The current and future state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs

Ruth Patrick, Kate Brown & Emma Drever
# Contents

Foreward .......................................................................................................................... 4  
Executive summary ......................................................................................................... 5  
Introduction & context .................................................................................................... 8  
Methodological approach ............................................................................................... 10  
  A mixed methods design ............................................................................................ 11  
  Qualitative interviews – an exploratory approach ..................................................... 11  
  The internet survey ...................................................................................................... 11  
  A question of ethics ...................................................................................................... 12  
  Summary ...................................................................................................................... 12  
About the survey respondents .......................................................................................... 13  
The landscape of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs .................................................... 16  
  The extent of Social Policy teaching across the UK .................................................... 16  
  Single & Joint Honours Social Policy programmes ................................................... 16  
  Tuition fees ................................................................................................................ 18  
  Reflections on course subject & content ................................................................... 18  
  Opportunities for placements and sandwich degree courses ................................... 20  
  Summary ...................................................................................................................... 20  
Teaching experiences and best practice in Social Policy teaching and learning ............... 21  
  Overview of methods of teaching and learning in Social Policy ................................ 21  
  Currency and ‘research-led’ teaching ......................................................................... 22  
  Assessment and feedback ......................................................................................... 23  
  The Social Policy student experience: ‘contact hours’ .......................................... 25  
  Summary ...................................................................................................................... 26  
Attitudes towards the future of Social Policy in times of change .................................... 27  
  Departmental changes ............................................................................................... 27  
  Staff redundancies .................................................................................................... 28
Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this report into the teaching of Social Policy in the UK. The Social Policy Association attaches great importance to teaching and learning and supporting these activities is a core element of our remit. Teaching and/or learning about social policy is, after all, what most of our members do; it is also essential for the future survival and development of the subject area. But it is increasingly difficult to identify where, how and who does this. Very few Departments of Social Policy now exist in UK Higher Education and there are equally few Single Honours Undergraduate Degrees in the discipline; Social Policy teaching is likely to be located alongside courses in Sociology, Social Work, Criminology or Applied Social Science. Even more diffuse and hidden is the Social Policy teaching and learning that takes place in settings like Geography, Politics, Nursing or Health and Social Care.

This survey provides us with the information we need to take stock of current teaching and learning activities. However, further changes are likely to take place over the coming years, as the map of higher education is reconfigured following the rise in tuition fees. The survey will therefore also help us plan how best we can safeguard Social Policy teaching and learning for the future. In the short-term, the survey will form the basis for a major conference to be organised by SPA on Teaching and Learning in Social Policy, to be held at the University of Edinburgh on 20th April 2012. This will be the opportunity for you to discuss the survey findings and contribute to plans for the future.

I would like to thank SWAP, the former Subject Centre on Social Work and Policy, and particularly Rebecca Johnson, for encouraging and funding this survey; Nick Ellison, who provided light touch oversight of the survey; Karen Rowlingson, who liaised between the research team and the SPA Executive; and, most of all, Ruth, Kate and Emma - the survey team itself, who have done a great job and just managed to beat the deadline of Ruth’s baby’s arrival. We are also, of course, very grateful for the help given by all those who completed the survey or took part in interviews. This report will be invaluable in shaping SPA’s activities over the coming years.

Caroline Glendinning

Professor of Social Policy

Chair UK Social Policy Association
Executive summary

In a climate of significant reforms to student finance, it is important to generate baseline data regarding where and in what degree combinations Social Policy is currently taught in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A context which includes the demise of the Social Policy and Social Work Subject Centre (SWAP), the folding of the Joint University Council Social Policy Committee (JUCSPC), and the withdrawal of Social Policy teaching at some universities makes such a project particularly timely and pertinent.

This report details findings from a small-scale study designed to explore the teaching of Social Policy in UK HEIs, while also gathering information on experiences of teaching Social Policy, examples of good practice and the training / support needs of teachers themselves. The research project also generated attitudinal data regarding the future of the subject and perspectives on how best to safeguard Social Policy in these times of change. The project was commissioned by the SPA with funding provided by SWAP. The closure of SWAP was a particularly important factor behind the survey; although the Higher Education Academy has retained one social work and social policy subject specialist, her capacity to support teaching and learning activities is very much reduced and therefore consideration is needed as to what the SPA can do to complement this work.

The research consisted of three central components:

- an audit of the teaching of Social Policy capturing baseline data regarding which HEI institutions teach the subject at both undergraduate and postgraduate level
- an internet survey exploring experiences of teaching Social Policy and attitudes to the future of the subject given the changing context of student finance and government support
- three qualitative interviews with Social Policy lecturers to explore their experiences of teaching Social Policy and expectations of how the subject will fare during times of change

174 individuals responded to the survey which generated rich data on both teaching experiences and attitudes to the teaching of the subject. Notably, a majority of respondents (53.4%) were not currently members of the SPA suggesting real scope for further efforts to extend recruitment to those identifying themselves as teaching Social Policy who are not currently members of the learned society.

Data from the audit of Social Policy teaching found that 69 HEI institutions offered degree courses that included some Social Policy teaching at undergraduate level, with 59 institutions offering Social Policy at postgraduate level. Single Honours Social Policy was available at just 16 HEIs for 2011/12. From 2012/13, Single Honours Social Policy will no longer be taught at either Stirling University or London South Bank University, reducing the range of institutions where Single Honours Social Policy is available by 12.5%. Findings highlighted that Social Policy is today taught in a range of contexts, and is often incorporated within broader degree courses such as Social Sciences.

The internet survey and qualitative interviews offered insights into the experiences of Social Policy teachers in 2011, alongside considerations of what constitutes best practice within the subject. Findings suggested whilst most Social Policy teachers are making use of more traditional teaching methods such as lectures and seminars, there is evidence of a growth in the use of placements and online teaching methods within the subject area. Ensuring that teaching materials were up-to-date and current was seen as best practice in Social Policy teaching and learning. Whilst this was seen as
challenging, updating materials regularly was common. Research-led teaching was also generally considered to be one of the hallmarks of good practice, with research findings indicating that practices of research informing teaching varies across Social Policy teaching. The experiences of teachers within the subject are likely to be subject to significant changes in coming years. This research provides a useful baseline against which to track such developments.

As part of the internet survey, respondents were asked about what tangible impacts they expected their department to experience as the changes to student finance are introduced in 2012. It seems there is a widespread expectation that undergraduate student numbers will decline and this will inevitably impact on other aspects of the teaching and learning experience. Indeed, 41.2% of respondents expect the number of undergraduate students studying Social Policy at their institution to fall in 2012. This contrasted with just 28.1% who thought student numbers would stay the same, and 1.9% who actually predicted that student numbers would increase. With regard to postgraduate student numbers, the most common expectation from respondents was that postgraduate student numbers would stay the same in both 2012 and over the next five years.

Findings from the internet survey also show that there is concern that in the future departments will be affected by redundancies, amalgamation with other departments and the withdrawal of courses. In terms of departmental changes over the next two years, 20.1% of respondents thought that amalgamation with another department was quite or very likely, while only 4.5% thought that the closure of their department was either quite or very likely. With regard to staff redundancies, a considerable proportion (9.3%) thought that redundancies in their department over the next two years is a very likely outcome, while 24.7% thought this was quite likely. The possibility of programmes or courses being withdrawn from their department was also seen as a fairly common possibility, with 42.4% of respondents reporting that the withdrawal of programmes or courses from their department was either very or quite likely over the next two years.

This research also explored ideas for how to best safeguard and protect Social Policy in times of uncertainty and against a backdrop of expected contractions in student numbers. Both the internet survey and qualitative interviews generated rich data on these themes, with particular attention paid to the role of the SPA in supporting Social Policy over the coming years. Survey respondents felt there was scope in efforts to market Social Policy more effectively in schools, while there was also seen to be potential in putting more emphasis on employability and offering more placements as part of degree and postgraduate courses. Importantly, the internet survey and audit uncovered pockets of good practice in terms of offering placements to students and placing emphasis on employability. A number of respondents highlighted the importance of attempts to increase awareness of Social Policy as a subject area, with work needed to make more explicit the close links between central contemporary issues such as welfare reform and public sector changes and the academic subject of Social Policy. Indeed, a significant number of respondents suggested that a key strength of Social Policy is its close alignment with the key issues of the day.

With regard to how best to support those already teaching Social Policy, a large majority of respondents (82.2%) said they would welcome the opportunity to share their experiences of teaching Social Policy with others. This is undoubtedly one area where the SPA could play a role by facilitating those teaching Social Policy coming together to reflect on their experiences and to discuss issues related to teaching and learning. Some survey respondents also suggested that the
SPA might want to consider increasing its focus on teaching and learning issues more generally, a finding which in fact resonates closely with the SPA’s own priorities for the future.

As the reforms to student finance take effect, it will be critically important that the SPA and wider Social Policy community continue to monitor changes in the teaching of Social Policy, while also taking action to try and safeguard the subject area.
Introduction & context

These are difficult times for higher education in the UK, with the current context raising pertinent learning and teaching issues for the subject of Social Policy. There has been growing concern amongst many who teach and research the subject that radical changes to student finance are likely to alter the teaching of Social Policy in unprecedented ways. The introduction of higher fees and the withdrawal of HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) funding are of particular concern, as is the possibility of a government cap on student numbers to reduce the burden of the proposed fee support system. These changes will take place following a decade of other substantive shifts in Social Policy learning and teaching. In keeping with broader higher education trends, we have seen a transition from the teaching of Social Policy as a relatively ‘boundaried’ discipline into it being taught as more of a ‘subject area’. Elements of Social Policy are now taught on many broad-based Social Science degrees, as well as within more vocational courses such as Health and Social Care and Social Work (Glendinning, 2011a).

Cuts to subsidies for Social Sciences teaching and learning are already being felt, with 2011 bringing the demise of the Social Policy and Social Work Subject Centre (SWAP), the folding of the Joint University Council Social Policy Committee (JUCSPC), and the withdrawal of Social Policy teaching at some universities. Teaching and learning in the discipline has historically been closely linked to the undertaking and dissemination of research within many institutions. A number of changes are afoot in funding systems for research, which represent other variables likely to have a substantial impact on Social Policy teaching and learning. We may better understand the impact of these changes following the 2014 REF (Research Excellence Framework).

