

*The British Journal of Social Work:*  
A Case Study of Applied Scholarship

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## Executive Summary

1. This report offers a detailed case study of the *British Journal of Social Work* over the first forty years of its life. We present it as a study of the most continuous instance of applied social work scholarship stemming from the United Kingdom. The study took place largely during the period when John Pinkerton and Jim Campbell were editors. Commissioned in the early stages of that editorial tenure, the study does not extend beyond that moment.
2. Journals have played a central role in shaping and being shaped by shifts in the identity of the field. The *BJSW* offers an apt focus for such a study. It has an uninterrupted history stretching back more than forty years. It has an established role as a BASW journal, and hence in the wider social work community. For much of that period it was the only prominent social work journal published out of the UK. Part of its purpose is currently understood to be to act as ‘a journal of record’, and thus to act as a representative depository of the writing of the field, in particular in the UK.
3. A number of general questions guided the study:
  - What policy decisions have been taken over the journal’s history?
  - How has the journal’s role been seen by key stakeholders?
  - Have there been significant shifts and changes in the journal’s position?
  - What issues have been seen to be sensitive and difficult for the journal?
  - Have the membership of the Board and editorial appointments reflected – intentionally or tacitly – shifts and developments in the journal’s identity?
  - What policies have been adopted about matters such as peer review?
  - What kinds of research and social work scholarship have been published in the journal?
  - What role has BASW played in the journal’s history?
  - How has the journal’s British identity been viewed in relation to international social work and research?
  - Is it possible to assess the relative weights to be given to influences *by* and *on* the journal?
4. We adopted various research methods:
  - i. *Archive and documentary research*. E.g. minutes of and reports to Editorial Board meetings; BASW records.
  - ii. *Oral history*. Interviews took place with former and current editors, review editors and earlier and other key informants
  - iii. *Analysis of journal content* for the final full year of each of the eleven editorial regimes.
5. The report follows four broad themes:
  - i. The identity of the journal

- ii. Journal practices
- iii. Journal content
- iv. The *BJSW*'s wider world.

### *The BJSW Identity*

6. A journal's identity is slippery, for example in terms of the 'international' character of the journal, and what should characterize a 'good' social work journal. Questions of *academic standards and professional relevance* are a recurring issue, and the marrying of relevance and rigour did not always sit comfortably. A further recurring unease was that between the *professional and the political* aspects of the journal's role.
7. On how change in the journal's identity has occurred, there was a frequent commitment to gradualism. Former and present editors emphasized sharing common ground with their predecessors yet expressed desires to bring something distinctive to their tenure.
8. Citations, impact figures and downloads have become almost the stuff of routine conversation among those who write about social work. Yet when editors and others spoke of the journal's reputation they spoke more broadly and almost never gave figures. The sense of achieving establishment status was reflected in how the journal is believed by some to be the default destination for those who wish to publish in a well-regarded journal.
9. There was occasional recognition that the journal did not reach practitioners and indeed may have become *more* distant from practice over the years.
10. We use the term 'citation' in two distinct contexts. First, we consider the way authors cite material as illustrative of writing styles in the journal and its immediate predecessor journals. Second, we draw on argument and limited evidence about citations when considering journal impact measures. Data regarding *BJSW* citations remains relatively rudimentary.

### *BJSW Practices*

11. Editorial appointments, editors' visions, the work of reviewers, and the infrastructure of technology are all located fairly close to the journal's day to day practice.
12. *Editorial Regimes*: On the cover of the opening issue of the *BJSW* all named people were given an affiliation, so suggesting the importance of institutional as well as personal identity. Continuity across the decades is noticeable, including a strong insider element (for example, editors often were appointed from within the existing editorial board), the role of networks, collegial processes, key colleague or friendship associations, serendipity (in the limited sense of luck), the guarding of continuity and identity, and the fit with career intentions.
13. *Doing the job*: Early editors often spoke of the week by week burden of work that editing involved. Within a decade of the launch of Scholar One Manuscripts as the leading journal and peer review system, the scale of the *BJSW*'s operation had expanded to bring editors back to the disquiet about workload experienced by their early predecessors.

14. What counts as good academic social work writing has shifted even with the relatively short period of the journal's history.
15. Internationalization runs through the journal from beginning to the present. A very early editor also spoke of developing special issues and establishing the international credibility of the journal.
16. How did regimes vary? In three ways. First, there were variations that could best be explained in terms of the influence of particular persons. Second, there were changes that probably were due to broader shifts over time. Finally, there were differences in the general character of regimes according to how interventionist they were. Moments of major shifts probably take place only when there is a high degree of interest congruence between the editors and the publishers and when the BASW is not opposed.
17. The move from solo to joint editorships was usually seen as an unproblematic and obvious consequence of the expansion of the journal. Sometimes a joint arrangement was seen as having intrinsic rather than a purely pragmatic advantage over solo arrangements. This contrasts with practices among leading USA social work journals.
18. *Reviewers and Reviewing*: It is possible with the advent of automated linkage of reviewers to submissions that the collective character of the reviewer list is less visible than in the past, even to editors.
19. An important question is the extent to which reviewers should belong explicitly to the social work community. It seems likely that those editors who stressed the importance of promoting and developing social work as a distinct field would want reviewers to mirror that profile.
20. Statistical advice has been perhaps the most frequent recurring issue regarding reviewer competence over the years. This seems in large part due to the general absence of such expertise (or quantitative skills more generally) within the key journal networks.
21. The journal has moved between emphasising the distinct identity of social work and emphasizing the essential connections with other disciplines. Our judgement from the limited evidence is that the general direction has been towards distancing social work from other disciplines.
22. The review process is possibly the aspect of journal work that is most visible to those on the receiving end, who have submitted manuscripts. The system of anonymising reviews is not as recent as we may assume. It was only by the late 1990s that the academic review culture as it now is had come to be taken more or less as given. Double-blind reviewing and associated methods of peer assessment are not neutral technical issues, but mirror particular conceptions of scholarship. They may be right but they are not self-evidently so.
23. *Editorial judgement*: the editorial decision of 'revise and resubmit' has become almost universal when submitting articles. Do such routine practices lead to undue standardization? When practised together with recent online processes, regular 'revise' requirements probably lead to a more direct and transparent feedback. Prior to then the kind of practice was more mediated through editorial extracts and digests. However whether article review and management patterns jeopardize creativity and originality remains a live issue.

24. *Technology and the BJSW*. When speaking of technology in relation to the *BJSW* we are doing so to represent the general sense that something significant took place with the move in the middle of the first decade of the new century to online submission, review, feedback, transfer of documents to publishers, and the shift whereby all communication back and forth between various interested parties took place through electronic means.
25. Several editors made comparisons with the 'old' system, and for almost all the change was seen in a positive light. The *BJSW* was seen by someone with a transatlantic viewpoint as being to the fore. 'I understand that the Oxford journals had been doing something like that, but you know, none of the NASW journals did and *Social Service Review* didn't, you know; there weren't any US journals that were that far ahead.' Through the publisher's eyes 'quite often ... you suddenly get a lot more submissions... which can be a good thing and a bad thing.' The familiar question of information overload came to the fore, although this anxiety was expressed through the words of the *BJSW* and the publishers rather than present or former editors.
26. One important aspect is around title loyalty. It is now likely that only a minority of readers will see any journal as something they follow, and that people read by choice of article and less than by choice of journal – a shift that can be seen as quite profound.

### *Journal Content*

27. *The British Journal of Social Work*, at the time of writing, had published almost two and a half thousand articles over its history. Who writes these articles? From where do they write? How are they written? What subjects come under their scrutiny? What can we learn regarding social work research methods and practices? Have there been trends and changes over the time of journal's history?
28. *Ways of Writing*: an understanding of the character and role of the *BJSW* is sharpened by setting it in the context of social work journal writing in the UK at the moment of its emergence - *Case Conference* (1954-1970) and *Social Work*. The former was approximately replaced by the now no longer published *Social Work Today* and the latter more directly by the *BJSW*.
29. Comparisons indicates a journal culture quite different from what came to follow – predecessors were far less proceduralized, suggesting a higher level of editorial power and discretion. The pattern of article formatting seems to imply alongside editorial power a light touch on formatting requirements. But we know little or nothing about how, for example, submissions were reviewed.
30. Comparing the final volume of *Social Work* with the *BJSW* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we detect various overlapping features that by and large distinguish the journal world of 1970 from the second decade of the twenty-first century:
  - i. The consistency and slightness of citation details contrast sharply with later writing styles.
  - ii. There is a strong USA-directed gaze in a significant proportion of the early articles.
  - iii. With a single exception, none of the empirical articles in 1970 made reference to research literature or indeed any literature at all.
  - iv. There was throughout an apparent sense of a relatively small scholarly community.

- v. The treatment of others with respect comes through occasionally. The tone of general respect was carried through to how men and women were referred to in the journal, although no consistent pattern can be traced.
  - vi. Some language categories are strikingly different from what later would be acceptable or appropriate. For example, a study of 'colour' as a variable in agency practice categorized clients as 'white', 'coloured' and 'half coloured.'
  - vii. Immediacy: e.g. correspondence. Almost all the letters were published in the issue immediately following the one in which the article commented on had appeared. There is a sense of exchange and contiguity that is rarely found in later journals, even in online journals.
31. In the first issue of the *BJSW* the general absence of a strong continuity of editorial board members with *Social Work* suggests the first editor wished for a new start and to signal this. With the exception of Noel Timms who had recently moved from the London School of Economics to Bradford, all came from the south of England and the Midlands. Oxford occurred three times. It was a solely English project with no-one from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. All this suggests the absence of later sensibilities about home nation. The contrast between the practice/academic balance of the Board and the solely academic composition of the assessors appears to signal an intention to create a 'learned journal.'
  32. In the opening issue there were six main articles, five sole authored. Of seven authors five were men. Four were empirically based. On referencing there was little or no change from *Social Work*. References were in numbered sequence, and marked by the same variability of citation style and format. On the whole the numbers of sources cited seems, by later levels, relatively small – ranging from 2 to 26 and with a mean of 12.
  33. The journal shows one apparent loss from its main predecessor, in that the sense of immediacy associated with the quick turnaround and presence of correspondence no longer appears in the journal.
  34. Another very visible change of format was the inclusion by the mid-1970s of a substantial section of 'Abstracts'. The tacit message of this development seems to be that social work is a field that draws on a range of relevant disciplines.
  35. By 2005 the journal still saw itself as primarily directed towards readers in the UK although 'papers from overseas are welcome.' The one aspect that within a very few years would appear almost archaic is that submissions were mailed directly to the journal office.
  36. The journal by now included eight articles and appeared eight times each year, thus producing something like 64 articles a year compared with approximately twenty in the early volumes.
  37. Perhaps the most striking change from early issues of the journal is the increase in volumes of citation. Citations ranged from sixteen to 71, with a mean of almost 41. Book reviews by now usually included citations. The upward trend in citation levels seemed to have continued, and probably at a fast rate. At the time of writing the sources cited ranged from 28 to 144, with a mean of just over 57. This seems to reflect a process of academization in the sense of becoming more 'academic.' At the same time it may suggest a form of rhetorical statement, of the 'See me showing how much I know the



field' variety. Not everyone was happy with such perceived trends. 'Put it beside your bed and it would be there for a year' as one key informant remarked!

38. We examined four general kinds of question regarding the *content of the journal*. First, who has written for the journal? Second, how can we describe and profile the journal content? Third, how far is it possible to differentiate within this general picture? Fourth, are trends discernible over the history of the journal?
39. Gender: the articles published under the eleven regime sample years totalled 483. Of these 257 (53.9%) were first authored by men and 220 (46.1%) by women. Not knowing the gender constitution of any appropriate comparison group, one can only hold in abeyance the question of whether men – or women – are over-represented in scholarly outputs. However, there seems fairly strong evidence that the gender balance in published social work scholarship shifts over time, and that in general the proportion of women as first authors is higher now than at some previous periods. The variation seems unlikely to be linked to the gender of editors. The interpretation of these figures is complex.
40. Country of affiliation: analysed by country of affiliation of the first author of each article, the *BJSW* is, first, largely a record of UK social work scholarship. Second, the interest in developing an identity for the journal within the USA seems relatively limited, insofar as this is measured by affiliation of authors. Nonetheless, third, the *BJSW* is far from being only a UK journal. More than one in four articles over its history have been first authored by those outside the UK.
41. What subjects come under the scrutiny of social work writers? What can we learn regarding social work research methods and practices? Do these subjects and methods fluctuate or change over time? In dealing with the content of the journal we adopted a relatively elaborate scheme. We distinguished the *primary research focus* and the *primary issue or problem* that was being addressed. In addition to the high proportion of articles that focused on more general theorizing or on questions of research methodology, the most frequent focus was on social work practitioners or managers. Children, families, parents, and foster carers were most often the centre of attention when research concentrated on service user or carer groups.
42. There is some suggestion from comparable studies that quite striking differences in preoccupation exist between academic, practitioner and service user researchers.
43. Research Problem: our figures represent probably the firmest available delineation of problems and questions addressed in social work scholarship. Earlier efforts, including those attempted in connection with national research assessment exercises in the UK and elsewhere, all have flaws. Social work scholarship covers a wide range of kinds of problems and questions. However, not too far short of half the articles dealt with either 'understanding, developing, assessing or evaluating social work practices', or attempting to 'understand or explain issues related to risk.' The field covers a healthy diversity of issues and brings an equally vigorous multiplicity of standpoints and orientations.
44. The sample size and number of cells makes trend analysis difficult. It remains an open question how far the problems and questions that preoccupy social work researchers shift over time, or are distinctive to the field.

45. Research Methods: Three out of five of all articles drew directly on empirical work. Of these a little under sixty percent were wholly qualitative, and just over thirty percent wholly quantitative. Just over one in ten were mixed methods, in the restricted sense of combining both qualitative and quantitative.
46. As a proportion of published articles, quantitative methods had a period of relative ascendancy in the middle years of the journal, but had fallen off rather dramatically since the turn of the century. Qualitative studies have changed in a mirror image, being relatively dominant in the early period, falling off considerably in the middle years, before rising again in the last decade. However, the actual *number* of quantitative social work studies has risen steadily, as the size of the journal has grown. But of course the rise in absolute numbers is even more striking for qualitative studies.
47. Just over half of all research studies employed one-to-one interview methods, and they accounted for just over one third of all methods employed. *Sample surveys* were adopted in almost 23 per cent of research studies. *Observation* and *ethnographic methods* accounted for just over one in ten of the main methods and were present in just over 16 per cent of all research studies. In rather similar proportions, *organizational and administrative documents* were the main method in just over one in ten studies and present in 17 per cent of all research studies. We explain why considerable caution is needed in interpreting these figures.
48. Gender, research interests and methods: women were significantly over-represented among first authors of qualitative articles, and men similarly over-represented among authors of quantitative articles. The research focus within articles also varies by gender. But the differences are less *within* research, but more obvious between research studies and those that deal, sometimes in a more general way, with methodology and theorizing. Men were more likely than women to write these latter kinds of articles. This *may* suggest that women are more likely to write about work that involves at some stage direct focus on and perhaps contact with, people, but we would not wish to state this in too dogmatic a way.
49. The results seem to suggest that the questions and problems that authors bring to research and scholarship may have gendered features. Bearing in mind the benchmark comparison that 46 per cent of all articles were first authored by women, of the articles focussing on theorizing only three out of twenty-five (12%) were first authored by women; of those dealing with learning and teaching – pedagogic research – nineteen of the twenty-six (73%) were by women; and of those that focused on social work organizations fourteen of the twenty-one (67%) were by women.

### The *BJSW*'s World

50. *The BASW*: The journal is owned by the British Association of Social Workers. How does BASW regard the journal, and how do the other stakeholders in the journal regard BASW's interest? The publisher's view was positive. '...if I was looking at a range of society journals that we publish, and if I wanted to come up with a model of how it can be done successfully, I think *BJSW* would be pretty close to being that model.'
51. The BASW key informant was unreserved: 'I saw it as the jewel in BASW's crown really, the *British Journal of Social Work*.' Yet for some, it was a relationship of indifference and distance, and for others one in which potential conflicts of interest were present.

