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Learning for interprofessional and inter-agency practice in the new social work curriculum: evidence from an earlier research study

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Summary *The UK Government's consultation document, A Quality Strategy for Social Care (2000) seeks consistency and excellence in care services and enhanced service partnerships. It states that this requires improved training for social workers and raises the prospect of a new social work curriculum in which learning for interprofessional and inter-agency practice will be strengthened. The document stresses the importance of evidence in decision-making in social care and this principle applies equally to training but there are few recent research findings on interprofessional and inter-agency learning in the social work curriculum. There are, however, findings from an earlier study which contributed to the mid-1990s review of the Diploma in Social Work but which have not previously been published in the mainstream media. These findings are reported and show: the kinds of organisations and professions with whom social work practitioners were in close contact in their jobs; the importance attached by social workers to defined skills in working with them; the perceived usefulness of training in developing relevant knowledge and skills; perceptions of shared training; and marked differences of learning experience reported by practitioners who had taken different training courses. Each set of findings is described and used as the basis of questions for the new social work curriculum.*

Key words: *Interprofessional; inter-agency; inter-organisational; partnership; training; curriculum; CQSW; CSS; Diploma in Social Work.*

The UK Labour Government's consultation document, *A Quality Strategy for Social Care* signalled the next stage in the social care modernisation agenda and gave encouragement and direction to champions of interprofessional training and practice (DoH, 2000a). The *Strategy* seeks consistency and excellence in social care and in the achievement of effective local partnerships both among services and between services and service users and carers. It describes three inter-related means to achieve them: first, a quality framework for local accountability, learning and improvement; secondly, the establishment of a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) to identify, develop and disseminate knowledge and evidence of what works; and, thirdly, the training and development of a more competent workforce in social care and social work.

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More specifically on social work and its role of partnership with other services, the *Quality Strategy* takes up the clear message in the *NHS Plan* (DoH, 2000b) and predicts that, in future, joint working alongside health and other care professionals will be common, and that social workers will develop their ability to work creatively with other professions (DoH, 2000a, para. 101). The place of social work training in this enterprise is addressed in reports accompanying the *Strategy* by the Government's consultants (JM Consulting, 1999a;1999b). They advocate building on the recognised merits of the UK professional qualifying award, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) by extending it from two to three years to accommodate a significantly improved curriculum and to strengthen specific areas which include learning for interprofessional and inter-agency working (JM Consulting, 1999a, paras 5, 6, 3.46). Access to the crucial knowledge base for training and practice in these and other areas will be enhanced through the work of SCIE (DoH, 2000a, paras 30, 32).

The Government's consultation will determine whether and in what form a national curriculum for social work is established. Whatever the outcome—consultations can be unpredictable and governments and their policies change—professional social work training will have to respond to demands to strengthen inter-organisational and interprofessional competence, but what should programmes include? If we apply the knowledge-based imperative of the SCIE proposal, the response to this question must be, first, to search available sources of evidence. Potential sources include the views of service users and carers, government inspection reports and research on practice and training.

To focus on research on social work training, we should ask, *inter alia*, what knowledge, skills and values do social workers need and how well did training equip them? Here a difficulty sets in. Since the first proposals for DipSW programmes received approval by the UK Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) at the start of the 1990s, there have been programme-wide studies of the training they offer (Marsh & Triseliotis, 1996) and studies of specific issues or dimensions (Trotter & Gilchrist, 1996; Jack & Mosley, 1997) but it is hard to find detailed attention to the content of learning for inter-organisational and interprofessional practice.

In the absence of the necessary information on the DipSW, there is a choice between proceeding without evidence or of considering earlier research. The latter is the obvious, knowledge-based option. Against it, are the preoccupations of a sector assailed by rapid, continuing change and a political culture that privileges the 'modern' and the 'new'. Yet current policies to promote so-called 'joined-up' working, although more comprehensive than before, are far from completely new and have clear links to earlier policy (DoH, 1988; 1989), while research on interprofessional and inter-agency practice and the social work curriculum itself has a long history (Parsloe, 1978; Whittington, 1983; Davies & Wright, 1989). Provided earlier research is applied with caution and, above all, demonstrates its contemporary relevance, it stands as a resource and may claim a hearing.