Despite a proliferation in overall student numbers throughout the New Labour era, the teaching of Social Policy remains relatively small-scale in comparison with more traditional subjects. Undergraduate recruitment has been a longstanding concern as A-level students may be unaware of the existence of Social Policy degrees or unfamiliar and unsure about their content. Given its relative obscurity alongside more traditional subjects, the forthcoming changes perhaps represent a particular threat to Social Policy. Estimations of the reduction in student demand for Sociology degrees suggest that this could be around 10-15% (Kelly and Burrows, 2011), a trend which we may see mirrored in Social Policy degree admissions. The implications of increased fees for postgraduate (including overseas) recruitment and mature student admissions are yet to be fully grasped.

Yet Social Policy is a subject characterised by empiricism, pragmatism, and a concern for direct policy implications. In a climate where research and learning are seen as being most valuable where they have practical application and impact, the field of study has many strengths in relation to the approaching changes. With graduate employability now a key component of excellence within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), those involved in teaching Social Policy would expect it to fare well in this area. From tacit knowledge of the student body, we might also expect that Social Policy would also excel in terms of diversity issues in comparison with other subjects. Social Policy has faced difficulties before (JUC for Social and Public Administration, 1979), and has survived.

There are particular challenges involved in keeping track of developments within the field of study, given that Social Policy is sometimes taught as a subject in itself, sometimes within other degree programmes, is housed in a wide variety of departments, and taught by a range of different types of institutions. Indeed, as it is a subject with especially indistinct and porous boundaries, many of
those engaged in courses focused on welfare and ‘social’ systems may not even identify themselves as part of the discipline\(^1\). Ensuring that the subject can offer the best possible response to forthcoming changes requires an understanding about where Social Policy is taught and by whom. Gaining insights into the issues facing those who teach the subject is vital in order to generate ideas about the best ways to support the field of study, and how to most effectively galvanise thoughts into action. To these ends, in 2011 the SPA, with funding from SWAP, commissioned a small-scale research project to explore the current and future state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs – the findings of which are presented in this report. The aim of the research was to provide the SPA with information about how it can best support and serve members, and represent Social Policy as a subject in a time of rapid and unprecedented change.

This report gives a brief overview of the methods used in this research, before moving on to present findings on where Social Policy courses are taught in the UK and the key features of Social Policy degree programmes. Insights are then offered into the experiences of those involved in teaching the subject, along with a discussion of their opinions about how the field of study can most effectively be safeguarded in the coming years. It then concludes with key recommendations on the SPA's role in the preservation of Social Policy teaching. The research is a timely reflection on developments in, threats to and potential opportunities for the subject of Social Policy. The research team hope that it will be useful not only to the SPA, but to all those with an interest in and commitment to safeguarding the future of Social Policy teaching in the UK.

\(^1\) How the research team have understood what constitutes the boundaries of ‘Social Policy’ as a subject is outlined on p. 10
Methodological approach

This brief section outlines the methodological approach taken in generating data on the teaching of Social Policy in UK HEIs. Based largely within the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds, this small-scale research project was undertaken between April 2011 and December 2011 with Professor Nick Ellison offering ongoing advice and guidance. Additional input from an expert in questionnaire design was provided by Emma Drever, a Research Director at the National Centre for Social Research.

The overall objectives of the research project were to develop a firm understanding of the teaching of Social Policy in UK HEIs, while also gathering information on experiences of teaching Social Policy, examples of good practice and the training/support needs of teachers themselves. The research sought to take stock of the current situation, while also being forward looking in considering people’s expectations for how the subject will fare as the changes to student finance take effect. Additionally, the research explored ideas for how the subject of Social Policy can be safeguarded in the future and particular thoughts on the role for the SPA in this regard.

This small-scale research project had three central components:

- an audit of the teaching of Social Policy capturing baseline data regarding which HEI institutions teach the subject at both undergraduate and postgraduate level
- an internet survey exploring experiences of teaching Social Policy and attitudes to the future of the subject given the changing context of student finance and government support
- three qualitative interviews with Social Policy lecturers to explore their experiences of teaching Social Policy and expectations of how the subject will fare during times of change

In designing and developing this research it was necessary to try and determine just what would be included as Social Policy and what would be excluded. This is a notoriously difficult area given the porous nature of Social Policy and ongoing disputes and debate within academia regarding whether Social Policy should be described as a subject, discipline or even a ‘field of study’. Adopting a pragmatic approach, the researchers chose to include in the audit all courses which appeared to have some element of Social Policy within them – either by explicitly referring to ‘Social Policy’ in the course name or associated detail or by reference to content which is typically considered to be ‘Social Policy’ (e.g. studies of welfare reform, citizenship and benefits provision). A decision was taken to exclude Criminology courses but to include Criminal Justice ones, given that the latter have more of a policy focus and thus fit neater into a wider Social Policy framework.

For the internet survey, however, we were completely non-prescriptive and sought to recruit all those participants who self-identified as doing some HEI Social Policy teaching. Given the academic debate regarding where the boundaries between Social Policy and other subjects start and end, the researchers opted to allow possible survey respondents to themselves decide whether they regarded themselves to be teaching Social Policy. This also ensured that all those who feel that they have a stake in the future of Social Policy were provided with the opportunity to complete the survey, thereby reaching the widest possible target audience.
A mixed methods design
A mixed methods research design was adopted which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods in generating relevant data on Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs. Initially, a desk based audit was conducted to explore where and in what contexts Social Policy is currently being taught. This audit drew on existing databases, and in particular utilised UCAS’s resources as well as previous work done in this field by SWAP (the Social Policy and Social Work subject centre). By cross-referencing databases and conducting internet-based research, it was possible to develop an audit of which HEI institutions teach Social Policy, at what level and in what degree course combinations. As part of this audit, the team developed a contact list which featured a key, named Social Policy academic in each institution – often a Head of School or subject lead - a resource which was useful in cascading the internet survey to potential respondents. Results of the audit were made available online and academics were encouraged to check that details for their own institution were correct via a mailing on the Social Policy JISCMail. The audit remains available from the SPA’s website (www.social-policy.org.uk) and is a valuable resource in providing a baseline of the extent and nature of Social Policy teaching in the UK in 2011.

This desk-based audit was complemented by an internet survey and exploratory qualitative interviews with three key informants. The survey and interviews generated data on the experiences and attitudes of those currently teaching Social Policy in UK HEIs and provided rich data for analysis. By adopting a mixed method research design which included desk-based documentary analysis and research, a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews this small-scale research project managed to generate a robust data set which incorporates both attitudinal and statistical data on the teaching of Social Policy in the UK context.

Qualitative interviews – an exploratory approach
To complement the internet survey and to inform its design, three qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals currently teaching Social Policy in UK HEIs. Interviewees were purposively sampled to ensure a spread of institution type was included. Thus, we spoke to an individual teaching at a Russell Group university, someone teaching at a post-1992 university where Social Policy is taught as part of a Social Science degree course, and another individual from a post-1992 university who is teaching in a department where the Social Policy Single Honours course is about to be withdrawn. This purposive sample was not intended to be representative but instead to capture recruitment patterns, experiences of teaching Social Policy and perspectives on future challenges across a range of institutions. Pen pictures of the three interviewees are provided in Appendix Two. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone, the third in person, and they followed a semi-structured format. Importantly, these qualitative interviews helped inform the design of the survey by highlighting particular areas of import and suggesting examples of good and bad practice which could be further explored in the survey itself. Data from the qualitative interviews has been thematically analysed and is presented alongside the data from the survey in the findings sections.

The internet survey
In designing and developing the internet survey – which formed the central part of this research project – the team drew on findings from the qualitative interviews as well as consultation and input from members of the SPA. Given the central import of the research topic to SPA members, the
research team opted to consult members themselves on the survey design to ensure that it covered areas considered of most import to those with a direct stake in the subject’s future. To this end, the researchers held a session at the 2011 SPA AGM in Lincoln where a first draft of the survey was distributed for discussion, generating invaluable guidance and feedback. Similarly, the research team consulted closely with the SPA Executive Committee and, in particular, received advice and input from the Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee of that Executive.

Determining what areas to focus on in the survey was a key consideration, particularly as it was necessary to keep the survey relatively short to ensure the maximum possible response rate. By consulting widely on the survey, the research team was able to ensure that the questions of most import to the Social Policy community itself were included design whilst more subsidiary – but nonetheless interesting – areas often had to be cut from the survey to keep the length manageable. The large majority of the survey consisted of closed questions, although two open questions were included to generate some qualitative data on key areas related to the SPA’s role in safeguarding Social Policy and broader ideas for how to encourage more people to consider studying the subject. A paper form of the survey was piloted with two respondents and this further helped refine the survey and ensure that each question was clear and comprehensible. The paper version of the final survey can be found in Appendix One.

In order to maximise the potential response rate to the internet survey, the team disseminated the survey widely to all relevant JISCMail lists as well as via Higher Education Academy networks, promotion on the SPA website and magazine, Policy World (the magazine of the SPA), and emails to the contacts established through the desk-based audit. In all communications, the importance of the survey was stressed as was potential respondents’ roles as key stakeholders in the future of Social Policy itself. Reminders were also sent out and the survey was available for online completion over a four week period. This recruitment strategy proved broadly successful and 174 people completed the survey.

**A question of ethics**

This research project followed good ethical practice at all times. Data was stored securely and all survey data was anonymous, given that individual’s contact details were not collated. Qualitative interview data has been anonymised with identifying material removed. There was a risk, in one instance, that the qualitative interviewee might be identifiable. This was discussed with the interviewee, who was happy for her data to be included as she explained that her central points are already on record and her host institution is well aware of her views.