52. *Publishers*: Views of Oxford University Press' (OUP) role were generally positive. For most editors the OUP respect for editorial positions was valued. Even when this seemed passive, it was appreciated. Editors were conscious to a greater or lesser extent that publishers had their own interests, and that these only partly overlapped editorial interests. OUP came on the scene in the 1980s, no doubt following a growing realization that the initial contract with the previous publishers was not satisfying mutual interests.
53. *Editorial Board*: The general view about the *BJSW* board was one of a comparatively active body, although it is difficult to pin down actual changes that stemmed primarily from the board. A change over time was implied in the comment that 'Increasingly it's been more collaborative and more shared responsibility with the board ...The board is unlikely to return to being fairly much a kind of civilised [...] club.' There was a sense, as with other aspects of the *BJSW*'s history, that there were highs and lows.
54. *BJSW and International Authors*: there is considerable preoccupation in the social work community in the USA regarding the merits of a scientific status within social work. The data from this study yields the unexpected. A clear association exists between broad methodological approaches and the region of domicile of first authors. But the variance is hardly in the direction that might be anticipated by the debates in the literature. Articles by authors in Commonwealth countries are overwhelmingly qualitative in orientation. Those from the USA and also the larger number from other countries both slightly exceed the proportion of qualitative articles from UK authors. The USA articles appearing in the journal do not reflect what is known regarding the methodological orientations of USA-authored social work research more generally. For example, of the thirteen experimental or quasi-experimental studies in the sample, ten were from the UK and none from the USA. One relatively plausible explanation seems to be that articles submitted to the *BJSW* by authors in USA universities are untypical of American social work scholarship.
55. There has been a gradual increase in the proportion of articles first authored by writers from outside the UK. However, efforts to gain the journal a presence in the USA academic community seem to have had limited success.
56. *Universities and 'excellent' research*. The Research Assessment Exercise (latterly the Research Excellence Framework, or REF) developed to become a yardstick of institutional and individual research achievement in the UK, aspired to and reviled in almost equal measure. We also encountered complaints about how university culture limits and constrains social work scholarship.
57. *Research 'impact'*: there is an increasing number of systems for measuring journal impact, although the front runner at the time of writing is still Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports. The *BJSW* was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the 2013 results, with an impact score of 1.162 (the current figures at the time of this research).
58. Two former *BJSW* editors, with other journal editors, have reviewed critically the nature and significance of journal metrics. They remark, for example, that 'There can be no automatic assumption that citation is equivalent to either approval or value. Citation *per se* may, for example, indicate that a paper (a) is controversial/bad; or (b) that other authors refute its contents... Similarly there can be no automatic assumption that citation means the original paper has even been read by the person citing it! (Blyth et al, 2010: 132f).

59. Yet despite serious reservations regarding such indices of the worth of science in social work, they have a dangerously seductive quality. For example, the *BJSW* publishers value citation and impact measures, albeit not so much for what they tell us about any intrinsic worth of the publications, but as a way of climbing the rank-order table of publisher repute.

60. We draw general *conclusions* from the research:

- i. The journal *is* a journal of record, as the only significant repository of social work scholarship in the UK over a period of more than forty years.
- ii. Whether or not social work is a discipline, has discipline-like qualities, or is a field with boundaries enclosing diverse borrowings, applications and adaptations, it makes sense to understand the content of the *BJSW* as a case study of applied scholarship.
- iii. We have been struck by the strong sense of continuity – in terms, for example, of how those to whom we spoke understood the journal’s identity, the ways in which editorial successions have been managed, and in our empirical analysis of what has found place between its covers. But there is no reason to imagine that the *BJSW* now is in some finished state of arrival.
- iv. The journal demonstrates a sustained capacity to incorporate and embody changes - writing voice, technology, size of operation, and so on. These changes have typically been marked by conservative incrementalism. More rapid change is only likely to occur when there is a (perhaps fortuitous) coincidence of interests between the editors and the publishers, but these always will be influenced by the nature of the *BJSW* as a professionally owned journal.
- v. We have noticed the presence – indeed we might say *essential* presence – of tensions in the identity and development of the journal. The classic example of this lies in the question of if and how the journal is or ought to be ‘international.’
- vi. The journal is the home of *British-led* applied social work scholarship, and is likely to remain so, though this is not the same as saying that it is simply a British journal.
- vii. Social work scholarship, particularly in the UK, would have been dispersed and more fragmented without the home base that the journal has provided over its history.

## Introduction

This report offers a detailed case study of the *British Journal of Social Work* over the first forty years of its life. We present it as a study of the most continuous instance of applied social work scholarship stemming from the United Kingdom. The study took place largely during the period when John Pinkerton and Jim Campbell were editors. Commissioned in the early stages of that editorial tenure, the study does not extend beyond that moment.

The post war period through to the 1970s saw a flurry of writing on social work history. This was followed by a period in which Marxist historiography dominated, at least in the UK.<sup>1</sup> There has been a modest revival of interest in placing understanding of social work in a historical framework, albeit sometimes rather celebratory in tone. There has been a *BJSW* special issue on history edited by Caroline Skehill in 2008, and a number of subsequent articles in the journal. There is a Social Work History Network in the UK, BASW keeps an archive, and there is an interesting History of Social Work project led by Jan Steyaert in Belgium.<sup>2</sup> The NASW website in the USA carries a standing site section on social work history<sup>3</sup>, and also holds a relatively extensive archive of oral history links to interviews undertaken some forty years ago.

There has been a recent interest in a more critical approach to social work history, partly through some interest in applying developing research methods from the humanities and social sciences (e.g. archival research, visual methods), partly through applications of innovative technology, and partly through the general influence of social theorists such as Foucault and Marx. It may be so that until very recently a professional sense of heritage has been stronger in the USA than the UK. Approaching the entrance to the School of Social Service Administration in the University of Chicago, one is immediately struck by 3 metre high hangings of Edith Abbott, Sophonisba Breckinridge and others. Among those who are cited in honorific terms, Jane Addams' name occurs probably the most frequently both sides of the Atlantic (and both sides of the Channel).

A major history of sociology in America included careful analysis of the significance of social work (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 2007), and a parallel history of sociology in Britain carries a corresponding chapter (Shaw, 2014a). Notwithstanding this interest, it is as if we are 'too embarrassed to look seriously at our history, afraid of the disorder we might find, too eager to distance ourselves from the pre-professional beginnings' and are, in consequence, homeless and 'disembedded' (Lorenz, 2007: 599).

Journals have played a central role in shaping and being shaped by shifts in the identity of the field. US studies have assessed this for the *American Journal of Sociology* (Abbott, 1999, chapter 3-6) and the *Social Service Review* (Diner, 1977), but little or nothing has been done in the UK. The *BJSW* offer an apt focus for such a study for several reasons:

- It has an uninterrupted history stretching back more than forty years.

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<sup>1</sup> A search of the social work literature from the UK illustrates the prolific output from numerous writers, including Peter Leonard, the editor of *Social Work*, the immediate predecessor journal to *The British Journal of Social Work*. For example Bailey and Brake (1975) Brake and Bailey (1980); Statham (1977), and Corrigan and Leonard (1978).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.historyofsocialwork.org/eng/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/general/history.asp>

- It has an established role as a BASW journal, and hence in the wider social work community.
- For much of that period it was the only prominent social work journal published out of the UK.
- It has been published by the same publishers for much of its life, so shifts and developments are more likely to have been internally driven.
- Many of the people who have been associated with the editorial direction of the journal are still alive.
- Part of its purpose is currently understood to be to act as ‘a journal of record’, and thus to act as a representative depository of the writing of the field, in particular in the UK.

A number of general questions guided the study:

1. What policy decisions have been taken over the journal’s history?
2. How has the journal’s role been seen by key stakeholders?
3. Have there been significant shifts and changes in the journal’s position?
4. What issues have been seen to be sensitive and difficult for the journal?
5. Have the membership of the Board and editorial appointments reflected – intentionally or tacitly – shifts and developments in the journal’s identity?
6. What policies have been adopted about matters such as peer review?
7. What kinds of research and social work scholarship have been published in the journal?
8. What role has BASW played in the journal’s history?
9. How has the journal’s British identity been viewed in relation to international social work and research?
10. Is it possible to assess the relative weights to be given to influences *by* and *on* the journal?

Our general starting position in relation to the study was to make clear that we would not be interested in undertaking a celebratory history of the ‘Let Us now Praise famous [Wo]men’ variety. Rather our interest was in seeking to deliver a rigorous, methodologically serious, but even handed study of the journal’s history.

The methodological approach stemmed from seeing this as a historical case study. We understood the term ‘journal’ widely to include all stakeholders. The fieldwork, data collection and analysis were planned as part of a whole. For example, we did not seal the analysis into an entirely separate phase after completion of the data gathering. One instance of this relates to the strand of argument that relates to shifts not only in the content of social work scholarship, but also, and in some ways more dramatically, in how scholarship is represented in the written form. We undertook this fieldwork and provisional analysis while parts of the archival work and the content extraction were continuing.

A second guiding principle was that we adopted a strategy that was intended to avoid treating the journal’s history in an unduly homogenous way. To ensure this we divided lead responsibility between us, and allowed the accruing of evidence to develop without emerging ideas about, for example, the content of the journal, to shape how we developed preliminary understandings of editorial policies as they were represented in the oral histories or the archival deposits.

In tune with case study research, we adopted various appropriate methods. We comment on how we developed the analysis of each kind of data in the following paragraphs.

### *Archive and documentary research:*

- Oxford University Press (OUP) records. We were given access to minutes of and reports to Editorial Board meetings, especially from more recent years.
- BASW records. Interesting if patchy records are kept on behalf of BASW at the Modern Records Centre linked to Warwick University.

- A review of two important predecessor journals, *Case Conference* and *Social Work*.

We were not given access to grouped data about reviewer recommendations or editorial decisions regarding submissions.

The diverse data required flexible analysis. OUP records had a mix of numerical (for example, figures about download and citations) and textual narrative (e.g. Board minutes and reports to the Board). BASW records consisted of early BASW minutes and some correspondence.<sup>4</sup> We developed a preliminary thematic structure for the OUP and BASW records, before bringing it into 'conversation' with the corresponding thematic framework for the oral histories.

### *Oral history*

Given that a high proportion of the people who have been associated with the editorial direction of the journal are still alive, comprehensive interviews took place with eleven former and current editors, review editors and earlier and other key informants. Some of these were joint interviews (where co-editorship had existed), and in one case the interviews were spread over two occasions.

This part of the research was first to be completed. They were transcribed. A detailed preliminary thematic framework was developed from a selection of five transcripts, taken from different stages of the journal's life. It was at this point that an early version of the eventual four central themes began to take shape. These were:

1. The identity of the journal
2. Journal practices
3. Journal content
4. The *BJSW*'s wider world

### *Examination of journal content*

We undertook a complete analysis of journal content for the final full year of each of the eleven editorial regimes. The final year of each tenure was chosen to allow evidence of any editor-linked influences on the journal.<sup>5</sup> The distant debt for the notion of 'regime' is Ian Sinclair's ground-breaking 1970 Home Office study of *Hostels for Probationers* in which he undertook cogent analysis of hostel manager regimes (Sinclair, 1970).<sup>6</sup>

In analysing the kinds of research published in the journal we adopted an extended categorization of kinds of social work research (Shaw and Norton, 2007, 2008), which had been developed originally on a sample of *BJSW* articles. This approach was agreed with the project Advisory Board at an early stage. The categories for this are manifest in the

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<sup>4</sup> The predecessor journals were part of Ian Shaw's library.

<sup>5</sup> The editors and their tenures of office are given in Appendix 3

<sup>6</sup> Unlike Sinclair's study, it will become clear that we found relatively little evidence for regime impacts, at least on the content of the journal.

tabulation in Tables 3.5 and 3.7 in Chapter Three. A classification of research methods, also developed by one of the team, was utilized in the report (See Table 3.10).

The analysis of temporal trends was conducted in relatively pragmatic way, by dividing the history of the journal into three roughly equal time periods, for the straightforward reason that it maximized opportunities for statistical comparisons. There were no *prima facie* analytic grounds for proceeding in ways directly driven by theorising.

The four broad themes identified above were progressively elaborated in the light of the various strands of initial analysis. The report follows these, with one chapter for each theme. We have endeavoured to place these in a logically plausible sequence.

### *Project Research Ethics*

A study of this kind has sensitive aspects. Information needed to be handled appropriately to avoid disclosing commercially sensitive information. Personal reputations may be bound up with editorial policies and decisions. The British Association of Social Workers would not wish to support a study that appeared to debunk or routinely disparage the contribution made by the journal.

The handling of research ethics was agreed with the original steering group. Part of the data already is accessible to the public domain. The two areas of ethical approval related to, first, the terms under which Oxford University Press (OUP) agreed access to part of the electronic database for the journal, and for the minutes and papers for Editorial Board meetings; second, the probability that the identities of former editors, and other key informants from BASW and OUP, could be inferred or discovered from the interview transcripts.

On the first question, the OUP representative undertook to agree sufficient terms of agreement. Certain data, such as the grouped, anonymous outcome of submission reviews, was not made available to the research team. On the second question, it was agreed that the project team would approach all persons to be interviewed, setting out the difficulty and asking their agreement based on informed consent as to the possible risk of disclosure. Appendix 4 is the consent form signed off by those to whom we spoke.

We needed to make decisions regarding the direct or inferable disclosure of names. We handled this, in agreement with the advisory committee, as follows. It was agreed by both interviewed people and the advisory committee that it would be impossible to hide identities in a number of cases, and those interviewed were happy that this was so, but that we would do what we could to hide unnecessary explicit or implied disclosure agreed with the original steering group, none of whom is still around. None of the names of the persons quoted direct is given, unless they chose to make their identities explicit. Where the data would make no sense if identities were hidden, or where the steering group specifically asked the authors to refer to particular people by name, *and* where such disclosure was not given in confidence, *or* would seem to risk damaging the names of those so cited, then names are given.



# Chapter One

## The *BJSW* Identity

*'To have a journal is a kind of badge of a profession'*<sup>7</sup>

In this opening chapter we explore how the journal's identity is elusive and difficult to pin down. Yet it is possible to say something about the *BJSW*'s origins and initial aims, as they were seen by the first editor and the British Association of Social Workers. We note how subsequent editors gained not only a role but a legacy. We outline the nature and some of the tensions in this legacy. We go on to plot elements of change and continuity over the first forty years of the journal. A central part of the journal's identity is its perceived reputation and the level of esteem in which it may be held. We explore these, both as understood by key informants and also as manifested in download and citation figures.

What constitutes a journal's identity is slippery. One example will stand for the general problem. Time and again we encountered claims about the 'international' character of the journal. The idea and the word came up in editorial minutes and reports, as part of former editors' memories, and by inference from the analysis of the contents of the journal over forty years. But just what is meant by being international? What counts as evidence one way of the other? It might – and among the various sources did – mean one or more of the following:

- Articles that address issues and develop knowledge that have meaning and application in a relatively large proportion of countries where social work is recognized.
- Submissions to the journal, and articles published that are by authors from a wide range of countries.
- Having people associated with the journal – as Board advisers, reviewers, and so on – from a growing number of different countries.
- Journal sales that are successfully marketed to a growing number of different countries.
- Journal articles downloaded by readers in a growing number of different countries.
- Acceptance of the journal, as variously measured, in the USA.

In addition, at a more general level being international is often seen as one of the more important indicators of esteem and status. One frequently referenced status indicator is the extent to which the journal is cited, as measured by the growing diversity of impact measures. We pick up these questions later in the report, but the diverse indicators through which being 'international' might be understood illustrate how the identity of a journal may have an inescapable ambiguity. Something similar can be seen when we consider what should characterize a 'good' social work journal. Should it be a 'journal of record' – a repository and subsequently archive that represents the broad field of social work? If so,

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<sup>7</sup> Former editor

does it make sense for the journal to have a characteristic ‘voice’ or should it represent many voices? Should it serve primarily academic standards or professional ones? Should the journal content have a very *direct* relevance to social work or a broader indirect relevance? This in turn raises the question of how far a journal of this kind can represent social work across different countries. As one person said to us, is it a British journal of social work or a journal of British social work? Box 1.1 (p. 27) gives some of the ways nine past or present editors and other key informants spoke of the identity of the journal.

### **The origins of *The British Journal of Social Work***

We come back to the implications of seeing the journal in one or more of these different ways, but before doing so the origins of the journal should be taken into account. The two premier British social work journals in the 1960s were *Case Conference* (1954-1970) and *Social Work*.<sup>8</sup> They both disappeared with the establishment of the British Association of Social Workers, the former being roughly replaced by the now no longer published *Social Work Today* and the latter more directly by *The BJSW*, first published in 1971. It is also to the point to recognize that the turn of that decade was a moment of profound shifts in the organizational and intellectual climate for social work in the UK and further afield. Organizationally and professionally, the Seeborn Report of 1968 had yielded a Social Services Bill that would introduce Social Services Departments in England and Wales. The British Association of Social Workers was emerging almost simultaneously. Social work programmes were increasing in number. Within those programmes a state of flux had been created by neo-Marxist messages, the rise of community work through the establishment of Community Development Projects, and the impact of labelling theory and Laing’s radical psychiatry. These were all unsettling the short-lived predominance of the psycho-dynamic practice framework in university programmes. The influence of all of these, with the exception of the establishment of BASW, were clearly evident in the pages of *Social Work*. Peter Leonard’s final editorial was titled ‘What is Social Work?’, in which he makes what he admits are ‘wide-ranging claims for social work’<sup>9</sup> and criticises those who, from a case and groupwork standpoint, resist such claims as ‘disruptive to professional identity’ or those who see it as ‘a predictable outcome of professional empire building’ (p. 2). He also pointed to the perceived breakdown of the assumption in social work of a ‘common set of values’ drawn from ‘Western democratic principles.’ In his final editorial Leonard welcomed the establishment of the *British Journal of Social Work*, though he was soon to leave British shores for Australia and shift his focus of interest to human rights. An early editor recalled,

‘There was a lot of writing about Marxism and Marxist feminism and things like that in the 1970s, and this was very much incorporated in social work education at the time, so that a lot of people who were writing for the journal were writing from a pretty left-wing point of view and from a point of view of ... what was loosely termed radical social work, and it set up quite a tension between some of the writing in the journal and what social workers were actually having to do in their day to day practice.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Three for a fuller description and comparison of these journals with the *BJSW*.