This means turning to studies of the two groups of programmes which provided qualified entry to social work and social care posts into the mid-1990s when output from the new single award, the DipSW replaced them. The first group led to the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW). CQSW programmes were located chiefly in universities and other higher education institutions and provided a range of undergraduate, post-graduate and non-graduate routes into social work through a combination of academic study and practice placements. The second group was the Certificate in Social Service (CSS). These programmes were managed and taught jointly by partnerships comprising further or higher education institutions and agencies primarily from the social care sector who were, mostly, the direct employers of the students on the courses. Students were largely non-graduates who attended college part-time and continued to work and learn in posts in the employing agency. CSS programmes trained staff from a variety of care settings while CQSW-holders were most

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likely to enter field social work. Both programmes came to be recognised by CCETSW as qualifying students for social work and they contributed important elements, such as practice placements and college-agency partnerships, to the design of the DipSW that succeeded them.

A search of published studies of CSS and CQSW programme finds relatively little detail on the aspects of the curriculum of interest here (for example, Casson, 1982; Davies, 1984; Gibbs & Signo, 1986). There is, however, one dedicated study that spans the two periods of the CQSW/CSS and the early DipSW and which supplied research evidence to CCETSW's mid-1990s review and revision of the DipSW but whose findings have not been published in the mainstream. It is the intention of this paper to report from that research as a contribution to a knowledge-based approach to the interprofessional and inter-agency curriculum in social work.

Specifically, the paper has four aims:

- To report aspects of a method that proved productive in the study of learning for interprofessional and inter-agency practice.
- To report a set of systematically researched findings in an under-researched area, the interprofessional and inter-agency curriculum in social work.
- To turn those findings to contemporary use by applying them as questions for the social work curriculum.
- To make the method, findings and curriculum questions available to a wider community of researchers and teachers in social work and other professions.

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The study

The study, known as the CCETSW-King's College Project, began in 1990, anticipating the impact and implications for social work training of developments in UK social policy which were to bring significant changes in organisation and practice in the social services, particularly in community care. These changes, together with developments in child protection, mental health and community justice, led to growing attention throughout the decade to the organisational, inter-organisational and interprofessional dimensions of social work. Social work education was itself undergoing major changes at the start of the 1990s with the replacement of both the CQSW and the CSS by the DipSW. Putting these two sets of developments together, the study raised questions about what social workers needed to learn in order to work effectively in their organisations and with other organisations and professions, and how well their training had prepared them.

Research designed to address these questions was carried out between 1990 and 1994 in CCETSW's London and South-East England Region by a small project team[1] from CCETSW and King's College London. Specifically, the study set out to examine:

- The knowledge, skills and values that comprise *organisational*, *interprofessional* and *inter-organisational* competence in social work.
- Their importance to social workers in performing their work.
- Social workers' perceptions of how effectively their training had developed these competences.

The study comprised a detailed review of literature, legislation and social policy and a three-stage investigation that involved:

- a survey and content analysis of the curricula of 20 of the 26 CQSW and CSS programmes in the Region (Stage I, 1990/91);

- a survey one year into practice of the former students of all 26 who qualified in 1990 ($n = 752$) (Stage II, 1991/92);
- a content analysis of the CCETSW-approved course submissions of their 19 successor DipSW programmes, paying special attention to the content of assessment (Stage III, 1993/4).

The findings were originally reported to participating programmes, respondents and other interests (Whittington, 1992; Whittington *et al.*, 1993; 1994)[2] and, as a priority, to CCETSW's review of the DipSW. Here they contributed directly to revision of the requirements for the qualification that remained in force pending implementation of the Government review (CCETSW, 1995; 1996; DoH, 2000a). CCETSW's revisions addressed both 'working in organisations' and 'interprofessional and inter-agency working', although by different means: the former, by defining it as a separate core area of competence; the latter, by integration into other core competences.

The latter approach positively modelled integrated practice but potentially diffused the subject in the curriculum. There was a case for more unified recognition of interprofessional and inter-agency learning and this is now stronger than ever. We shall concentrate on the findings in this area and, for reasons of space, will focus on aspects of knowledge and skill explored in the Stage II empirical centre-piece of the study which was conducted in 1991/2. This used a postal questionnaire, which had been piloted by mail and group interviews, to survey practitioners one year into practice (response: 65%, $n = 489$). Experience of all types of CQSW and CSS programmes was represented among respondents who were employed in all the main sectors, settings and service areas but mainly in social services departments (SSDs) ($n = 359$), probation (whose officers at the time trained as social workers) ($n = 58$) and the voluntary sector ($n = 40$). All are referred to as social workers in the report and not distinguished unless a particular finding requires it.

