

**Report**

**Evaluation of the Yorkshire Rural and Urban  
Social Work Teaching Partnership**

**Yorkshire Rural and Urban Social Work  
Teaching Partnership**

**Interface Associates UK Limited**

Interface is an independent organisation with a mission to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, individuals and families. We are national leading experts in early intervention and prevention. Interface was established in March 2010, by members of the former Families Delivery Team, Families at Risk Division at the Department for Education (DfE). We were successful in receiving £2m grant from DfE (Families at Risk) that later moved to DCLG Troubled Families' team to support with this agenda.

We have a strong history of evaluation, strategic management and service redesign, as well as excellent knowledge of the local landscape. Our added value arises from our familiarity with many of the issues, dynamics and pressures that individuals and staff may experience when delivering this type of support.

**Interface would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in the research.**

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## 1. Context and Method

### Introduction

1. Interface was commissioned in April 2018 to conduct an evaluation of the Yorkshire Urban and Rural Social Work Teaching Partnership. We would like to thank all the stakeholders involved in the evaluation for their time and insight, on which this evaluation is largely based.

### Background

2. The Yorkshire Urban and Rural Social Work Teaching Partnership (YURSWTP) is part of the national Social Work Teaching Partnerships (SWTPs) programme funded by the Department of Education (DfE) and Department of Health and Social Care (DoH). The programme was developed by central government to improve the quality of education and experience received by social work students and practitioners, following reviews such as Narey and Croisdale- Appleby<sup>1</sup>. These reviews highlighted the need for a greater focus on practice based training, higher quality CPD and a clearer skills and career development framework for social work.
3. Key drivers for the Social Work Teaching Partnerships (SWTPs) national programme are to:
  - Enhance partnership arrangements between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employers;
  - Attract more able students;
  - Embed the knowledge and skills statements (KSS) into academic curricula and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for existing workers;
  - Raise the quality of social work practice.
4. The first phase of the national SWTP programme was launched in 2014, through government seeking applications from local authority led partnerships. The scheme was extended in 2016, and the YURSWTP successfully applied for 2 year grant funding of £706,000 – aiming to grow, develop, inspire and sustain a highly skilled and confident social work workforce, able to meet the diverse challenges of frontline practice with children and adults. The YURSWTP was fully operational by March 2017, supported by the appointment of a Project Manager.
5. The partnership consists of four local authorities and two universities:
  - Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (Lead Partner)
  - City of York Council
  - Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council
  - North Yorkshire County Council
  - University of Huddersfield
  - University of York.

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Narey (2014). Making the education of social workers consistently effective. Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of the education of children's social workers. Prof. David Croisdale-Appleby (2014). Re-visioning social work education. An independent review.

North Yorkshire County Council worked with the Partnership on aspects of the programme in phase 1 before joining as a full member from April 2018. Calderdale Adults joined the partnership in December 2017.

6. The partnership is led by Social Work Senior Managers and academics. It brings together Principal Social Workers, Workforce Development leads, Social Work academics and researchers, frontline practitioners and young people and adults who have experienced social care. The partnership is funded to deliver the stretch criteria set by DfE and aims to do this through:
  - Driving up standards of social work practice by promoting excellence and improved outcomes for service users;
  - Offering a broad based, robust pre-qualifying curricula underpinned by the KSS and providing high quality, statutory placement learning opportunities;
  - Providing a dynamic programme of CPD activities that strengthens existing practice, prepares practitioners for the assessment and accreditation process and supports progression to management and leadership level roles;
  - Collaborating cross-partnership to share resources, training and learning opportunities;
  - Supporting practitioner led research that responds to local practice needs and embedding a culture of research informed practice;
  - Developing and implementing information based workforce planning strategies aligned to local labour market requirements;
  - Improving the public perception of social work and promoting the value and satisfaction that careers in social work can offer.
  
7. The current structure of the partnership is as follows:
  - A Strategy Board chaired by the Assistant Director Calderdale and comprising Assistant Directors (Social Care) or equivalent from each of the local authorities and Heads or Deputy Heads of Social Work Departments in both universities
  - An Operational Board comprising Principal Social Workers and Workforce Development Leads from each of the local authorities and Social Work lead academics from each of the universities.
  - Key to the lines of communication and accountability between the two boards and its workstreams is the Project Manager appointed in March 2017.
  
8. Work is currently delivered through the following workstreams which meet every 8 weeks:
  - Placements
  - Workforce Strategy

 Academic Programmes





9. These replaced the previous 5 workstreams from April 2018:

-  Admissions
-  Curriculum & Academic Delivery
-  CPD
-  Placements
-  Workforce Planning.

10. In addition, there are a number of Task & Finish subgroups which meet as required.

## Evaluation Scope and Method











1. The aim of the evaluation is to:





-  identify and explore the achievements of the partnership to date, in terms of benefits and outcomes for students, social workers, partners and clients, in the context of the strategic aims and vision
-  understand the challenges and enablers of effectiveness (past/future)
-  explore added value, value for money and sustainability
-  make suggestions to support the future development of the work.

2. The Yorkshire Urban and Rural Partnership was successful in its application for an extension grant and will be funded until March 2019. The evaluation has been conducted to support the partnership going forward within this context.

