if and when they arise.

By contrast, there was a strong voice among some social work respondents for leadership that attends to the distinctive profile of academic social work as an emerging research discipline:

Let's please stop talking about social care and social work in the same breath. Academic social work needs to make stronger claims for itself and to get out from under employer and other stakeholder interests….. We need national leadership for social work as a research discipline, intellectual momentum for social work as a social scientific discipline. We need an articulate, critical voice for academic social work research and capacity that is distinct from employer, service user, government and other stakeholder opinion and interests. (Social work consultant)

When asked to discuss leadership and co-ordination of efforts to grow research capacity and excellence in social work and social care, most social work consultants focused, either by default or on principle, on their own discipline.

Some, however, suggested variations on a model which might provide the best way forward – ensuring that social work needs are strongly represented, but with clear synergies to be developed with cognate disciplines:

If the focus of this body is on social work and social care research, then it should include/involve all disciplines. But social work academics/stakeholders should be at the core of such a body.

It should recognize the contribution of other disciplines but distinguish between these and the specific nature and contribution of social work research. (Social work consultant)

A cross between a Royal College and subject specific associations may be a good model. A central organizing body in which academic social work has a strong voice. This would lead to the other activities which should involve clear dialogue with policy makers about research agendas and clear dialogue with other disciplines about all research matters. (Social work consultant)

12.4.4 Academic research capacity and practitioner research, knowledge transfer and impact

In line with ESRC priorities, the strategic adviser consultation has focused on developing academic research capacity and excellence. By contrast, other concurrent initiatives (government and higher education funded, JUCSWEC and UKSCRC (see Annex 2) have also embraced the wider agendas of increasing and improving practitioner research, and knowledge transfer. Most social work consultants and some from cognate disciplines reflected on whether the two related but distinct sets of objectives should be taken forward through leadership of the same or separate initiatives. What emerged overall was the view that the two strands of capacity development should be mutually beneficial:

Practice relevance is essential, so is policy relevance. Which makes the academy-practice relationship central, whether it’s academic researchers looking at practice, or practitioners researching themselves, or preferably both together. Or whether it’s policy people and front line professionals using research to make their decisions, it’s
part the same story. Not a lot of point painting one part of the picture and leaving the rest all grey. (Social work consultant)

The remit should include agency and practice based research where possible as these are likely to be highly practice relevant. However I would hope that inclusion [of practitioner research] might promote the academic rigor and generalisability of such research. Knowledge transfer priorities should be included too where they encompass social work/social care priorities and are conducted using rigorous methodology. (Social work consultant)

Most important, several consultants underlined the argument (see section 3) that that if social work and social care research impact on policy and practice is to be assured, not only the intrinsic quality of the work but its extrinsic relevance and utility for research users are key. Users, in turn, are not just policy makers, but the service providers and practitioners who are responsible for making policy work in practice:

Not just social policy but also good social work research already has huge significance for the policy making world out there and for the people in the front line who do the job of putting it into practice. So yes, we have to keep on raising our game to make sure the evidence we’re giving them is strong and not just the evidence but the way we make sense of it. But at the same time we’ve got to do all we can to make sure it gets through. That’s not just about dissemination. It’s training people to look for it, understand it and make use of it. There’s politics mixed up in it too. But where would we be if we left the users out of the equation? (Social work consultant)

With this in mind, several consultants made the case for a distinct leadership focus on developing academic research capacity for producing work that is rigorous and robust and is also highly amenable to knowledge transfer, relevant both for policy and practice. Synergies could then increasingly be developed over time with wider research development agendas and concurrent initiatives in the field (Annex 2) to improve practitioner research and uptake:

Given the applied nature of social work and social care research then it seems sensible that it should embrace agency/practice based research and knowledge transfer priorities. However, it is clear that there is a need for academic social work/social care research needs to be central to such a body with an explicit remit to address them. (Social work consultant)

Let’s start with academic research where there is a recognizable entity for social work at least. Plan to develop from that base to collaboration with practice based research, which has different priorities, different timetables etc. (Social work consultant)

I think in the long term it might be foolish to discount issues of impact which in terms of practitioner research and take up of research amongst the professional body, those two things dovetail very clearly, for the longer term. (Cognate consultant)

12.4.5 Leadership through new or existing bodies

As several consultants observed, there is a range of existing bodies within whose remit the strategic steer and co-ordination of a research capacity development initiative in social work and social care might be incorporated, either in the short or longer terms. Candidates most mentioned were JUCSWEC, SCIE/IRISS, research centres such as SSCR, and/or a consortium of DTCs and DTUs where social work
and social care are strongly represented. However, consultants expressed diverse views on these possibilities, conflated at times with their views about concentration of research funding and influence:

*I’m a great believer in organisations like NICE and SCIE as intermediary organisations. Because it creates a structure, it creates a place which of course is funded by government but the arms length from government is made clear. So it’s not just academic voices, but different user perspective voices are involved as well. So I’d be supportive of those taking a lead.* (Cognate consultant)

*SCIE’s remit is different though. They’ve done a good job of promoting high standards especially in [research] reviews. And they do look wider than just social work, which is good. But for obvious reasons they’re very policy driven and they’re about conveying research messages into practice. They should be working with you but I don’t think if we’re talking about building up academic research that’s the right place to lead it from.* (Cognate consultant)

*We need some kind of research institute or body, with strong representation from social work academic departments, to take overall responsibility for taking forward the research and capacity building agenda for all levels. So far the work has been largely done by JUCSWEC and it’s been important but has been largely unfunded. It’s also got a wider focus in some ways, but not very interdisciplinary because it’s social work. An institute could be interdisciplinary and develop strands of activity or sub groups around particular themes.* (Social work consultant)

*You might look to centres where excellence is already concentrated to take this forward. That’d make sense in lots of ways. But it could also be a hostage to fortune. So say if it all goes through the social care school [SSCR] first of all they may not want to, second they’re just England, and third it means that some areas are much better represented than others, adults not children, policy not social work etc. So all that would need to get looked at. And if it’s done through the new training centres [DTCs and DTUs] well that may or may not be what they want to do and also there’s no guarantee how well they’ll cater for social work or social care anyway so that remains to be seen.* (Cognate consultant)

Clearly there are pros and cons associated with the prospect of leadership through existing bodies of the kind of initiative envisaged. Further consideration of the various alternatives will be needed.