Findings will be described on the following: the kinds of organisations and professions with whom respondents were in close contact in their jobs; the perceived usefulness of training in providing knowledge of them; the perception of shared training; the importance of defined skills in working with people in other organisations and professions; the perceived effectiveness of training in developing these skills; and marked differences in the learning experience reported by practitioners who had taken different training courses. Each set of findings will be used as the basis of questions for the new social work curriculum.

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Other organisations and usefulness of training

Respondents were asked, first, 'Which four types of ORGANISATION (*other than your own*), have you worked with MOST CLOSELY in your present job?' All responses mentioned at least one organisation, and 82% of them cited four different organisations. In total, nearly 80 types of organisations were cited from the general to the specific and these were categorised for analysis. The categories mentioned by more than 15% of respondents are shown in Table 1. Organisations cited most often were the *Department of Social Security (DSS)*, *health services*, *housing agencies* and *voluntary agencies*. Most groups of respondents followed the frequency pattern of citations given in Table 1 irrespective of their sector or setting, especially in indicating the top four. The exceptions were independent sector staff and probation officers, a majority of whom cited local authority social services departments (SSDs) as often or more than those from other organisations, accounting for most of the citations of this category.

The following question asked: 'How useful was your training (college *and* practice)[3] in providing the knowledge you require of these organisations?' and gave a five-point scale for reply, from 'Very useful' to 'Very little use'. Table 2 shows the responses for the seven groups

Table 1. *Organisations with which respondents had most contact*

Organisation n = see Table 2	Percentage of respondents citing close contact $n = 479$
DSS	67%
Health services	66%
Housing agencies	59%
Voluntary agencies and charities	42%
Education services	28%
Police	19%
SSDs	17%

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of organisations cited most frequently and combines responses for 'Useful/Very useful' and for 'Little use/Very little use', respectively.

Training was most useful in relation to knowledge about SSDs, with 79% of those citing them stating that training was 'Useful' or 'Very useful'. This appears to reflect the pervasiveness of SSDs in the employment and training of social workers even for those students whose practice learning was located predominantly elsewhere. The next most useful area of training concerned the DSS, the organisation with which most respondents said they had close contact, but here the usefulness rating fell markedly, to 35% of respondents citing the organisation. Furthermore, 31% said that training had been of little or very little use in this area.

In all remaining cases, including health services, the perception that training was useful dropped below 30% and in some areas, like the police and education services, far below it. At the same time, perceptions that training had been of 'Little/very little use' climbed in some categories (housing, voluntary agencies, education services and the police) to around half or more of those citing those organisations. There were no important variations between categories of respondents in their rating of the knowledge gained from training about other organisations. We were not alone in finding perceived shortcomings in this area of training.

Table 2. *Usefulness of training in providing knowledge required of organisations in close contact*

Organisation & number of respondents citing it	Useful/very useful	Between useful and little use	Little use/very little use
DSS $n = 320$	35%	34%	31%
Health services $n = 316$	29%	33%	38%
Housing $n = 283$	22%	26%	52%
Voluntary agencies and charities $n = 202$	28%	24%	48%
Education services $n = 135$	14%	30%	56%
Police $n = 91$	16%	22%	62%
SSDs $n = 81$	79%	17%	4%

Table 3. *Professions or occupations with whom respondents had most contact*

Profession/Occupation n = see Table 4	Percentage of respondents citing close contact $n = 481$
Police officers	53%
Solicitors	42%
Health visitors	41%
Social workers[4]	35%
GPs, psychiatrists and other doctors	32%
Teachers, head teachers	29%
Community psychiatric nurses (CPNs), district and community nurses	17%

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Marsh and Triseliotis report that between 12% and 18% of their respondents said that the tasks of dealing with the DSS, health, criminal justice agencies and education had not been included in their DipSW courses (1996, p. 36).

Main points from the findings

- The large numbers of organisations with which practitioners were in contact.
- The predominance of particular organisations.
- The serious gaps in learning about those organisations.

Questions for the curriculum

- With which organisations are students most likely to work, bearing in mind service changes?
- What focused learning and assessment is there about the policies, structures, functions and processes of those organisations and their collaboration with social workers and their employing agencies, at the general and local level?
- Do students show themselves to be well-informed about the organisations they need to work with closely?