## Method

3. The evaluation activity took place between April and June 2018. A mixed method approach was developed to generate a rich data set for analysis. This comprised qualitative consultations with over 40 stakeholders, document review, and several small-scale surveys. Specifically:

-  Review of documentation and existing project evaluation reports (including attendance data for MRC training, CPD modules & 2 TP funded masterclasses; evaluation reports from Lecturer Practitioner (LP))
-  Workshop with 10 members of the partnership's Operational Board
-  Interviews with key stakeholders (3 LPs, Board members, wider Partnership staff) n= 17
-  2 focus groups with 7 social workers engaged in CPD
-  6 Service Users in a focus group
-  5 Practice Educator Consultants (PEC) and 2 Social Work Profession & Learning Development Officers (with a similar role) in a focus group
-  3 Practice Educators in a focus group
-  Survey of 7 students currently studying a degree in social work (5 x year 1; 2 year 3)[this was a change of method, due to lack of availability for focus groups]
-  Survey of Strategy Board members 5 out of 8 responded
-  Survey of post student placement feedback (provided by the partnership) n=41

4. Research tools were developed for each stakeholder group and consultation method, including focus group guides, workshop guide, online surveys and semi-structured interview guides. These were based on an evaluation framework, comprising the following topic areas:
  -  Effectiveness of the partnership working
  -  Benefits, outcomes, impact and sustainability
  -  Challenges and enablers
  -  Perspectives on added value and value for money.
5. A qualitative analysis was undertaken, with all contributions being analysed against the evaluation framework. It has not always been possible to quantify the number or type of stakeholders who put forward a perspective to avoid compromising confidentiality due to the small numbers of particular stakeholder types involved.

## 2. Effectiveness of the Partnership

1. Overall the partnership has been very successful, despite operating in the context of austerity, pressures on capacity and continuous policy and regulatory change. The following findings should be considered in that context, noting that at the time of evaluation the partnership has been fully operational for only a year.

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***“The whole process has changed end to end from assessment of students, to placements, practice education and CPD. The relationship between the HEIs and Councils is better than it ever has been.” (Partnership Board)***

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### Partnership structure and operation

2. The partnership’s structure and operation has evolved over time and is now effective. The original partnership board now meets as an Operational Board (under a revolving Chair) every 8 weeks, with accountability to a Strategy Board (chaired by the lead partner) which meets quarterly. Once embedded, this new governance structure has the potential to achieve deeper engagement and commitment by senior leaders across organisations.
3. The partnership has developed clear aims, objectives and an activity plan. The level of consensus reached is reported as an achievement in itself, and this is corroborated by the alignment between the activity plan and what strategic stakeholders want from the partnership (from Board survey):
  - Better trained social workers who can cope with the demands and rewards of statutory social work
  - To promote excellent social work
  - To support retention within organisations that have learning cultures
  - To ensure a sustainable workforce that works to best practice standards and benefits from quality experiences for career development
  - More confident and skilled social workers
  - Flexible and dynamic partnership working to support recruitment and retention, and CPD.
4. There are clear governance processes within the partnership and accountability is maintained through appropriate monitoring and feedback mechanisms. This allows milestones to be completed, thus releasing quarterly grant payments from DfE/DoH successfully. The partnership has responded appropriately to receiving less funding in year 2 than expected (due to more partnerships being funded nationally) by streamlining lower priority activities and careful budget management.
5. All relevant organisations are represented on the respective boards and stakeholders understand their roles. Excellent work has been undertaken to engage service users elsewhere in partnership activities, and the partnership is in



a strong position to include service users in strategic and operational delivery going forward. PVIs are not represented on the boards, because of the national guidance that placements should be statutory, but their role within the work of the partnership in providing placements is still valued. The partnership is in the process of setting up a Placement Provider Reference Group to include PVIs and Health Trusts which are not members of the TP but which provide placements. This will enable the partnership to share learning from placement work and support the development of statutory/PVI integrated placement models.

6. In general, meetings are well attended and stakeholders report how important it has been to learn more about each other's drivers, structures and priorities. Some stakeholders feel there are too many meetings, and perhaps now that key relationships are more established, the use of virtual meetings could be explored. Having met for only a year the partnership can be said to be still at an early stage of maturity. Representation from organisations is not always consistent, nor at a sufficiently senior level within HEIs, which can hinder high quality decision-making. This lack of continuity 'in the journey' can mean discussions are duplicated and that the discussion is subsequently taken outside the partnership meetings, which is inefficient and affects transparency. Several people interviewed felt that members of the partnership did not yet voice their opinions and concerns openly and as a result there was a lack of challenge in relation to some of the key issues that the partnership has to address, particularly in relation to curriculum content. To ensure sustainability and continued progress with the good work already undertaken the partnership needs to move to a new level of maturity where all partners are receptive to fair criticism and challenge.
7. Wider organisational ownership is a challenge and a further risk to sustainability. Social work practice is a constantly changing landscape and local authorities need to invest in the long term and become learning organisations to be confident that their staff can develop to meet future challenges. That changing landscape should also inform HEI practice. Individuals who are active within the partnership are passionate about the importance of the partnership to address this, but their organisations as a whole appear to be less interested or committed. This seems due to a combination of awareness, competing priorities and a general low level of inter-organisational understanding. These building blocks to wider commitment are recognised by the partnership, and need to be worked on further.
8. The partnership developed an early communication and engagement strategy for partners, front-line social workers, students, HEI staff and service users. This is in line with good practice and draws on learning from the national evaluation of

teaching partnership pilot projects<sup>2</sup>. A key to “getting the message across” has been the investment in the TP branding and website and the use of communication platforms such as Twitter and the E-newsletter. All are very clear in their intent of “INSPIRING SOCIAL WORK”. The communication strategy has been effective in engaging and raising awareness among some immediate stakeholders, but it was evident from our evaluation that it has been difficult to reach beyond those engaged in the partnership. Awareness of the partnership within the workforce was poor outside those immediately involved, with social workers in LA children’s services perhaps better informed than those in adults and mental health teams. Some stakeholders were unaware of the TP and didn’t appreciate that activities they heard about were linked to it, or funded by it. Some stakeholders were not aware it was both HEIs and LAs working together. All stakeholders report capacity as an issue related to awareness, and some suggest that communication through established meetings within member organisations would better facilitate sharing of TP information particularly in LAs. For example, team meetings, senior management meetings and directorate meetings could receive regular updates from the TP.