<sup>9</sup> Rather than reference the content of *Social Work* in a style of today we have scanned the contents pages and included them as Appendix 1.

<sup>10</sup> We would have used pseudonyms to give a sense of individual identities, but we think the cumulative consequences of doing so would have enabled relatively easy identification of speakers. The report has a slightly anonymous feel to it as a result.

But the *BJSW* origins go back at least a further twenty years. In the 1950s social work's disciplinary associations were oriented fairly tightly to social policy (or social administration as it was then called) and to psychotherapy of the psychodynamic variety. David Donnison, later to be prominent in various academic and public roles, was an assistant editor of *Case Conference* in the 1950s and was looking after securing reviews. Richard Titmuss wrote a strong piece on 'The Administrative Setting for Social Work' for the first issue. It is interesting to observe the London and specifically London School of Economics (LSE) influence, and also the journal's tone. Clare Winnicott – a doyen of the social work and psychotherapy world, and also at the LSE in the early 1950s – recalled a conversation with the founder and only editor of *Case Conference*, Kay McDougall, the year before it commenced, remembering that 'the journal was not to be a learned journal for the few, but to be essentially for practitioners.' McDougall herself reaffirmed 'I had never planned to produce a learned journal' (McDougall, 1970: 514).

Olive Stevenson, the first editor of the *BJSW*, immediately set a contrast. 'The Journal must speak for itself and justify—or fail to justify—its claim to be "a learned journal", comparable to those in other professions and academic disciplines.'<sup>11</sup> So Olive Stevenson opened the editorial of the first issue of the journal, both declining to, yet also expressing a position while doing so. The journal initiative and editorial appointment came, we are told, from a 'temporary committee of BASW' – 'a new association struggling to achieve an identity for social work.' The Editor had been given 'complete freedom' apart from 'certain financial matters'. The Editor had apparently appointed the Board. The seven members, including herself, comprised three academics, three from practice and the General Secretary of BASW. This number tallies exactly with *Social Work*, although only one had carried over from that journal. Five of the seven were women. Ten assessors were also listed, including just one from the *Social Work* editorial board, and of whom all were British academics with three women. The inside back cover had 'Notes for Contributors' dealing with basic issues about mailing address, typing format, referencing, numbers of copies, (minimum) footnotes and receipt of offprints. There is a closing editorial note that 'the whole question of providing abstracts of other journals in the *British Journal of Social Work* is under active consideration.'

Stevenson expresses the ever-difficult balance of the academy and practice:

I make no apology for the fact that the assessors are all academics. For this is the expertise which is needed for this purpose and the representatives of the field on the Editorial Board will ensure that our intellectual aspirations do not run away with us—or run away from the field... It will not always be easy to find a proper balance between scholarship and readability. For we are conscious of the fact that unlike some 'learned journals' the readership is mainly composed of busy practitioners.

She talks of *BJSW* aspiring to three kinds of article:

1. Research. 'If work claims to be research then it must be judged by rigorous standards.'

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<sup>11</sup> The quotations from Stevenson in these paragraphs are all from her Editorial in the *British Journal of Social Work* 1 (1): 1-3.

2. 'Good description.' She adds that 'this is probably the way the practitioner can contribute most to the journal.' 'If...there is also some tentative conceptualization which advances social work theory then so much the better.'
3. 'Reflection and argument.' 'There is need to spend time looking at the trees...with scientific precision but there is also need to look at the wood.'

### **Identity and identities**

Later editorial participants in general had a sense of being heirs to a history, the more so as years pass. Even if what exactly that history consisted of seemed unclear, its burden of history remained. In one of the interviews with joint editors, when asked about the original aims behind the founding of the journal, their exchange was 'I don't really have an idea. Do you have [name]? No, I have no idea whether there was a kind of a founding declaration.' Yet the same editors emphasized that the *BJSW* has 'a legacy and history' and 'We do feel we have a responsibility to that history...We were a bit nervous ... about our role because of this very important history.' A commitment to talking the journal forward was never at the expense of a sense of continuity with something to which they were heirs.

'in relation to the other point I made earlier about wanting to retain and celebrate the past strengths while also adding newer ones, then yes I think it sums that up, because it still, you know, a wholly trustworthy, very reputable research based article, the sort of thing you would always want *BJSW* to publish, whilst just being that touch irreverent and streetwise.'

Asked if the journal had a characteristic voice one former editor replied 'traditional, but traditional doesn't mean conservative... I thought it was quite an exciting journal, still do actually, that's what I mean about being traditional and not conventional, it's authoritative and respected, but it's actually also quite brave.' In this regard, Board reports refer to efforts made in recent Editorial regimes to 'unsettle' the familiar tone of the journal and ensure new and under-reported aspects of social work were given due attention:

'In recent years the Editorial Board has been commissioning two critical commentaries a year in order to cover topics which feature less frequently in the journal and when selecting from amongst expressions of interest to guest edit our annual special issue, the Board is also keen either to encourage in-depth coverage of new social work developments or to provide more space for a consideration of key topics which impact on social work generally.' (Report to Editorial Board, 2010)

A dominant and fairly unified narrative has become established about the origins of the journal. There was a sense of breaking new ground – 'it was the original, it was first', as one early editor expressed it.

'I heard Kenneth Brill talking in 1969 at a lecture in Manchester University, when he was announcing the plans to launch the British Association of Social Workers. Among those plans he floated the idea that it might make possible an academic journal, which at that stage social work didn't really have...'

A much later editor recalled 'I think it was an effort to, to state clearly that it was possible and desirable to have a high quality academic journal in the field of social work, that social work counted as an academic discipline, and that it had its own distinctive characteristics that meant that it wasn't, couldn't simply be subsumed into sociology or social policy or

criminology or whatever.’ Falling in the years between someone else elaborated the position.

‘One was the business about, you know, ... trying to develop the knowledge base of social work, but the other very important purpose was as a unifying publication. It was a time, as you know, when all the different groups of social workers, child care, psychiatric social workers, almoners etcetera, were coming together in one profession, and BASW was formed... the journal started in ’71. So it was a publication which would really bring together these different groups, would articulate all their different concerns and underpin the drive towards greater professionalization. I think that was a very important, and I think quite explicit purpose for the journal.’

Here and at other points we are left to judge the relative weight given to broader ‘social forces’ or influential individuals, though almost never are there any hints of less than worthy motives. Within these accounts are a number of important tensions. First, the *BJSW* is, to use the terminology of the publishers, a ‘Society Journal.’ This makes questions of *academic standards and professional relevance* a recurring issue. The distinction was perhaps most strongly voiced by one former editor:

‘explicitly it is to provide an outlet for academic writing relevant to the social work world, but implicitly, especially at the outset, it was to help to establish social work as a respectable academic discipline... Probably the legitimate answer is the first, but (the) second is actually what I think was more important when I was editor... it aims to be academic... it was still at that stage a step in the process of social work becoming a respectable profession’

Someone else remarked ‘I think that actually it was important to have a journal that was looked on and respected, not just in a sense political, but also within the academic world, because social work had always had a slightly uneasy place in the academic world, often looked down on by some of the other more scientific and established disciplines.’

While ‘having a recognized professional journal is part of that ... notion of what a, in quotes, “proper profession” looks like’, the marrying of relevance and rigour did not always sit comfortably. ‘I was always on the lookout when I was editor for research based papers connecting with social work practice’, one editor remarked, but went on to regret ‘that’s one thing that social work has always been deficient in is research into actually doing social work.’ The core question is not so much whether one or the other is important but more an issue of the nature of the connection between the two. The Editors of a recent editorial regime explicitly referred to this connection when reflecting on their contribution in their outgoing report to the Board:

‘A priority has been to extend the range of topics covered in the journal and to maintain the academic rigour and quality of individual contributions. At the same time, we have been more demanding of authors to show what the implications of their research or theorising are for social work practice, a central function in our view of a journal such as the *BJSW*, given its origins and terms of reference. The *BJSW* is about contributions which are both scholarly and relevant

Does academic rigour result in professional relevance, or ought direct relevance be the starting point? Historical developments also bear on this question. Technological changes such as ‘Advance Access’ and the promotion of free articles and special editions online were

noted in contemporaneous Board reports as being important in ensuring the BJSW was topical and able to 'lead' on social work issues of the day<sup>12</sup>. We also mention the rise of external research assessment processes when looking at the BJSW as part of a wider world, and one consequence of this may be that 'almost all the journals over a fifty year period or so, they've generally become less professionally oriented and much more scientific in terms of their scholarship.' The tension was helpfully expressed by one editor in the context of the change of journal publishers from Academic Press to Oxford University Press in the late 1980s:

'Academic Press, who were very concerned with ... the whole scholarly quality; they wanted a journal ... that was acceptable in international terms, that fitted in with their academic publishing business, and on the other hand BASW I think, while it supported the journal certainly, was really more interested in things that had greater relevance for practitioners. So I think there's always been that tension between the two, between relevance and to the sort of day to day practice activities of social work and the more academic side of it.'

We will suggest when discussing journal practices that this same tension may continue.

A second endemic unease is that between the *professional and the political*. While the academic/professional tension is more or less constant through the journal's history, the political/professional pressures fluctuate. We have suggested that they clearly were evident at the time the journal was founded. Related to this is the question of the 'voice' with which the journal has spoken or should speak. This is a question with several facets. For example, almost all to whom we spoke represented the creation of the journal as part of strategy to find a voice for social work. One former editor expressed it in the following value-driven way:

'it's a voice you can respect and trust, but obviously isn't the voice of one person... because everybody signed up to, well it is a set of principles, isn't it, a set of assumptions about how knowledge is collected and measured in the broadest sense, and valued and communicated, and then applied, so in that sense it's one voice.'

The journal was sometimes described as being 'generic.' BJSW 'has a number of different qualities, and in terms of its breadth of coverage, its generic qualities, it's a journal that represents a lot of what's going on, in terms of academic interest in the UK, with an international outreach.' 'Clearly it is a generic journal... we always prided ourselves on saying we deal with all aspects of social work.' Participants who allied themselves more explicitly with the professional purposes of the journal tended to interpret its genericism partly in terms of being pluralistic. Three participants speaking about the opening years of the present century independently remarked:

'It tries to represent many voices... in terms of theory, practice, key issues, and indeed more recently I think in terms of the service users' voice.'

'I think probably in a number of ways the journal became somewhat more inclusive and open to additional voices during that time that I was there, I served for seven years.'

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<sup>12</sup> For example, giving free access to papers in 2009 in relation to two nationally high profile issues - the Peter Connolly case and in 2011 on the Munro Review.

‘One of the things that interests us both I think was the idea of the journal being about something. It wasn’t just a kind of catch all for anything that an academic or anybody else wanted to write about, that it should have some kind of identity... We wanted to keep it very pluralistic.’

Yet this pluralism was harnessed to a belief – mixed with aspiration – that the journal expressed and enhanced social work’s more confident, distinctive identity. ‘I’m still saying “we”,... I think we do feel we’re a “we”, don’t we; we’re a community.’ The sense of community identity was evident in a reflection on editorial ‘vision’ made to the Board:

‘We are positioning the Journal as a broadly based, engaged but not partisan vehicle in which different perspectives and paradigms can co-exist. At the same time we are trying to show something of our own views on how we think social work should be responding to the particularly sharp social, economic and political challenges that are affecting the UK and the wider world’.

Several participants observed with approval the demise of the earlier subject abstracts that ran in the journal over a period. Of that period, one person said ‘You have got reviews of psychology, reviews of sociology, and that for me I think represented, a professional and academic social work that was maybe less confident about its own academic coherence.’ One editor expressed it as follows:

‘I have to say for me the first real sense of, the journal had a purpose beyond well that’s where you went to read the critical commentaries, to read the articles that were relevant to a particular piece of work you were doing... was Audrey Mullender’s, which was a very explicit statement as I recall, of the need to, for the profession to have the confidence to express itself and indeed to defend itself, to openly express its value base.’<sup>13</sup>

## Continuity and change

One interesting perspective from a partly external position yielded a series of comparisons with social work journals in the USA. Box 1.2 (p. 28) strings these in series.

Where does this leave us regarding the extent to which the *BJSW* shifts in identity? Most probably would agree that ‘journals are kind of super tankers; they take a long time to turn around.’ Hence ‘successive editors and co-editors have just gone, you know, developed from the work of others, so I don’t think it’s fundamentally changed.’ ‘I don’t think it has hugely changed.’

Yet there was a recurring commitment to gradualism. ‘There’s a danger I think with the defence of the tradition ... that that becomes a kind of defence of a fairly cosy relationship. We kind of motor along and ... people do what they do.’ One of the most striking realizations was the stance of those editors who did wish to change the journal. The journal was a ‘bit of an elder statesperson really I suppose! ... The elder statesperson was rather somnolent when I took over! Had to wake up and engage with the world!’ But notwithstanding, this was ‘Without losing that, you know, that respect and that dignity.’ ‘I

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<sup>13</sup> We occasionally quote names. This usually is where they are quoted interestingly – and generally appreciatively – by someone else, or when the quotation otherwise would be meaningless. We avoid wherever possible identifying the speakers.

think I felt it was ... worthy but dull...worthy but dull, just wasn't reflecting what we were spending hours debating in social work programme teams at that time, wasn't there at all really.'

This does not yield a clear-cut agreement on the journal's identity. Not only are there endemic tensions that are part and parcel of social work itself, but participants rarely seemed too troubled by their lack of knowledge of the 'facts' about the journal. Part of the development of disciplinary fields is through rhetorical narratives that come to provide reference points for community identity. The role and location of the *BJSW* within British social work is not the same as it was in 1971. 'I think it's certainly got a very academic voice that has been there from the start' someone plausibly observed, while immediately adding 'I think its role probably is a little bit different now in some ways. It's got more competition.' Someone related such changes to the status of the journal.

'I think it's difficult to claim that any one journal can be a journal of record. Now if my knowledge and expertise were in a different field I might be thinking differently about this, but... I wouldn't automatically think that the *BJSW* was the first place to go... I think it's quite difficult to be sure that you could confidently and justly claim to be a journal of record. I think it's become more difficult and I think during its first 25 years maybe that might have been the case. I think it's much more problematically the case now.'

We elicit details of such changes throughout this report. Yet the journal continues to hold the centre ground. Asked of what British social work scholarship consists, there are two reference points: the results of the quinquennial national exercises to assess the quality of research in British universities – and the contents and profile of the *British Journal of Social Work*. Whatever one makes of the 'international' character of the journal, it is only in the UK that the journal holds a position central to the identity of the field.

### **Repute and Esteem**

Citations, impact figures, downloads and so forth have become almost the stuff of routine conversation among those who write social work. Yet when editors and others spoke of the journal's reputation they spoke more broadly and almost never gave figures. Perhaps understandably, as those who had at one time or another invested much in the journal, the predominant appraisal was positive. The following quotations each from a different person, give the general drift of such remarks.

'It's number one of course!'

'It's the premier British social work journal, which has been in existence for many decades,... and has top quality papers in it, and over the, particularly more recent years, has developed an international reputation as well, as a social work journal'

'It still is held in very high esteem, it seems to have managed to retain that.'

'The journal has grown in size, and probably esteem over the years, not necessarily to do with us but our predecessors, and I think has grown with confidence...we still feel we would be one of the premier journals that libraries and academics would want to try and renew'

Even to someone now rather detached and on occasion critical it is 'still the premier journal in the UK and highly regarded elsewhere.'