Other professions and usefulness of training

The next pair of questions began: 'Which four PROFESSIONS or OCCUPATIONS have you worked with MOST CLOSELY in your present job?' Four hundred and eighty one respondents cited at least one, and 88% of them named four different professions or occupations. In all, nearly 50 professions, occupations or job titles were cited. Categories reported by more than 15% of respondents are shown in Table 3. Those with most citations were *police officers, solicitors* and *health visitors* but if we group together all the *health professions* (*health visitors*, *doctors* and *community nurses* of different kinds), this becomes by far the largest category cited, with 90% of respondents citing one or more health professional.

Respondents had been asked to name '*other* professions or occupations' with whom they worked most closely so it is of interest that so many (168) mentioned 'social workers'. Citations in this category came especially from those working outside of the local authority SSDs, the main social work employer, originating with probation respondents and field and residential social workers in the independent sectors. However, it also includes citations by

local authority field and residential social workers of staff in different settings or divisions in their own departments and in other local authorities.

Groups of respondents varied in the professions they cited the most. Residential and adult services workers cited GPs and other doctors more than other professions. Social workers in child protection (the largest group in the sample) cited police officers more than other categories.

The succeeding question asked: 'How useful was your training (college *and* practice) in providing the knowledge you require of these professions or occupations?' The best ratings for usefulness (73%) were given by respondents who cited knowledge of other social workers but ratings were very much lower for other professional groups (Table 4). The highest rating for usefulness here stood at 31%, for training in relation to community nurses of different kinds.

The lowest ratings, at 14%, were given to knowledge of teachers and police officers but training in relation to solicitors and doctors fared poorly too. Furthermore, around half or more of respondents who cited these four groups said that training in this respect had been of little use.

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Main points from the findings

- The large numbers of professions with whom practitioners were in contact.
- The predominance of particular professions.
- That contact with other professions is not a function primarily of working in multidisciplinary settings; on the contrary, it is a typical feature of social work roles across sectors, settings and service areas.
- The high usefulness rating given to learning about other social workers (which analysis of curricula suggests was not primarily the result of planned teaching and may therefore have been a benefit of training together).
- The serious gaps in learning about other professions.

Questions for the curriculum

- With which professions are students most likely to work, bearing in mind service and occupational changes?
- Is there focused learning and assessment about these professions (such as their structure, training, work culture, service models, language, values or priorities) and their approach to collaboration with social workers and others?
- Do students show themselves to be well informed about the professions they need to work with closely?
- Assuming that learning about other social workers was an important by-product of the experience of training with them, do particular training structures facilitate or impair this and, if the latter, what compensating opportunities can be provided?

Knowledge of other professions is only one side of the equation in interprofessional work. Project resources gave no scope to ask other professions about their knowledge of social workers. However, survey respondents were asked how well they thought their present role was understood by the professions with whom they worked most closely (Table 5).

Practitioners perceived the highest levels of understanding of their social work role among other *social workers*, although this was not especially high (59% said they understood 'Well' or 'Very well'). The next highest levels were recorded for *health visitors*, *CPNs and other community nurses* (around 50% were thought to understand the social worker's role well). As

Table 4. *Usefulness of training in providing knowledge of other professions or occupations in close contact*

Profession/Occupation & number of respondents citing it	Useful/very useful	Neither	Little use/very little use
Police officers $n = 253$	14%	29%	57%
Solicitors $n = 200$	19%	25%	56%
Health visitors $n = 196$	27%	36%	37%
Social workers $n = 168$	73%	19%	8%
GPs, psychiatrists & other doctors $n = 156$	22%	29%	49%
Teachers, head teachers $n = 139$	14%	32%	54%
CPNs, district & community nurses $n = 83$	31%	33%	36%

will be reported, the two latter groups in particular were cited by respondents as sharing aspects of training with them. Those citing *GPs and other doctors* perceived the poorest levels of understanding. Forty-five per cent thought that this group understood them 'Poorly' or 'Very poorly'. Across the whole sample, 44% said their role was understood by others 'Well/Very well', while 25% said it was understood 'Poorly/Very poorly' ($n = 481$). There was very little variation from these values among different groups of respondents.