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***“I would like to see more senior managers involved. We need the movers and the shakers. My sense is that people don’t know enough about the partnership.” (University)***

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9. The combination of partners with different types of locality, different HEI specialisms and local histories has worked well in many ways – including learning from each other and sharing specific skills and knowledge. Initially, HEI stakeholders may have found challenging the lead role given to LAs by the DfE/DoH, but over time this has lessened as respect for each other has grown. However, the partnership has only been in operation for one year and there are inevitably still some tensions that need to be worked through. Curriculum content is one tension that the partnership board identified needs to be addressed, and a second is the issue of research. Research is core to the work, and to some extent funding, of HEIs but is at the edge of LA thinking. There could be benefits for all partners if LAs and HEIs worked together to identify relevant research topics that would be useful to inform LA practice.
10. The geography of the partnership area presents a challenge to effectiveness. The partnership covers a large area, not particularly well connected via public transport or roads. All stakeholders reported that it is a struggle to travel between the areas, and for CPD students it is a real barrier. Some stakeholders described it as feeling like two partnerships, because of the different dynamics around the two university areas. For some, the concept of a smaller partnership

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<sup>2</sup> Social Work Teaching Programme Pilots: Evaluation; Dorothy Berry-Lound, Sue Tate and Professor David Greatbatch – HOST Policy Research; 2016

is attractive because it is an easy solution, but it would reduce the added value of diversification and affect achievements such as progress on the admissions process. As the partnership becomes more embedded, the partnership could explore the use of technology for both meetings and the delivery of training to overcome geographical issues.

11. The appointment of a Project Manager (PM) in March 2017 has been extremely successful. Prior to this appointment the pace had been slow (for reasons largely out of the partnership's control). The PM post has enabled a faster pace, put a framework around the partnership vision, aims and delivery; enabled active monitoring of delivery; ensured that workstreams report to the board and facilitated relationships and decision making. It is clear from stakeholder feedback that this post has been fundamental to the progress and success of the partnership. Thought needs to be given as to which and how the functions of this post will be delivered and embedded going forward.






## Workstream Achievements

12. The partnership is structured to deliver across 3 workstreams, each led by a named individual from within the partnership. Considerable progress has been made across some workstreams, which – in terms of theory of change – are building blocks to achieving the overall aims of the partnership.

## Academic Programme Workstream

### Admissions

13. The work on admissions is considered a huge success and demonstrates how a previously thorough process can be stretched for further improvement. The admissions workstream - comprising a combination of admissions tutors, practitioners and users - has been focused on assessing degree programme applicants for the best potential social workers. Working in partnership, they have redesigned the process to include further structure and rigour. They have adopted DfE criteria on point scores for under and post graduate courses and changed the format of assessment. Key features of the new assessment day process include:

-  In depth discussion with students about the course, what to expect and introductions to staff and users present
-  Service user discussion with candidates in the morning, which influences areas to explore with candidates at interview
-  Practitioners are involved in all elements (this works on a 'pool' basis to allow flexibility around workload)
-  Group discussion of a case study
-  Candidates are selected on the basis of discussion between staff and service users

- i The partnership has received positive feedback from students.
14. Service users have played an important role in the selection process and felt their views had been listened to and valued. Service user groups at both HEIs have been involved in the design of the new process and received training to support them with undertaking assessment of candidates.

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***“It’s an equal voice, we have moved from consultation to involvement, SU input is taken into account – we make a difference.” (service user)***

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15. The TP is subject to the same stretch criteria as other TPs in terms of entry criteria for social work courses, 120 points for undergraduates and 2:1 for graduates. The main challenge in admissions and recruitment is the use of this point score. Most stakeholders report that this has proved too rigid. Flexibility to offer places to students who performed well at assessment (but who just miss the point threshold) is required. Last year 10 students just missed the point score, and previously HEIs would have been able to recruit these individuals. Instead, they have had to take candidates through clearing that have not been through the selection process. This is frustrating for HEIs when there is a financial imperative to fill course places. A more structured policy has been approved by the partnership, which will be in place in time to finalise the 2018 admissions process. The DfE has been consulted on this approach.
16. The partnership has just completed its first round of recruitment using the new admissions process so it is too early to say if the quality of students is higher because of the partnership, although both HEIs report being confident that the process will result in high quality students, with the right values and attributes to make excellent social workers.

### Curriculum & Academic Delivery

17. The Academic Programme Workstream considers course content and aims to bring the new standards and more practice-based skills into the curriculum. Specific achievements include:
- i The introduction of the Lecturer Practitioner roles
  - i Embedding the new KSS into the curriculum and CPD – CPD has recently been mapped against the KSS to identify gaps and inform discussion about how these should be addressed
  - i A new course offered by both HEIs - although developed for pragmatic and financial reasons - the integrated 4 year MSocW (UoY) MSci (UoH) course has created new stretch for undergraduate students whilst enabling students to progress to masters level
  - i New content has been developed, with greater practice elements, including a module involving service users (UoH).