**Summary**

Taken as a whole, the methodological approach adopted in this small-scale research project has proved effective in generating robust, relevant data on the areas of central interest to this research. In particular, the research team were pleased with the comparatively high response rate to the internet survey. This is arguably testament to the importance of the issues explored in the survey, and reflected the fact that many respondents have a direct stake in the survey’s focus: the current and future state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs. Certainly, the three-pronged approach of a desk-based audit, exploratory qualitative interviews and an internet survey generated interesting findings as the following sections demonstrate.
About the survey respondents

In total, 174 individuals completed the survey – a healthy response rate for an internet survey. Of these, the gender split was fairly even (44% of respondents were male, while 56% were female). Respondents were drawn from 63 institutions, representing a wide range of geographical locations throughout the UK (see table below). Indeed, every country of the UK was represented (and every English region) and respondents were drawn from a range of institutions included Russell Group, ‘94 Group and post-1992 universities.

Region/country where respondents were based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/ country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland and Northern Ireland</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below shows the current job title of survey respondents. Almost ten per cent (9.8%) of respondents were postgraduate students engaged in some teaching as part of their postgraduate degree, and this in part reflects the growing reliance on postgraduate students to assist with and contribute to undergraduate teaching. 25.9% of respondents were Lecturers, 21.3% Senior Lecturers and 17.8% Professors. 14.4% listed their current job title as other. This included Emeritus Professors who were still engaged in some teaching, those on hourly and freelance teaching contracts, Research Fellows and Visiting Lecturers and Fellows.

Respondent profile – Job title

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate student</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were asked to name their home department as the research team were keen to get a sense of the departmental locations from which Social Policy is currently taught in the UK. The table below shows the findings from this survey question. 24.8% of respondents were teaching Social Policy from within Social Policy and /or Sociology departments and 35.2% from within broader Social Science departments. 17.9% of respondents taught Social Policy within Social Work and 9.7% in Health and Social Care settings, reflecting the increasing importance of these subject areas to the teaching of Social Policy.

**Respondent profile – Departments taught in**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social policy/sociology</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader social science</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social care</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the survey respondents had a long experience of teaching Social Policy, with 46% having taught the subject for 10 years or more as contrasted to only 12.1% who had been teaching for less than two years (see below). Thus, the survey findings draw on a wealth of teaching experience – in total 68.4% of respondents have been teaching Social Policy for more than 5 years. At the same time, however, the survey also includes the experiences of those who are newer to the teaching of Social Policy meaning that the full range of teaching experiences is included in the survey results.

**Respondent profile – Length of time teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time teaching</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 years, but less than 5 years</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years, but less than 10 years</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the rationale for conducting this survey was partly related to the closure of the SWAP subject centre and an interest to explore what extra work the SPA could do to help fill the gap created by its closure, respondents were asked about their use of SWAP resources. Responses to these questions are outlined in the table below. 35.7% of respondents had sometimes or often used the paper resources provided by SWAP, while the comparable figure for online resources was 33.9%. These figures were substantially higher than for attendance at networks or events run by SWAP, with only 17.2% of respondents saying they had attended these sometimes or often.
Use of SWAP resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
<th>Paper resources (%)</th>
<th>Online resources (%)</th>
<th>Networks or events (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, it was particularly interesting to note that the majority of respondents (53.4%) were not members of the Social Policy Association. Given that the survey was particularly focused on exploring what future role the SPA can have in safeguarding Social Policy one would expect this to be of particular interest to members of the SPA. The very fact that so many non-members chose to complete the survey suggests there is a considerable constituency of academics teaching Social Policy with a clear interest in the subject’s future who are not currently SPA members. This undoubtedly suggests scope for targeted membership recruitment and more activities by the SPA to widen its membership base.
The landscape of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs

In seeking to take stock of the extent and nature of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs, this research project encompassed an audit of where Social Policy is being taught in the academic year 2011/12. The objective was to gather some baseline data on where Social Policy is taught, at what level and in what contexts to enable future tracking of how the teaching of Social Policy fares as the changes in student finances take effect.

Full results of the audit are available online at www.social-policy.org.uk and this brief chapter presents some headline findings from the audit. It is anticipated that the audit could be a useful resource for Social Policy academics seeking information about the practices of other institutions, whilst it may also be helpful for potential students researching courses in this subject area. Data collected for the audit includes details of course fees, entry requirements, course titles and short notes on the content of the courses themselves.

The extent of Social Policy teaching across the UK

Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs appears to remain comparatively widespread, with 69 UK institutions offering some Social Policy teaching at undergraduate level. This figure encompasses Single Honour degree courses, Joint Honours options, as well as institutions where Social Policy is taught as part of broader Social Sciences and related degree courses. It should be noted that this figure is probably an underestimate, given that is was simply not possible to track all instances of Social Policy teaching in HEIs, particularly where this may be simply one small part of a module or of a degree course, for example in Health Sciences or Social Work.

At postgraduate level, taught Masters programmes which include an element of Social Policy are available at 59 institutions across the UK. Again, these encompass Single Honours Social Policy Masters programmes as well as Social Research Methods training and broader programmes which incorporate some element of Social Policy teaching.

Single & Joint Honours Social Policy programmes

Focusing on the teaching of Single Honours Social Policy, in 2011/12 this was available at 16 institutions. This is a comparatively low figure and it should be noted that there is a much greater availability of Joint Honours degree courses where Social Policy can be studied with another subject such as Sociology, Politics or Economics. Indeed, 31 institutions offered Social Policy Joint Honour degree programmes with some institutions offering a considerable range of Joint Honour options. For example, at the University of Glasgow it is possible to take degrees in Applied Public Policy combined with 25 possible Joint Honour subjects – providing indication of the breadth of degree choice possible. Similarly, at Liverpool John Hope University it is possible to combine the study of Social Policy with that of 19 other subjects which include Dance, Biology and English Literature. While the most common Joint Honour options remain combining Social Policy study with Sociology, Politics or Economics there is also a notable trend in offering Social Policy Joint Honour degrees with a broader range of possible combinations extending outside the humanities into languages, sciences and business management.

The table below details the institutions where SingleHonours Social Policy was available for 2011/12, the entry requirements for this degree course, the current annual course costs and the qualification obtained on successful completion of the degree programme.
## Single Honours Social Policy degrees in UK HEIs – 2011/12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Entry Requirements*</th>
<th>Course cost</th>
<th>Qualification obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglia Ruskin University</td>
<td>140 points</td>
<td>£3,225</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bath</td>
<td>ABB-BBC</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Birmingham</td>
<td>BBB</td>
<td>£3,145</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
<td>ABC-BBB</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Glasgow</td>
<td>ABB</td>
<td>£1,820</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kent</td>
<td>ABB</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Leeds</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Lincoln</td>
<td>240 tariff points</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London School of Economics and Political Science</td>
<td>ABB</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London South Bank University</td>
<td>240 tariff points</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nottingham</td>
<td>ABC - BBB</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Salford</td>
<td>220 tariff points</td>
<td>£3,325</td>
<td>BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Stirling</td>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>£1,820</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea University</td>
<td>BBB</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BScEcon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Ulster</td>
<td>240 tariff points</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>£3,375</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Entry requirements are listed as entered on the UCAS database. While many institutions have particular A-Level requirements, others list their entry requirements in terms of tariff points.

It should be noted that from 2012/13 Single Honours Social Policy will no longer be offered at either Stirling University or London South Bank University, reducing the range of institutions where Single Honours Social Policy is available by 12.5%. The table above shows the range of institutions where...
Single Honours Social Policy is currently available, which includes Russell Group, 94 Group and post-1992 universities. Single Honours Social Policy can be studied in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland at present and is available to students achieving various results at A-Level. The Universities of Glasgow, Kent, Bath and London School of Economics all demand entry requirements of ABB. Anglia Ruskin University, by contrast, demands only 140 tariff points, the equivalent of a CD offer at A-Level. Most institutions award a Bachelor of Arts on successful completion of a Social Policy degree course, although some institutions instead award a Bachelor of Science. In regard to course fees, most institutions are currently charging £3,375 per annum in tuition fees.

Tuition fees
Broadening out to all undergraduate courses where Social Policy is taught, the average annual tuition fees for 2011/12 stood at £3005, suggesting that the majority of institutions were charging the maximum fee of £3,375. The table below details the average fees charged to home and international students (outside of EU) studying courses which include some Social Policy content at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate level.

Average annual tuition fees 2011 / 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Home students</th>
<th>International (outside EU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>£3005</td>
<td>£9499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>£4330</td>
<td>£9915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table demonstrates the considerably higher costs for international students with average annual fees at both undergraduate and postgraduate level above £9000. At postgraduate level, home students wanting to study courses which include some aspect of Social Policy face average tuition fees of £4330. Interestingly, the mean of £4330 for postgraduate taught Masters is derived from a wide range of variations in tuition fees across institutions. For example, at the top end Bristol University charges £6390 for its Public Policy Masters while fees for Birbeck University’s Social Research Masters stand at £6222. By contrast, Northumbria University charges students only £2200 to undertake its MA in Social Sciences, while there are a number of institutions charging around three thousand pounds for a taught postgraduate maters including Ulster University, where tuition fees stand at £3290 for its MSC in Social Research Skills with Specialism. Evidently, the student fees landscape is undergoing substantive reform and it will be both interesting and important to monitor tuition fees for Social Policy courses as the 2012 changes take effect and bed down.

Reflections on course subject & content
As part of the audit, the research team also gathered some detail on the course content of the Social Policy courses and modules available to HEI students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. This qualitative data collection revealed some interesting findings.

At undergraduate level, it seems that a number of institutions continue to include aspects of Social Policy teaching as one segment of broader Social Science degrees. While these are commonly encapsulated within a traditional ‘Social Sciences’ degree programme, there is a notable growth in
institutions offering more specialised degree courses in areas such as Youth and Childhood Studies, Public Services Research, Abuse Studies and Law and Welfare. It is now possible to gain a degree in Social Inclusion from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, for example, while Coventry University offers a degree in Applied Community and Social Studies. These comparatively new degree programmes offer students the opportunity to study the Social Sciences from within a particular framework of interest, and often seem to be particularly geared towards maximising employability.

With regard to the course content of more traditional Single and Joint Honours Social Policy degrees, the majority of degree programmes audited included a dissertation in the final year and an element of research methods training was also a common feature of many of the degree programmes. Given the importance in the current climate of maximising the employability of degree programmes, the emphasis on research methods training common to many Social Policy courses could perhaps be highlighted more effectively in efforts to market Social Policy to potential students. The audit also revealed that many of the HEIs’ Social Policy teaching featured modules on the history of the welfare state, welfare reform, citizenship and / or comparative Social Policy.