This positive assessment sometimes was given in comparison with other journals. We saw this in the series of comparisons from a USA perspective. UK participants made remarks such as 'I think it's the single most respected journal for, in the UK, there are lots of other publications which are more polemical or discursive, but you've got to turn to *BJSW* for research', and 'I think it was more scholarly than any of the British journals.' Looking back over the transition from previous journals one editor said:

'I thought it achieved something actually, for social work in Britain that previous efforts ... hadn't achieved, so before... I think the *BJSW* quite quickly achieved a level that was well beyond what *Case Conference* had been able to achieve in terms of the depth and quality and range of the material it published.'

This sense of achieving establishment status was reflected in how the journal is seen by some as the default destination for those who wish to publish in a well-regarded journal. For example, 'academics I would simply assume take care that they make sure that any relevant material in the *BJSW* is incorporated into their work.' One editor fell into alignment with that position, looking back to a previous career stage and saying 'it was the journal that I aspired I guess to get published in. I think that there was...then, I hope still now, amongst academic peers, that it was recognised in terms of esteem.'

In consequence, this was sometimes seen as bringing reflected glory:

'I think one other motivation, becoming joint editors of such a prestigious journal would be seen in a very positive light at the university, in terms of enhancing the esteem of social work as a department here at the university.'

Negative remarks, even when made, often were selective either in terms of one part of the journal's identity or in referring to a period in the journal's history. We have heard already the lament that at one time the journal was 'worthy but dull.' There also was occasional recognition that the journal did not reach practitioners and indeed may have become *more* distant over the years. 'I think it could be quite a deterrent kind of object to them, in that, I mean the issues have tended to get longer and I think for many practitioners it would simply seem a bit overwhelming, really, to try to have to come to terms with material in there.'

The only general criticism came from someone who realized they were probably out on a limb:

'It's not quite a journal of record and the way that *The London Times* regards itself as a newspaper of record. The *BJSW* doesn't record the passage of events, but it does record the evolution of thought in social work, to a lesser extent possibly practice. The sad thing... is that progress of research in social work is negligible, and I think probably the *BJSW* reflects that. It's caught up in the sort of circular process of research, not really making any great headway over the 40 years of its time. Others would disagree with that, but ... I think it quite strongly.'

The question of being a journal of record raises core questions about journal identities. Abbott, in his historical analysis of the *American Journal of Sociology*, aptly says 'In one sense...the basic issue...is the relative balance of the archival and controversial functions of journals' (Abbott, 1999: 189).

**Figures, figures...**

An occasional sense of aspiration and hope can be heard in these approving estimations of the journal. How does evidence regarding citations and downloads compare with such estimations? We believe that an important distinction is in order regarding the meaning of downloads and citations. Downloads tell us which articles are most scanned and in some cases read by readers. Citations tell us which articles are most drawn on by other authors. Both figures began to be available only when journals became digital. In the case of the *BJSW* we have figures from 2005-06, although interpretation is not straightforward and calls for more sustained analysis.<sup>14</sup> For example, in addition to trend analysis, it would be of interest to have careful analysis of the kinds of articles that are most likely to be downloaded and cited, and to assess whether most read (downloaded) articles are similar or different in kind to most cited articles. We consider citation figures when examining the *BJSW*'s impact in the final chapter of the report.

Initial conclusions from documentary data made available to us suggests a number of general conclusions. First, the volume of *BJSW* downloads seems to be increasing fairly substantially. Second, the number of downloads per article also seems to be increasing. The one figure we can be fairly confident for 2005-06 is that the most downloaded article had a combined total of 2497 downloads.<sup>15</sup> For 2010-11 – the year for which we had the latest figures – the most downloaded article had a total of 5102. On the general increase overall, the only safe inference about download totals for 2005-06 is that the top ten articles were downloaded substantially less than 20000 times, whereas for 2010-11 the total was 31366. Notwithstanding the apparently informative supply of statistics, there is still little we can say by way of interpretation. For instance, on what *kinds* of articles get downloaded, and whether they are typical of the contents as a whole, by 2010 the journal had introduced a 'free editors' choice' system and seven of the top ten articles were 'free choice' ones. This obviously loads the dice in regard to which kind of articles are likely to be downloaded. The three 'top ten' articles that were not editors' choices were on reflexivity, risk in child protection, and emotional intelligence.

We have a final reservation about the value and risks of such statistics. It is *possible* that the most frequently downloaded articles are review papers rather than original research.<sup>16</sup> Journal publishers may decide that it would be a good thing if editors sought the kind of article that is more likely to be downloaded. Whether that would be in the interests of the longer-term development of the field is a matter of judgement.

We have explored the journal's identity as seen in its origins, the editorial legacy, the elements of change and continuity, and the repute and esteem of the journal. In the following chapter we examine how this complex identity is sustained and embodied in journal practices.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, the download figures for 2005-06 give separate lists for the top ten HTML and top ten PDF formats which does not enable a composite top list.

<sup>15</sup> Once again there is a caveat. The download figures for later years separate out downloads of the abstract from those of the whole article. We have not included abstract figures for later years. We do not know whether the 2005-06 figures also include abstract downloads, and so those figures *may* be inflated.

<sup>16</sup> This is an informed guess based on information from different sources within and without this project.

## Box 1.1

### What is the *BJSW*?

'Obviously its identity is to some extent tied up with its attachment to BASW and to it being a British journal... and that was something that came up in discussions on the editorial board from time to time. So anyway, it has a certain Britishness. I guess if you looked at the, at the authors publishing in the journal, a large percentage of them would be from Britain'

'Clearly it is a generic journal... we always prided ourselves on saying we deal with all aspects of social work, whether it's social work practice, management theory, education research. And despite... its title, social work that takes place anywhere in the world.'

'...an essential publication to actually support their practice, and you know, with peer reviewed research, I think that would be why I would say they need it, because that's where they get their evidence base.'

'I would say that it should be a journal of record for a profession, and a place for academics in particular to consider what social work is about and where it's going, and for them to report social work research, or relevant research from other fields... Then I thought it was unique, certainly in Britain, not unique in the world.'

'Its primary purpose is to help to build up the scientific and intellectual foundations of social work, as a profession and as a practice, so it's really basically to do with the knowledge base on which social work draws... to my mind it has two, two sort of functions really, one is the very practical utilitarian function of developing social work practice in a range of fields, but it's also very much to do with building up the credibility really of social work, and its respectability I suppose you might say.'

'By preserving the quality and the scientific standards it is a repository of the research to which at a later date and in different ways frontline workers do have access...(W)hat the *BJSW* does is provide the sort of, both the repository, the archive and the test bed for good social scientific knowledge about practice of social work. So that's what I think it's for, it's to fulfil that scientific testing and archiving role'

'I think the core elements of that knowledge should transcend countries, should be global, for that profession ..., and I saw the *British Journal of Social Work* as being a key driver for the profession to achieve that ... but I'm not sure about the word academic discipline so much as a professional activity which is underpinned by rigorous research and literature, and a commitment I guess to people ... keeping up to date with that'

'...the oversight of research findings in the social work, in the discipline of social work, and of course therefore useful for the social work profession, but as channelled through academic thinking about it. I think it's still the foremost place to keep up to date with research findings about social work.'

'If you want to know what's happening within British social work or what's been written about British social work in any field really, a good place to start is the *BJSW*, because it tends to have the influential writers writing there...We hope the editors throughout the period have in some ways contributed to this idea of a repository that captured the aggregate views or the exceptional views of the profession as it has developed over those years... That basic function of representing the face of social work as a profession, that hasn't actually changed.'

‘I think one piece of that voice is certainly anti-oppressive practice which, as you know, is not a phrase we hear a lot in the United States. We tend to talk about social justice or empowerment or, you know, working for the disenfranchised or something, but all of that seems to be captured in the nice little British term anti-oppressive practice.’

‘The identity I think is certainly connected to public sector work, because in the UK that’s where social workers work and most of the countries that read the *BJSW* that’s probably true as well.’

‘It is a more scholarly journal than *Social Work*, which is our journal for the National Association of Social Workers... I think it has both a broader range and a more international focus than *Social Service Review*. It’s not simply limited to empirical social work studies like the *Journal of Social Work Practice* or *Social Work Research*, so I would call it more inclusive, more international, more multi method, and yet quite scholarly and rigorous in comparison to most US journals.’

‘I think the *BJSW* currently pays more attention to theory than most other journals that I am aware of, and I think that that is a strength.’

‘I think more than the NASW journals ... *BJSW* also has a social change mandate.’

‘One of the things I’ve noticed about social policy in the UK, is that it often is profoundly influenced by an incident, you know, something like a child who dies in foster care, or a scandal, you know, connected to some statutory agency or some private agency, (which) will lead to things like white papers, parliamentary hearings and investigations, and policy change often flows from those incidents, which is something I don’t see happening in the US.’

‘The *BJSW* wants to have its own identity too, as a British journal, they want British spelling, certain kind of references, I can see how that contributes to its identity, but it would be easier for submitters if there were a little more flexibility.’

‘There are readers and constituents of the journals who perceive it as being quite male, quite white, quite middle aged, quite middle class, who were hoping for more diversity in the editorial membership.’

**Box 1.2      The *BJSW* as seen through appreciative USA eyes**

## Chapter Two

### *BJSW* Practices

Having depicted both the identity of the journal, how are such visions of identity sustained? What practices characterize the journal? Broadly speaking, there are those practices that are located primarily within the immediate creation of volume upon volume, and there are practices through which the journal interacts with those worlds that touch on its boundaries. Editorial appointments, editors' visions, the work of reviewers, and the infrastructure of technology are all located fairly close to the journal's day to day practice. Moving outward, the Board, the publishers, the British Association of Social Workers, developments in university libraries, social work programmes and governmental research assessment programmes all form part of the worlds within which the journal is placed.

We will move generally from the centre outwards. In the first part of this chapter we consider the role of editors. We then move on to consider what is known regarding review practices, before bringing together a recurring theme – that of the significance of the move to online submission, reviewing, and working relations with the publisher. We return to the *BJSW* in the wider world in Chapter Four.

#### Editorial Regimes

##### **'It's the way the world works' - becoming a *BJSW* editor**

We noticed earlier some of the contrasts between the *BJSW* and its predecessor, *Social Work*. On the cover of the opening issue of the *BJSW* all named people are given an affiliation, so suggesting the importance of institutional as well as personal identity. It is striking that, with the exception of Noel Timms who had recently moved from the LSE to Bradford, all come from the south of England and the Midlands. Oxford occurs three times. It is more specifically a solely English project with no-one from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. All this suggests the absence of later sensibilities about home nation. We may be wrong, but to our best understanding all Board and Assessor members were white British. The contrast between the practice/academic mix of the Board and the solely academic composition of the assessors appears to signal an intention to create a 'learned journal'.

There also is a hint in the archives about other factors at work in the appointment of editors. The minutes of a meeting of the BASW Publications Committee in August 1973 records that the advert for the second editor had included the requirement that Olive Stevenson's successor 'should be a professionally qualified social worker of standing and experience.' A brief note records that just two expressions of interest had been received and that it had been agreed that Phyllida Parsloe should be appointed with the added note that she was 'the senior of the two candidates.'

The quotations in Box 2.1 (p. 44) are placed in time order of when the speaker was appointed, ranging from the 1970s through to the present decade. Here, as often through this report, it is in effect not possible to hide identities, and we have continued the policy of retaining the quoted names of those who are spoken of rather than the speaker, but only doing so when there is no apparent intention to make personal criticisms. Kenneth Brill, in

the first quotation, was the first General Secretary of the British Association of Social Workers.<sup>17</sup>

The common ground across the decades is noticeable. The strong insider element, the role of networks, collegial processes, key colleague or friendship associations, serendipity (in the limited sense of luck), the guarding of continuity and identity, and the fit with career intentions. The absences are as marked as what is present. There is little sense of any open competition, or going for the best editor/s regardless of any previous direct or indirect association. This valuing of known insiders is well captured by the following account:

‘I had a sort of quite lengthy history with the *British Journal of Social Work*, ... originally as I was the book review editor for the journal at some point in time and I can’t honestly remember when it was now, ... and then when my term of office there expired, again one part of the contract arrangements is that the retiring book review editor can remain on, again by agreement with the editors and ... British Association of Social Workers - who have the final say on all appointments to the editorial board - could then remain on as a, quotes, “ordinary”, end quotes, board member.’

Two observations are necessary. First, it is not easy to be precise regarding the strength of this aspect at different times over the history of the journal. Evidence we consider later suggests that it certainly seems to have been quite marked in the opening decade on this century. Second, this is not to demean the process, or to suggest that the editors were anything other than the right choice. Nor is it to assume that editors and editorial regimes are indistinguishable. At least two of the former editors plausibly presented themselves in key respects as outliers, slightly maverick. But the overall consistency perhaps connects with the identity of the journal as a ‘Society journal’ where a strong representative identity is as stake.

### **Doing the job**

Early editors often spoke of the week by week burden of work that editing involved.

‘...all done rather on a shoestring really, I mean my wife actually did ... a lot of the administration. I couldn’t manage that, you know, I wasn’t given time within the university to do it, so that was actually quite difficult ... and everything was so slow because we didn’t have e-mail or computers, so everything was done by mail. It took an awful long time to send things out, get them back, send them to the publishers, get proofs back, send the proofs back, so I think compared with now it was actually quite a hard slog to actually just keep it rolling and keep to deadlines.’

‘it involved a huge amount of work and while in one sense I think it was also helpful to one’s career aspirations, in fact it meant that you had very little time for writing and research of your own, so I think it did involve quite a bit of sacrifice as well actually. But I think I would have been very reluctant to put myself forward had I not been asked to do so ...Six issues a year was a real treadmill. I mean it took an enormous amount of time. I reckon I spent two or three days a week on it.’

Without doubt the advent of online systems for submission, reviewing, proof correction and so on have alleviated this pressure. However, our general impression is that the classic operation of Parkinson’s Law is at work here such that editorial work expands so as to fill

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<sup>17</sup> See [http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw\\_34604-3.pdf](http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_34604-3.pdf) for an account of the origins of BASW.

the time available for its completion. Within a decade of the launch of Scholar One Manuscripts as the leading journal and peer review system, the scale of the *BJSW*'s operation had expanded to bring editors back to the disquiet experienced by their early predecessors. Hence in one joint interview two post-Scholar One editors echoed each other's remark:

*(Joint editor 1)* that's been another surprise for us, ... just the treadmill aspect of production of the journal. Well certainly for me, I didn't expect ... that to preoccupy us quite so much, ... ensuring the throughput of material, trying to ensure the quality of material, trying to control the amount of material...

*(Joint editor 2)* It would be nice to have more time to engage with some of those authors and shape up a bit of the material in a way that was authentic to their voice, but also took into account our sort of concerns as editors, and I agree X, we don't get an awful lot of space to do that.'

Engaging with the authors raises an important characteristic of editorial work in the *BJSW*, and one that probably follows from being a Society journal. The quotations below are from four very contrasting editors and from four different decades.

'I went out of my way to attract contributors, to encourage them, to help them, to accommodate their peculiarities in some way, to make them feel welcome, and I think I did succeed in that.'

'We had much more difficulty, we had an awful lot of papers that we had to turn down, a lot that we'd spend hours and hours and hours rejigging, because we thought they had something of interest to readers, but they weren't really in a format that was publishable. So I think all the reviewers and the editors spent a lot of time really helping people to improve articles so that they could be put in the journal'

'I did almost completely rewrite one or two papers because there was the germ of something ... a germ of something. It was so badly written, I ended up feeling we're not a discipline that knows how to write very well, but we have a lot to say.'

'We tried to encourage I suppose other voices from outside the academic community to write. But it's definitely not easy...When the odd practitioner did come forward with paper I know X and I invested a lot of time and energy in helping them to polish and make it as good as possible.'

Having said this, editors are not willing to give anything a chance. One person distinguished those submissions that failed to get beyond the editors' initial appraisal (*emphases added*):

'If) it's essentially an opinion piece or a tirade of one kind or another, or it just didn't have any scholarly merit, or was way shorter or way longer than the journal could consider. So there are quite a lot of situations where submissions don't go out for review at all.'

What is it that is being eschewed and implicitly honoured in such statements? There are *genres* of writing - loose sets of criteria for a category of composition. The term is often used to categorize literature and speech, but is also used for any other form of art or utterance, and relates to the history of ideas about rhetoric. Classic distinctions of *genre* in literature are those between prose, drama and poetry. When applied to academic writing it

includes recognition of ways it is associated with a tradition and a community, with a distinctive style, and forms of expression and vocabulary. The characteristics of this distinctive style when evident in mainstream academic writing include exactness, clear linkages between different aspects of what is written, seriousness of tone, and transparency, for example through the notion of replicability.<sup>18</sup> But as we have illustrated in the previous chapter, what counts as good academic social work writing has shifted even with the relatively short period of the journal's history.

