

Commonalities and Differences

Personal and professional identity of
transnational social workers in the United
Kingdom

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Acknowledgment and disclaimer

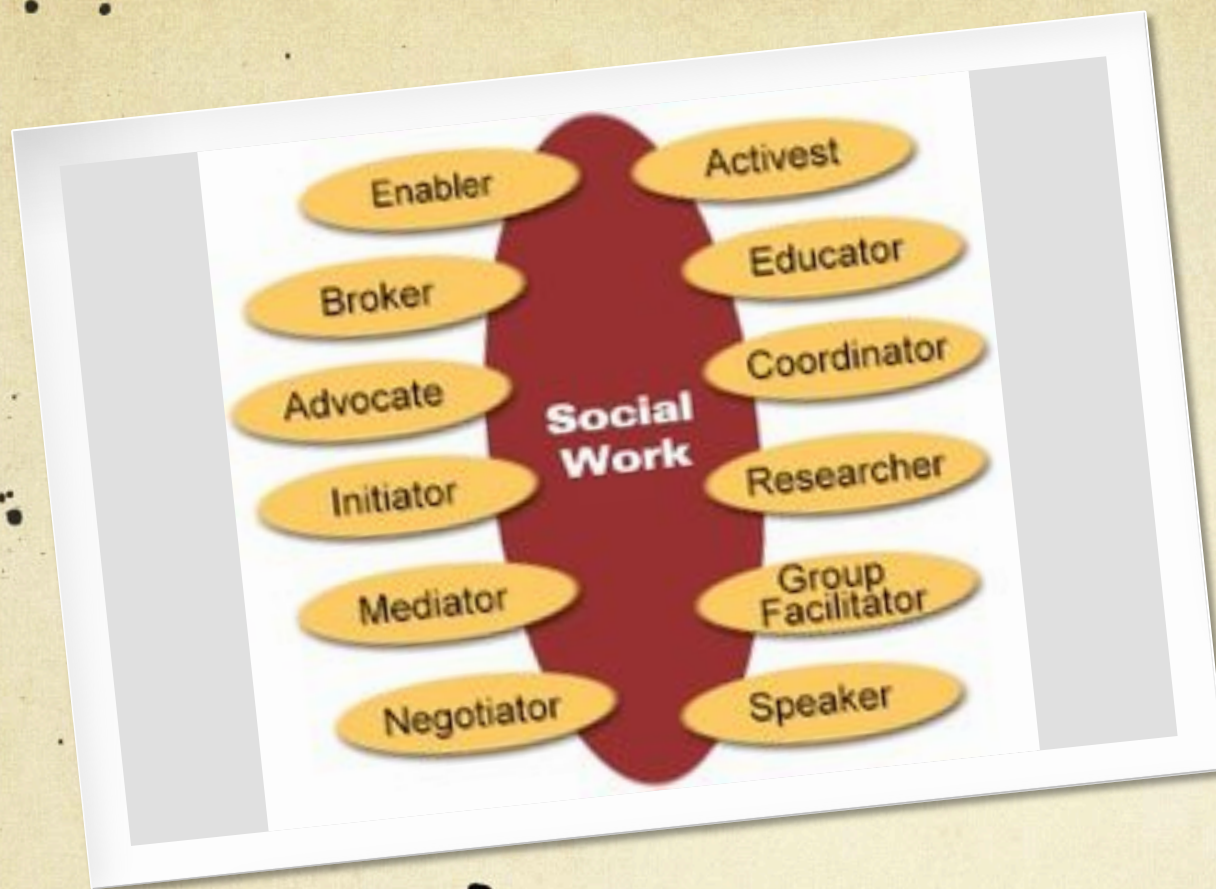
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Data and Methods

- Ongoing research since 2009
- Workforce records (GSCC 2003-2012 and HCPC 2012-2015)
- Online surveys of non-UK qualified SWs (101 in 2010 & 32 in 2014)
- Interviews (11) and 2 focus group discussions (7) with transnational social workers
- Survey of 27 EEA countries re social work training and regulations
- Literature and policy review

Background and significance

- Globalisation, mobility and transnational professionals
 - Recruitment shortages
 - Role of national recruitment policies
- The specific context of social work
 - Nation-specific; yet acknowledging within cultural diversity
 - International social work
 - Glocal contexts
- Variable qualifications and training contents
 - Central set of values and ethics
 - Challenges facing the notion of 'global social work'



The English Social Work Profession

A dynamic context of change

- Ongoing recruitment issues particularly within child protection work
- Children and adult social work are located within different government departments
- SW qualifications' reforms since 2003
 - Moving from DipSW to a full degree qualifications
 - Assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)- 2012
 - Frontline SW training schemes 2013
- Wider reforms to social work as a profession
- Immigration and austerity measures