### 12.5 Establishing leadership for a short term initiative

12.5.1 Taken together, the evidence presented above does not yet offer a blueprint for strategic leadership and co-ordination of social work and social care research capacity development in the short or longer terms. In the short term, at least, the infrastructure for strategic steer will be dependent on the resource available and the scope of an initiative to be steered.

12.5.2 In this light, it seems reasonable to conclude that:

- Proactive, early engagement of the ESRC with stakeholders is to be encouraged, to establish potential for a 3-5 year initiative (and components of it).
- If agreed (in part or in whole) scope for such an initiative, models for infrastructure and co-funding arrangements should be determined in principle.
• Sponsorship of strategic leadership and co-ordination of such an initiative should be a priority focus, if the initiative is to have coherence and be effective, and for planning to progress.
• The initiative and leadership should be configured to address country-specific as well as common research and policy contexts and priorities.
• Representation of and partnership with key stakeholders and concurrent initiatives should be maximised.
• Further attention will need to be paid to the potential for any one stakeholder body, centre or network of research excellence to take strategic lead.

12.6 Learned society – leadership for the longer term

12.7.1 Among the longer term leadership strategies to be considered will be the case for a learned society – either for social work and social care, or for social work with clear links to relevant cognate learned societies. At present there is no independent learned society for social work (nor indeed for social care, since it does not have discipline status). As discussed (10.14), learned societies can fulfil the functions both of inclusive professional association and of leadership and representation in wider fora. Many learned societies also take strategic lead in research capacity development programmes and activities within and across their disciplines. Most, if not all, of the cognate disciplines that might contribute to social work and social care research have learned societies of their own.

12.6.2 This is not the case for social work. JUCSWEC is not an independent learned society, but one committee of a joint society with two other disciplines which have separate representation of their own (SPA). Though the JUCSWEC Research Sub-committee has been productive in developing a research strategy (2006), the committee title reflects its overarching focus on education rather than research. Its funding base is minimal since, unlike other learned societies, JUCSWEC has no subscription based individual membership, and no income from a journal or subscribed events. Hence its officers are for the most part not funded. During the three years since the research strategy was produced, the workload of the Research Sub-committee has so expanded (both for strategy implementation and for proactive or reactive responses to other developments) that the challenges of fulfilling the leadership function required, on an unfunded basis, have been formidable. In addition, given the absence of independent learned society status, the visibility of research leadership to external stakeholders is sometimes compromised. There have, for example, been several occasions during the course of the strategic adviser project, when others (including the ESRC) have been unclear whom to contact for representation of social work in consultations; there has also been confusion on occasion about whether the same allocation of ‘places at the table’ as is offered to cognate learned societies should go to JUC as a whole, or to component committees separately.

12.6.3 Several consultants made observations along these lines:

*There’s no equivalent here to the National Association of Social Work in the USA. As a professional organisation for visibility. And also as a network letting people know what is going on including what research is happening where, about what, etc.*

(Social work consultant)

*I’ve always been intrigued by the fact that there isn’t a learned body for social work. When we came to do the RAE panel selection, we were nominating for this panel. We had all these nominations for social policy but who were we going to liaise with
about the social work parts to this equation? There was the professors of social work group [Association of Professors of Social Work] and a JUCSWEC. But you see there is a JUC social policy panel committee too but it's not a learned body. That's not a good thing for social work, not to have that. Social policy is much more grounded in the system and I think it is largely because we've had a body, SPA. That's represented our interests, whereas social work hasn't been at the table. British Society of Criminology has its own journal Criminology and Criminal Justice. It has an annual conference and has visibility, has a place at the table in government consultations, a place at the table in relation to the ESRC, can suggest research programmes and so on. Where is the social work equivalent? (Cognate consultant)

12.6.4 Proposals are currently afoot to make changes to the committee structure of JUCSWEC, with consultation forthcoming. Among them is the proposal to establish an independent, membership based learned society with funded staff. There may also be links to be made with the British Association of Social Work, and with a potential National College for Social Work in England; the latter has been mooted by the Social Work Taskforce (2009) as an association to drive up standards and represent the social work profession as a whole in public and policy arenas. How far the profile of research, alongside those of profession and education, may come to the fore in a National College, remains among many questions to be determined. But the inference to be drawn from evidence to the strategic adviser consultation is that potential for a self funded learned society to represent the research interests of the discipline, to raise visibility and provide long term steer of research and capacity development strategies, is to be strongly encouraged. Though there would not be a direct role for the ESRC in developing a learned society, endorsement of the proposal in principle would be valuable.