At a postgraduate level, the most common taught Masters programme across UK HEIs was in Social Research Methods. This reflects the requirements for Social Policy related funded PhD students to have first completed appropriate research methods training. Where Social Research Masters are offered, these are frequently generic Masters in Social Research designed to equip students with the necessary skills to become competent social researchers. The University of Essex stands out as offering more specialist Social Research Masters in Survey Methods for Social Research and Longitudinal Social Research.

A number of institutions do offer specialist Masters in Social Policy (sometimes titled Public Policy) while again it is also possible to specialise in particular aspects of Social Policy and thematic areas such as housing, citizenship, childhood, health and gender. In an innovative development, Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) recently launched an MSC in Citizenship and Human Rights which is a work-based-learning Masters which has been developed through a partnership between the university and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). GCU’s Citizenship and Human Rights Masters represents an important example of joint working between a HEI and the voluntary sector and may be one model whereby the employability prospects of taught Masters are maximised. Another Masters programme founded on a partnership model is provided at the University of Bedfordshire where an MA in ‘Comparative European Perspectives’ is taught. This Masters programme is developed and delivered in partnership with Humak University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland and the University of Tartu, Kultuur Academy, Estonia.

Most of the Masters programmes available follow a traditional one year programme, with many institutions also providing the option to complete the Masters part-time over two years. Some particularly innovative practice is observable, however. As one example, the University of Ulster’s MSC in ‘Social Research Skills with Specialism’ is taught entirely online, presumably to allow for distance learning and more flexible modes of study.
Opportunities for placements and sandwich degree courses
As well as exploring course content, the audit also attempted to track opportunities for students to complete relevant placements as part of their studies as well as highlighting instances of degree programmes where a ‘sandwich degree’ is offered (a course which includes a year in a non-university setting). Very few institutions offer degree programmes which include a sandwich year, although a number of universities do offer placement opportunities for students, frequently in the voluntary and charitable sector. One university that does offer sandwich degree programmes is the University of Surrey where some Social Policy is taught within its Politics with Policy Studies BA. Students have the opportunity to undertake a professional training year with an organisation committed to social or political change. Placements might be with a voluntary sector organisation, a government or local authority department, an MP or MEP, or an international organisation. Given the rising cost of higher education and the increasing pressure to enhance the employability offer provided by a degree, the provision of more sandwich year options and placement opportunities seems an obvious growth area for HEIs teaching Social Policy.

Summary
This audit of the teaching of Social Policy in the UK has demonstrated the breadth and diversity of Social Policy teaching that is conducted across British universities today, as well as the comparatively widespread distribution of Social Policy teaching in every region in the UK. While it is notable that today only 16 institutions offer a Single Honours Social Policy degree programme, there are a rich range of undergraduate degrees and postgraduate taught Masters available that include elements of Social Policy teaching. Going forward, it will undoubtedly be critical to monitor how the picture of Social Policy teaching across the UK changes as the reforms to student finances take effect. Hopefully, this audit will serve as a useful baseline from which to monitor changes and assess how institutions adapt in response to the changing climate facing higher education today.
Teaching experiences and best practice in Social Policy teaching and learning

The experiences of those who teach Social Policy are able to offer insights into how Social Policy is learnt and taught within HEIs. This section focuses on the main methods used to teach Social Policy, the way the subject is assessed and on how those who teach the subject perceive good practice. It offers insights into areas of strength within the teaching of the discipline, which could be used to inform strategies to improve and safeguard the subject.

Overview of methods of teaching and learning in Social Policy

The research found evidence of a wide variety of methods being used in Social Policy teaching and learning. The majority of respondents were mostly making use of more traditional formats involving both lectures (89%) and seminars (86%), although nearly half of respondents were also involved in teaching in one-to-one tutorials (see chart and table below). 7% made use of online tutorials and a smaller number used online lectures or podcasts (3%). Comments accompanying the survey suggested that this may be a growth area of learning resources.

Teaching methods used by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching methods</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one tutorials</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online tutorials</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online lectures</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of more innovative methods, placements were provided for all students in a quarter of cases. Where these were not offered for all students, they were offered for most courses in 13% of cases and for some courses in around 30% of cases.

**Currency and ‘research-led’ teaching**

There was evidence to suggest that keeping materials up-to-date was commonplace amongst Social Policy teachers. 96% of survey respondents with responsibilities for course content reported updating their material at least once a year, with the remaining 4% updating content at least once every three years. Qualitative data suggested that keeping course material up-to-date was seen by Social Policy teachers as a core component of teaching the subject, given its close connection to fast-moving current affairs. One interviewee considered bad practice as follows:

“In a field where you have elections and so on, and so last year’s material can be out of date very quickly and then there are cases where it’s not updated, I would see that as a bad thing. The routine rolling forward of what you did last year without enough thought, and without learning from your experiences” (Reader in Social Policy).

Within HEI environments, ‘research-led’ teaching tends to be recognised as one of the hallmarks of good practice in teaching and learning, although is notoriously difficult to define and measure. The present study explored the frequency with which teachers of Social Policy reported using examples from their own research in their teaching practice, taking this as an indicator from which to draw insights into levels of ‘research-led’ teaching.

**Use of own research in teaching**

![Pie chart showing distribution of teachers using their own research in their teaching]

Overall, 11% of Social Policy HEI teachers reported *always* using examples taken from their research in their teaching, with 42% reporting that they *frequently* did so and 40% that they *sometimes* did (see table below). A minority (7%) reported never making use of their research in their teaching.
Use of own research in teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often uses examples from own research in teaching</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviewees suggested that, due to its strong connection to current affairs, research-led teaching was a particularly important (if challenging) aspect of good practice in teaching Social Policy:

“The fact that I get to teach on my own topics. That enables me to concentrate my efforts on what I think I’m good at” (Lecturer in Social Policy).

“Sometimes, we are teaching on so many different units, teaching so many different areas that we don’t necessarily keep as up-to-date or know in depth because when you’re looking at policy making in health, and general Social Policy, and then international... There’s just too much changing all the time” (Senior Lecturer in Social Policy).

A tension between the focus of their work being teaching and the focus being research was noted by the interviewees to whom the researchers spoke. There was also the suggestion of a possible divergence in this respect between the different ‘types’ of institutions. Interviewees indicated that linking research with teaching was associated more with Russell Group and ‘94 Group universities, whereas post-1992 universities were more inclined to prioritise teaching and the student experience:

“Because of the type of institution it is, it is considered to be teaching-focused rather than research-focused, and people feel quite proud of themselves if they don’t do any research but they are very, very good at teaching” (Lecturer).

This quote suggests that although it is generally considered as one of the benchmarks of excellence, research-led teaching may not be uniformly perceived as one of the hallmarks of good practice across the subject. Qualitative data indicated that research-led teaching was also seen as closely tied to resources. Larger departments were perceived by interviewees as having more scope to focus on research, due to their greater capacity for specialisation and more substantial capacity for expenditure on this: “We don’t get any relief for doing research unless can get money to buy yourself out” (Senior Lecturer). It should be noted that with such a limited sample size of only three interviewees, caution must be taken when inferring generalisations from the qualitative data. Further research would be required to reach any more than a tentative hypothesis on this issue of trends in research-led teaching according to ‘type’ of institution.

Assessment and feedback
Interviewees often observed and commented upon longstanding debates about which means of student assessment are the most effective within the field of Social Policy teaching and learning.
The traditional model of part-essay and part-exam remains central to the assessment process for Social Policy courses (see table below), with respondents reporting that assessments were largely via essays (96%) along with exams (63%).

**Assessment methods used by respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment method</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual presentations</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group presentations</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although assessments mainly followed more traditional routes, utilising a range of means of assessment was generally considered to be good practice. The research suggested a degree of movement away from essays and exams as uniform measures of success within some Social Policy learning settings. Social Policy teachers gave substantial emphasis to the importance of assessment via verbal communication and more group-based or oral tasks. 39% of survey respondents were using group presentations to assess student performance, with 31% using individual presentations. Others reported using debates and discussions.

“*We have really piloted a lot more of these presentations, the use of newspapers as a way of engaging students in really up-to-date activities. Making them find a topic and then doing research around it*” (Senior Lecturer).

There was evidence to suggest that pockets of more innovative and creative assessment practice are developing within Social Policy learning, with teachers responding to the emphasis on graduate ‘employability’ within HEI settings. Both survey respondents and interviewees indicated that more ‘applied’ methods of assessment were increasingly being used, including tasks such as policy briefs, court reports, and newspaper-report led learning and assessment. Web-based tasks such as wikis, online discussions and blogs were also noted as being employed in some instances. Just over 10% of survey respondents were using placements as part of the assessment process in their teaching.

Given the increased profile of results from the National Student Survey (NSS), feedback is an issue to which HEIs now often give substantial attention. Student interest in feedback was noted as significant by interviewees, with speculation that this may be linked to increased competition in the workplace after graduating: “*The great knowledge that if you get a 2:2 it’s not going to be very good for you, in the jobs market, and what do I need to get a first*” (Reader).

64% of survey respondents were providing feedback in written form, with 94% providing informal verbal feedback and around one quarter using online feedback (see table below).
Feedback methods used by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback method</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annotation of essays</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written feedback forms</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal verbal feedback</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>94.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback given online</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Popular with students, annotation of essays has proved controversial within writing-based disciplines in HEI settings, with some assessors arguing that the resources required to undertake annotation makes this method of feedback untenable. Despite this, 62% of Social Policy teachers surveyed reported that they used annotation of essays as a feedback technique. Qualitative data suggested that students may be reluctant to maximise opportunities for feedback in instances where it was offered as optional:

“No one ever takes you up on it [feedback in the open door]. I’ve never had anybody... I’ve only been here for a year, but no one’s ever come back to me and said: ‘can we talk about this essay mark that you’ve given’” (Lecturer).

The Social Policy student experience: ‘contact hours’

Although researching Social Policy student experiences was outside the remit of this project, given the growing importance of student contact time within HEI settings, the survey was designed to generate some insights into this.