2009

Laming report-
Mar 2009

Social work practices with children

The National Safeg'ding Delivery Unit

2010

The National Safeguarding Delivery Unit abolished

The Munro review - 1st interim report

"Step Up To-Social Work" programme

2011

Birm'am social work Academy opens

UNISON speaks of the 'exploitation' of SWs

SW reform board: guidance and expectations

2012

CSW becomes an independent entity

General Social Care Council abolished

HCPC takes over SW registration

2013

Frontline SW training scheme introduced

SWRB disbanded

Gov. appoints new chief social workers for adults and children

2014

Children SW innovation programme

Children and Families Act 2014

2015

Think ahead mental health training

College of Social Work abolished

Bucking'shire CC announced a recruitment drive of SW from Romania



Challenges to transnational SW mobility

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Immigration policies

- UK immigration policies have been dynamic over the past decade or so
- The expansion of the EU in 2003 (A8) then later in 2010 (A2)
- Introduction of the points-based immigration system (2008)
- MAC placed children SW in the 'shortage occupation list' in 2010
- Introduction of on non-EU immigration cap 2010-2011
- Brexit - 2016 ?

Impact on the individual

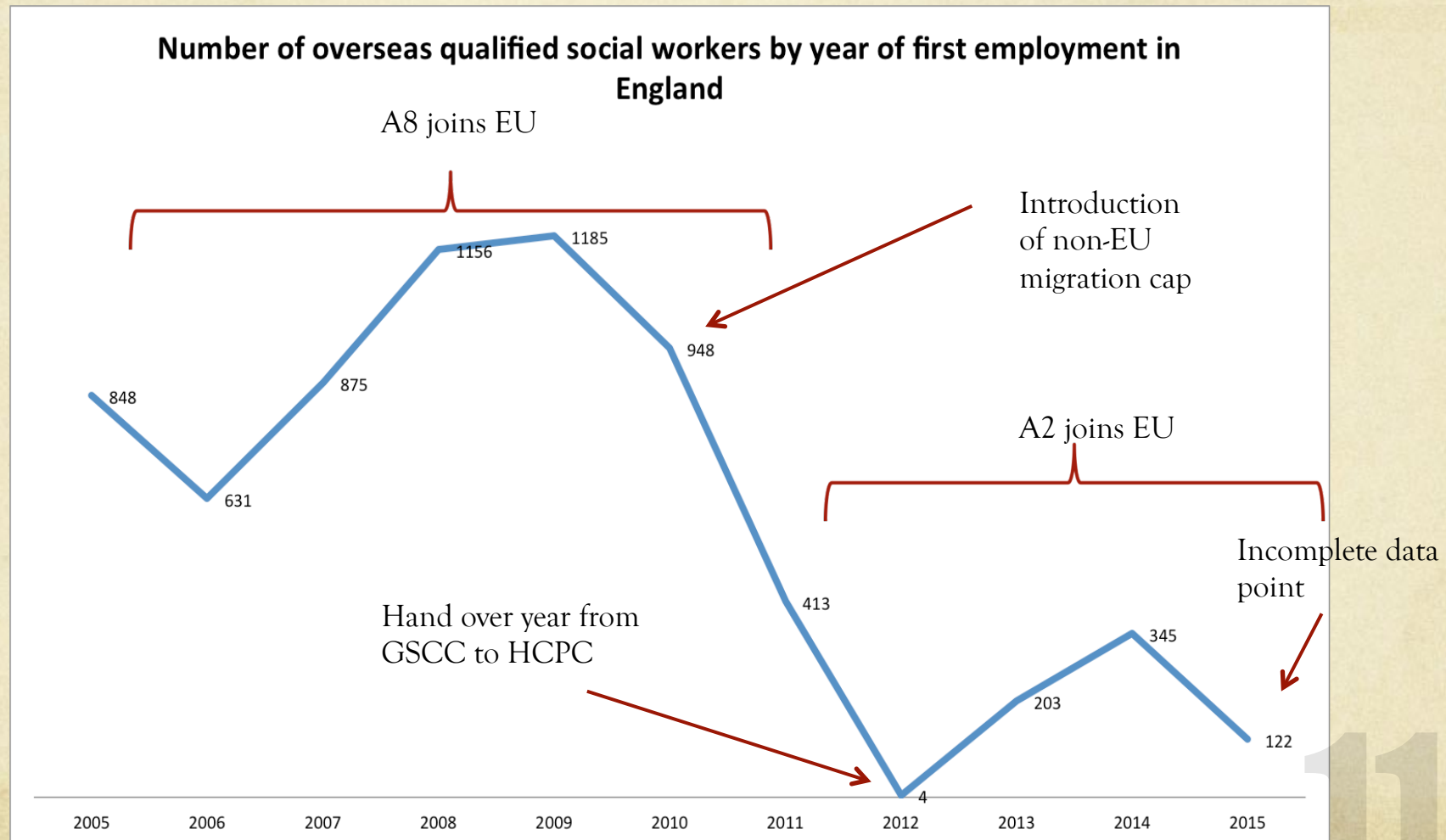
It was really just the option of being able to choose a job here. I graduated in Germany and started looking around there. At this point in time, there were very few people employed and employers really had to choose between say, 250 application forms for each job. I knew UK needed SWs so I came here.