12.6.6 Further complexity remains, however, as to how far a learned society could, or should, represent both the social work discipline and the social care field – in the latter case drawing in all cognitive disciplines that contribute to social care research. The question is not easily resolved. Despite movement towards a ‘post disciplinary era’, learned societies remain configured around disciplines not fields. Cognate disciplines (such as psychology, sociology, criminology, social policy) have their own learned societies and members may feel little incentive to join another; social work may no sooner gain than lose its ‘place at the table’ if representation is diluted within a disciplinary mix:

I recognize the need for representation - that’s what a learned society would bring. It's an interesting question because if the group is to represent social work and social care there will be people who aren’t part of JUCSWEC who will say “That doesn't represent me”. (Cognate consultant)

Because it’s an emergent field it’s a tough one - the whole question’s wrapped up with an issue about the identity of the area. Maybe it’s contradictory in the sense that having a voice in a multidisciplinary setting is probably more fruitful than disappearing into a social work enclave. I think it works easier when it’s a single discipline because you get your professional bodies that have legitimacy and authority to talk about it and don't necessarily have to go and negotiate with 20 other people. I think it’s really hard in social care because of the number of people that have genuine interest in it. It goes back to the starting problem of what is social care because on one level there are all sorts of players but no-one who’s clearly got all the levers and authority to drive it. (Cognate consultant)

One option may be for a learned society primarily to represent the social work discipline, but with inclusive membership of those from cognate disciplines who also
identify themselves with social care research. There could also be formal links established to cognate learned societies, in particular to special interest groups within them, where there are common thematic interests.

12.6.7 Beyond the question of disciplinary representation, there is also the question of professional and other stakeholder representation within a learned society:

*That’s not to say it’s not something that should be done. But it is because it’s across departments, across disciplines, across different academic centres and across government departments, other organisations, policy, practitioners all have a role. I think it does need doing, it’s just so difficult. Who would it be for and who would be the people to do it?* (Cognate consultant)

Given the centrality to social work and social care research of links to practice as well as to policy, and in particular the need for research impact, it makes sense for policy and practice stakeholders who have an interest in research to be engaged in a learned society. This would be no different in principle from the way in which, for example, policy makers are included within the membership of the Social Policy Association. In the case of social work and social care, however, it will be essential that the focus on research is not lost.

12.7 Towards sustainable research capacity and excellence in future

12.7.1 As this discussion has illustrated, it is by no means yet clear what will be the best mechanisms for longer term, self funded strategic leadership for social work and social care research. Whether or not a learned society will prove to be the best vehicle remains to be seen.

12.7.1 What is clear is that the work begun through leadership of a dedicated short term initiative will need to continue on a self sustaining basis, to ensure lasting growth of social work research capacity, excellence and impact in future. Combined feedback from this consultation confirms that longer term leadership will need:

- to provide ongoing strategic direction and strong coherent voice to shape research and capacity priorities and agendas;
- to do so in dialogue with key policy and research funders, other stakeholders and cognate disciplines;
- to make the strongest possible cases for resourcing social work and social care research through coherent, robust co-funding mechanisms;
- to continue to promote engagement of social work and cognate disciplines in high quality social work and social care research around priority themes;
- to provide ongoing co-ordination of research capacity development and training strategies;
- to develop further the infrastructure to support sustainable research capacity and excellence; at UK-wide, national and regional levels;
- to develop and disseminate models of good practice for social work and social care research training and capacity development;
- to conduct ongoing review of research resource, priorities and capacity to ensure continued productivity, excellence and impact;
- to continue to promote the profile, visibility and status of social work and social care research in all fora.
12.8 Summary of findings

E) STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR OPTIMAL OUTCOMES

Case for 3-5 year strategic leadership and co-ordination
Leadership for a 3-5 year research capacity development initiative is needed to carry forward recommendations of this report and:

- Develop work programme and infrastructure for advancing strategic priorities.
- Engage in dialogue at highest level with key stakeholders, cognate disciplines and leaders of concurrent initiatives to promote engagement and establish synergies, maximize and diversify funding streams.
  - Oversee programme; monitor, review and evaluate progress.
  - Develop and disseminate models of good practice for swsc research training and capacity development.
  - Steer development of strategic body for longer term leadership/co-ordination.

Interface with concurrent initiatives and wider agendas
Strategic leadership body for 3-5 years:

- Should address different country priorities and contexts.
- Should focus on sw & sc research, including cross-discipline engagement while ensuring sw contributions and needs strongly represented.
- Begin with focus on academic research capacity quality and impact; increasing focus over time on knowledge transfer and practitioner/user research.
- Might be established within existing bodies/centres-needs further consideration.

Long term leadership will be needed to:

- Provide strategic direction and strong voice to shape research and capacity agendas, establish infrastructure and robust co-funding mechanisms, in dialogue with key funders, stakeholders and cognate disciplines.
- Engage sw and cognate disciplines in high quality research on priority themes.
- Co-ordinate ongoing research capacity development and training strategies.
- Promoting profile, visibility and status of social work and social care research.

Learned society

- Establishment of learned society in longer term may provide self-funding mechanism for future leadership.
- Further consideration is needed about representation of social work alone, or swsc, in partnerships with cognate learned societies.
- ESRC support in principle for proposal welcome.

Potential for ESRC support:
ESRC short term (3-5 year) co-sponsorship is sought along with proactive strategic engagement with stakeholders to galvanise their short term co-sponsorship and longer term investment in leadership towards sustainable growth and excellence

See Recommendation: 5
PART IV: THE CASE FOR CHANGE AND WAYS FORWARD

SECTION 13: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Conclusions

13.1.1 The aim of this consultation and desktop review was to examine what is needed to develop capacity, engagement and excellence in social work and social care research, and to make recommendations to the ESRC and co-sponsors accordingly. Within this, specific objectives were to identify priority interdisciplinary research themes, research capacity development mechanisms, key career intervention points, infrastructure and co-funding arrangements to support these.

13.1.2 There is a well recognized need for high quality research to inform, scrutinize and evaluate the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of social work and social care policies, services and practice. The latter, in turn, are vital in tackling contemporary social, welfare and economic challenges. They and their outcomes are closely related to those of other fields, including health, education and criminal justice, with which they are increasingly integrated. Government and providers are accountable for their success, failures and costs.