Common ground yet desires to be distinctive go hand in hand within editorial regimes. As one former editor aptly expressed it, 'I suppose there's probably no way of getting around this, you know, when new editors come in, of being a bit critical of their predecessors, saying "We can improve on this", "We can improve on that."' Asked if there had been an agenda they had brought to the journal most, perhaps understandably, could recall one thing or another. This might have been about the content, tone or structure of the journal. On '*tone*' one editor aimed 'to bring it up to date... to make it a clearer reflection of where I felt the discipline was at that time and was going. We were passionate, it was a passionate era, about what the profession and the discipline should be engaged with.' Developments of this kind are not always viewed so warmly. Referring to a period quite close in time to the previous remark, someone said 'people have got more keen to express opinions and to engage in discussion, even though they've got nothing to say.' On *content*, another reminded the interviewer 'I was one of the ... pioneers of behavioural social work, and though I wasn't trying to make it into a behavioural social work journal, I was trying to push the journal, and social work, in the direction of an evidence base.' On format and *structure* someone recalled 'we encouraged some shorter, particularly research notes, things like that which could be produced quite quickly and didn't have to go through the rather ponderous, slow publishing process.' Two editors listed their vision for the journal.

'One was our commitments to retaining its status as a journal of record, that's what, that's what it was, and we wanted to maintain that. So quite a, if you like a traditionalist goal, we wanted to preserve that, we didn't want it radically changed, in direction. Secondly, there was one around the internationalisation, we want to see that developing more, and thirdly we wanted to see a more active engagement with what we assumed would be developments around the new technology.'

The second point – internationalization – runs through the journal from beginning to the present and a very early editor also spoke of developing special issues and establishing the international credibility of the journal. Seemingly pragmatic decisions sometimes were seen as supporting preoccupations with the international standing of the journal. The same editor, speaking of the various developments during that regime, said 'the key one was the move to six issues a year, and also I think there was a clear focus on trying to extend international readership.'

How far any of these things actually happened is a different matter, but they were perhaps more likely to do so when there was a congruence of interest between at least two of the three key stakeholders, Editors and board, BASW and publishers. A key informant from the publishers said of one editorial regime '... I had the sort of relationship with them where I could be pushing certain things which I felt were important to the journal. One of them was

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<sup>18</sup> A full discussion of academic writing and developments in that form is an interesting topic in its own right. For a recent short discussion see the Appendix on 'Writing Social Work Science' in Shaw (2016).



the profile in the States... When I say pushing, I knew this was something that they were interested in as well.'

How, then, did regimes vary? In three ways. First, there were variations that could best be explained in terms of the influence of particular persons; second, there were changes that probably were due to broader shifts over time; finally there were differences in the general character of regimes according to how interventionist they were.

*i. Personal differences*

Personal differences were highlighted by several people. An early editor said

'I had a... very idiosyncratic vigorous style of editorship which you would never get now in journal editorship. It's much more constrained, and perhaps rightly so. I think editing you see is actually a creative art ... It's as much, it's a bit like being either the producer of a play or an orchestral conductor, and ... I think the demeaning of editorship, as being simply an administrative process, totally fails to recognise that.'

The creative nature of editing was reiterated shortly after. 'I think strong editing is actually a creative and an artistic virtue that I've tried to practice.' An editor from a quarter of a century later said when asked on editorial aims 'I think to some degree it will reflect (the) personality of the editors... I think that for example when X and I were editing it, we did probably look out for more sociological and politically orientated articles than say psychologically. I'm not sure if we did or we didn't, but I suspect that we probably did. Those are things that attracted us.' A more direct relation of editorial regimes to the general identity of the editor can be seen in the following comment:

'My impression when Audrey came on was that it was quite a big deal... Audrey was great, she was fun... so my sense is that she was ... more of a free spirit kind of editor than perhaps the previous... I think Audrey probably viewed herself as shaking things up a little bit, but to what extent that made any difference to the actual output of the journal, I don't know<sup>19</sup>... She had a slightly kind of irreverent ... approach to things.'

*ii Changes over time*

Changes over time are more elusive and difficult to pin down. Without doubt the scale of the operation and the business aspects changed radically. In addition it was widely *believed* that editorial modes of operation had changed, though most commonly in relation to the volume, article flow, and technological infrastructure. More than once we deliberately have strung together short series of quotations in time sequence to illustrate recurring rather than shifting preoccupations and modes of judgement. An example of this can be seen in the following two comments that both came from the same early editor. S/he referred to how

'the academic world of social work at that time was still finding its feet really, and there wasn't a lot of research about, whereas I had been trained as a researcher, a

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<sup>19</sup> We have noted earlier the remark about journals being like tankers with regard to the labour and time frame within which they change.

social science researcher. So I did feel that it needed strengthening on the research side - that was my view of it.'

Yet s/he soon after confessed to a 'rather pessimistic view that the world goes round and nothing really changes, and I think in that sense social work research is of the same order, which is sad.' The interviews very occasionally prompted doubts regarding change-related assumptions. After referring to the internationalization of the journal someone said 'Though again, even in those early days ... - interesting question for you to find out actually - there may well have been the presence of American material.'<sup>20</sup>

### *iii Interventionist*

Variations in terms of how interventionist an editorial regime may prove do seem fairly well grounded. There was one clear-cut example. The editors listed and elaborated on the changes they had introduced (Box 2.2. P. 45).

Shifts of this kind probably take place only when there is the degree of interest congruence that we mentioned above. These same editors said 'I think OUP were very keen for us to begin to use Manuscript Central, now ScholarOne, and we were too... That was very much driven by Oxford University Press that wanted to, in keeping with all other journals.' But shared interests, even when they happen, should not be seen as unreserved. Perhaps more surprising, diverging interests may not follow conventional expectations. For example, it may sound commonsensical that publishers will press for accessible, market-friendly outputs, while academic editors may be more likely to require and reward academic rigour. But in the case of the *BJSW* this was not obvious. We saw above that several editors stressed the importance of nurturing social work writers, and, where possible, giving time to nursing a less than perfect manuscript through to the finishing line. The response of the publishers to such worthy endeavours was less straightforward. We have included an extended extract from one interview that suggests this assumption about which interests promote academic rigour are quite different (Box 2.3. P. 46).

Before moving on to talk about the review process, a brief note regarding the move from solo to joint editorships is in order. The single most noticeable theme in editors' views on this issue was that the change was usually seen as an unproblematic and obvious consequence of the expansion of the journal. 'It was a move, very pragmatic move I think, that was the main reason, the job had become too big for one person basically'. Is a typical remark of this kind as were the following comments:

'It's really hard for me to see very many advantages of having a single editorship for a journal that publishes as many articles a year and tries to cover as much of the world as the *BJSW* does.'

'The sheer volume of work that is entailed in the work of the journal suggests that, would seem strange for us that one person could manage that, while they had a fulltime job... it would be difficult now for any member of academic staff to really find the time to run a journal in the way it had been run in the past.'

A similar conclusion was reached from the publisher's standpoint. 'Most of the journals I deal with have multiple editors, so it's very much the norm for me now.'

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Three for data regarding 'American material.'

Sometimes a joint arrangement was seen as having intrinsic rather than a purely pragmatic advantage over solo arrangements. 'I think having joint editorship seems to me to be a very sensible idea, and to have a certain amount of flexibility.' For another co-editor, 'we enjoy working together, we know more or less what the other one might think if we're not around, and so it was just good fun to be honest... it was just enjoyable to be able to talk ... about articles and to reflect on them.' Rather than splitting the work 50/50 most co-editors seem to have shared decisions regarding the final fate of a submission.

The exception to this general welcome for the inevitable was a former editor who 'thought it was daft... I'm not a great believer in co-editing. I think it tends to reduce the style and personality of a book or a journal, you know, you get the sort of combination of two people and you tend to get the lowest common denominator if you're not careful. So it avoids risk in one sense, but on the other hand I think good editing should involve risk, so I think it's not a good idea... A single editor is likely to give the journal a stronger personality, a double editor less so.' On balance 'I think it's led to the greater routinisation of the process of editing and publishing.' Continuing, this editor suggested 'I think the reasons probably were ... that on the whole people think social work should aim to be safe and balanced, and they thought, possibly rightly, that they might achieve that better with two editors than one.'

Although this development was seen as an almost inevitable consequence of journal trends, it should be noted that this has not been the pattern in the USA where *Social Service Review*, *Social Work*, *Research on Social Work Practice* and *Social Work Research* are all solo edited, though in some cases there are tiered levels of responsibilities. The remark above about greater routinisation may have some plausibility, and it may certainly reduce the likelihood of the appointment of 'outlier' editorial appointments, and the sense of individuality.

### **Reviewers and Reviewing**

Distinguishing between the judgements of editors and those of reviewers should not be overdrawn. We have noticed already the way articles are categorized and in some ways filtered in or out prior to review. Editors may have varied in how much they engaged in pre-review filtering. At the moderate level, one editor said:

'there were very occasionally articles that came in ... where English was probably not the first language, and ... they were unintelligible. ...And you did very rarely get people who ... would send you really sort of bizarre pieces that were not suitable for publication, you know, 3000-word rants about things, or things that were not written in English, so very, very occasionally at the margins we might exclude ... stuff from review, but nothing that looked anything like an academic article was ever, we sent everything out that looked like it might be...'

An important underlying question here is the degree of power invested in editors and how far that has changed. An early editor was unequivocal on this point.

'In my time the editorship was much more powerful I think is the fair, the right word. I felt that it was the editor's role not necessary to accept the views of the reviewers, because often they were in conflict with each other, and so I did feel very strongly that the editor was, had the last say, the last word, on whether journal articles should be published or not... I didn't allow the reviews or reviewers to make

demands on either me or the author... It gave me absolute freedom to publish an article if I thought it merited publishing even if one or other of the reviewers didn't. So it was a very pragmatic system, which is very different from what applies now.'<sup>21</sup>

But this sense of exercising power persisted into the 1990s, albeit with greater equivocation:

'there were some papers that I rejected without sending them to assessors. Looking back I'm not sure that was a good thing to do, but I mean I was certainly confident, and I would go on being confident, that the papers that I did that with would not have been accepted for publication; but arguably it was a bit unfair to the authors.'

It is possible that one consequence of the journal's expansion is a reversion to editorial autonomy. 'We are increasing the use of reject without review as part of this, our increased clarity around what we think should be there, what shouldn't, as a way of managing the flow of articles.' We can say little about the figures for editorial decisions on submissions. What the Board reports from the last decade or so do tell us is that rejection rates have slowly increased, from 27% in 2004 to 40% in 2011, possibly as a result of increased submissions and of tightening acceptance criteria, as well as 'benchmarking' against comparable journals where rejection rates are higher. It is interesting to note here that rejection rates for the UK and Europe track consistently lower over this period of time than the general rejection rate, with those for North America and the 'Rest of the World' categories being higher. This raises interesting tensions between the expectations for the journal to have an international aspect to its identity, and the kinds of papers editors would deem acceptable. Indeed, at one point during this time period the Editors comment that 'the rejection rates for overseas manuscripts are of interest', with reasons being given as 'lack of relevance of topic, poor quality of content and/or insurmountable problems with written English' as well as cultural differences in social work practice. Regarding this last point, and moving onto the role of reviewers, it is suggested that there may be a 'mismatch' between reviewer expectations on appropriate subject matter and what is submitted, particularly in relation to clinically-based papers from North America.

The profile of *the reviewer database* is important. It is the nearest we have to an operationalization of the range of knowledge and standpoints that are thought to make up the field. We were not given access to lists of reviewers for any period of the journal's history nor, apart from the documentary records referred to below, to information about patterns in decisions regarding outcomes, and so can make only limited assessments of this central question.

First, it is possible with the advent of automated linkage of reviewers to submissions that the collective character of the reviewer list is less visible even to editors. Recent editors remarked,

'we will eventually get down to try and make sense of the types and the quality of the reviewers... The numbers that we've got and where they come from, I think it's fair to say, still is a bit of a mystery to us. There's this big list of reviewers, some of whom volunteer themselves, some of whom automatically come up because they've

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<sup>21</sup> Not having access to review recommendations and editorial decisions, we are unable to assess the veracity of this supposition.

authored, means that ... there's a bit of a lottery in who pops up if you do the automatic allocations against subject area of interest.'

This 'modern' system is quite different from what obtained thirty years ago. Speaking of reviewers, an editor of the time recalled 'I think on the whole they tended to be people that the editorial board knew and recommended, I think they were, I don't think it was a very open process, I don't think people were invited to apply.' Midway through the history of the journal some detected a process of academization, such that 'while we were editing it there was a move away from practitioner assessors towards pretty much exclusively academic ones.' Indeed, quoting someone else, 'that journal, like all journals, is now part of that...process by which academics and university departments come to be rated on the scale. So it's a very crucial dimension in the way of life that academics now live.'

An important question is the extent to which reviewers should belong explicitly to the social work community. It seems likely that those editors who stressed the importance of promoting and developing social work as a distinct field would want reviewers to mirror that profile. If so, then the following 'deviant' comment is of interest - 'It was hugely important that you brought in political scientists or statisticians, or criminal justice experts, if the article merited their thoughts.' There are two aspects to this comment. First, statistical advice has been perhaps the most frequent recurring issue of this kind over the years. This seems in large part due to the general absence of such expertise (or quantitative skills more generally) within the key networks – board, editorial team and reviewers. Partly as an answer to this, in a later editorial regime the *BJSW* procured the services of a consultant statistician in order to 'help us review manuscripts as a third reviewer where our other reviewers do not feel expert enough to comment on the statistical analyses described in the papers' (Editorial Report, 2007). Possible implications of this can be considered alongside the content analysis in the following chapter. Second, and possibly still more important, the journal has moved between emphasising the distinct identity of social work and stressing, as in the quotation above, the essential connections with other disciplines. Our impression is that the general direction has been towards distancing social work from other disciplines (for example, through the abandonment of subject abstracts that were part of the journal for a period in its early years). Certainly, an on-going commentary in Board minutes has been whether articles are 'social work' enough to be relevant to the journal, with papers described as 'perfectly good' being rejected because they fall outside such a remit – for example fitting more within the fields of sociology or psychology. The question has various ramifications but is not simple, and our general position is that there are weaknesses in strong advocacy of either position (c.f. Shaw, 2007).

The review process is possibly the aspect of journal work that is most visible to those on the receiving end, who have submitted manuscripts. Editors are of course journal authors in a different capacity, so understand, as one editor put it, 'the worst thing from the point of view of people who had written papers was this question of where a reviewer was very slow in actually responding. We had to be quite apologetic at times, diplomatic with somebody who had submitted a paper and was having to wait a long time.' Indeed, in 2004, Board discussions included reference to the advent of a 'relentless system of reminders for those reviewers who transgress the three week deadline'.

The actual arrangements for reviewing are by most people taken for granted. Articles are sent to two people anonymously, chosen for their knowledge and the field, who reply to the editors who then make a judgement based on the reviews. Neither author/s nor reviewers

know the identity of the other – a process of ‘double blind’ as it sometimes it called. The first observation to make is that the system of anonymising reviews is not as recent as we may assume. This exchange took place with an editor who was in place in the late 1970s.

*‘Were the reviews always anonymous?’*

Yeah, we didn’t tell the, those who had submitted papers didn’t get to know who the reviewers were

*OK, were the authors also anonymous to the reviewers?’*

They, no, no, the papers at that time would have gone out with the name of the person there.’

This editor went on to say ‘I think that there were the beginnings of discussions about the anonymity and so on, and the new system, but during my time things didn’t actually change.’ Referring to practice a few years later, another editor said

‘We certainly had two reviewers, but we only provided blind reviews on request. It was a much less transparent review process in those days... an author could request a blind review, in which case their name was blacked out, and there was nothing which identified them, which was sent to the reviewer, but I don’t think that, I can’t remember that ever happening actually. I don’t think anybody ever requested a blind review.’

By the late 1990s the academic review culture as it now is had come to be taken more or less as given. Take the following two comments from that general period:

‘So sometimes you can work it out, and occasionally we let things slip through, but 99.9% of the time yes it was double blind...but yes, they went out double blind... unless we made a mistake’

‘I think it’s very important. We’re a small world, especially once you get into the specialist areas. You’ve got to be able to comment, because you could have someone who’s brilliant but they’ve done a poor paper or done a paper you’ve seen three times before.’

The purpose of including this time series of accounts is not to raise knowing smiles at the superiority of later ways of doing things. While we have not been able to discover any sense of the change being troublesome, we should not treat it as given. The first of the final two quotations refers to one commonly encountered reservation – that it is possible in some cases to identify the authors. We have kept an editor’s name in the following quotation from this same editor:

‘But I mean not really, insofar as people kind of know who people, I mean Mark and I wrote a lot at the time around child deaths and childcare scandals, so if anybody read a piece on that they’d have been able to spot it was me and Mark. So sometimes you could work it out...’