A further question asked social workers how well or poorly training had prepared them for the perceptions which other professions and occupations have of their professional role. Twenty-seven per cent of the 481 respondents said they had been well or very well prepared but 31% reported poor or very poor preparation.

Table 5. *Perceived understanding by other professions/occupations of the respondent's role*

Profession/occupation and number of respondents citing it $n = 481$	Understand well/very well	Neither well nor poorly	Understand poorly/very poorly
Police officers $n = 253$	37%	33%	30%
Solicitors $n = 200$	48%	29%	23%
Health visitors $n = 196$	51%	34%	15%
Social workers $n = 168$	59%	30%	11%
GPs, psychiatrists and other doctors $n = 156$	24%	31%	45%
Teachers, head teachers $n = 139$	34%	36%	30%
CPNs, district and community nurses $n = 83$	50%	30%	20%
Housing workers $n = 56$	30%	32%	38%

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Main points from the findings

- Social work practitioners did not feel well and widely understood by the other professions with whom they are in close contact.
- Over a quarter thought that training had left them well prepared for the perceptions held of their role by other professionals but just under a third were poorly prepared.

Questions for the curriculum

- What opportunities are there for students to test their perceptions of the levels of understanding among other professions and for these levels of understanding by other professions to be improved?
- If social workers continue to believe themselves to be poorly understood and remain unprepared for the perceptions of others, what impact does this have on the quality of, and levels of confidence in, their interaction with others?
- What preparation are social workers given for conveying the nature of their role and for managing misperceptions by others?

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Shared training

Respondents were asked whether any of their training had been 'shared with students who were training for a profession outside of social work' and asked for the names of the professions. Respondents who had shared training were also asked whether this had improved their understanding of the professions concerned.

One hundred and forty-eight of the 469 responses (32%) indicated some shared training and 143 cited the profession involved, identifying 21 other professions or occupations. Health and allied professionals and especially community psychiatric nurses, district and community nurses, learning disability nurses and health visitors predominated, representing two-thirds of the 143 citations. However, there was only one citation for shared training with doctors; this was the professional group that respondents believed understood social workers least well. Very few citations were given for the police and none for solicitors, the two single groups with whom respondents said they had most contact.

Respondents who had shared some training were asked 'to what extent did this shared training improve your understanding of the profession/s concerned?' Twenty-one per cent of the 148 respondents said their understanding had been *improved extensively* (see Figure 1). Forty-five per cent had found it *moderately improved* and 34% reported *marginal improvement*. This broad pattern of response applied irrespective of the professions named and showed no significant variation between groups of respondents.

Main points from the findings

- Fewer than a third of respondents had experienced any shared training with another profession.
- Most shared training involved nurses from different branches of the profession; shared training with doctors and high contact groups like the police and solicitors was negligible or non-existent.
- Two-thirds of social workers who had experienced some shared training reported that it improved their understanding of the other profession moderately or extensively.

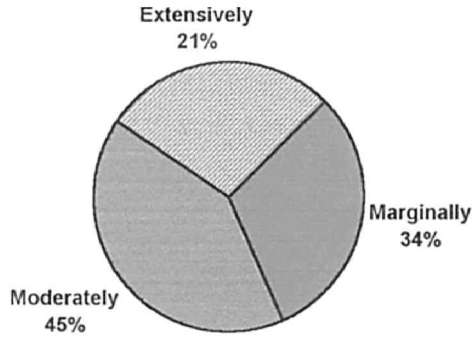

Figure 1. *Contribution of shared training to social workers' understanding of other professions.*

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Questions for the curriculum

- What opportunities are there for shared learning, including shared practice, especially with the professions that students will work with closely or whose roles will be critical to the outcome of work?
- Are the opportunities evaluated by those involved?

Skills in working with other organisations and professions

Earlier phases of the study had identified 13 examples of skills that may be used in working with people in other organisations and professions. The skills are shown in the left-hand columns of Tables 6 and 7. Respondents were asked to say how important the skills were to the performance of their present job, with answers given on a five-point scale from low (1) to high importance (5). The importance attached to these skills is striking and the strength of the finding was sustained regardless of the sector, setting, service area or type of training of respondents. More than 80% of respondents rated 11 of the 13 skills as 'Important' (4) or 'Very important' (5) (Table 6). The median statistic for all skills was 4 or above and in five skills the median was 5.