13.1.2 Set against this is the recognition that, despite some promising signs noted in the RAE 2008, the research base overall is not strong and its potential for excellence and impact not fulfilled. Historically there has been significant under-investment in this research field; funding - and consequently much of the research base - is piecemeal, patchy and small scale. There appears to be a relatively low rate of engagement in social work and social care research by relevant cognate disciplines, though the extent or reasons for this have not been explored; hard data are not available since social care is not a recognized category in research management, information or assessment systems. Academic social work, by contrast, has an improving profile and signs of strength, but has a well-evidenced capacity problem. It is priority area, with ‘pockets of excellence’, low critical mass, an older demographic profile and has suffered from a longstanding ‘cycle of resistance’ between research and practice.

13.1.3 Distinct from previous and concurrent initiatives, the strategic adviser consultation and report have focused on academic research productivity and excellence, on social work and social care research and interdisciplinarity, and on maximising complementarity with ESRC and other funder priorities. These foci were not uncontested among the consultant group. In particular, achieving a balance between addressing capacity needs of social work and engagement of cognate disciplines, towards the overarching goal of promoting excellence in social work and social care research, has been challenging.

13.1.4 Desktop review combined with consultant feedback identified key characteristics to which high quality and high impact social work and social care research can aspire, along with examples of where these have already been achieved. With respect to each characteristic identified, there are advantages both for research which maximises distinctive disciplinary contributions and for ‘interdisciplinary’ research. The latter (generically labelled) can mean multi-disciplinary combination of discrete discipline contributions, fertilisation through cross-discipline exchange or ‘discipline hopping’, or thoroughgoing integration of diverse disciplinary knowledges, skills and concepts within the same enquiry. Whichever the model, and whether within individual studies or in combination, high
quality social work and social care research might be characterised as: i) combining the purposes of ‘research for knowledge’ and ‘research for use’; ii) where evaluative, examining not just what works, but how and in what contexts in order to establish transferable messages; iii) investigating the interstices between public and private, individual and social; policy and practice; social work, social care and related professional domains; and iv) multi-modal and question-led, utilising a wide range of rigorous methodological approaches, as appropriate to the question.

13.1.5 Consultants found it difficult to characterise or assess the strengths and deficits of the social work and social care research base since most did not recognise it as a corpus. They tended to comment on quality of social work research and contributions of other disciplines to this field. Substantive strengths of social policy research in addressing social care issues were well recognised. So too, by most social work consultants and some cognate respondents, were social work research nearness and communicability to practice, focus on social justice and on articulating the voices of service users. There was also some good evidence of interstitial research (see 13.1.4), and work drawing on diverse disciplinary knowledges and skills. However, the limited range and use of innovative qualitative approaches was highlighted by several. Most consultants drew attention to quantitative deficits, especially lack of input into or use of large datasets or service data (cross sectional or longitudinal); lack of other large scale surveys, cross-national or cross-context comparison; the paucity of experimental or quasi-experimental design; likewise of robust evaluation and outcome measurement; and of cost benefit/effectiveness analysis. There were some good examples of multi-modal or mixed methods research, but clear scope for more to capture social work and social care complexity. Improved integration of theory with method was also recommended.

13.1.6 Consultants were asked to identify priority substantive and methodological research themes for social work and social care for the next 5-10 years, around which research capacity building might be organised. In the light of their suggestions, identified strengths and deficits of the research base, concern to maximise interdisciplinarity, contemporary challenges and potential for impact, 6 substantive themes and 8 methodological are proposed. They are not mutually exclusive. Substantive themes are: i) Demographic change and diversity: the contribution of social work and social care; ii) Professionalism and service provision in social work and social care, in contemporary management, economic and welfare contexts; iii) Tackling health and wellbeing inequalities: the contribution of social work and social care; iv) Risk, decision making and choice in social work and social care; v) Promoting social inclusion and engagement through social work and social care; and vi) Practice development and innovation in social work and social care. Methodological themes are: i) Using quantitative methodologies; ii) Developing and diversifying qualitative methodologies; iii) Using and developing mixed methods; iv) Evaluation research; v) Developing and using measurement; vi) Use of large datasets and service data; vii) Analysis of costs, cost benefits and cost effectiveness; and viii) Systematic and research review.

13.1.7 Cognate discipline and social work consultants alike were broadly in favour of increased interdisciplinarity. However most confirmed that the integrity and status of each discipline’s contribution also needs to be upheld. Throughout the course of the strategic adviser initiative, maintaining the balance between these priorities, towards the overarching goal of improving social work and social care capacity and quality as a whole, was challenging. Academic social work research, with distinctive contributions to make in terms of connectedness to practice, risks occlusion in a disciplinary mix favouring established research excellence over potential. Social care research, by contrast, is difficult to pin down since it is nowhere formally categorised.
The needs of cognate discipline researchers who might engage in social care research are very difficult to pinpoint since the disciplines and researchers are so diverse, and since, by and large, few identify themselves as social care researchers. Several of the cognate discipline representatives invited to join this consultation because of the relevance of their work to social care had never before considered the link in any detail. Inevitably, therefore, while the focus of this report has been on improving social work and social care research as a whole, especially interdisciplinary research, at times the capacity needs of social work have been more prominent, not just because they are pronounced, but because they are identifiable.

13.1.8 The enquiry highlighted the diverse profiles of potential and current researchers to be engaged. Members of cognate disciplines at all career stages, but especially early career, need incentives to motivate them to engage in this research field. Key obstacles are: institutional barriers to interdisciplinarity; lack of status and resource for social work and social care research, perceived complexity and perceived lack of international relevance/publication prestige; and lack of visibility of ‘big social care questions’. In social work, new graduates commonly go direct to practice; they need encouragement, support and improved opportunities to choose research. Experienced practitioners and early career academic researchers tend to be mature professionals, with heavy workloads in often underdeveloped research cultures. The most academically able and research minded among them need encouragement, financial and other support, with appropriate training and career development/transition opportunities, in order take the path towards research excellence.