(Female, Germany, Interview, 2009)

Immigration status gave me limited work opportunities, as other LA and agencies do not offer work permit.

(Female, the Philippines, Online Survey, 2010)

Scale and trends in recruitment of international SWs in England





Social work training and regulation

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UK, European and global contexts

- Huge variations in the regulation of the profession and its qualifications across Europe and globally
- Qualification recognition was one of the most challenging aspects for international social workers in our study
 - Those from within the EU seemed to face more difficulties
- Wider implications related to training focus in different countries
 - Extended to the how work is organised and delivered
 - Workplace culture
 - Working with service users

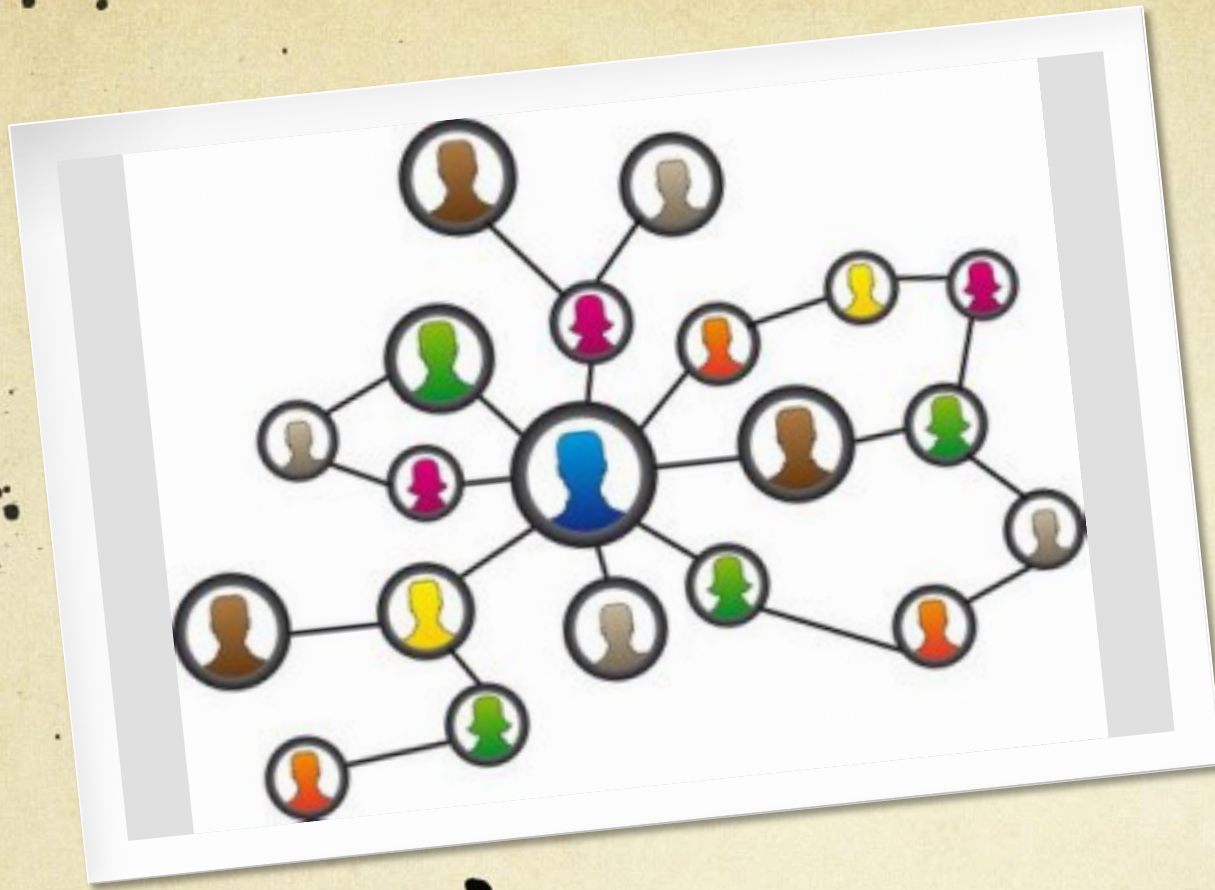
Views related to qualifications and regulations

I am still in the process of registering with the HCPC - this is a very difficult process for international people!