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***“[The practical elements are bringing] a deeper learning experience for students.” (University)***

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18. Although there have been changes to the curriculum, some stakeholders particularly within the LAs would like to see even greater change. Stakeholders report that the UoH is particularly focused on working with LAs to ensure the curriculum meets local needs. However, in general there remains an inevitable tension about the balance between academic and practical learning across the partnership. This debate between the weighting given to critical thinking and other academic skills versus practical skills was very evident in interviews and whilst there has been greater alignment in thinking across stakeholders, much of this sits again with individuals and not institutions who still have very different drivers and pressures. Several stakeholders cited concerns about the research focus of HEIs and how this, for financial reasons, drives course content rather than need.

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***“Need to maintain a focus on this - some still come to practice without skills or knowledge around doing an assessment or what section 47 is.” (PE)***

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***“The HEIs are not as flexible as the Local Authorities might wish in their offers - still based on a push towards academic / accredited pathways and modules, not particularly the direction of travel for most local authorities so there’s a tension that exists” (Senior Stakeholder)***

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### Lecturer Practitioner

19. Key to the curriculum development and academic delivery work is the role of the Lecturer Practitioner. The University of Huddersfield was already employing a Lecturer Practitioner whose area of specialism is mental health and, although not funded by the partnership, is making a significant contribution to its overall work. The TP funded two new LP posts offering practising Social Workers the opportunity to teach part-time on academic courses within the partner universities. These posts, both with a focus on children’s social care, were actively working to bridge the gap between theory and practice within the curriculum, one at the University of Huddersfield and one at the University of York.
20. Unfortunately, the partnership funded post at the University of Huddersfield effectively ended after only three months because of ill health. To overcome this the partnership has provided a more structured approach to involving a wider staff group in teaching.
21. The two remaining LPs are highly active within their universities. They have rewritten course modules to incorporate additional practical and specialist elements, with both current LPs delivering significant portions of the course. For example, one LP has delivered 10 out of a series of 14 lectures on the Children and Families module to final year BA and MA students. Two of these were

delivered jointly, and the LP facilitated guest speakers. The same LP has also (amongst other things):

- Contributed to assessment day (BA1)
- Delivered preparation for practice sessions (MA1)
- Facilitated Professional Development group work, including placement reflection and specific skills and knowledge sessions e.g. readiness for practice scale, resilience
- Individual supervision of 9 students - 2x each term(BA1)
- Marking of assignments x2 modules
- Contributed to interview days for prospective students.

22. There are similarities between the work of both LPs. At UoH the LP focuses on integrating mental health and mental capacity into the teaching of social workers at all levels – specifically by teaching mental health legislation and legal literacy e.g. sessions on the Mental Capacity Act. This is an excellent example of the role meeting a local identified need – in working to ensure social workers know how to document evidence to support legal action. There is no LP role relating to Adult Services at UoY.

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***“[By using anonymized case studies] “the dry legal matter is brought to life and made more relevant” (LP)***

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23. All stakeholder types can cite benefits of a more practical curriculum and students in particular are very positive about the benefits and impact on their learning. In the student survey, 100% those who had had contact with an LP (five out of seven respondents) reported positive impact on their learning.

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***“The LP was able to draw on her experience and provide clear examples throughout the module which made it easier to understand and easier for us to see how theory can lead to practice” (Student)***

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***Over the years social work teaching has drifted away from practice to theory, the LP role has pulled that back, keeping curriculum and teaching focused on practice. (Social Worker)***

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***“Really useful to have a lecturer who could tell us about what she is doing at the moment and relate things to current cases” (Student)***

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24. The LP role is clearly highly valued by most students and HEIs, helping students apply key concepts and adding major value to modules. This excellent feedback could realistically lead to improved course ratings (although it is too early to say).

25. A key challenge for individuals undertaking the LP role is juggling the academic and practice roles, and this underpins a recruitment challenge around the role. Good supervision and flexibility have been important in enabling these LP roles to be effective, as has a very disciplined approach to time management by the post holders. LAs see some value, for example improved legal literacy, but the role is less visible, and the benefits less direct to them in the short term. There remains a lack of awareness of the role more widely within LAs.

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***“For example, the training department replicated a programme of training for social workers that the LP already delivers through the CPD programme at the university. This casts doubts that the role is valued within the LA although it is probably down to lack of awareness.” (Social Worker)***

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26. An unintended benefit has been the rise in students requesting placements in the specialist areas taught by the LPs. Thought needs to be given as to how other social work specialists may be encouraged into the role to harness this benefit more widely, particularly those in child protection and other roles where ring-fencing hours and caseload reduction is perhaps more difficult. The role could be shorter term, where social workers could conceive of balancing two roles for 3 months, but not a year. This would bring greater perspectives into the curriculum and support recruitment of social workers across all areas of social work. Social work senior managers are key to making this happen, adjusting and managing caseloads as necessary.

### Lecturers in practice

27. This is an area for development going forward. There is one isolated example of an academic going into practice as part of the TP programme. There is also evidence of initial activity related to this goal, for example one university sent a list of lecturers and their areas of expertise to local authorities. Many stakeholders see a benefit in the potential of this area of work, but there are a number of barriers which are preventing progress – capacity, clarity about purpose and communication. During interviews it was apparent that university staff were seeing lecturers in practice as a teaching role and not necessarily one where they would learn from the experience to take back to the classroom. The partnership needs to have an open discussion about its expectations in relation to this role.