13.1.9 Research and capacity development for social work and social care requires direct and indirect investment and support from a wide range of stakeholders. Especially in current funding climates, potential for increased support and co-sponsorship needs to be maximised in the light of the beneficial and cost effective impact that can be achieved. There are potential synergies with concurrent higher education funding initiatives. HEIs need encouragement to raise institutional priority for social work and social care and reduce discipline boundaries; academic social work departments need to promote research culture and support. Synergies could be developed with several government funded research development initiatives, and in particular opportunities for health funding need extending to research capacity building at the social and health care interface. Likewise there is scope for co-investment in capacity development from other research funders, including MRC and third sector sponsors. Continued lobbying with social work and social care employers and professional regulators is needed to encourage their support for research training. JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS should be key strategic allies.

13.1.10 Post-graduate research training is a vital career intervention point to engage and nurture next generation social work and social care researchers. Core training should provide a sound social science base, with ‘purposeful interdisciplinarity’, alongside distinctive fitness for disciplinary purpose. Specialist and advanced training in particular should address priority methodological themes, such as evaluation research, large data sets, rigorous and diverse qualitative and participatory methods. Candidates from non social work disciplines will need dedicated training opportunities for familiarisation with the field and practice base.

13.1.11 There are significant concerns that the concentration of excellence in DTCs and DTUs may marginalise social work in particular, given its emergent status, low critical mass and dispersed pockets of excellence. Social care too may not be well represented, since it is less visible without discipline status. It is essential that the social work academy ensure maximum disciplinary and geographical representation
within DTC/DTU bids, and maximum use of flexibilities within DTC/DTU arrangements to meet the needs of social work and social care. It will also be helpful if, among DTC/DTU applications meeting the criteria for excellence, the ESRC would use its strategic steer to ensure social work and social care representation in the network, and further promote capacity development and cognate discipline engagement in this area through strategic allocation of awards to, and within, centres. Potential for extending the ESRC’s existing arrangements with MRC and NIHR for co-funding studentships could also be explored.

13.1.12 The case is also put for two non standard postgraduate training provisions. Firstly, a targeted studentship open competition for social work and social care, providing earmarked opportunities for engagement of social work and cognate discipline candidates, to undertake research on priority themes. Candidates would be required to meet the same standards of excellence as all other applicants to the open competition, but would be attracted by the explicitly targeted incentive. Secondly, pilot of an appropriately funded stand alone masters scheme would attract practitioners with good masters qualifications and/or with excellent first degrees, who are considering research/academic careers and need research training. Such a programme would also promote employer engagement and knowledge transfer. There is also strong social work support and some from cognate disciplines, for inviting the ESRC to reconsider their position of professional doctorates. These provide a key career development/transition pathway into research for experienced practitioners and managers, and/ or early career social work academics, meeting the same academic eligibility criteria as for postgraduate research training.

13.1.13 Combined responses to this consultation indicate that beyond the provision of high quality and accessible postgraduate training opportunities for the best candidates, the range and embeddedness of capacity needs in social work and social care research require a range of complementary strategies in combination. These point to the need for a targeted, time limited and multi-faceted initiative to boost capacity for excellence sufficiently that its benefits can be sustained. Piecemeal concentration on one or two mechanisms, targeted at one or two constituencies and/or career stages, is unlikely to pay sustainable dividends. A 3-5 year fixed term initiative would be sufficient to catalyse development of capacity, infrastructure and co-funding arrangements to provide the platform for self sustaining growth and excellence thereafter. A dual role for the ESRC is suggested: direct co-investment, and proactive strategic engagement with key stakeholders to galvanise co-funder support. If only components but not the whole of such an initiative may be considered, a third but preliminary role will be to engage in dialogue with key stakeholders to determine which components may be best capable of achieving some discrete but sustainable benefits.

13.1.14 among the components of such a fixed term initiative, additional training opportunities are needed both for academically promising postgraduate and early career researchers (within and outside the DTC/DTU network) and for mid- and senior career social work researchers. NCRM, the Research Methods Festival and VITAE provisions could be better configured and marketed to include social work and social care relevance. But neither these nor the much valued but intermittent RDI provisions are sufficient to cater for needs. Many of the most accomplished mid- and senior career social work academics need training to improve and diversify research skills, and to improve their capacity and skills for research supervision, mentoring and research leadership and management. There is currently no ESRC funded

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31 Given their diversity, it has not been possible to identify training needs for mid- or senior career cognate researchers.
mechanism to meet these needs. A sufficiently sustained training initiative for 3-5 years would boost research capacity within the current generation of academics as well as their capacity to lead and foster the next generation.

13.1.15 Targeted use of standard fellowship schemes (as with studentships) could also provide a much needed boost in career development opportunities. To engage members of cognate disciplines these might best be targeted post-doctoral and perhaps at senior levels – the latter providing incentives for interdisciplinary leadership and high level collaboration. For social work, in the short term - pending development of a cohort of best trained postdoctoral candidates – fellowship opportunities would be best targeted towards mid- and senior career researchers, and mid- (professional) career practitioners undertaking doctorates. Again, the same standards of eligibility and excellence would apply here as elsewhere.

13.1.16 Some other standard ESRC researcher/research support and development mechanisms could also be more effectively deployed for social work and social care research. These include proactive encouragement of applications for interdisciplinary seminar series on priority research themes, and ‘international activities awards’ enabling early career researchers to develop networks and potential for cross national collaboration and comparative research. Some dedicated non standard mechanisms would complement these. They include: project attachment schemes, buddy mentoring schemes, rolling programme of events, and development of electronic resources and portals for research information and exchange, and to signpost existing networks, events and opportunities. In particular for engagement of cognate researchers, they include ‘discipline hopping’ awards and prize competitions for collaborative interdisciplinary research proposals on priority social work and social care themes.