A reciprocal question asked how well training had equipped respondents to use these skills in their present job (Table 7). The highest rating was given to *written and verbal communication*, for which 73% said they had been well-equipped (median 4). Only one other skill, on managing confidentiality and access, gained a median of 4. Responses on all but one of the remaining skills resulted in medians of 3 and, in six skills, those saying they had been well or very well-equipped fell to a third or fewer of respondents.

The importance ratings attached by respondents to each of the 13 skills in doing the job were compared with the ratings they gave for the effectiveness of training, using the Wilcoxon matched pairs, signed-rank test. Statistically significant differences were found for each skill area at the level, $p < .001$ with ratings for effectiveness of training falling repeatedly below importance. This comparison led to a further computation which found that discrepancies between importance for practice and effectiveness of training were especially marked in the following skills: *conducting multi-disciplinary meetings; ensuring your professional point of view is heard; conveying your agency's policies; handling conflict with other organisations and professions*; *adapting to change in other organisations and professions.*

In three of these (*multi-disciplinary meetings, handling conflict* and *adapting to change*), the frequency tables show that between 40% and 50% of respondents said they had been poorly

Table 6. *Importance of interprofessional and inter-organisational skills*

Skills	Median	Combined % saying Important or Very Important	*n*
1. Using formal and informal networks of other organisations/professions	5	87%	487
2. Skills in written and verbal communication	5	97%	488
3. Selecting the right organisational level for communication	4	82%	486
4. Managing confidentiality and issues arising from client access to records	5	87%	488
5. Forming co-operative working relationships	5	91%	487
6. Negotiating working agreements with other professions	4	85%	487
7. Conducting multidisciplinary meetings	4	71%	488
8. Ensuring your professional point of view is heard	5	92%	488
9. Conveying your agency's policies	4	84%	488
10. Ability to challenge individual discrimination by other organisations and professions	4	81%	487
11. Ability to challenge institutional discrimination by other organisations and professions	4	80%	488
12. Handling conflict with other organisations and professions	4	80%	488
13. Adapting to change in other organisations and professions	4	68%	487

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or very poorly equipped by training (Table 7). Thirty-four per cent said the same of *conveying agency policy* and 28% of *negotiating agreements with other professions*.

The first round of exploration of the Stage II data examined findings widely for evidence of differences between groups of respondents and looked especially at implications for the DipSW curriculum, but differences that were found exhibited no marked patterns. Re-analysis of the entire data set again in 1997 confirmed this overall picture but further detailed exploration and manipulation of the data found one striking and recurring area of exception, in the responses of practitioners who had taken the CQSW and the CSS, respectively (Whittington, 1998). Analysis using the Pearson *chi-square test* found statistically significant differences at the level, $p < 0.001$ in nine of the 13 interprofessional and inter-agency skill areas between these two groups of practitioners. Difference was found in the greater tendency of CSS-holders than CQSW to report being well or very well-equipped by training and of CQSW-holders to report being poorly or very poorly-equipped. There were some poor ratings for training among CSS-holders too, but proportionately fewer than among CQSW-holders. The nine skills in which the cited level of difference was exhibited are indicated with an asterisk (*) in Table 7 and two examples from the test data are given in Table 8.

Table 7. *Effectiveness of training: how well-equipped in interprofessional/inter-organisational skills*

Skills	Median	Combined % saying Well-equipped or Very well-equipped	Combined % saying Poorly-equipped or Very poorly-equipped
1. Using formal and informal networks of other organisations/professions ($n = 485$)	3	49%	14%
2. Skills in written and verbal communication ($n = 486$)	4	73%	06%
3. *Selecting the right organisational level for communication ($n = 484$)	3	28%	31%
4. *Managing confidentiality and issues arising from client access to records ($n = 485$)	4	56%	16%
5. *Forming co-operative working relationships ($n = 484$)	3	48%	16%
6. *Negotiating working agreements with other professions ($n = 484$)	3	33%	28%
7. *Conducting multi-disciplinary meetings ($n = 485$)	3	23%	45%
8. *Ensuring your professional point of view is heard ($n = 484$)	3	44%	25%
9. *Conveying your agency's policies ($n = 482$)	3	32%	34%
10. Ability to challenge individual discrimination by other organisations and professions ($n = 483$)	3	49%	23%
11. Ability to challenge institutional discrimination by other organisations and professions ($n = 483$)	3	44%	25%
12. *Handling conflict with other organisations and professions ($n = 485$)	3	24%	42%
13. *Adapting to change in other organisations and professions ($n = 485$)	3	21%	48%