The issue became the focus of a major controversy in Chicago sociology around 1960-61. Everett Hughes had been Editor of the *American Journal of Sociology (AJS)*. A transition period was marked by ‘intense conflict between Everett Hughes and Peter Rossi’ (Abbott, 1999: 140). The context and what was in effect a putsch while Hughes was away in Germany need not detain us. But the issue of double-blind reviewing was symptomatic. It was a lost

battle for Hughes but there is an interesting note from him on the arguments against it that raises some significant points about kinds of bias, and we rescue that discussion from Hughes' point of view in Box 2.4 (P. 47. 'Everett Hughes on the bias of double blind reviews').

Abbott interestingly observes that Hughes' position on this issue 'rested on the classical Chicago conception of social facts as situated, a position diametrically opposed to the new decontextualized sociology of variables represented by Blau and Rossi' (p. 147). Double-blind reviewing is depersonalization of social work scholarship, though Hughes probably underestimated the kinds of discrimination that were likely under the system he seemed to prefer. In principle there would be a fairly strong empirical test of the hypothesis through a careful 'before and after' study of the adoption of double-blind reviewing, but the data for such a natural experiment probably does not exist.

### **Editorial judgement**

Among the observations that first prompted the proposal to undertake this research was a comment, again by Abbott, on how the editorial decision of 'revise and resubmit' had become almost universal when submitting articles. 'I do know from personal experience that 99.9% of the time it's going to be some form of revise and resubmit' as one editor expressed it. Indeed, the rarity of any author having an article accepted as it stood was reflected in one editor's remark that 'I know there were only ever two in my whole editorship that I didn't proof, that I didn't alter things and proof read in stylistically, and I only remember who one of the people was.'<sup>22</sup> So, as another observed, 'I think that it's fairly standard procedure... I have no idea whether it's any less than it would have been in, or any more than it would have been in the past.'

Do such routine practices lead to undue standardization? The evidence is not easy to pin down, for similar reasons that applied to our remarks regarding testing the effects of the use of double-blind reviewing. One person opined 'I would be surprised if it led, in the case of social work anyway, to greater uniformity, because I think the assessors are diverse enough and covering a wide enough range in terms of opinions and expertise.' Someone else weighed the pros and cons:

'it can be seen I think as just either part of quality control, which I think is how we would see it, or I suppose it can be seen as pushing everything away to the margins to a more standardised, sanitised centre. But I think for us at the moment, the quality control argument outweighs that one.'

When practised together with recent online processes, regular 'revise' requirements probably lead to a more direct and transparent feedback. Prior to then the kind of practice was more mediated through editorial extracts and digests:

'I don't think the reviewer's comments were sent to the author, I think it was probably a summary. I think a summary was developed by the editor, of what the comments were, and the author was written to along those lines, trying to be as tactful as possible I think and as kind as possible.'

There were, however, substantial caveats raised in the interviews. These related to questions of the nature of academic disciplines and whether article review and

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<sup>22</sup> This editor then added 'I'll tell you after you've put the thing off!' but never did!

management patterns jeopardize creativity and originality. On the nature of academic disciplines someone said,

‘I think it’s given power to reviewers that I think isn’t always justified, and reviewers can be as idiosyncratic as authors, so you can end up with some very silly ideas coming from reviewers so that if you adopt that revise and resubmit method, which I agree I think has become the norm, it rather undermines the principles of academic discipline I think. But it is true, yeah, and it’s true of the *BJSW*.’

The observations regarding risks to creativity are perhaps not altogether dissimilar:

‘I do think the sort revise and resubmit thing probably brings everything back to the norm, and probably means that things are somewhat safer and less dangerous, and I don’t think that’s particularly helpful. I would rather see people publish and be damned than publish and have all the edginess taken out of it. So frankly I think that the revise and resubmit may well lead to a sort flattening of innovation and creativity. People are nervous about saying anything that might get them into trouble, which is such a pity.’

Regardless of whether one accepts these criticisms, they helpfully raise a general issue that already has surfaced. We quote at some length to fully represent the case made:

‘It presents two quite different problems I think, one in relation to authors who are writing about theory or policy. Obviously reviews can be helpful to an author in that area, but if you give reviewers the right to veto what an author has written, then it does make a nonsense of the nature of academic debate. I think in respect of articles that are research based, then the real difficulty here I think is to do with the extent to which the sort of research you get in a social work journal corresponds to the high levels of quantitative methods in the natural sciences. I think there, there’s a legitimate case to be made for peer critique of methodology, because of the risks that can occur if the methodology is flawed. Now I think in the social sciences, and especially the policy related social sciences, methodology is not quite as straightforward as that, and so therefore with reviewers you run the risk of methodological critiques which are themselves ideology based, and that can be very dangerous.’

This argument brings us back to questions regarding how the nature of social science scholarship in general and social work in particular ought to be reflected in the canons of peer assessment. Double-blind reviewing and associated methods of peer assessment are not neutral technical issues, but mirror particular conceptions of scholarship. They may be right but they are not self-evidently so.

### **Technology and the *BJSW***

We tend to talk about ‘new’ technology. While there are new *forms* of technology, the phrase ‘new technology’ may be misleading. What we think of as ‘new’ is not essentially so, but only so at this moment in our time. As Karen Staller says when talking about this topic, ‘the future quickly becomes the past and that which is cutting edge today will be – someday soon – antiquated’ (Staller 2010: 287). This is partly because ‘the way we collect, retrieve, store and manage data will always be shaped by context including the historic moment, and our relationship to it’ (p. 287). In the frequent use of the phrase ‘new technology’ we can see how ‘technology’, like the word ‘science’, functions as a positive rhetorical value.



When speaking of technology in relation to the *BJSW* we are doing so in a very limited way, to represent the general sense that something significant took place with the move in the middle of the last decade to online submission, review, feedback, transfer of documents to publishers, and the shift whereby all communication back and forth between various interested parties took place through electronic means.

Several editors made comparisons with the 'old' system, and for almost all the change was seen in a positive light. This one editor recalled 'much of what agonised me, drove me, certainly in the earlier part before I managed to do some of this catching up was this awful backlog, that's not good for anybody. It's terrible for the author... e-mail's just changed the world.' To feel the force of this we have given several remarks, all from different editors, in Box 2.5 (p. 48).

The *BJSW* was seen by someone with a transatlantic viewpoint as being to the fore. 'I understand that the Oxford journals had been doing something like that, but you know, none of the NASW journals did and *Social Service Review* didn't, you know, there weren't any US journals that were that far ahead.'<sup>23</sup>

There were occasional recollections of positive features of the former arrangements. One editor, perhaps slightly tongue in cheek, told us:

'I quite liked carrying hard copies around because I did lot of proof reading on the train and in meetings and so on... but I got to the point where I could sit in a meeting with a manuscript on my knee under the table and proofread while still participating in the meeting... It suited me, to have a physical bundle of stuff that I could see, much easier for this thing of grouping the papers because you'd actually got them there and you can look at them.'

Hesitations sometimes were voiced, as in the opening quotation in Box 2.5 regarding the risks of depersonalization. That element sometimes is present as a given, and without any negative valuation. Two joint editors recalled, 'with Manuscript Central, as soon as you locate a reviewer for a paper they get slotted into the system, so the list naturally enlarges.' More strategically they explained 'we standardised within Manuscript Central the issues that we wanted reviewers to consider when looking at the paper... So we standardised that a lot and we did give a lot of thought ... to exactly what the reviewer form should look like and why.'

More generally, through a publisher's eye 'quite often ... you suddenly get a lot more submissions, so the journal just becomes more accessible. If someone can ... submit through a sort of website then you suddenly start getting submissions from parts of the world that you previously weren't getting them from, which can be a good thing and a bad thing.' The figures for submissions show a doubling of submissions from 2005 to 2011, with thirty countries represented in 2010 compared to nineteen in 2006. In one respect, of course, this simply moves the queue down the road, and the recognition of 'Advance Access' publication (introduced to the *BJSW* in 2005) as equivalent to hard copy publication has been a direct consequence.

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<sup>23</sup> One of the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) journals only moved to online submission within the last three years.

In ways that return to Staller's observations (Staller, 2010), one is forcibly struck by how recent some changes took place and how present practices are not givens. It should also caution us against assuming that journal changes are now in some final form or are in some obvious way 'correct.' The role of memory is important here, not in the simple psychological sense of whether things are remembered correctly, but in a more interesting way, that how certain ways of doing that were at the time seen as part and parcel of how things always were and would be done, but now seem a forgotten world. E.g. One editor said 'I can't remember because it's pre e-mail', and later 'I can't remember because it's pre e-mail, so how on earth did we do it? It just feels like impossible now but we did ... And I was once talking to an author on the phone, we used the phone, that's what we used to do, a lot of phoning.' Someone else observed, speaking of the years following the turn of the millennium,

'it doesn't seem like a long time ago, but actually it was, and ... our system frankly, for ... managing editions, was one based on plastic carrier bags, in that we bundled everything together and put it in a carrier bag and that would be the edition. I mean that was as sophisticated as it went.'

The familiar question of information overload came to the fore, although it was through the words of the BASW and the publishers. More descriptively, the publishers observed:

'publishers love it, they love the fact that there are more and more ambitious academics being told that they have to write for publication if they want to get anywhere in this world, and there are more and more young academics around the world who fit that pattern. So the outlet of what is still the premier journal in the UK and highly regarded elsewhere, is bound to mean that more and more pages would have to be printed in order to accommodate that flood of aspiring academics... So I think you'd have to say it's a good thing, but it's a reflection of the madness of modern academic life.'

In less sanguine terms those who speak for practitioners stress 'our problem is that we are tending to use these changes by and large to overload people rather than find ways of making information more manageable for people. I think there's probably a way to go to actually use what we produced to signpost more effectively so that people can easily find their way to the information they want rather than having to wade through things.'

From the viewpoint of two former editors this development was seen in different terms. Once again a development in one context was seen to serve the constant concern to internationalize the journal, in that '... the readership has become far more international than 40 years ago, primarily because of the way in which the journal is actually disseminated, electronically and through the Internet, rather than through hardback, well softback paper copies.' Technological changes in dissemination could be reinforced by shifts in publishing strategy. For example, OUP instigated a 'developing countries programme' in 2003 which meant institutions in these assigned countries were given free online access to journals published by the Press. This saw institutional circulation for the *BJSW* in these countries double proportionately from 2003 to 2004, from 22% to 44% of total circulation. It is interesting to note that institutional circulation of *BJSW* within the UK has significantly decreased over recent years, with an OUP report to the Board showing a drop in the total proportion of institutional circulation from 47% in 2000 to 7% in 2011. Although that shift

has to be understood in the context of a large expansion in overall institutional circulation, with subscription to the *BJSW* jumping from 914 institutions in 2000 to 4494 in 2011.

The *BJSW* is one very small fish on a heavily stocked pond when it comes to developments in journal publishing. One of the deepest and most extensive consequences has been in relation to libraries, and the future prospects for hard copy publication of journals. The development was described by one editor as follows:

‘journals are sold in baskets to libraries and ... it doesn’t make much sense now. I mean I access *BJSW*, I do have a physical copy because as an ex-editor, but to be honest if I want anything I go online and get the PDF. So I mean it’s hard to know now ... how you count readership. Copies produced when it was a text-based entity you could count, but now I guess it’s hits and downloads of the PDFs, so I don’t know how you measure readership anymore.’

The meaning of this development is more profound than a question of scale and volume. Recent editors worried out loud that ‘I wonder how many years down the line that will come to be questioned. There’s already kind of glimmers of it around expectations of people receiving the hard copies, where they’ve say been guest editors to a special edition, so there’s glimmers of things which may be, well for me personally, unacceptable changes. I would hate to see the journal for example cease any hard copy production.’

One important aspect is around title loyalty. An early editor was one of the very few to notice this. ‘Because of what I’ve said about the enthusiasm in BASW for it, it did have quite a number of loyal individual subscribers, even outside of the academic sphere. I suspect that is no longer the case, and I wouldn’t be surprised if it was principally a library based journal now.’ It may now be the case that only a minority of readers will see any journal as something they follow, and that people read by choice of article and less than by choice of journal – a shift that may be regarded as quite profound. Seen negatively, this may be regarded as a fragmentation of collective scholarly enterprise, whereby people easily can locate the work of favourite authors. We can see a parallel development in the ways people listen to music, and in the options for ‘following’ particular individuals in various cultural spheres. This trend is not entirely straightforward however. Individual subscription to the *BJSW* has grown in recent years, particularly in the UK, with subscriptions more than doubling from 2000 to 2011. In 2009, OUP undertook a sustained marketing drive aimed at BASW members, resulting in a 45% increase in individual subscriptions by 2011. More generally, notifications of journal contents have become routine for many academic faculty.

We have begun to consider the *BJSW* within the wider world. In the final chapter we consider this more fully, examining the influence of the British Association of Social Workers, the publishers, the Board members, and academic concerns about research impact. But before doing so, we present data which lies close to the core of the project – that relating to the material that the journal carries, and the way in which it does so.

## Box 2.1 Accounts of Appointments

On hearing Kenneth Brill [speaking about the planned *BJSW*] 'I was very taken with that idea. I was a very young academic...and it really, I thought that was the goods, so I was in favour of the launch, and, being an ambitious young academic I thought "Yeah, I could have something to do with that."' Later, 'when Olive was close to retirement from the editorship and she, and it was clear that a successor was needed, I wrote and offered my services, and she wrote back and said, "Well really Phyllida wants it at the moment, but why don't you become book review editor?" So I became book review editor at the, when was that - '74 - and there was a kind of implicit notion that I would be the editor after Phyllida, so it was a kind of ordinary career related process really, nothing more, nothing more sort of esoteric or idealistic than that. It's the way the world works'

'Well I didn't apply, I was approached by BASW... someone from, I can't remember who, but someone from the head office in BASW approached me.'

'I was on the editorial board at the time, so I had a strong interest in it, I think I probably wouldn't have applied, but I was asked to do so because there really wasn't, I don't think anybody was very interested actually at that time. And I had just finished doing some research and writing and so on and it seemed like a good time to take on something new.'

'I knew somebody had a friend who was on the editorial board, and he kind of encouraged me to think about applying, and suggested that an application from X and myself for joint editorship would be favourably looked on by the board I suppose, that's my memory. So I approached X and knew he was interested in applying for the editorship'

'I think it just felt like, an age and stage thing really, I was very much moving on in my career at the time, and felt I had a contribution to make...a two-way benefit, that obviously my career would benefit, but I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't, it was primarily that I felt ...there was a task to be done and I felt I could do it.'

'X sort of said to colleagues here at (university), "Is anyone interested in putting in an application to jointly edit the *British Journal of Social Work*?", and given what I said about how I saw it as the top journal when I was training and thereafter, I thought "Whoo! That would be good."'

'It's one of those serendipitous things...I'm not exactly sure what they liked in my interview or what they saw in me, but I had done my homework, I mean I'd read some issues of the journal, I'd studied the website a good bit. Martin from OUP was interested in whether I had any suggestions after that, and I was able to make a couple, so, and it was just a very congenial interview, I think all three of us hit it off.'

'We were approached, as others were approached, by our predecessors, to think about, as possibilities, possible editors, invited to submit our CVs and go for interviews... there was a sense of well other people think we can do it, it seems interesting to us to do it, we know we can work together.'

## Box 2.2      An interventionist regime

- Board doing guest editorships
- Board members writing editorials
- Move to online submission
- Further developing the special issues
- More consistent use of critical commentaries
- Developing the journal's international profile in relation to appointing a USA associate editor
- Drew up job specifications e.g. for international advisors
- Conflict of interest policy/code of conduct drawn up

These entailed regularisation and a kind of corporatism. 'Some of the other things that occasionally appeared in the journal were very *ad hoc* and we thought well either they need to appear on a regular basis or actually not at all.' Realizing a consequence of this they remarked 'it wasn't any sort of deliberate attempt to keep everything within house.'

More generally they remarked 'we were a bit surprised I think by the archaic nature in which the journal was being run at that time...We were very keen to set very high standards in terms of how, making sure manuscripts were dealt with in a timely manner, not letting reviews drift and that kind of thing. And that certainly paid dividends in terms of, well I think in part in impact factor.'

In summary 'part of our ethos was we wanted to make that a bit more systematic, but also considerably more democratic.'

### Box 2.3 Publishers' Brand

'One of the issues that I think the journal had, probably continues to, is managing growth really, and I think that it's always a tricky subject to negotiate with editors, is what's the appropriate number of papers you should be accepting, the acceptance rate as a percentage ... Now I think that [they]... saw part of the journal's mission as being to help authors to improve their papers, particularly younger authors. So they would spend a lot of time and a lot of referees' time working on papers that probably weren't that great, and possibly they ended up rejecting them anyway or they might have worked them up into a point where they were publishable. And I think I would have gently suggested on a number of occasions that, noble as that mission is, ... I didn't think it was what they should have been trying to do, because, because (a) ... it was taking up an awful lot of their time, (b) there's a general problem with referee fatigue in the academic world, so people are being asked referee more and more papers, and they really don't want to receive papers that are not particularly good to begin with, and (c) I felt that the journal should be aiming, broadly speaking, for high quality.