13.1.17 There is a case for establishing a professional association (probably also a learned society) for social work, if possible in combination with social care, to foster collective research identity, sense of belonging to a common community, and participation in research events and exchange. A learned society, properly resourced, might in time provide much of the researcher development and support needed. In the short term this might provided through the DTC/DTU network (if social work and social care are suitably represented), along with other existing centres of research excellence in the discipline and field.

13.1.18 Consultants almost unanimously confirmed that investment in research capacity must go hand-in-hand with direct investment in research and research infrastructure. Parallel research investment creates demand, which in turn generates incentives for engagement and the means for further growth. Funded research can also contribute directly to capacity building through required inclusion, where relevant, of social work and social care input, project internships or attachments, and pump priming for larger and collaborative bids.

13.1.19 There are compelling examples of scope for extending and diversifying the research (co)funding base, especially for health and social care research where government and health funder (including NIHR and NICE) and MRC co-sponsorship could be sought. High quality research on other priority themes – such as promoting inclusion and participation, responding to welfare inequalities or the impact of new technologies on professional practice and service effectiveness – should appeal to third sector research funders and other research councils (EPSRC). There are also good current examples of collaborative funding partnerships for interdisciplinary research – including with ESRC co-investment,
13.1.20 More direct investment in research infrastructure is also needed. More centres or networks of research excellence could provide sufficiently secure funding for continuity and support, and heterogeneity of research approaches and thematic interests to address substantive and methodological priorities for social work and social care research.

13.1.21 Strategic leadership and co-ordination, with supporting infrastructure and resource, are essential prerequisites for research capacity development initiatives to be coherent and effective. ESRC and co-sponsor support for leadership of a 3-5 year initiative would provide the platform from which longer term strategic leadership, infrastructure and sustainable funding base could be developed, to continue growth of capacity, research excellence and impact.

13.1.22 Leadership for a 3-5 year initiative should carry forward the recommendations of this report. In particular it should focus on: progressing a work plan and infrastructure to advance consensus priorities; high level dialogue with key stakeholders and cognate disciplines to establish synergies; maximizing investment and diversifying funding sources; overseeing implementation of a capacity building programme, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating progress. An overarching priority would be to establish mechanisms for longer term leadership and co-funding arrangements. A leadership body needs to have representation from all 4 UK countries. It needs to focus on social work and social care research and cross- or interdisciplinarity, but also to address distinctive discipline contributions and needs.

13.1.23 Longer term leadership, with underpinning infrastructure, should provide strategic direction to shape ongoing research and capacity priorities and agendas, and a strong coherent voice for high quality social work and social care research, in dialogue with key policy makers and research funders, other stakeholders and cognate disciplines. It should continue to promoting engagement from all relevant disciplines, to co-ordinate ongoing research capacity development and training strategies and to promote infrastructure development. It will need to lobby strongly for resourcing social work and social care research through coherent, robust co-funding mechanisms, and to continue to promote the profile, visibility and status of the discipline and field. In the medium to longer term, an independent learned society might fulfil this role, with the potential for both social work and social care to be represented within such a society to be further explored.
## 13.2 Recommendations

### 13.2.1 Recommendation 1: An initiative to strengthen capacity for excellence in social work and social care research, organised around priority themes, should promote interdisciplinary engagement and address distinctive disciplinary needs and contributions to research excellence and impact.

To:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESRC</th>
<th>R.1a) All stakeholders should consider organising social work and social care research capacity development around priority research themes. These should be configured to address current strengths and deficits and to promote interdisciplinary engagement, to capture forthcoming social, welfare, economic and intellectual challenges, and to maximise value for knowledge generation and policy/practice impact.</th>
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| All stakeholders[^32] | R.1b) Priority substantive research themes proposed are:  
- Demographic change and diversity: the contribution of social work and social care  
- Professionalism and service provision in social work and social care, in contemporary management, economic and welfare contexts;  
- Tackling health and wellbeing inequalities: the contribution of social work and social care  
- Risk, decision making and choice in social work and social care  
- Promoting social inclusion and engagement through social work and social care  
- Practice development and innovation in social work and social care |
| | R.1c) Priority methodological research themes proposed are:  
- Using quantitative methodologies  
- Developing and diversifying qualitative methodologies  
- Using and developing mixed methods  
- Evaluation research  
- Developing and using measurement  
- Use of large datasets and service data  
- Analysis of costs, cost benefits and cost effectiveness  
- Systematic and research review |

[^32]: ‘All Stakeholders’ includes (in addition to ESRC): Governments; Non-government agencies/centres; HE funding councils; DTCs and DTUs; HEIs and UUK; Other research councils; Third sector research funders; Employers; Regulators; SCIE and IRISS; JUCSWEC and cognate learned societies
13.2.2 Recommendation 2: The ESRC should engage in strategic discussion with stakeholders to consider co-sponsorship of a short term (3-5 year) initiative to catalyse longer term sustainable growth in research capacity and excellence. This would be supported by attention to social work and social care research capacity in ESRC strategic steer, targeting of standard and non-standard resources.