(Female, USA, online survey, 2014)

The quality of the social work qualifications in the UK needs to significantly improve. SWs tend to, in general, lack knowledge of theories & application of those to practice.

(Female, Canada, online survey, 2014)



Social and Culture Capital: Pros and Cons

Social capital and support networks

- Drawing strength from immediate and wider networks
- Role of social networks at different stages of the migration and employment journeys
- Could be the main reason for moving and joining the occupation
 - Joining spouse
- Cross-border support mechanisms
- Open-door for moving in and out – varies by migration status and free-labour mobility
- Social network can also pose constraints on career decisions

I came here initially for my wife, who was studying for a post graduate and what we had in mind then was for her to complete her master's, do a PhD, then I can also pursue my PhD then see where are we. I discovered that both of us cannot be international students at the same time because it's quite expensive. So I said, "Oh no, the best thing is just to look for what the family will be living on." So fortunately for me, social work, and that was that...

(Male, Nigeria, Interview, 2011)

I would like to move to another job in a different sector in the UK. However, I envisage it being difficult as I am raising a young family and the cost of living i.e. mortgage, child care etc. doesn't allow me to take time off work in order to study or train to change career. Changing career is my preferred choice.

(Female, Albania, Online survey, 2012)



Skills' transfer to a new cultural context

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Professional adaptation

- Negotiating multiple social works and knowledge (Grey et al., 2008)
- Is social work 'too' culturally specific to be translated (Welbourne et al., 2007)
- The socio-political and, more importantly, historical contexts
 - Culturally distinct concepts of social work
- Dealing with culture shock within a profession that is 'culturally-sensitive'
- Transitional difficulties and professional dislocation (Fouche et al., 2013)

Culture understanding

- What does the term 'culture' means
 - Themes from interviews and focus group reflect both the wider UK culture norms and those specific to social work practice
- Two way process- to understand and to be understood
 - Differences observed between EU and non-EU workers
 - More EU workers report difficulties in communicating with staff and service users
 - More non-EU workers feel their colleagues and employers don't understand their culture
- The 'new' social structure of the UK is likely to be different from that at 'home'
- Social work 'image' in the UK

Employers' role

We felt like we got a lot of support when we were in the States [at the recruitment stage] but then when we got here [the UK], that [support] sort of tapered off ... I think it's important for the employer to sort of touch base with the individuals. I mean you know, they put in all of this effort in terms of getting us here and then we got here, you know, sort of left to your own devices.

(Female, USA, Interview, 2010)

Support mechanisms

I had never been to the UK and didn't know anyone when I moved here. It was literally trial by fire. The agency the LA used to recruit me was supposed to provide support/induction into UK life but didn't and the LA had no concept of the adjustment/support international social workers would need moving to a new country.

(Female, Canada (with Dutch passport), online survey, 2014)

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Capitalising on the individual experience

- Insider knowledge and awareness
- Integration within the team
- Acceptance from the client group
- Induction – a lost opportunity?

I personally feel that the UK has very little space for outside social workers. After immigration the professionals should have been attached with the relevant departments to gain experience for a reasonable period before practicing independently & to make use of his/her full potential. I had been trying my best to work voluntarily in the social care field but in veil. Maximum I could get was befriending with Asian service users.

(Male, Pakistan, online survey, 2014)

Communication and language issues

- Situation specific language styles
- Effective communications with colleagues and service users
- Effectiveness of service delivery
- Consequences on the individual
 - Social isolation
 - Stress, spill-over, burnout

I have had an experience of working quite closely with an Italian social worker and I always think she's angry with me. I always feel like I've done something wrong. I've learned that it is actually her way of expressing herself. But it does sounds, quite often she sounds very angry when she isn't, I realise that. There are sometimes, you can sound more abrupt and your accent can make you sound more abrupt.

(Female, Sweden, Interview, 2011)

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Learning an exportable language could be a target in itself

I always knew that I wanted to do something with the English language. I thought well, is there a way to combine my passion for the English language with social work and that's how I ended up doing an international degree in social work, back home in Holland.

(Female, The Netherland, Interview)

Speaking the same language does not mean hassle free communications

Even though we speak the same language – [there are] different value base and references in different countries, which may make communications difficult.

(Female, New Zealand, Focus Group)

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Conclusion

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Key discussion points

- Can social work be a 'global' profession
 - Challenges in developing a cross-national SW curricula: local context, assumptions, practicalities, partnership working etc.
- Transnational mobility will continue albeit reflecting different profiles of people
- Diversification of users' groups and links to a wider diverse workforce
- Celebrating diversity- support mechanisms and inclusive practice
- Acknowledging hurdles especially with a very dynamic context of migration and social work policy reforms



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