Respondents were first asked to report their own average contact hours with students\(^2\). The survey shows a fairly even spread of experiences, ranging from teaching from two to four hours, to ten or more (see table below). In addition, respondents were asked about average contact hours in their departments. Of the 76% of respondents who were aware of the number of weekly face-to-face contact hours, findings indicated that over 70% of Social Policy students receive more than eight hours of contact time per week. 41% of survey respondents reported that their students received ten or more hours of contact per week, with 37% reporting this at between eight to ten hours. Under six hours of contact was reported by 10%, with only 1% reporting less than two hours. Contact time was in some cases noted as declining in the final year of study due to increased emphasis on self-directed or more independent learning and research.

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\(^2\) This was understood as formal teaching hours and informal ‘office hours’
### Contact hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact hours</th>
<th>Average contact hours of respondent (%)</th>
<th>Average contact hours in respondents’ departments (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 hours</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 2, less than 4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 4, less than 6</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 6, less than 8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 8, less than 10</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (165 respondents)</td>
<td>100 (132 respondents)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was some qualitative evidence to suggest that contact time may be another issue within the teaching and learning of Social Policy which may be influenced by whether the institution is part of the Russell Group, 94 Group or a post-1992 university. “My view is that, the sort of students that we get, we need to have a lot of contact time with them (Senior Lecturer).” The Senior Lecturer, who worked at a post-1992 university, had a different experience from the Reader interviewed, who worked at a Russell Group institution:

“We’re a major research university, you know, research is our main thing, the lecturers aren’t always there. We don’t meet people as routinely as we perhaps might...So you may be at the university thinking you’re having access to this great research stuff, but it’s not always accessible” (Reader).

### Summary

The present research has offered insights into the experiences of Social Policy teachers in 2011, and of considerations of best practice within the subject. Although most Social Policy teachers still employ more traditional teaching methods such as lectures and seminars, there is evidence of growth in the use of placements and online teaching methods within the subject area. Ensuring that teaching materials were up-to-date and current was seen as best practice in Social Policy teaching and learning. Research-led teaching was also generally considered to be one of the hallmarks of good practice, with research findings indicating that practice related to this varies across the field of study. Further research may be required to understand trends in relation to this. Whilst more traditional forms of assessment were widely utilised, there were indications that more applied methods of assessment were increasingly being used, such as policy briefs, court reports, web-based activities, placements and verbal communication tasks. Contact hours in Social Policy seemed relatively high, although again, further research is required to understand this picture in more detail. The experiences of teachers within the subject of Social Policy are likely to be subject to significant changes in coming years. This research provides a useful baseline against which to track such developments.
Attitudes towards the future of Social Policy in times of change

Survey respondents were asked to consider how they expected changes in student finance to affect student numbers as well as potential knock on effects around department closures, amalgamations and staff redundancies. This section of the report highlights findings in this area while also drawing on relevant reflections from the three semi-structured interviews with key informants.

Departmental changes

Survey respondents were asked if their host department had been affected by either departmental closure or amalgamation with another department over the last two years. 3% of respondents had been directly affected by their home department closing, while a considerably larger proportion (21%) had been affected by amalgamation with another department.

Looking to the future, respondents were also asked how likely they thought it that their department will be affected by amalgamation and closure in the next two years. The results from the survey are detailed in the table below. They demonstrate that amalgamation was seen a much more likely outcome than the complete closure of university departments. For example, while 18% of respondents thought that amalgamation with another department was quite or very likely only 4% thought that the closure of their department was either quite or very likely over the next two years. These figures do suggest that a significant proportion of survey respondents expect their departmental structure to be affected by the changes in student finance, while also providing evidence that some departments have already experienced changes in the form of both amalgamation and closures.

Departmental changes in previous 2 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departmental changes</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamation with another department</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closure of department</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundancies in department</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal of programmes</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likelihood of departmental changes in next 2 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood of departmental changes</th>
<th>Amalgamation with another department (%)</th>
<th>Closure of department (%)</th>
<th>Redundancies (%)</th>
<th>Withdrawal of programmes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all likely</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very likely</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite likely</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staff redundancies

Undoubtedly, there is an understandable concern that HEI staff will be threatened with redundancies as the changes to student finance take effect. Interestingly, there was already evidence that a considerable number of our survey respondents had seen redundancies in their own departments – indeed 21% said redundancies had occurred over the past two years. Looking forwards, a considerable proportion (9%) thought that redundancies in their department over the next two years is a very likely outcome, while 23% thought this was quite likely (full results in table above).

Withdrawal of programmes or courses from departments

The survey also sought to generate data regarding how far and whether departments where Social Policy is taught are being affected by particular programmes of study and courses being withdrawn. Interestingly, this was the most common issue faced by departments over the past two years with 27% of respondents reporting that programmes or courses had been withdrawn in their department. In terms of the next two years, this was also seen as a fairly common possibility with 39% of respondents reporting that the withdrawal of programmes or courses from their department was either very or quite likely (for full results see table above). These figures suggest that a large proportion of the respondents to this survey expect a future that will include changes to the courses and programmes offered by their host departments. Given such a climate, it is perhaps even more important for the SPA to continue to monitor and track changes in the teaching of Social Policy in UK HEIs.

One of the three key informants interviewed for this research was herself being directly affected by the withdrawal of the Social Policy degree course from the HEI where she worked. She explained how the decision to end the Social Policy degree programme occurred, and her fears regarding the consequences of this change.
“The decision was made from the top in the faculty to say they were not going to go ahead with Social Policy. They said they didn’t think they could recruit and they were doing us a favour because we could then be put into teaching on Sociology, Criminology etc. So it doesn’t affect us losing our jobs but it is the end of a particular degree, and so I guess our feeling was there still would be recruitment ahead. But they decided not to give it a chance to see what happened so we’re taking the final new intake in September [2011] and then we will run out the degree. And while that degree’s running out we start teaching elsewhere. But, basically, Social Policy’s gone. It’s really dramatic, it’s very sudden. There was no consultation – a decision was just made. I think there’s a huge threat for the study of Social Policy at new universities and I think it’s a huge threat for students from disadvantaged backgrounds being able to study it, and therefore contribute, and provide a different perspective and understanding because they come from different backgrounds.” (Senior Lecturer).

While the Senior Lecturer’s university was ending the Social Policy degree course they had decided to try to develop some sort of Masters programme, believing that there might still be demand for postgraduate Social Policy study. The interviewee explained: “So they’re [the university] saying we don’t think there is a need for an undergraduate degree but we think there is an interest for postgraduate work in this area (Senior Lecturer).” Another of the interviewees in this research suggested that Masters courses may actually flourish in a broader economic climate of recession and high youth unemployment. The Reader interviewed argued that Social Policy Masters “can do well in recession as graduates can’t get a job so do one year Masters” instead.

**Postgraduate student numbers – future prospects**

Survey respondents were asked what they expected to happen to student numbers studying Social Policy at their institution at both postgraduate and undergraduate level in 2012, and over the next five years. Looking first at postgraduate students, the most common expectation from respondents was that postgraduate student numbers would stay the same in both 2012 and over the next five years. The full results are shown in the table below and show that some respondents even expect postgraduate student numbers to increase in 2012 (6.3%) and over the next five years (14.5%).

**Respondents’ expectations of student numbers in the future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student number expectations</th>
<th>Number of undergraduate students in 2012</th>
<th>Number of undergraduate students in next 5 years</th>
<th>Number of postgraduate students in 2012</th>
<th>Number of postgraduate students in next 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rise</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay the same</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100 (161)</td>
<td>100 (165)</td>
<td>100 (160)</td>
<td>100 (160)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Undergraduate student numbers – anticipated decline
The anticipations and expectations for the numbers of students studying Social Policy at postgraduate level contrasts quite notably with those for undergraduate student numbers, which is obviously where the change to student finance in England and Wales will have the most immediate effect.

Indeed, 41% of respondents expect the number of undergraduate students studying Social Policy at their institution to fall in 2012 as the new student finance regime comes into force. This contrasted with just 28% who thought student numbers would stay the same, and 2% who actually predicted that student numbers would increase (see the table below for full results).

Looking across a longer time frame, over the next five years the picture is marginally more optimistic with 26% expecting student numbers to fall and 38% anticipating that student numbers will stay the same. As the table below shows, some 6% actually predict that the numbers of students studying Social Policy at their institution will rise over the next five years.

Respondents’ thoughts about social policy student numbers in 2012 (Series 1) and in five years’ time (Series 2)

Summary
The findings explored above demonstrate the extent to which survey respondents are expecting tangible impacts as the changes to student finance are introduced in 2012. At undergraduate level, it seems that there is a widespread expectation that student numbers will decline and this will inevitably impact on other aspects of the teaching and learning experience. There is also concern that in the future departments will be affected by redundancies, amalgamation with other departments and the withdrawal of courses.

It is in this context that the SPA has a particular role to play in seeking to sustain the academic subject of Social Policy, and promote it as an area of study to potential students. There is inevitably going to be considerable uncertainty and anxiety across the subject area and there is perhaps also
scope for the SPA to provide forums for those teaching Social Policy to discuss their concerns and ideas for how to safeguard the subject in these challenging times. In the next, final section of this report we conclude our analysis with some central recommendations for the role of the SPA and how it can best work to effectively support Social Policy teaching and learning in UK HEIs.
Safeguarding Social Policy and the SPA’s role

Given the changing climate in HEI funding and particular concerns regarding student recruitment post 2012, it is critically important to explore how best to protect and safeguard Social Policy so that it continues to be widely taught and studied throughout the UK. This section of the report details findings from the internet survey and qualitative interviews on this theme. It also draws on the rich data generated from two open questions which asked survey respondents about their ideas for how to increase the number of students studying Social Policy as well as for thoughts regarding the role of the SPA in promoting and safeguarding Social Policy. Of central import is how best to effectively market Social Policy as a subject of study in order to increase student recruitment at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Following an exploration of particular ideas around how best to try to increase the number of students studying Social Policy, this section turns to a consideration of the training needs of those actually teaching Social Policy. Evidently, ensuring that those teaching Social Policy have the best possible access to opportunities to improve their teaching practice is a central component of wider efforts to deliver the highest quality of Social Policy teaching across the UK. Given the closure of SWAP, there is perhaps scope here for the SPA to consider expanding and revising its role in ways that most effectively support its members’ teaching and learning needs. In concluding this section, findings on other ways in which the SPA might be able to contribute to safeguarding Social Policy are also detailed with a range of suggestions emerging from the generated data.