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***“We look forward to the opportunity to do the same in LAs when we shadow and offer them advice. This has not been on the table now as other areas have been more important but we are now talking about doing this.” (University)***

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***“There needs to be more discussion about what they want – lecturers on duty or teaching on the shop floor.” (University)***

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***“No one has time to go into practice – it’s a critical time for funding.” (relates to wider routes into SW, University)***

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## Placements Workstream

### Placements

28. The partnership is making good progress in meeting the requirements for two statutory student placements, having increased statutory placements and continuing to offer PVI placements, as part of this. A new PVI placement has been developed in a private respite centre for children with disabilities, which is considered an excellent setting for a first placement. More first placement opportunities are needed for UoY students although CYC have taken first placement students for the first time - and some ambiguity remains about what the partnership understands a statutory placement to be. Calderdale and Kirklees local authorities previously struggled to offer the required number of placements, which through the partnership’s work has become less of an issue.
29. A number of improvements to placements have been suggested by stakeholders participating in this evaluation:
- More 1:1 contact whilst on placement, whether by PE or Lecturer
  - No assignments whilst on placement
  - Clear plans when putting students into MAST/CIN to ensure students get the full experience
  - Improved inductions, shadowing different teams and integration between children’s and adult’s services
  - Reduced pressure on PEs not to fail students on placements.

### Practice Educator Consultants & Practice Educators

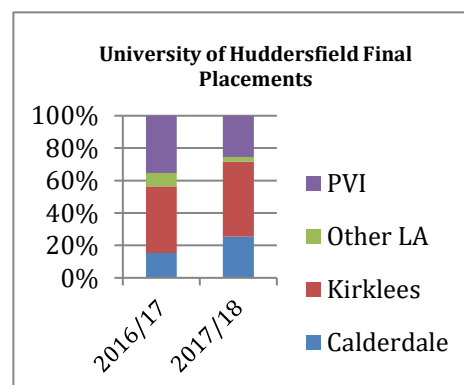
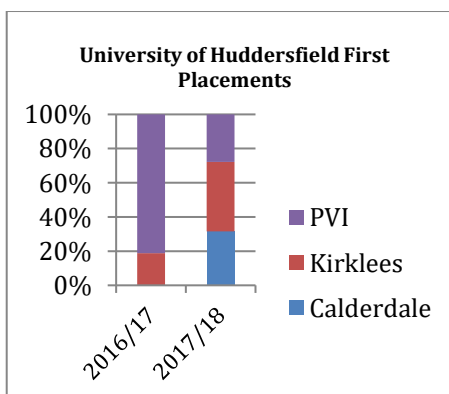
30. Practice placements are considered a key driver for the partnership and the work of the Practice Educator Consultants (PEC) has been highly valued across stakeholder types. The Partnership has five dedicated Practice Educator Consultants in place. York CC (2PECs); Kirklees (2PECs) and Calderdale (1PEC). NYCC have two existing Social Work Professional Learning Development Officers, who fulfil a similar role (and were included in this research). Calderdale Adult Services and NYCC Adult Services have recently appointed a PEC.
31. The PEC’s responsibilities are broadly similar throughout the partnership and include: ensuring the capacity and quality of statutory placements for students, mentoring Practice Educators (PE), student induction, group supervision for students every 4-6 weeks, meeting with the university, running professional development groups for students, matching students to placements, admissions interviews, co-ordination of practitioners and co-delivery of the PE training



courses.

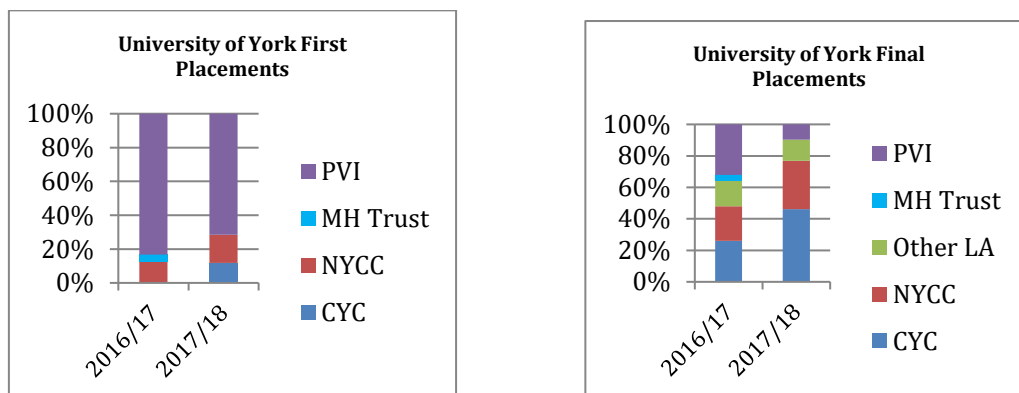
- 32. The NYCC roles are slightly different to the PEC role. They fulfil most of the PEC responsibilities with a few additions. They interview secondees to courses, deliver stage one and two PE courses via York University, including marking papers and attending panels, deliver a reflective supervision course and generally influence course development.
- 33. In Calderdale and Kirklees the PECs developed and conduct a “speed matching” exercise to match students to PEs, which involved quick conversations between students and PEs about mutual needs and expectations. This process is highly valued by all stakeholders. Across all local authorities the PECs have co-developed with HEIs new allocation processes to provide earlier LA involvement in placement matching. They are also responsible for student pods whereby they case manage up to 6 students, holding case accountability for them. If a case needs to step up to CPR or be closed the PEC discusses with the team manager who is ultimately case accountable. There are too few students in York to have a pod, instead PECs act as longarm Practice Educators.
- 34. The PECs have been instrumental in increasing statutory placement capacity, and delivering wider placement improvements and most stakeholders (students, PEs, HEIs) generally report better suitability of placements, although there was a concern that fewer students want to be placed in adults services since the introduction of matching and there are still some mismatches<sup>3</sup>. However, it is important to note that the partnership, particularly through the work of the PECs, has made significant strides in its work to increase its statutory placement provision. This success is evident in the following tables:

**Table 1 &2 Comparisons University of Huddersfield Placements 2016/17 and 2017/18**



<sup>3</sup> Student Placement Survey and CPD focus group

**Table 3 & 4 Comparisons University of York Placements 2016/17 and 2017/18**



35. A range of stakeholders report that the quality of placements has improved and that students feel better supported in their role. The student post placement survey corroborates this, with 33% of the 40 respondents finding the placement very useful (45% useful). 54% found the support provided by the PEC very useful (38% useful n=40) and 100% found that when they contacted the PEC they got the response they wanted.