To:

| ESRC |
| Co-funders incl: MRC, Government, NIHR, HE funding councils, JUCSWEC, SCE, IRISS |
| **R.2a)** The ESRC is encouraged to enter into strategic dialogue with key stakeholders to consider co-sponsorship of a targeted, time limited and multi-faceted initiative to boost capacity for social work and social care research excellence and impact. Given the range and diversity of disciplines to be engaged, career stages for engagement, and capacity needs at individual, institutional and cross-institutional levels, piecemeal support for one or two mechanisms is unlikely to pay sustainable dividends without complementary mechanisms to maximise benefits. A 3-5 year initiative would aim to catalyse development of capacity, infrastructure and stakeholder sponsorship mechanisms, as the platform for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term. The underpinning principle throughout such an initiative would not be to reduce required quality standards in order to be inclusive of social work and social care. It would be to raise social work and social care research quality standards and engagement, and to maximise opportunities for those with highest potential for excellence to attain it. |

|  |
| **R.2b)** Further recommendations of this report are based on the model of a 3-5 year capacity development programme. If, for financial or other reasons, a multi-faceted programme cannot be considered for social work and social care, the ESRC and potential co-funders are strongly encouraged to enter into dialogue between themselves and with other stakeholders to agree the priority mechanisms for support most likely to be effective in their own right. |

| ESRC |
| **R.2c)** Strategic planning should be underpinned by representation of social work (along with key cognate disciplines contributing to social care research) on the peer review college establishing the new postgraduate training network, and membership of other ESRC boards. |
**Recommendation 2 cont.:**

To:

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<th>ESRC</th>
<th>R.2d) Within the excellence criteria for selection of DTCs and DTUs under the new postgraduate training framework, the ESRC is recommended to use its strategic steer to maximise opportunities for growth of social work and social care research capacity and excellence. This should include: ensuring discipline and geographical coverage in the selection of DTCs and DTUs; favouring high quality DTC/DTU bids which offer the optimal range of funding and delivery flexibilities and provision of training to other centres. It should also include use of strategic steer in the allocation of quota awards to, and directions for allocation of awards within, DTCs, to ensure availability of high quality training opportunities for strong social work and social care research candidates.</th>
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| **ESRC Co-funders incl:** | **MRC**
**Government**
**NIHR**
**Regulators**
**Employers** |
| R.2e) The ESRC is invited to consider targeted use of standard training and career development mechanisms to promote capacity and excellence in this research area. Three models are suggested:

i) A dedicated studentship open competition scheme, to provide earmarked opportunities for cognate discipline engagement and career development/transition opportunities for social work researchers. All candidates would be required to meet the same quality standards for eligibility and award as normally apply.

ii) Early establishment of dedicated fellowship award schemes, on the same basis as above, with co-funder sponsorship. (See Rec.3)

iii) Co-sponsorship of a stand alone research masters on a pilot basis, for candidates with good social work masters or first class degrees who have excellent academic potential but lack research training. Regulator recognition and employer support should be sought. |
| **ESRC**
**DTCs/DTUs**
**Other centres of excellence/ Training and support providers** | **R.2f) The ESRC is encouraged to badge and configure NCRM, Research Methods Festival and VITAE provisions to highlight social work and social care relevance. They are also invited to consider sponsoring on a short term basis (3-5 years) additional training and research support and development opportunities that are not covered by the above provisions, to cater to the diverse needs of high quality researchers at all career stages (see Rec. 3).**

R.2g) Operational infrastructure to provide the required research training and support might be provided through the DTC/DTU network (if social work and social care are suitably represented). Contributions could also be made by existing centres of research excellence in the discipline and field if not included in the network. In due course, a self funding learned society might provide this. |
13.2.3 **Recommendation 3:** Training, support and career development opportunities should be established at all career intervention points, with emphasis in the first instance on postgraduate, post-doctoral and senior career engagement of cognate disciplines, and on postgraduate research engagement and mid/senior career researcher/leadership development of high quality candidates in social work.

**To:**

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<th>ESRC</th>
<th>DTCs/DTUs</th>
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<td><strong>R.3a)</strong> High quality training, support and development opportunities at all career stages need to be put in place to help overcome significant disincentives to cognate researcher engagement in this field. The targeted studentship and post doctoral fellowship schemes proposed above (Rec. 2e) should attract cognate researchers early in their professional identity formation. This could be complemented by dedicated training and/or attachments to familiarise them with the field, and a range of wider opportunities for cross-disciplinary exchange. Active dialogue to promote stakeholder co-sponsorship for these opportunities should be pursued.</td>
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<th>Other centres of excellence</th>
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<td><strong>R.3b)</strong> Incentives to be considered for mid- and senior career cognate researchers to engage collaboratively in social work and social care research include professorial fellowships to support ‘research leader’ exchange, with the requirement for cross-discipline collaboration in appropriate funding bids. Other incentives would include sponsorship of interdisciplinary seminar series on priority themes, and ‘discipline hopping’ schemes along the lines offered by the MRC. Active dialogue to promote stakeholder co-sponsorship should be pursued.</td>
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<th>HEIs</th>
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<td><strong>R.3c)</strong> To ensure that highest quality social work candidates have access to highest quality postgraduate research training, all relevant training opportunities should cater for new graduates and ‘non-traditional’ candidates. This involves maximizing funding and delivery flexibilities. A targeted studentship and a mid- career fellowship scheme should attract the highest quality candidates and stimulate employer/co-funder support. In addition a pilot stand alone masters (Rec. 2e), would provide the ‘taster’ for research and career transition, with potential for employer support and regulator recognition in due course. Further researcher development and support provisions, such as attachment schemes, buddyng schemes and improved online resources would also provide support. Active dialogue to promote stakeholder co-sponsorship should be pursued.</td>
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<th>Co-funders incl: MRC Government NIHR</th>
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<td><strong>Employers Regulators</strong></td>
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**Recommendation 3 cont.:**

To:

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<th>ESRC</th>
<th>JUCSWEC</th>
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<td>R.3d) The ESRC is invited to reconsider its position on professional doctorates, in further consultation with JUCSWEC. These provide a key career transition/progression pathway into research for practitioners and early career social work academics meeting the same academic eligibility and award quality criteria as for traditional doctorates.</td>
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<th>ESRC</th>
<th>DTCs/DTUs</th>
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<th>Co-funders incl: MRC</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>NIHR</th>
<th>HE funding councils</th>
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<td>R.3e) The ESRC, in partnership with the range of potential stakeholder co-sponsors, should seek to ensure training and support provision for mid- and senior career social work academics during the next 3-5 years. This should cover research skills (especially methodological and large bid writing), as well as research supervision, mentoring, research leadership and management. Targeted fellowships, including for research leader exchange, would boost career and capacity development among research leaders themselves and importantly among their more junior colleagues. A range of additional and informal researcher support mechanisms would benefit this group – including specialist research input schemes, buddying, seminar series and other exchange fora.</td>
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13.2.4 **Recommendation 4: Social work and social care in higher education should develop institutional and cross-institution co-ordinated strategies to maximise high quality input into, and use of, of capacity development and research opportunities from all available sources.**

To:

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<th>DTC/DTU applicants</th>
<th>HEI social work</th>
<th>JUCSWEC</th>
<th>UUK</th>
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<td>R.4a) It is essential that social work and social care research training is adequately represented in HEI-consortia bids for DTC/DTU status. This applies to both to social work (as an emerging discipline with ‘pockets of excellence’ and social care which has no discipline status or formal representation. HEI-consortia bids should include in their portfolios outreach training provision for other centres, and should maximise inclusion of input from existing pockets of excellence. Social work and social care academics should also lobby within their own DTCs to maximise internal allocation of awards to social work and social care candidates, and for the range funding flexibilities, training pathways and delivery modes required for cross discipline and social work engagement to be offered. In addition, HEI-consortia bids should exploit all possible local and regional potential for co-funding by employers and other relevant agencies of postgraduate studentships for highest quality candidates.</td>
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**Recommendation 4 cont.**

To:

| DTC/DTU applicants | R.4b) JUCSWEC, UUK and individual social work departments should lobby HEIs to raise institutional priority for social work and social care and reduce institutional barriers to cross-discipline engagement and interdisciplinary work. Academic leads in HEI social work departments should maximise opportunities for development of research culture and mechanisms for internal support of researcher activity and growth. Cognate discipline academics with social care research specialisms should do likewise. |
| HEI social work | |
| JUCSWEC | |
| UUK | |

13.2.5 **Recommendation 5: Short term investment should be made in strategic leadership and infrastructure for research and capacity development as the platform for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term.**

To:

| ESRC Co-funders incl: Government, NIHR, HE funding councils, JUCSWEC, SCE and IRISS | R.5a) Strategic leadership and co-ordination, with infrastructure and resource to support them, will be essential to achieve coherent and effective research capacity and quality improvement. Without some central resource and steer, other equivalent initiatives have not succeeded. The ESRC is encouraged to engage in strategic dialogue with key stakeholders to agree short term co-funding arrangements to support leadership and co-ordination of research capacity development. (This applies whether a full 3-5 year programme or a more modest package is envisaged). |
| Strategic leads for research capacity development (short term) All stakeholders | R.5b) Leadership for short term (3-5 year) research capacity development should provide strategic steer for advancing the recommendations of this report, and should engage in high level strategic dialogue with stakeholders and sponsors, to agree further priorities, develop infrastructure and funding partnership agreements. Leadership and co-ordination should include coverage/representation of all UK counties and relevant disciplines. A key strategic objective for short term leadership will be to develop infrastructure, leadership and co-sponsorship arrangements for sustainable growth in the longer term. |
**Recommendation 5 cont.**

To:

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<th>Strategic leads for research capacity development (short term)</th>
<th>R.5c) Longer term leadership should continue to progress these priorities, including consolidating social work and social care research capacity and profile, and strategic engagement with funders to influence research and sponsorship agendas. In the medium to longer terms, an independent learned society might fulfil this role. ESRC support in principle for establishment of such a body would be welcome.</th>
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<tr>
<td>All stakeholders</td>
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13.2.6 **Recommendation 6:** The ESRC should consider playing a proactive strategic role with key government, health, public and third sector bodies, higher education, employers, professional regulators and research funders, seeking to maximise synergies for co-sponsorship, especially in the short term.

To:

| ESRC, JUCSWEC, SCIE and IRISS | R.6a) In addition to its own direct sponsorship role, the ESRC is encouraged to take a proactive strategic role, alongside JUCSWEC and potentially SCIE and IRISS, in galvanising stakeholder co-investment and partnership support. The weight of the ESRC behind such endeavours will increase their chances of bearing fruit. |
| JUCSWEC, Employers Regulators, ESRC | |

R.6b) JUCSWEC should continue to lobby social work and social care employers and regulators to maximise support in principle and in kind for research capacity development. Employers in particular will be more inclined to sponsor research training if this is recognised with professional accreditation and if knowledge transfer benefits are explicit. ESRC support for this lobby would be valuable.

R.6c) Among the opportunities for co-sponsorship of research capacity building to be further developed, particular attention should be paid to those with government and other health sponsors, including NIHR, NICE and the MRC. Extension of the current partnerships between ESRC and both NIHR and MRC, to co-fund social and health care studentships and fellowships, should be a key priority. Synergies with other government funded social care research capacity development initiatives need to be consolidated. Similarly, opportunities for collaborative investment with higher education funding councils should be vigorously pursued.
**Recommendation 6 cont.**

To:

| ESRC Research funders incl: Governments Non government bodies including health/NIHR NIHR Other research councils Third sector – e.g. JRF, Nuffield, Big Lottery |
|---|---|
| R.6d) Also welcome will be proactive efforts from the ESRC and other research funders (government, third sector, other research councils) to identify where social work and social care priority themes resonate with their own distinct or commonly held priorities for direct research funding. Similarly they are encouraged actively to seek social work and social care input into decision making about their own priority themes. Where collectively or singly research funders identify relevance of social work and social care research to their priority themes, they might explicit calls for high quality interdisciplinary social work and social care inputs to be included in bids. |