Getting into schools – promoting Social Policy to school students

The internet survey asked respondents to consider how effective running a marketing campaign for school students about Social Policy might be in increasing the future numbers of Social Policy students. The responses are detailed in the table below which demonstrates that 24.1% thought that a marketing campaign could be very effective, whilst 50.6% felt it would be quite effective. Notably, only 4% anticipated that running such a marketing campaign would be not at all effective suggesting that the majority of respondents felt there was at least some scope in marketing Social Policy more effectively to school students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Running a marketing campaign for school students about social policy</th>
<th>Offering more sandwich placements to students</th>
<th>Highlighting the jobs that social policy graduates go onto (e.g. in course websites and brochures)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very effective</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite effective</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very effective</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all effective</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indeed, a number of respondents returned to the idea of a marketing campaign in schools in their answers to the open question regarding how best to increase student numbers, with a range of particular suggestions emerging. Respondents frequently noted that there is an issue in schools
whereby students are simply unaware of the subject of Social Policy even existing and so do not consider it when they come to choose university courses. This lack of awareness of Social Policy as a subject is linked to the incorporation of Social Policy teaching at school level within Sociology A-Level, although in Scotland students are perhaps more exposed to Social Policy via the Higher available in Modern Studies.

One respondent argued:

“I think that many pre-university students simply do not know what ‘Social Policy’ is. There needs to be more creative marketing of Social Policy as a degree level subject, particularly making use of social media to raise awareness of Social Policy amongst future students. We need to bring Social Policy to life, integrating an examination of interesting contemporary events into courses e.g. the riots. I also think that directly appealing to students doing pre-university courses in related subjects (e.g. Sociology, Economics, Government and Politics, Law etc) would be beneficial. Many of them simply do not know that a Social Policy course will draw on a wide range of disciplines and skills, which is KEY for employability, and will give students a high level of both sectoral and commercial awareness, another crucial factor when it comes to getting a job after university.”

It was suggested that there is potential to work more closely with careers advisers and teachers to explore Social Policy as a subject, and to encourage them to relay information to their students as one way of disseminating knowledge about Social Policy. Sixth form teachers were highlighted as a particular target audience, given the role they play in the decision making of future students regarding what to study. One respondent suggested sending university lecturers and researchers into schools to discuss with students what Social Policy is, while another recommended taster days where interested school students could learn more about what the study of Social Policy involves. A broad-based PR campaign to promote Social Policy was also frequently mentioned, with a number of respondents suggesting particular scope for placing emphasis on the real life context within which Social Policy sits.

In a time of considerable welfare reform and pressure on public finances, there is continued coverage of ‘Social Policy issues’ in the national and local media. However, this is rarely explicitly recognised as Social Policy coverage and there is thus perhaps work to be done in encouraging and enabling school students to make the link between topical issues of the day and the academic study of Social Policy. This was a theme emerging from a number of open responses to the question on how best to increase the number of students studying Social Policy. One respondent argued: “I think the most important thing would be to make any marketing relevant to real life – Social Policy sounds dull to lots of people, so highlighting its practical realities and potential would be more appealing.”

This relates to a broader project to raise the media profile of Social Policy as an academic subject which pertains to issues of benefits, welfare reform, public sector deficits and so on – issues that are currently right at the top of the political agenda. Some respondents spoke about the need to capitalise on the high profile of Social Policy issues in the media in ways that reflect attention onto Social Policy as an academic subject:
“we need to highlight the ongoing importance of Social Policy in all areas of life - the current welfare reform agenda and the recession could be an opportunity to do so. We need to make Social Policy seem current and relevant to modern life.”

This theme was also highlighted in our semi-structured interviews, with the Lecturer arguing:

“Social Policy is obviously relevant to people’s lives, so you’ve got to try and sell that idea. Reaching out to people and saying this is what Social Policy is, it’s interesting and relevant to your real lives is probably needed in a discipline like Social Policy and is probably something that could introduce increased interest.”

This perspective was shared by the Reader interviewed who suggested that Social Policy academics; “…can draw great strength from the fact that the issues of the day absolutely square with things that we’re teaching and researching, and we need lots more on all of this.”

Undoubtedly, there could be a role for the SPA here, with a broad goal of developing and building the Social Policy brand. As one respondent argued:

“considering the coverage that social policies receive in the media, I think the SPA could do more to illustrate that these self same issues are being covered and examined in undergraduate and postgraduate courses across the country.”

Another respondent agreed: “Social Policy is too often not seen as a ‘sexy’ subject choice, [so there is a] need to engage potential students by rebranding and identifying Social Policy champions.” One respondent described the public perception of Social Policy as ‘dry’, diagnosing an ‘information and image problem’ while another called for a ‘sustained PR effort’ to emphasise the ‘distinctiveness of Social Policy as a discipline’. Particular suggestions in this regard included encouraging well known personalities in political and public life to record videos discussing the value of Social Policy which could then be used in the media and in marketing the subject to school students.

Overall, the findings from this research suggest there is scope to consider further how best to market Social Policy such that more school students have knowledge about it as a subject area and are better informed about what its study involves, with a particular emphasis on highlighting the links between the academic subject and topical political issues of the day. As one respondent concluded: “We must find mechanisms for getting attractive and informative materials about Social Policy into schools and sixth form / FE colleges.” This effort should perhaps sit alongside a broader and more ambitious project to encourage better national awareness of the link between Social Policy issues as explored in the media and the academic subject itself.

**Changing the degree offer – more placements please?**

Respondents were also asked to consider whether offering more sandwich placements to students would be an effective strategy in efforts to increase the future recruitment of Social Policy students. Responses to this question are set out in the table above (see also chart below). They show that 23.6% felt this would be very effective, while 47.1% thought increasing the number of sandwich placements would be quite an effective approach. As with views on the marketing campaign in schools, very few respondents (0.6%) felt that offering more sandwich placements would be not at all effective in increasing Social Policy student numbers in the future.
As already reported, the audit into Social Policy teaching found that very few Social Policy courses currently include year-long sandwich placements as part of their degree programme. On the other hand, results from the survey showed that a relatively high number of institutions were providing placement opportunities to some or all students as part of the degree offer, though given the audit results it can be assumed that most of these are for shorter time periods.

In a climate where the employability offer of degree programmes is increasingly pertinent, departments might want to further explore whether and in what ways they should increase the potential for students to undertake either a one year sandwich work placement or shorter placements as part of their degree. In responses to open questions, some respondents highlighted the potential in increasing opportunities for work experience and placements, with suggestions of a particular role here for the SPA to act as a broker between HEIs and public and voluntary sector organisations in creating placement opportunities. As one respondent argued: “creating interesting internships or placement opportunities would certainly be attractive,” suggesting that this is one way to increase Social Policy student numbers. Another argued that departments should look to: “make the most of student employment placements on undergraduate programmes – and expand this sort of employability capacity wherever possible.”

**Employability matters – promoting and maximising the employability of Social Policy study**

One of the central reasons why increasing the number of sandwich placements might be seen as contributing to increased student recruitment is the link between work experience within degree contexts and enhanced employability. Given a context of high student fees, it is almost inevitable that prospective students will give careful consideration to how far and in what ways their chosen programme of study might enhance their employability on completion of the degree. Survey respondents were asked to consider whether highlighting the jobs that Social Policy graduates go on to do would be effective in increasing student recruitment (see results in the table above and chart below). Again, a very small number (1.1%) felt this would be not at all effective which contrasted with 55.7% who felt this would be quite effective and 35.6% who believed this strategy would be very effective.

Certainly, putting more emphasis on the employability of Social Policy degree programmes was a common theme in responses to the open question regarding how best to increase the number of Social Policy students in the future. Respondents suggested providing more information to prospective students about how a degree in Social Policy can link into a number of career options. One respondent argued: “I think it is extremely important in light of the increased fees to underline jobs and job opportunities that Social Policy graduates go onto.” Another called for action to “demonstrate the employability potential from a Social Policy degree or a degree which has a policy element,” while one respondent said efforts should focus on ways to “demonstrate how it [Social Policy] is interrelated with a number of careers”. Again, several respondents saw a particular role for the SPA in efforts to highlight the employability potential of Social Policy, while also taking additional steps to enhance and maximise employability. With regard to the latter, one respondent suggested more needs to be done to ‘sell’ Social Policy to employers so that they recognise the value of employing someone with a Social Policy degree. Another respondent suggested entering into a dialogue with employers to find out the skills set they require from Social Policy graduates to ensure that courses are better tailored to meeting prospective employers’ needs. Evidently, there is
potential in looking to the employability offer provided by Social Policy degree programmes and this is certainly an area which the SPA might want to explore in more detail. As one respondent concluded: “There is...a job to do in ‘marketing’ the employability aspects of Social Policy more carefully – this can be done at both the SPA and school / department levels.”

Promoting social policy as a subject – ideas seen as potentially effective or very effective by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Running a marketing campaign for school students about social policy</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering more sandwich placements to students</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlighting the jobs that social policy graduates go onto (e.g. in course websites and brochures)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increasing the numbers of Social Policy students – changing the course(s) provided

In responses to the open question regarding how to increase the recruitment of Social Policy students, a number of other suggestions were made which included ideas for changing and adapting the courses offered to make them more appealing to a wider range of students. Ideas included making courses more vocational and ensuring that all degree programmes feature research methods training, thus expanding the employability of Social Policy across UK HEIs. Respondents also suggested moving towards more Joint Honour degree options as well as increasing scope for part-time study, given that this may open up Social Policy study to a wider range of potential students. In seeking to encourage students to perhaps include an element of Social Policy in their degrees, one respondent argued that there is scope to increase the number of optional Social Policy modules which can be taken as electives even if the main subject of study is something quite different. In a similar vein, another respondent suggested that there is potential to encourage more teaching of aspects of Social Policy within a diverse range of degree programmes including Education, Business Medicine, Economics and Sociology.