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***“Placements are 100% better. The role of the PEC is crucial and the time and effort put into this has paid off.” (Social Worker)***

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36. Stakeholders consistently spoke highly of the PECs, in terms of their skills, variety of backgrounds and their work in supporting and developing social workers across the partnership. Specific other benefits mentioned include:

- PECs put a structure around the PE role, which was previously undervalued, and have developed a lead role on practice education in the absence of ownership from elsewhere within the authority;
- being integrated into teaching in a purposeful way has increased the quality of PE training and communication;
- improved alignment between practice and academic learning through the PE masterclasses, their knowledge, skills and relationships;
- supporting the ‘joining up’ of LAs in their approaches and practice (although this needs to continue);
- understanding more about different areas of social work;
- students securing jobs in LAs;
- student satisfaction - NYCC conducted its own satisfaction survey with students. They report a real difference in the quality of feedback by students.

37. The support PECs have provided to PEs is reported to be invaluable – through training, individual support and mentoring. As a result, PEs have been a major

beneficiary of the PEC role, and there are an increased number of PEs which has supported the increase in the number of placements available. The PEC and PE roles have been complementary and worked well together. All members of the PE focus group showed great commitment to their role, and wanted to continue to the PE L2 training. PEs spoke about how being in the role had “upped their game” as social workers because supporting a student caused them to be more reflective of their own practice and to focus more on research and theory. However, there are reported to be fewer social workers coming forward from adults’ services for PE training. A possible reason for this could be the lack of clarity within local authorities about the support on offer for those taking up the PE role either in terms of reduced workload or payment.

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***“The support for PEs is much better and PECs input into PE education at the university is really valuable.” (Social Worker)***

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***“PECs have meant that the whole management and oversight of placements is so much easier. Connections between universities has been beneficial and enabled sharing of ideas and experiences.” (Social Worker)***

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***“PECs are a physical presence and people know about it. Social work teams know what they do and the benefit of them.” (Social Worker)***

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38. It is evident that the PEC role has been extremely effective in developing placements, raising the quality of placements and valuing and supporting the PE role. Stakeholders consistently felt this was a priority that must not be lost.

### **Workforce Strategy**

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***“[The partnership has been] Strengthening links with the university, impacting on their work, strengthening relationships and influencing course content” (Social Worker)***

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39. The Workforce Strategy workstream, initially called CPD, has been re-named to capture the higher-level goals of the partnership and improve alignment between workforce planning and CPD. The work has an immediate focus on progression routes and CPD development. Social workers are positive about the greater access to academic courses at the universities, although geography and time (limited capacity and lack of additional study time) remain barriers to involvement.

## 40. Achievements include:

- Innovative computer game for students and social workers to improve assessment and communication skills
- Development of new modules such as the Innovations in Professional Practice (UoH) – where advanced practitioners carry out research, which they hope will impact on local policy and practice. This has received excellent anecdotal feedback from the 9 social workers who are comprised from a range of specialist areas, across children’s, adults and mental health teams.
- Delivery of the Aspire to Inspire (UoH) module for Practice Supervisors – 15 social worker managers have completed this leadership and management course.
- Two TP funded masterclasses with a combined total of 75 attendees were held, where social worker specialists were brought in to deliver specific training to meet needs identified by local authorities e.g. children family worker to mental health.
- Embedding Making Research Count (MRC) in LA CPD programmes through TP funding for annual subscription costs;
- Both universities have offered TP funded places on research degrees; 4 practitioners are completing MRes/MSc by Research programmes with areas of research agreed between local authorities and HEIs.

## 41. There is significant positive feedback regarding the additional CPD activities designed and funded by the partnership. Stakeholders report that the learning is:

- encouraging revisiting of theory and practice in contemporary social work;
- encouraging further progression (all PE Level 1 students in the focus group expect to progress to PE Level 2 training);
- reinvigorating energy around social work;
- AYSE – supporting transition to better practice.

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***“I have run a reflective practice group with ASYEs with money from TP - excellent opportunity for me to learn from and support them with practice dilemmas” (Strategy Board)***

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## 42. The other major task for the Workforce Strategy workstream is the production of a labour market plan and workforce planning summary. The partnership produced an initial report in January 2018 in relation to labour market outlook and workforce demand and supply covering the period 2015-2017. The report demonstrates a reasonable understanding of the make-up of the workforce and is a good starting point for the partnership in terms of its future planning. However, the partnership recognised that there are some key gaps in the management information available within local authorities. This is an ongoing area of work for the partnership and should become “business as usual” as it is key to informing the priorities of the partnership as it progresses. In order to further develop university admissions, staff recruitment, career progression plans and CPD, local authorities must have a comprehensive knowledge of both their current workforce and their future needs.