And of course ... that's part of OUP's kind of brand and our mission, and I think ... that largely was shared... by the editors. But I suppose there was a tension, so there was probably a tension there between myself on the one hand, probably encouraging the editors to be a bit more selective and to be a little bit more ruthless. If a paper really wasn't going to make the grade ... it's generally kinder and better for everybody concerned to say so at the outset. But ... I think they struggled with the idea of just rejecting the papers and not helping authors out with positive feedback from referees.'

#### Box 2.4      Everett Hughes on the bias of double blind reviews

Hughes was writing in response to a letter from Peter Blau who had enacted double-blind reviewing when he took over the *American Journal of Sociology* in January 1961.

‘You give as one of your reasons for anonymity, bias against an author. But bias against an author is only one of several kinds of bias of which any one of us may be guilty. We are biased against topics, against styles of writing, against ideas. It is not likely that reading an article anonymously will eliminate all these other biases which may be, at least taken together, a good deal more important than bias against a particular person. A second thing which is in my mind is that people will almost certainly guess who wrote articles in the field in which they are familiar... Finally, I come to what I consider an even more important item. Anonymous reading is done on the assumption that each article is an independent item, not related to what a man may have done before and what he may do in the future. This is an entirely false assumption. A given piece of a man’s work has to be judged not merely by itself but as one item in his complete or growing production. It fits into something that he has done before. In some cases the article may be an isolated piece of work which the man will not follow up, but in the cases of the better articles, I think we will find that it is best understood as part of a man’s ongoing work, and a man’s ongoing work is by the nature of the case a very personal product and by no means anonymous.’

**Box 2.5      Technology: the demands of the old ways and the benefits of the new**

‘I think it was seen at the time and still occasionally it’s seen as depersonalising the process... But I think it’s hugely, it’s made the whole process hugely more efficient... it’s significantly improved the efficiency of the production from our point of view, so I think in all those respects it’s been, it’s been a positive thing.’

‘I think it’s really positive, because it speeds the whole process up, I think that’s the key thing, I would have loved to have had that, those processes available when I was editor... Still my main recollection is working with my wife, just the enormous labour that was involved in just sending things out and checking when they came back, and chasing up the odd reviewers who never seemed to be available... It was just very labour intensive and I would have thought that all the developments in online stuff now, you know, frees up people perhaps to concentrate on the content rather than keeping the process going.’

‘If an article had to be redone the whole thing had to be retyped, an awful effort really, so that made it much more difficult as well. I think now it’s so much easier, that you can actually sort of comment on articles and they can be instantly corrected and altered and so on, modified’

‘remember this is largely pre-, not pre-Internet quite, but certainly pre- e-publication, and we didn’t have the way of recording engagement that is available to journals now, so all we could do was use the rather traditional print means of trying to engage people in debate...We did actually both of us use our partners for proofreading sometimes and for reference checking, so we just used our friends and family, it was very amateur operation.’

‘I don’t imagine any journal now would be able to function without ScholarOne, for example. It’s a very efficient system.’



## Chapter Three

### Between the Covers

*The British Journal of Social Work*, at the time of writing, has published more than two thousand articles over its history. Who writes these articles? From where do they write? How are they written? What subjects come under their scrutiny? What can we learn regarding social work research methods and practices? Have there been trends and changes over the time of the journal's history? All of these questions are in part contingent on a further clutch of questions regarding editorial regimes, review practices, the impact of changes in technology, and so on, covered in the previous chapter. In this chapter we make a broad distinction between what is written and how it is written, dealing first with the 'how'.

#### Writing Social Work

We suggested in the opening chapter that an understanding of the character and role of *The BJSW* is sharpened by setting it in the context of social work journal writing at the moment of its emergence within *Case Conference* (1954-1970) and *Social Work*. The former was approximately replaced by the now no longer published *Social Work Today* and the latter more directly by *The BJSW*. Recalling that Kate McDougall, the editor of *Case Conference* throughout its history, affirmed 'I had never planned to produce a learned journal' (McDougall, 1970: 514), nonetheless she lamented in the final issue that 'it has always been much harder to get detailed accurate accounts of practice than ideas about what was, is or should be happening' (p.510). Richard Titmuss offered one explanation of the success of the journal in the correspondence columns of its final issue. 'I am inclined to think that had *Case Conference* been launched and maintained as a journal for academic research and the promotion of PhDs it would not have made this contribution.' This welcoming of a distancing of social work writing from 'academic research' and 'the promotion of PhDs' – and by perhaps the best known social administration academic in the UK – illustrates a position that it probably was assumed could be held safely and without fear of being marginalized within the social work (or social administration) community at the time the *BJSW* appeared on the scene.

At that moment of closing reflection, Noel Timms, writing in the (invited) correspondence columns of the final issue of *Case Conference*, said 'At some time we ought to try to specify the character and purpose of the social work writer... (T)he writer in this area is still rather a marginal man. He is seen by some as occupied in an essentially second order activity, writing about what others are more properly doing.' In an article for the final issue of *Social Work* – a journal that traced its lineage directly back to the first journal of the Charity Organisation Society – Timms gave illuminating extracts from three pieces, one from each predecessor journal, although 'It has to be admitted that much of the literature published in the journal seems to leave the world much as it was' (Timms, 1970: 4). Through such an inspection, he suggests we can trace ideas 'without necessarily having to assume that the "ancients" were, on occasions, very modern or that nothing really changes' (p.5). Yet – and here he points to a problem somewhat akin to that posed by Kay McDougall – 'In the midst of this exploration over a period of almost one hundred years social workers themselves remain somewhat

elusive. We can reconstruct their real world with difficulty. Rarely do we encounter some reference to the pattern and quality of their lives' (p.5).<sup>24</sup>

An appreciation of the role and stance of the *BJSW* calls for a brief portrayal of how scholarly work was reflected in the journal that stood as its nearest predecessor. Subsequent developments, continuities and contrasts will be clearer as a consequence. The following paragraphs are based on the final three issues of the quarterly *Social Work* (Volume 27, issues 2, 3 and 4).

The format of *Social Work* is interesting. A 32 page quarterly, it contained four main articles, a book review section, often a correspondence page or so, and intermittent editorials. The journal was in double column format with smaller font size than its successor journal. The articles vary in length from one another with the longest running to about 8000 words and the shortest around 2000 words.

The front page carries the contents, the names of the editor and Editorial Board, and addresses for submission of contributions. The Board is small in number – in addition to the Editor and Deputy Editor there are five Board members. All seven were men. It was published by the Association of Child Care Officers and the Association of Family Caseworkers. When describing format and style of the journal, most of the generalizations have their exceptions. Indeed, lack of uniformity is one of the striking impressions. All of the Board members and editors are named first name and surname and no affiliations are given. There is a slight sense of taken-as-given knowledge. Likewise for the contributors, although author names are a mix of first name or initial. The only information about submission of articles is a statement that 'articles and correspondence' should be sent to Peter Leonard at Mary Ward House in Tavistock Place – the subsequent home of the National Institute for Social Work and a well-known London centre for community projects. Book reviews went to the Deputy Editor and 'subscriptions and advertisements' to 'Mrs M. Elford' (Mary Elford) who acted as Secretary to the journal.

This indicates a journal culture quite different from what came to follow - far less proceduralized, and suggesting a level of editorial power and discretion. The pattern of article formatting discussed below seems to imply alongside editorial power a light touch on formatting requirements. But given that the whole process had very little perspicuity we know little or nothing about how, for example, submissions were reviewed. This is generally confirmed by the recollections of someone who was an author in the closing period of *Social Work's* existence:

I think Peter<sup>25</sup> was interested in the article as a rare attempt to replicate a study. As far as I recollect we were not asked to change anything and any editorial changes were of layout or minor textual editing... At that time I had three articles ... published in XXX and the process was very similar. If the editor liked the submission then it would be likely to be published and they consulted other people at their discretion rather than a very formalised system of peer review.

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<sup>24</sup> Timms was one of the few social work writers talking about language at that time (e.g. Timms, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Peter Leonard.

Of the twelve main articles in the final three issues of *Social Work*, five are directly empirical,<sup>26</sup> and throughout were unambiguously focused on social work. Of the fifteen sole or joint authors four were women and eleven men. All but one of the articles were by UK authors, the only exception being a USA piece by Martin Rein in the final issue. Indeed, his and one by Pinker on stigma in the same issue were both reprinted from other sources – a form of journal writing that was to become very rare and in most instances treated with disapproval.

Journal writing rests within a wider field of writerly identity. We detect five overlapping features that by and large distinguish the journal world of 1970 from the second decade of the twenty-first century. These refer to:

- Referencing the literature
- Language and Respectfulness
- Gender
- Immediacy
- Scientific method

#### Referencing the literature

Most of the articles adopted an arrangement whereby citations were numbered in the text and listed in numbered sequence in the end references. Several observations may be made. *First*, the consistency and fullness of citation detail reads differently from later formats. Few of the details that now would be regarded as standard (journal page numbers or parts, author initials, book publishers, place of publication, and consistency in how authors are listed) were so regarded in 1970. Occasionally articles were referenced in ways similar to later methods, or even with a simple list of sources at the end with no cross-reference to the text. The end references carried repeat references using the Latin ‘tags’ *op cit* and so on.

*Second*, there is a strong USA-directed gaze in a significant proportion of the articles. Two thirds of the references in a ‘controversial’<sup>27</sup> piece by Kemeny and Popplestone on client discrimination in social welfare organizations were to USA sources, and this was not a marked outlier. Almost every reference was either to British or American literature. The balance of journal to book references was approximately 1:3, very unlike today and probably reflecting different beliefs about where scholarly authority is located. The review section of the journal covers five pages each time, and the reviews were fairly substantial, with five to eight reviews in each issue. The USA gaze is apparent here too, with a substantial proportion of the reviewed books coming from the States.

*Third*, there is, to later eyes, a curious characteristic of referencing approaches in empirical articles. With a single exception, none of the empirical articles made reference to research literature or indeed any literature at all. This was presumably not an accident. The tacit assumption seems to be that empirical data does not need justifying within a context of either cumulative research thinking or the world of wider ideas. This is not to say that the

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<sup>26</sup> Three drew on archival or contemporary agency records, one was a brief survey, and one was based on a substantial interview study of GPs in York.

<sup>27</sup> There was a strongly worded response letter by Elizabeth Irvine in the following issue on which we comment below.

articles are 'empiricist'. For example, Timms' review of writing in this and predecessor journals has much by way of ideas.

### Language and Respectfulness

There is throughout an apparent sense of a relatively small community. We have already noted the lack of mention of author affiliation. The treatment of others with respect comes through occasionally. Walton and Heywood, replicating an influential study by Parker on prediction of success or failure in foster care placements, say that 'After discussion with Mrs N Lingard tutor in charge of the course, it was decided to approach Dr Parker and ask whether he thought...' Then, 'Having had Dr Parker's blessing...' they proceeded.

Walton and Heywood were not however subservient and conclude categorically that one of Parker's key assumptions was 'invalid.' And as we will observe through the correspondence columns, this mutual respect was beginning to break down. As Leonard had observed, the assumption of core shared values was a more tenuous assumption.<sup>28</sup>

Other language categories are strikingly different from what later would be acceptable or appropriate. For example, a study of 'colour' as a variable in agency practice categorized clients as 'white', 'coloured' and 'half coloured.'

### Gender

The tone of general respect was carried through to how men and women were referred to in the journal, although no consistent pattern can be traced. We have already noted that 'Mrs M Elford' was listed as 'secretary' to the journal. We can find book reviews signed 'R. Wright (Miss)' and a letter back to Walton and Heywood signed '(Mrs) J. I. Low'. However, the practice of often giving first names of authors made gender more visible than is often the case in 21<sup>st</sup>C social science journal writing.

A less obvious use of gender language can be found in a somewhat caustic exchange in the correspondence column. A correspondent from Adelaide wrote to the July 1970 issue on an article Elizabeth Irvine had written in the 1969 volume, taking issue with her discussion of scientific method, where Irvine apparently had written that it included 'imagination and intuition disciplined, of course, by that attention to mistakes and failures as well as to successes...' He<sup>29</sup> remarks "'Of course": if only it was 'of course' Mrs Irvine.'

### Immediacy

The correspondence columns are of considerable interest. Almost all the letters were published in the issue immediately following the one in which the article commented on had appeared. Low's letter follows Walton and Heywood, and Rigby's letter drew a further letter that appeared in the final issue of the journal. There is also a long letter from Irvine taking issue with Kemeny and Popplestone's critique of client discrimination that appeared in the following issue. There is a sense of exchange and immediacy that is rarely found in later journals, even in online journals. The journals obviously had a much quicker turn-round than our later, more technologically equipped, age can manage.

### Scientific method

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<sup>28</sup> We do not mean to suggest that prior to this period social work had been free from controversies, or that relations had always been 'sweetness and light'.

<sup>29</sup> While the letter is signed only 'K. Rigby' a Google search can readily bring up a matching Ken Rigby.

There are barely subterranean rumblings about scientific and research method in the journal. Having said as much, while the proportion of research-based articles is not that different from contemporary social work journals, there is little reflection on the research process. Nothing is said about how data was analysed, and no awareness of methodological writing appears in the journal. Influential methods texts by writers like Cicourel and Denzin<sup>30</sup> were just appearing but would not influence social work for a few years.

We emphasize that this analysis should not be read in a modernistic frame, assuming that earlier writing was more naïve or primitive compared with subsequent forms. However, it is fair to express the shifts that we trace in the following paragraphs as part of a process of academization. 'Academize' has two associated meanings. First, a trend whereby subjects for study are brought into the academy, usually but not always the university. Second, it also carries a sense of subjects becoming increasingly 'academic.' For some, perhaps especially those external employers of professional graduates, this has often been regarded as equal to being in a negative sense 'unpractical' and also perhaps as 'not leading to a decision.'<sup>31</sup> It also carries the meaning of a subject developing a research culture, with consequent pressure to develop curricula embedded in research. There is a further strand to 'becoming academic' that carries the association of cultivating a scepticism in stance. There are elements of both becoming increasingly part of the academy and of growing more 'academic' in the role of journals, although primarily the latter.

### **Writing in the new *BJSW***

The contrast between *Social Work* and the newly minted *BJSW* in 1971 is striking. The general absence of a strong continuity of editorial board members suggests Stevenson wished for a new start and to signal this all named people are given an affiliation, so suggesting the importance of institutional as well as personal identity. We have seen that, with the exception of Noel Timms who had recently moved from the London School of Economics to Bradford, all come from the south of England and the Midlands. Oxford occurs three times. It is more specifically a solely English project with no-one from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. All this suggests the absence of later sensibilities about home nation. The contrast between the practice/academic mix of the Board and the solely academic composition of the assessors appears to signal an intention to create a 'learned journal'.<sup>32</sup>

Stevenson's editorial indicates her own reading of the journal's identity. She suggests the Board gave 'as wide a spread of interests as possible' within a fairly small number, especially 'fields of practice.' This latter remark implies how she understood the forms of practice-based knowledge in social work. She gives added emphasis to this point when saying that the assessors were chosen 'to provide as wide a range as possible and in particular of methods and aspects of social work.' Whether the radical Peter Leonard had been asked to

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<sup>30</sup> As a personal anecdote, Ian Shaw recalls Martin Davies recommending Denzin's *The Research Act* within a year or so of its first publication in 1970. Davies was then working in the Home Office Research Unit in Manchester.

<sup>31</sup> Shorter Oxford Dictionary.

<sup>32</sup> A thank you note in Issue 4.1 (p. 3) to 'Mrs Connie Sansom' who as Stevenson's secretary, had set up the journal's systems, illustrates that continuing role as well as continuity in ways of formal address related to gender. However, as early as August 1973 Stevenson was remarking to the BASW Publications Committee that 'the journal was getting its secretarial help cheaply because the Association was only paying for a junior secretary to do the straight typing... It was essential to have a senior secretary to deal with importunate authors'! Modern Records Office. MSS.378/BASW/2/246

join is not known – he sadly is deceased<sup>33</sup>. Leonard was the youngest member of the Seebohm Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Services and a founding professor of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warwick, before moving to McGill University in Canada as Director of the School of Social Work in 1987.

On length, 6000-8000 words is the guideline, but ‘occasionally longer material may be published.’ The book review section, we are told, will adopt a thematic approach – the rationale is again with the intention of writing for practitioners. Finally, in connection with social work’s preferred disciplinary associations it is interesting that the *BJSW* is set in line of descent also from *The British Journal of Psychiatric Social Work*.