In seeking to better understand what prospective students want from their university degree, one respondent suggested that the SPA might consider going into schools and holding focus groups with students to discuss their aspirations and expectations from university study. Findings from focus groups in school settings could then inform advice and guidance on how HEIs might consider adapting their recruitment materials and degree programmes to most effectively cater for prospective students.
Summary

This research project explored a range of ideas for how best to increase the recruitment of Social Policy students in the future, an issue particularly pertinent in times of change where recruitment may become a real challenge given the increases in student tuition fees. Marketing campaigns in schools, increasing and promoting the employability of Social Policy study, and exploring opportunities to increase the availability of sandwich placements were all seen to have scope in this regard. In addition, survey respondents highlighted potential in capitalising on the real world relevance of Social Policy study with efforts to raise the profile of Social Policy as a subject of study.
Training needs of those teaching Social Policy

In exploring how best to safeguard Social Policy for the future, it is also critical to consider the teaching and learning needs of the current (and future) generation of HEI Social Policy teachers. Developing and ensuring first class Social Policy teaching is evidently one central component of ensuring the future of the subject and its continued popularity with students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

In the internet survey, respondents were asked if they felt they would benefit from training in a range of areas including marking, lecturing and delivering lectures online. The findings (shown in the table below) reveal that there was some demand for training in these areas. Only 29% said they would not benefit from training in any of these areas. The most popular areas where training was felt to be of potential benefit were delivering lectures online and training in subject specific areas with 41% and 29% respectively saying they would find access to such training beneficial.

Training needs of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivering lectures online</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving presentations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving seminars and tutorials</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving lectures</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing workload</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in social policy subject areas</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to share experiences</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those respondents who had identified some training as being of benefit were also asked how they would like any such training to be delivered. 71% said they would prefer training to be delivered in person – either through courses or seminars – while 58% said they would like to be able to access training online.

Interestingly, while specific skills training was not identified by a majority of respondents as being beneficial, 82% said they would welcome the opportunity to share experiences of teaching Social Policy with others. There is thus evident demand for more opportunities to share experiences of teaching Social Policy and this is perhaps one area where the SPA could facilitate Social Policy teachers coming together. One respondent suggested scope for a one-day workshop on teaching Social Policy, which might be particularly useful for Sociologists who may not have had any training on Social Policy. Commenting on the potential in sharing experiences, one respondent said:

“I think that the sharing and dissemination of teaching this specific subject would be invaluable especially to those new to teaching Social Policy. Perhaps the sharing of lecture notes / presentations etc would be beneficial for both staff and students.”
In a semi-structured interview, it was suggested that there may be scope for SPA to add value to training in Social Policy teaching received by postgraduate research students and early career lecturers. The interviewee argued:

“You can imagine bringing together young lecturers from a range of universities who were in their early years and were doing some sort of certificated work on education, teaching and learning in their own institutions. It would be helpful to compare experiences with other colleagues (Reader).”

The interviewee also suggested scope in looking at sharing reading lists between institutions to stop “academics reinventing the wheel at the same time”. Given the demise of SWAP, it is particularly important for the SPA to explore how best to support the teaching and learning activities of its members. Findings from this research project suggest particular potential in providing forums for Social Policy academics to share experiences and reflect on examples of good practice. Although relatively low numbers of respondents said they would benefit from more specific training, it is perhaps necessary to explore further whether there would be sufficient demand to make running courses on particular aspects of teaching Social Policy beneficial.

**Looking to the SPA’s role in safeguarding Social Policy**

In commissioning this research project, the SPA was particularly interested to explore how those teaching Social Policy felt it could most effectively help to safeguard and protect Social Policy in the coming years. An open question on how the SPA can best do this elicited a wide range of responses and key themes from these are now explored. A number of respondents recorded satisfaction with the work currently being done by the SPA, with some respondents welcoming the growing interest of the SPA in teaching and learning matters as evidenced by the Teaching and Learning Committee on the Executive as well as the work currently being done as part of this research project. “It is good to see the SPA attending to teaching issues”, noted one respondent. Indeed, another respondent suggested that it is important for the SPA to retain its focus on this area: “continuing to try to track developments in the teaching and learning of Social Policy as the changes start to take effect...is very important for lobbying”. Another called for a “much more robust effort from SPA which has been far too concerned with research at the expense of teaching.”

In her extended interview, the Senior Lecturer frequently returned to the theme of the diversity of both the teaching and student body for the subject of Social Policy. She was concerned that Social Policy is increasingly taught largely in Russell Group universities which may be less accessible for certain groups such as ethnic minorities and mature students. This Senior Lecturer saw a central role for the SPA in seeking to ensure that Social Policy as an academic subject is made available to the most diverse possible range of students. She argued:

“They [the SPA] need to look at ‘who are the people we’re training?’ Who’s getting in, who’s getting postgraduate studies, who’s doing PhDs, who’s the students who are not training anymore, and what does that mean for the future? How diverse are the students? Which universities are still offering Social Policy? Because if it’s only being offered at Bristol, Bath, Leeds, University of Sheffield, their student bodies are white and I think that’s a problem.”

With regard to particular support with teaching and learning issues, a number of practical suggestions were generated from this research. These included measures to give Policy World more
of a focus on teaching issues, the development of a section of the SPA website devoted to providing teaching and learning resources to members, and potential in running regular day conferences centred on teaching and learning issues. The respondent who suggested scope for day conferences went on to argue that the SPA could “act as a conduit for ideas about learning and teaching (encouraging members to contribute ideas, perhaps creating a blog for learning and teaching discussions).” Additionally, one respondent suggested that the SPA should explore ways to become more involved in the PGCert in HE so as to ensure better representation of Social Policy related issues.

In considering how the SPA can best help safeguard Social Policy, a common theme emerged around providing and/or signposting students and teaching staff to financial assistance. With regard to the SPA’s potential role as signposter, respondents suggested that the SPA could develop a funding list for both postgraduate and undergraduate students detailing available scholarships and bursaries. It was also suggested that the SPA could itself look at providing some financial support with a number of respondents calling for the development of a bursary scheme for students. Particular suggestions including providing a modest bursary for third year undergraduate students seeking to undertake local fieldwork research—most likely as part of their dissertation. This is an innovative idea, and one which might have real scope to engage current Social Policy students by providing them with an invaluable opportunity to undertake social research.

As well as seeing a role for the SPA as both a direct provider and signposter to financial support, some respondents saw scope for the SPA to play more of a brokerage role by negotiating and working with employers in the public, private and third sector to encourage them to part-fund and/or sponsor degree courses for particular students. Undoubtedly, this is a contentious issue but it is nonetheless notable that a number of respondents saw a potential role for the SPA in this regard. One respondent argued that the SPA should be more active in seeking to ensure that there is appropriate financial support available for the next generation of Social Policy researchers asking: “what, for example, did the SPA have to say regarding the ESRC decision to close small grants and target resources on fewer, bigger grants?”

More broadly, survey respondents suggested a role for the SPA in seeking to sustain and increase the level of recruitment of Social Policy students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. This is tied in with efforts to promote the subject and market it more effectively, both to school students and in the media more broadly (for a fuller discussion of how best to market Social Policy as an academic subject see pp. 32-34). Some respondents argued that the SPA should also defend the value of the subject and be prepared to lobby policymakers and politicians on the value of Social Sciences in general, and Social Policy in particular.

In ensuring the organisation’s own sustainability, several respondents emphasised the importance of continued efforts to increase the membership levels of the SPA itself. One respondent said there is more scope for the SPA to provide opportunities for members to come together whether at conferences, seminars or informal networking events. Such a programme of events might also help increase membership numbers, particularly if special packages of membership plus event registration are offered. This viewpoint was echoed in the semi-structured interview with the Reader who argued that:
“...anything that brings people together like this week [SPA annual conference], or other conferences would be good. I think there is room for that because universities will pay for people to attend things, so I think regional conferences could be really useful.”

Interestingly, a large number of respondents suggested that the key role of the SPA in the current context is to encourage and promote Social Policy research exploring the impact of the Coalition’s policies. This was felt to be particularly pertinent in a climate of the reform of student finances as well as ongoing reductions and reform in the policy domains of most relevance to Social Policy.

**Summary**

This section of the report has outlined findings around how best to safeguard Social Policy in the current climate. In particular, it has highlighted potential areas for SPA activity and involvement as well as exploring how best to encourage and promote Social Policy as a subject of study. In the next, final section of this report we conclude our analysis with some central recommendations for the role of the SPA and how it can best work to effectively support Social Policy teaching and learning in UK HEIs.
Conclusion and recommendations

This report has summarised findings from a research project designed to explore the teaching of Social Policy across UK HEIs, with a particular remit to consider attitudes to the future of the subject in times of transition in the higher education landscape. The preceding sections have highlighted the rich data generated by this research which incorporated a desk-based audit, internet survey and three semi-structured qualitative interviews. Findings from this small-scale research project should be useful to the SPA as well as to all those with a stake in the future of Social Policy which extends beyond the academic community alone to include prospective students, government researchers, think tanks and so on. In this brief conclusion, it is worthwhile reflecting on and foregrounding central recommendations for the future work of the SPA in the light of this research project.

Critically, this report provides baseline data regarding the state of Social Policy teaching in UK HEIs in 2011. Figures from the audit and associated data from the internet survey provides invaluable information regarding where Social Policy is taught, by whom and what forms of assessment, feedback and teaching are most commonly utilised. Given the changes to be introduced in 2012, a central role for the SPA will be to continue to monitor how the subject evolves as the reforms to student finance take effect. There might well be scope to repeat the Social Policy audit in future years to explore how Social Policy is being taught in HEIs after these reforms have been implemented.

High levels of concern about the future of Social Policy were revealed, in the light of the changing higher education context. Expectations were that undergraduate student numbers will decline when the higher tuition fees start to operate from 2012. This fall in student numbers at the undergraduate level is expected to endure over the next five years, with many also anticipating reductions in postgraduate numbers in the future. Against this backdrop of uncertainty and worry regarding falling student numbers, the SPA has a central role to play in providing a forum where people can discuss their concerns as well as facilitating explorations regarding how best to minimise any negative impacts on the teaching of Social Policy in UK HEIs.