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Main points from the findings

- Thirteen skills in working with other professions and organisations were tested for their relevance to practitioners and all were endorsed, most of them strongly so.
- The high levels of importance attached to these skills in getting the job done were sustained regardless of the sector, setting, service area or type of training of respondents.
- Interprofessional and inter-agency skills are needed by practitioners at the qualifying level and cannot await post-qualification training.
- In 11 of the 13 skills, fewer than half of practitioners said they were well-equipped by training.
- The discrepancy between ratings given for importance and ratings for effectiveness of training were especially marked in some skills and in five between a quarter and a half of practitioners said they had been poorly-equipped by training.
- Practitioners who had taken the CQSW had a greater tendency than CSS–holders to report being poorly-equipped by training and lesser tendency to say they had been well-equipped. Further CQSW-CSS differences are reported in the next section and the questions they provoke will be taken up there.

Table 8. *How well-equipped by training in interprofessional and inter-organisational skills: examples of responses by type of course taken*

Negotiating working agreements with other professions

Course type	Poorly/very poorly	Between poorly and well	Well	Very well	$n = 484$
CQSW	113	135	70	27	345
	33%	39%	20%	8%	100%
CSS	25	49	40	25	139
	18%	35%	29%	18%	100%
$\chi^2 = 20.63$,	df = 3	$p < 0.001$			

Handling conflict with other organisations and professions

Course type	Poorly/very poorly	Between poorly and well	Well	Very well	$n = 485$
CQSW	162	119	48	17	346
	47%	34%	14%	5%	100%
CSS	42	47	34	16	139
	30%	34%	24%	12%	100%
$\chi^2 = 19.43$	df = 3	$p < 0.001$			

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Questions for the curriculum

- Has the inclusion of the 13 skills and others that may be relevant been critically considered by curriculum designers?
- What opportunities are there for learning and assessing the skills?
- Do students and those who work and train with them see the opportunities as effective and what does assessment show?

Contributions to competence

Respondents were given five sets of sources (shown in the left column of Table 9) and a five-point scale from 'Very low' to 'Very high'. They were asked to rate the contribution of the sources to their ability to work in their organisation and with other organisations and professions (the reference to 'their organisation' connecting with another part of the survey).

The least highly-rated sources were, first, those in the part of the programme spent in the university or college (*college-based*) and, secondly, employer input in the year or more since qualifying involving *supervision* and *induction* of workers into their job roles, or *other training*. The highest overall ratings were given to practice learning at work or placements during the course (*practice-based learning)* and to *work experience after qualification* (Table 9).

Again, statistically significant differences were found between CQSW and CSS-holders. Most striking were differences over *college-based learning* which 66% of CSS-holders rated as high or above as against 36% of CQSW-holders (Table 10).

Table 9. *Contributions to competence of different sources*

Contributions to ability to work in organisations and with other organisations and professions: sources	Rank order	Combined % saying High/very high contribution	*n*
1. Work experience since qualifying	1	84%*	485
2. Practice-based learning	2	84%*	487
3. Previous training and/or employment	3	77%	485
4. Supervision, induction or other training since qualifying	4	56%	487
5. College-based learning	5	45%	487

* The ranking is due to the larger number of 'very high' ratings given to 'Work experience since qualifying'

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Main points from the findings

- Work experience since qualifying and practice-based learning were rated the most important contributions to organisational and interprofessional competence; college-based learning and employer supervision and induction the least.
- Lowest ratings for college-based learning came from CQSW holders while most CSS-holders rated it as high.

Questions for the curriculum

- The first point is an alert to possible disconnections of college-based learning and practice-based learning and to questions of integration and relevance in teaching and learning.
- It may also point to the particular strengths of learning in the work-base or placement in developing practice skills.
- This section and the previous one reported the significantly different valuation by, respectively, CSS-holders and CQSW-holders of their training in interprofessional skills and of the college-based contribution to these skills. Higher ratings of training by CSS-holders were also found in other parts of the study (Whittington, 1998). The reasons for these findings were not clear from the research but the questions they provoke about factors that influence effective interprofessional learning in social work training are of renewed interest because of the current DipSW review. Three sets of factors may have played a part and are now outlined briefly.