43. A number of challenges still remain, in terms of genuinely creating learning organisations and enabling real career progression.
- Better communication is still needed about options for development for frontline workers;
  - HEIs can't be flexible on numbers due to financial imperatives. This means that identified needs can only be met if there are enough participants to ensure a module/course is viable;
  - Staff in local authorities need one point internally to access training. This needs to be a focus of CPD going forward. Several stakeholders remarked that a rolling training schedule for the forthcoming year and reduced caseloads would help them to better engage with CPD.
  - CPD is still developed in a piecemeal fashion and not coherent in terms of being an integrated offer in the context of a learning organisation.
  - AMHP training is only available in Leeds/Manchester which are outside the partnership and is only available to staff within Adult Services; some stakeholders felt the partnership should consider this.
  - The partnership needs to build on its work in relation to workforce planning and develop a robust current and future profile of its social work staff and plan for their developmental needs and career progression.

### 3. Added value, Impact and Sustainability

#### Added value

1. Stakeholders directly involved with the work of the partnership discussed the value of building relationships both within the LA group and HEI group, as well as between the different types of institutions. Understanding the drivers, pressures and context of individual organisations has increased knowledge and respect for each other's work and has created new relationships that could lead to additional activity beyond the work of the partnership.

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***"The Universities now know each other better, have the same agenda and can share concerns. The partnership has put a human face on working together and dispels myths each organisation may have held about the other. The partnership helps with triangulation." (University)***

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***"[it has] Enabled a shared dialogue about how best to meet needs of local authorities in support of the social work reforms agenda." (Local Authority)***

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***"We have grown as a partnership and I believe are a stronger university because of it." (University)***

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***"LAs now better understand that HEIs have an academic timetable and are a business – we can't do anything without money." (University)***

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***"The partnership has improved the understanding between LAs and HEIs as to their respective pressures and needs. The two HEIs have also learned from each other and have supported each other's students." (University)***

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2. The new admissions process has led to staff knowing students better at the beginning, which has given them a greater appreciation of student needs and the difference the teaching makes to them by the time they are ready for practice.
3. Practice Educators, who have benefited greatly from the partnership, report that social workers have had to take another look at their own practice, which has "stepped up" everyone's standard. Although the social work teaching and training culture has yet to be transformed, most stakeholders immediately involved in the partnership felt there was an expectation of change.

## Impact

4. As with the national evaluation of pilot partnerships<sup>4</sup>, the real impact of the partnership on recruitment, retention and quality of social work practice will not be measurable until current students are practicing social workers and CPD learning is fully embedded. What is evident is that the partnership has achieved several intermediate outcomes, mostly relating to those people immediately involved, that have led to a deeper and more relevant learning experience for current students and existing social workers. These outcomes will support movement towards a confident, competent workforce, and stakeholders report anecdotal examples of impact and feel the direction of change is right.








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***“It [the partnership] was a key reason for me choosing York as I wanted a guaranteed statutory placement” (Student)***

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5. Quantitative and qualitative data suggests that students in the partnership are enthusiastic about becoming social workers<sup>5</sup>, and that the partnership is retaining more local students – potentially because of better placement experience. This applies particularly to students attending UoH, partly because it tends to attract more local students than UoY. A view was expressed that through an improved induction, from the start, LAs could work more closely with HEIs to ensure that students feel that the LA is somewhere they could work and establish a career. This could involve induction units in the workplace and potentially build in knowledge of partnership local authorities into course modules.
6. There is a need to ensure that impact measures are in place (and the associated data aggregated across the partnership) in order to generate evidence of impact.

Measures could include:

-  Increases in applicants and point scores of applicants
-  Increased course satisfaction scores
-  Course final grades
-  Service user feedback - improved quality of service
-  Confidence in becoming a high quality social worker
-  Morale of social workers
-  Retention and progression of social workers.

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<sup>4</sup> Social Work Teaching Programme Pilots: Evaluation; Dorothy Berry-Lound, Sue Tate and Professor David Greatbatch – HOST Policy Research; 2016

<sup>5</sup> 6/7 students in the Interface survey said they are likely to become social workers on graduation (the one student who did not was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student, with a poor experience of 2<sup>nd</sup> placement – although we do not know if this contributed).

7. Overall, it was felt that the partnership would need 2-3 more years before impact would be demonstrated by such measures.

## Sustainability

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### ***'Without funding much of this would not have happened' (Senior stakeholder)***

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8. It will be a significant challenge to maintain momentum going forward, without funding from March 2019 unless there is significant focus on sustainability. In general, all stakeholders were positive about the permanence of the changes that have taken place to date. Some elements of the partnership are sustainable without funding, namely the admissions process, updated curriculum content, relationships built, the workforce development resources available and the increased knowledge and skills of those involved in current CPD.
9. However, there is no doubt that the work of the Project Manager, PECs and LPs has been fundamental to change, and without these functions being delivered it is possible that the capacity for further change will be limited. The focus going forward must be to embed the functions of the partnership into mainstream activity across organisations. The PEC role has been very valuable to local authorities and there is evidence that they are trying to identify funding to continue these posts. Creativity should be explored to maintain the LP role in some format, perhaps by using vacancy funding. Embedding the servicing, prioritisation and monitoring roles of the PM will be important to avoid strategic and operational drift.
10. There are many factors in the external environment that are barriers to impact and sustainability, including:
  - Limited capacity and funding across all organisational types – reductions in funding has resulted in staff cuts and less capacity going forward to teach, support, offer progression and offer competitive pay to social workers. For example, CPD modules (with positive feedback) were well attended when the TP paid for them, but future uptake from LAs without funding is unclear.
  - Range and depth of impact to date – most of the impact has been felt by individuals immediately involved in the partnership activity, as opposed to organisational commitment. Unless there is a change of culture within partner organisations, impact and sustainability will be limited going forward. In general stakeholders felt that LAs and HEIs, as whole institutions, still appear to hold attitudes that are a challenge to the partnership values and aims;
  - The work is not embedded as a mainstream part of workforce development and the learning culture is not yet 'whole organisation'. This isolates the work outside core functions, leaving its sustainability vulnerable.