Indeed, the SPA arguably needs to place central focus on teaching and learning issues in the coming years and should direct its energies and resources towards this aspect of its work. This recommendation fits closely with the SPA’s own future plans with the current chair – Caroline Glendinning – recently describing supporting teaching and learning in Social Policy as one of the SPA’s two priorities for the next year (Glendinning, 2011b). In this respect, there is particular scope for the SPA to explore how best to support those teaching Social Policy in UK HEIs with consideration of ways in which the work of the now disbanded SWAP can be continued by the SPA. The survey found that a large majority of respondents would welcome opportunities for sharing experiences of teaching Social Policy, and this is undoubtedly one area where the SPA could act as facilitator and enabler. The SPA might also want to explore ways in which it can more regularly bring SPA members together, whether for regional conferences, training events and/or online webinars.

Furthermore, given the importance of efforts to safeguard and promote Social Policy in the current climate, the SPA should consider how best to try and maintain and even boost the recruitment of Social Policy students in the future. This might encompass work around marketing Social Policy as a subject, sustained engagement with schools to try and increase the national profile of the subject
and the possibility of studying it at university level, as well as efforts to highlight and reinforce the employability potential of studying a degree that incorporates Social Policy.

Finally, it was notable that the majority of survey respondents (53.2%) were not actually members of the SPA. The survey offered no financial inducement to take part and relied purely on respondents wanting to give their viewpoints and perhaps thus having a stake in the subject’s future. This therefore suggests that there is a large constituency of individuals teaching Social Policy who are not currently SPA members, further implying scope in efforts by the SPA to boost membership numbers. In a current climate of uncertainty, the role of organisations such as the SPA can become even more critical, given that they provide both physical and virtual spaces where those with common experiences and concerns can come together and discuss how best to move forward in an unfamiliar and daunting context. The SPA might therefore want to look at a reinvigorated attempt to boost membership numbers, with particular scope perhaps in organising conferences and regional events whereby reduced rate membership is incorporated as part of the conference registration fee.

Taken as a whole, this report provides data on both the current state of Social Policy teaching in the UK as well as prospects and attitudes towards how the changes in HEI funding and finance will impact on the subject. At the same time, attitudinal data has also been generated on how best to safeguard Social Policy in the future. It is notable that the teaching of Social Policy remains comparatively widespread, while there are also numerous examples of innovative practices which suggest a subject area ready to move forward and adapt to changing contexts. What is more, a number of survey respondents and qualitative interviewees highlighted the particular potential in emphasising Social Policy’s central connectedness to the issues of the day around welfare state reform, public finances overhaul and so on.

Whilst there is certainly a need to be proactive in seeking out ideas and approaches to best meet and respond to the new HEI landscape, it is also important to be optimistic that the study of Social Policy can and will endure these challenging times. As one of the qualitative interviewees concluded:

“I’ve seen this going on for many many years. You know, ‘what about Social Policy?’ A kind of agonising about Social Policy but we still have reserved our position. We are still seen by the research councils and the funding councils as a distinctive thing alongside all the other mainstream Social Sciences” (Reader).
References


Acknowledgements

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Appendix One: Paper copy of online survey questions

SPA HEI Survey:
The teaching of social policy in the UK today

SECTION A: ABOUT YOU

Firstly, we’d like to find out a bit about you.

Are you....
- Male
- Female

What is the name of the institution where you teach social policy?
- Please enter
- I prefer not to say

What is the name of the department where you teach social policy?
- Please enter
- I prefer not to say

What is your current job title?
- Postgraduate student
- Lecturer
- Senior lecturer
- Professor
- Teaching fellow
- Other (Please enter)
How long have you been teaching social policy – please include any teaching carried out as a postgraduate student?
- Less than 2 years
- 2 years or more, but less than 5 years
- 5 years or more, but less than 10 years
- 10 years or more

Which social policy modules are you teaching this academic term (September to December 2011) – please include all modules you are teaching on, even where the teaching is shared with other members of staff?
- Please enter
- And is this module for undergraduate students, or postgraduate students? Don’t know (TO BE ASKED FOR EACH MODULE)

Are you a member of the Social Policy Association (SPA)?
- Yes
- No

SECTION B: YOUR EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING

We would now like to find out about your experiences of teaching social policy.

Which forms of teaching are you involved in? Please tick all that apply.
- Lectures
- Seminars
- One-to-one tutorials
- Giving lectures online (e.g. through podcasts)
- Online tutorials
- None of these

How often do you use examples from your own research in your teaching?
- Always – in every lecture/seminar I teach
- Frequently – in most lectures/seminars I teach
- Sometimes – in some lectures/seminars I teach
- Never

Which of the following methods do you use to assess students? Please tick all that apply.
- Essays
• Exams
• Individual presentations
• Group presentations
• Placements
• Posters
• None of these
• Other (Please specify)

How do you give feedback to students on their work? Please tick all that apply.
• Written feedback forms
• Online e.g. through Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)
• Informal verbal feedback
• Annotating/ writing comments directly onto students’ essays
• None of these
• Other (Please specify)

Thinking about this academic year (2011 to 2012), how many contact hours would you say you have with students in the average week – by contact hours we mean face-to-face contact, including formal teaching hours and informal office hours?
• Less than 2 hours
• 2 hours or more, but less than 4 hours
• 4 hours or more, but less than 6 hours
• 6 hours or more, but less than 8 hours
• 8 hours or more, but less than 10 hours
• 10 hours or more
• Don’t know
• I prefer not to say

How often do you update the content of the modules you teach?
• At least once a year
• Less than once a year, but at least once every three years
• Less often than once every three years
• Never

• I’m a postgraduate student/ It’s not my job to update the content

Thinking about the last three years, have you been involved in developing new courses?
• Yes
• No

• I’m a postgraduate student/ It’s not my job to develop new courses
SECTION C: THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

{ROUTING: THIS SECTION IS NOT APPLICABLE FOR POST-GRADS}

The next few questions are about students’ experiences of studying social policy at your institution.

Does your department provide work placements for undergraduate students as part of their university course?
- Yes – for all students
- Yes – for most students
- Yes – for some students
- No
- Don’t know
- I prefer not to say

Thinking about this academic year (2011 to 2012), roughly how many contact hours do students in your department have on average per week – by contact hours we mean face-to-face contact, including formal teaching hours and informal office hours?
- Less than 2 hours
- 2 hours or more, but less than 4 hours
- 4 hours or more, but less than 6 hours
- 6 hours or more, but less than 8 hours
- 8 hours or more, but less than 10 hours
- 10 hours or more
- Don’t know
- I prefer not to say

SECTION D: TRAINING NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES

We now have a few questions about your training and support needs and experiences.

Have you used any of the resources provided by SWAP? Please tick one box on each line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online resources, including the website or</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

48
Do you feel you would benefit from training in any of the following areas? Please tick all that apply.

- Marking
- Lecturing
- Giving seminars and tutorials
- Giving presentations
- Managing your workload
- Delivering lectures online (e.g. through podcasts)
- Sharing experiences with other social policy teachers
- Training in social policy subject areas
- None of these
- Other (Please enter)

{Routing: Only ask if respondent answers positively to TRNWANT}

How would you like to receive training? Please tick all that apply.

- Online
- In paper form
- In person (through seminars or courses)
- Other (please enter)

SECTION E: SOCIAL POLICY IN THE FUTURE

Higher education is facing many changes at this time, including changes to the ways in which students finance their degrees. The next few questions are about the future of social policy, in the context of these changes.
Thinking about ways to increase the number of social policy students in the future, how effective do you think that each of the following activities might be? Please tick one box on each line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Very effective</th>
<th>Quite effective</th>
<th>Not very effective</th>
<th>Not at all effective</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Running a marketing campaign for school students about social policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offering more sandwich placements to students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highlighting the jobs that social policy graduates go onto (e.g. in course websites and brochures)</td>
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</table>

Do you have any thoughts or ideas about how to increase the number of social policy students in the future? Please write your answer in the box below.

In the past two years, has your department been affected by any of the following issues? Please tick all that apply.

- Amalgamation with another department
- Closure of the department
- The withdrawal of programmes or courses from the department
- Redundancies in the department
- Don’t know/ I prefer not to say
In the **next** two years, how likely do you think it is that your department will be affected by any of the following issues? *Please tick one box on each line.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Quite likely</th>
<th>Not very likely</th>
<th>Not at all likely</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamation with another department</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Closure of the department</td>
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<tr>
<td>The withdrawal of programmes or courses from the department</td>
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<td>Redundancies in the department</td>
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In 2012, when changes to the way that students finance their degrees come into effect, do you expect that the number of undergraduate social policy students at your institution will...

- Rise
- Fall
- Stay the same
- Don’t know

Over the next five years, do you expect that the number of undergraduate social policy students at your institution will...

- Rise
- Fall
- Stay the same
- Don’t know

In 2012, when changes to the way that students finance their degrees come into effect, do you expect that the number of postgraduate social policy students at your institution will...

- Rise
- Fall
Over the next five years, do you expect that the number of postgraduate social policy students at your institution will...

- Rise
- Fall
- Stay the same
- Don’t know

Higher education is facing many changes at this time, including changes to the ways in which students finance their degrees. Do you have any suggestions about what the Social Policy Association (SPA) could do to support social policy teaching and research in this context? Please enter any comments in the box below.

Thank you for your time!
Appendix Two: Pen pictures of qualitative interviewees


**Senior Lecturer** in Social Policy at a post-1992 university. Many years (20 plus) teaching experience. Currently teaches on a Social Policy Single Honours degree course. This course is due for closure and is taking its final first year intake in 2011/12. Has been at current institution for 20 years and was instrumental in encouraging department to start offering a Single Honours Social Policy course. Teaches on a wide range of modules including approaches to Social Policy and courses on policy making process, health care and equalities.

**Reader** in Social Policy at Russell Group university. University provides range of Social Policy degree programmes (Joint Honours) as well as a Single Honours programme. Interviewee has been at current institution for thirty years and teaches and convenes both undergraduate and postgraduate modules. Modules he teaches on include courses on politics of British public service and on the politics of the welfare state.