The first is the *curriculum*, where no great differences were found in subject content between

Table 10. *Contribution of college-based learning to organisational and interprofessional abilities: comparison of responses by type of course taken*

Course type	Very low	Low	Between low and high	High	Very high	$n = 487$
CQSW	16	76	130	97	29	348
	5%	22%	37%	28%	8%	100%
CSS	0	9	38	56	36	139
	0%	7%	27%	40%	26%	100%
$\chi^2 = 50.55$		df = 4	$p < 0.001$			

programmes but where the percentage of CSS-holders (42%) reporting shared learning with other professions was greater than among CQSW-holders (27%); the second concerns the *characteristics of respondents* where the profile of older, more experienced CSS-holders may have combined with a greater orientation to supervisory roles and management learning, to make them more receptive to organisational and inter-professional learning; the third relates to the different *structures* for organising and integrating learning in the CQSW and CSS, including the close participation of agency and college partners sought in the CSS model and its work-related, organisationally-grounded learning objectives and opportunities.

The significance of these variables cannot now be resolved for interprofessional learning in the CQSW and CSS but may be asked of the DipSW where clear scope remains for analysis of all the dimensions identified (for example, Darvill, 1997). Meanwhile, the possible link with the structure of programmes suggested is a reminder that content represents the curriculum's visible surface and should not be considered in isolation. There is a long-established case that the structure of the curriculum and the relationship between the different contributors have powerful effects on the experience of students, the integration of learning and the models of practice that they develop (Holland, 1988). This is germane to the proposed restructuring of DipSW provision and a prompt to connect the topics of delivery and curriculum content which are separately reported in the Government consultation (JM Consulting, 1999a; 1999b).

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Conclusion

In the decade since the project reported here was begun, the growth of partnership policies and their acceleration under the New Labour modernisation agenda have made learning for interprofessional and inter-agency practice an increasing priority for social workers and social care staff. This priority is built into the national training strategy for social care with its objectives for partnership working and national occupational standards for the DipSW (TOPSS England, 2000; Whittington, 1999). The questions raised in this paper are offered as a contribution to a knowledge-based curriculum designed to support learning for partnership working. Clearly, however, there is more to the curriculum than we have described.

In the first place, there are many decisions to be made on objectives and detailed content and these are particularly acute where any shared learning is intended (COT/CCETSW, 1999; Wilby & Elwyn, 1999). Furthermore, there are important aspects of the study not reported here that we consider integral to a curriculum aiming to develop competence in interprofessional and inter-agency working. They concern knowledge and skills for work within organisations as well as values for the whole enterprise. Certain of those values connect with, and are realised by, a further set of skills involving partnership with service users, carers and the wider community (Croft & Beresford, 1997). The curriculum will also need to address the strategic and policy contexts of partnership as represented in the Government's modernisation plans and responses to them (DoH, 1998; 2000a; 2000b). A curriculum that deals adequately with all of these dimensions and underpins them with appropriate critical and theoretical analysis as well as accommodating other curriculum development will undoubtedly require the additional time envisaged in the JM Consulting report.

No one imagines, however, that a strengthened curriculum for interprofessional and inter-agency practice in social work or in the other professions where it is planned (DoH, 2000b) will be sufficient alone to achieve the local partnerships envisaged by government and the creative co-operation by professionals that government and many of us seek. These aims will demand major shifts in the social care and health professions, their training and their work organisations. This is contested territory where change will be a more or less negotiated

outcome and won with a combination of evidence, a degree of faith and strong measures of political and professional will. It will also take time and resources if it is not to falter from the sheer fatigue of those involved. Even then, it is not an easy path but the alternative is to explain convincingly to service users and carers why they should put up with services that are fragmented and with professionals who don't work more effectively together.

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Notes

[1] The team comprised: Colin Whittington, Head of CCETSW's London and South East Region and director of the project, Linda Bell, project Research Associate, King's College and Ray Holland, Senior Lecturer and project academic consultant, King's College.

[2] Comprehensive details of findings and methodology are reported in Whittington (1998) and are available from the author.

[3] In the 1991 Pilot to the study, few practitioners had any doubts about their recall of training and their ability to judge its relevance to current work. However, some were hesitant about distinguishing precisely and consistently between learning gained from the part of the programme spent in the university or college (college-based) and the part spent in practice at the placement or work-base (practice-based); hence the form of the question.

[4] Includes citations of social workers, probation officers, residential social workers and care managers.

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