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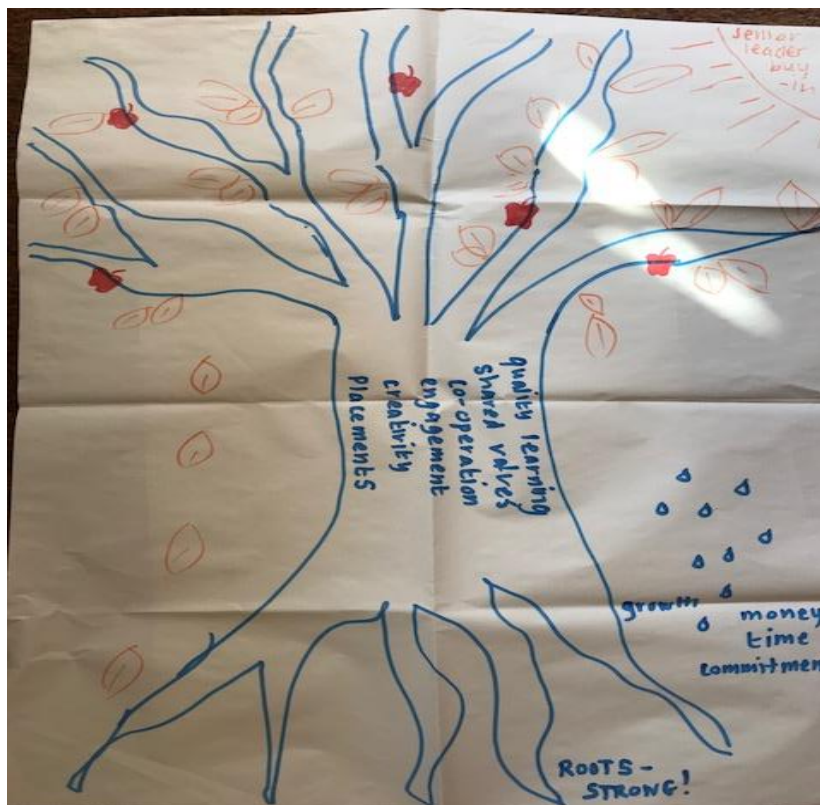
***"[we are still] hindered by LA views that the quality of staff results from the HEIs and social work would improve if staff were trained from within" (University)***

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**“[There remain] challenges in inspiring and equipping SWs for more senior roles” (Board)**

11. Overall, the partnership has developed a strong foundation amongst those involved, but without considerable focus on mainstreaming activities and growing this foundation more widely within organisations, sustainability is not guaranteed. This is represented by a diagram produced at the Board workshop.










**Value for Money**

12. It is not yet possible to provide quantifiable value for money, as it is too early to measure the impact of the partnership in terms of recruitment, retention and quality of social work. Most stakeholders who were well connected to the Teaching Partnership felt that on balance it had been value for money, or it was too early to say. A tiny minority did not agree and felt their time would have been better spent. In general, those stakeholders who knew less (CPD students, students, wider stakeholders) inevitably felt unable to comment.

## 4. Conclusions

- The Teaching Partnership has been successful, making significant progress specifically in admissions, placements, developing PEs and in bringing practice into the curriculum.
- There have been huge improvements in relationships and understanding between organisations (within and across organisation types).
- The PEC role is universally supported as a catalyst for change, and should be funded going forward. Practice educators have benefited hugely from the work of the PECs, who have felt the challenge of raising the quality of students' practice, and responded to it.
- Communication with the workforce is challenging and awareness is low outside those immediately involved with the TP. In line with the national evaluation report, children's services and adults' services are engaging at a different pace.
- The LP role is valued, particularly by students, HEIs and local authority staff who support students.
- Geography will remain a challenge, but the evidence suggests that there is much added value to be lost by running the partnership as two smaller partnerships. The regional meeting of SWTPs gives the partnership access to ideas and learning from neighbouring partnerships.
- The tension regarding the balance of academic and practical requirements within the curriculum should be more openly discussed. Alignment between what the HEIs deliver and what the local authorities need is improved, although there is debate over how important local needs are if attractive jobs are not available.
- The commitment required by stakeholders to transform the quality of social work is challenging in the current climate. The pressures on running HEIs as a business restrict their flexibility and the workload within LAs is at or beyond capacity. Whilst cultural differences and organisational respect have been built, this needs to continue in order to enable robust debate and discussion going forward.
- Academics in practice has not been a focus – there is little agreement of what this is and how it can be achieved.
- The partnership has made good progress with the engagement of service users.

## 5. Recommendations

-  LAs and HEIs need to embed the partnership vision and aims as part of their workforce development more widely and become learning organisations - mainstreaming the learning approach tested here will transform the quality of the workforce and become 'the way we work'.
-  There needs to be even more communication. There is not enough awareness and as a result not enough buy in within the partnership's organisations both at a senior level and operational level (outside immediate stakeholders). Using the organisations' core communication mechanisms should be explored.
-  The PEC role needs to be funded to continue – this role has been successful and enabled movement towards the aims.
-  The LP role should also continue and be funded. However, the partnership should review the way it established the post to ensure lessons from the past have been learned.
-  HEIs need to continue to develop knowledge of local issues to help alignment of course and local needs.
-  The partnership needs to develop a model to enable academic learning from practice. Some consideration should be given as to how the experience could complement the work of the LP to ensure a current view of different aspects of social care are incorporated on courses.
-  The partnership needs to consider using virtual communication methods to support engagement across the area for partnership meetings and workstreams, and also for the delivery of training.