In the opening issue there were six main articles, five sole authored. Of the seven authors five are men. Four articles are empirically based. On referencing there is little or no change from *Social Work*. References are in numbered sequence, and marked by the same variability of citation style and format. On the whole the numbers of sources cited seems, by later levels, relatively small – ranging from 2 to 26 and with mean of 12.

## 1974

This image of the first issue is useful as an indicator of the kind of self-awareness set for the journal. By 1974 Stevenson had reached the close of her tenure and the journal had established its ‘voice.’ Of the five articles in the closing issue of her tenure, four were very explicitly empirical in form, and based on structured, quantitative data<sup>34</sup>. The former *Social Work* pattern of small numbers of citations, and almost none for empirically founded articles, had fallen away, although references were still in numbered sequence. Articles included a range of between 6 and 51 citations (mean = 25).

The ‘Notes for Contributors’ remained by later expectations very minimal, covering type formats (on one side, double spaced and wide margins); numbers of copies (‘Two copies are essential, three or four desirable’). No word limit is given. Referencing gave examples for books and articles. ‘Footnotes...should be kept to a minimum.’

The journal shows one apparent ‘loss’ from its main predecessor, in that the sense of immediacy associated with the quick turnaround and presence of correspondence no longer appears in the journal. There were occasional exchanges (including with one of the present writers!), but it was a dying form. Responses to articles, when they were to appear, were themselves in the form of academic articles. Another very visible change of format was the inclusion of a substantial section of ‘Abstracts’. These were grouped under Sociology, Psychology and Psychiatry, Public and Social Policy, and Social Work. Each included abstracts of three to five journal articles together with a paragraph of ‘Comment.’ The tacit message of this development seems to be that social work is a field that draws on a range of relevant disciplines<sup>35</sup>. The choice of these four disciplines suggests how the editorial team understand the boundaries of social work. Selecting some and omitting others (e.g. politics, economics, or history) speaks to the field’s sense of identity.

## 2005

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.mcgill.ca/socialwork/faculty/retired/leonard>

<sup>34</sup> Trends regarding qualitative and quantitative articles are set out later in this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> The inclusion of ‘social work’ is slightly odd, but may well connect to Stevenson’s remark in the first issue about the journal being read by ‘busy practitioners.’

The journal had undergone significant changes by 2005, which in most cases can be understood as reflecting twin processes of academization and standardization. To take the latter first, the instructions to authors have expanded considerably from early issues of the journal. Aspiring authors are given rules regarding strict word limits, spelling ['British usage (Shorter Oxford Dictionary)'], a word limit for article abstracts, inclusion of 'three or four key words or short phrases', text spacing, referencing (now in A-Z order of author rather than numbered sequence from the text), footnotes and appendices (both 'not normally admitted'), and guidelines for the presentation of statistics.

The earlier practice within *Social Work* of including material first appearing elsewhere is now disavowed. Authors are advised that criteria are 'intrinsic merit' and 'readability and interest' – a pairing that probably reflects a continued sense of both university and practice audiences.<sup>36</sup> The journal still sees itself as primarily directed towards readers in the UK although 'papers from overseas are welcome.' This is perhaps reflected in changes in subscription patterns that we mentioned earlier. The one aspect that within a few years would appear almost archaic is that submissions were mailed directly to the journal office. There is no mention of whether submissions could in practice be sent by email attachment, and the instruction is to mail to 'Mrs Sue Hansen' at the journal office.

The journal by now included eight articles and appeared eight times each year, thus producing something like 64 articles a year compared with approximately twenty in the early volumes. Authors are uniformly listed by name and surname. Only one of the eight papers in the reviewed issue for 2005 was sole authored, and three were authored by three or more authors. Of the 22 authors, thirteen were women. Five of the articles were directly based on research data, although the presence of research review material and some attention to textual analysis makes the 'research' boundary less clear. Notwithstanding the move to an international presence among the editorial team and Board, all but one of the articles in this issue were written from the UK. This is not, of course, a criticism. Where it may become a matter on which someone may make a judgement is in terms of how far a journal should be 'inward' or 'outward' in its gaze. What evidence there is suggests that USA scholars are perhaps the most inward-looking as measured by the extent to which their citation sources are drawn from within their own country (Shaw, 2014b). The UK, compared for example, with some countries elsewhere in Europe, is also relatively inward-gazing.

Perhaps the most striking change from early issues of the journal is the increase in volumes of citation. Citations ranged from sixteen to 71, with a mean of almost 41. Book reviews by now usually included citations.<sup>37</sup> By the time of the latest issue to hand at the time of writing<sup>38</sup>, ten articles were carried, giving some 80 articles per year. The journal submission and review process was entirely online, and conducted through a platform (Manuscript Central) that was being widely used by journals across the world. The upward trend in citation levels seemed to have continued, and probably at a fast rate. The sources cited ranged from 28 to 144, with a mean of just over 57.

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<sup>36</sup> We were not granted access to subscription profiles so cannot comment on the important question of ways readership of the journal has changed during its history.

<sup>37</sup> Seven of the nine book reviews did so.

<sup>38</sup> By which time the journal subscription price for institutions had risen by 96% in eight years, suggesting a market buoyancy notwithstanding years of recession.

How one interprets this trend and pattern is not self-evident. Viewed positively, it may indicate a growth in the field, or possibly a greater knowledge of the field by writers. More neutrally, it does seem to reflect a process of academization in the sense of becoming more 'academic.' At the same time it may suggest a form of rhetorical statement, of the 'See me showing how much I know the field' variety.<sup>39</sup>

These broad conclusions are reflected in the ways trends in social work journal writing were seen by editors. The recurring response from many of those to whom we spoke was that social work writing indeed had become more 'academic.' This perceived trend was noted almost as much by early editors as by those who had held the reins more recently. A very early editor expressed this as follows:

'I think it did gradually become, come to be more taken over by the academic world, and they became, certainly during my time, much more influential I think than the professional.'

Speaking with hesitation, another early editor concluded:

'I think it's become more academic and, so I think, as ... more and more of the content is research based, that has a particular style to it, which is not so polemic, you don't wear your heart on your sleeve when you're writing an article, so I think ... that's a part of it, becoming with a greater research contributing to social workers' and academic discipline, that clearly affects the kind of overall style that you're getting in papers... One of the more general things... happening around the time I was involved was the shift from more polemical kind of articles to more analytic articles... Earlier on people would have written perhaps with more of a personal style.'

Two content elements of writing forms were included in 'academic' - research and theory. 'There were two broad categories of paper coming through, and I think they were the research based ones and the theory based ones.' When speaking of research, the comments tended to be appreciative, and to refer to trends over time (Box 3.1). Occasionally this was set *against* theory-writing, as when one editor said 'I think there was a move towards probably more empirical material, rather than more theoretical or anecdotal material which I think have been around in the early days.' The same person suggested that 'some of the more ... reflective, maybe some more theoretical material, some more methodological material, is probably now going in to other journals other than the *BJSW*', and the journal had become 'a bit too...narrowly empirical.' More explicitly, another editor recalled 'I would have liked to have seen much more on ... the development of theory I think than we had.'

*Box 3.1 Perceived Trends in BJSW Research Writing – about here*

It is quite possible that editors were sometimes conjectural and knowingly impressionistic. For example, an early editor, referring to an occasion when former editors were asked to select an article from their period for reprinting, said 'ironically the two that I chose were

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<sup>39</sup> We are reminded in this connection of Ada Sheffield's long-ago remarks about social work case recording of the kind she delightfully calls "Behold-me-busy details" (Sheffield, 1920: 82) where case writing is 'constantly interrupted by what is virtually an accounting to the supervisor ... for time spent.' 'In each instance the important concerns of the client are dropped for a space while the visitor makes it clear that she is on the job and earning her pay' (p.84). In this connection we have not traced trends in levels of *self*-citation although we noticed twenty in one article!



not particularly favourite articles of mine... They reflected the period of the time when I was the editor... Ironically, because they were theory related both of them, they ...weren't in tune with my empirical approach.'

Part of the interpretive problem of much of this, is the deep ambiguity of the term 'theory', which may be used in senses anywhere from propositional forms of explanation to speculative pieces. One editor spoke about the value of:

"staking out ground' pieces where an opinion would be expressed about, for instance, the way in which social work research ought to develop, so there's probably a bit like a normative material in there - you know, "This is what we think ought to happen", because there's a sense of a profession still in the developmental stage.'

Not everyone was happy with such perceived trends towards greater scholarly tone and weightiness. 'Put it beside your bed and it would be there for a year' as one key informant remarked! An early editor, when asked if social work writing had changed, said:

'in a funny kind of way I don't think it has. ... The reservoir of available material has expanded hugely, many, many times, ... But of course because of ... the way in which the academic world has moved and everyone is required now to produce research in order to get promotion, ... and suchlike, and even in order to attract funding for research projects, the churning out of material has become much, much greater, and almost mechanical really. And as a consequence of that, in some respects, the quality of much of the writing is not good. But having said that, clearly there are many high quality papers written as well, so I think the main change has been that you've got to dig deep for the good quality that's there, and not worry too much about the dross.'

Finally, although less fully developed, a number of editors would have concurred with the judgement one more recent editor made regarding sensitivity to questions of gender, sexuality, disability and ethnicity that 'I do think that the engagement with equality and diversity is now pretty universal and pretty taken for granted.'

### **Inside the *BJSW***

We have by and large resisted looking at 'facts and figures' regarding the journal until this point. This is due partly to our intention to understand such figures within a contextual frame, set by the history, beliefs and practices of the journal. In the following pages we examine four general kinds of question. First, who has written for the journal? Second, how can we describe and profile the journal content? Third, how far is it possible to differentiate within this general picture? Fourth, are trends discernible over the history of the journal? These questions overlap. For example, much has been said regarding the characteristics of the scholarly community in social work in regard to such matters as how gender to some degree constitutes the interests of that community.

When dealing with trends we usually consider them over three periods of time, although sometimes in more detail. This division was driven by pragmatic reasons. Not wishing to prejudge trends, yet not having a large enough sample of journal articles to permit extensive analysis against other variables with relatively large numbers of categories, we opted for a way that would allow feasible analysis. But it did not seem arbitrary to us. The other key term we use in this connection is 'regime' to refer to the different editorial

tenures.<sup>40</sup> In accord with the terms of the original contractual agreement, we opted to analyse the final complete year of each editor's tenure, on the grounds that it was at this point that any editor-influenced changes would have time to become manifest.

## BJSW authors

### Gender

The articles published under the eleven regime sample years totalled 483. Of these 257 (53.9%)<sup>41</sup> were first authored by men and 220 (46.1%) by women.

**Table 3.1 Gender of First Authors**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	257	53.9
Female	220	46.1
Sub-total	477	
Missing	6	
Total	483	

There is limited evidence about the gender of the social work author community. Are writers any different from non-writers? What differences exist from one country to another? In a recent study just over seven in every ten first authors were women – substantially higher than for the *BJSW* (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013).<sup>42</sup> It is not immediately obvious what benchmark this should be set against. Not knowing the gender constitution of any appropriate comparison group, one can only hold in abeyance the question of whether men – or women – are over-represented in scholarly outputs.

For example, we examined the data to explore whether the gender distribution of authors varied from one part of the world to another. We found no association.<sup>43</sup> But whether this is a feature of articles in this one journal or something true more generally we do not know. It would be possible in principle to examine this comparison in different and perhaps more discriminating ways. Collyer, for example, has examined publications from the sociology of health and medicine in order to illuminate inter-country relationships between knowledge workers, and national systems of sociological knowledge production. She finds that core–periphery relations define significant features of sociological work, impacting on citation patterns, inter-country collaboration and the selection of reference materials (Collyer, 2014). She distinguishes within national systems of knowledge production between core and periphery countries, but gives attention especially to the example of Australia as a 'semi-periphery' country, and of indeterminate status in the world system. Her general argument is to the effect that we should retain scepticism regarding assumptions that

<sup>40</sup> Out of interest the distant debt for the term is Ian Sinclair's 1970 Home Office study of *Hostels for Probationers* in which he undertook cogent analysis of hostel manager regimes.

<sup>41</sup> When speaking of gender of author we are referring to gender of first author. There were six missing cases.

<sup>42</sup> A more appropriate comparison would be to hold constant the time period. For the *BJSW* editorial tenures from 1999 to 2012 55.6% of first authors were women. This is still lower than the 70% in the study by Shaw and Ramatowski, which covers a similar period.

<sup>43</sup> There was a slight gradient, with the percentages of articles first authored by women showing USA (57.9%), UK (56.2%), Commonwealth countries (50.0%) and all other countries (44.1%).

globalization acts as a homogenizing or equalizing force. Collyer does not look at gender differences, but her approach suggests a potentially interesting way of examining inter-country gender-of-authors patterns in social work. We are not aware of any corresponding work in social work, although one of us has written a critical note on comparative social work citation patterns between the USA, the UK and Nordic countries (Shaw, 2014b).

However, there do seem to be indications from our own study that the gender balance in published social work scholarship shifts over time, and that in general the proportion of women as first authors is higher now than at some previous periods. This conclusion gains support from the following table that traces the gender distribution of first authors through the history of the journal.

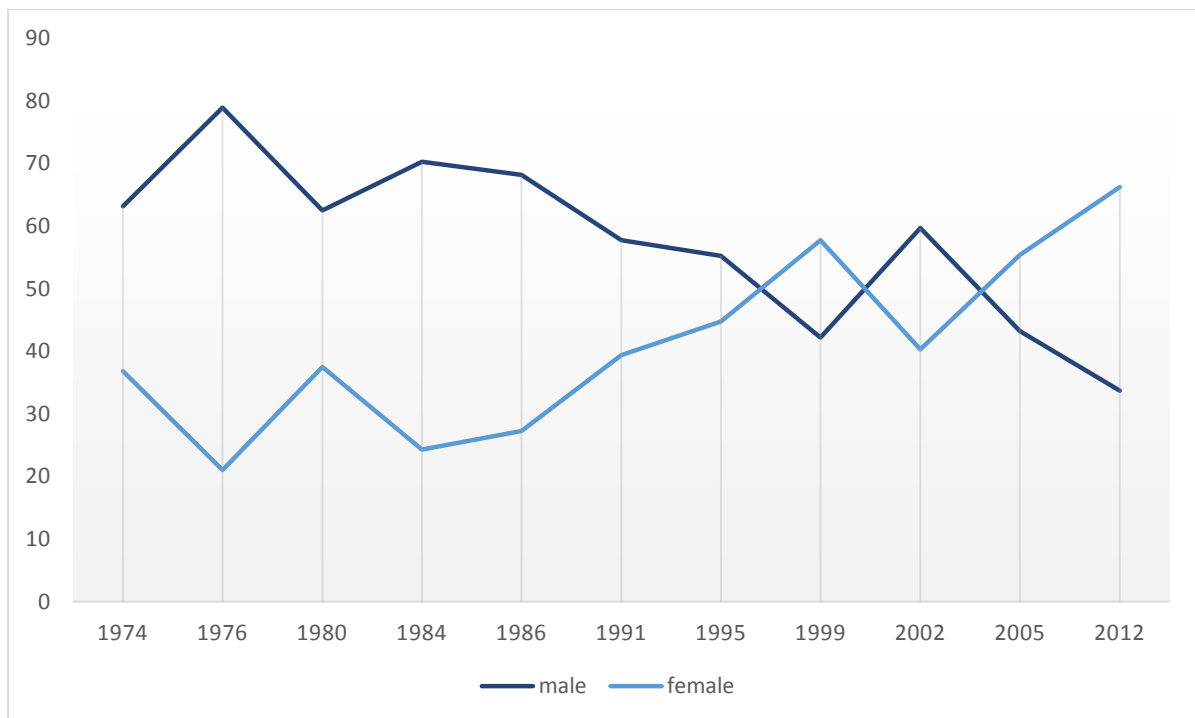
There is a clear significant trend for an increase in the proportion of articles first authored by women. There are several potential explanations for this, including a growing proportion of submissions by women first authors, a gender-related shift in assessed quality of articles, associations between the gender of editors and authors, or factors related to review panel recommendations.

Before briefly considering what can be said about each of these, it may be worth noting that a similar trend occurred in what may be the only comparable social work study (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013). That was a review of all articles rather than a sample, and over a shorter period of just over a decade from 2002. The journal was edited by the same editors throughout that period.

**Table 3.2: Gender of First Author by Editorial Regimes**

			Sampled regimes			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Gender of first author	Male	Count	68	70	119	257
		% within Sampled regimes	70.1%	62.5%	44.4%	53.9%
	Female	Count	29	42	149	220
		% within Sampled regimes	29.9%	37.5%	55.6%	46.1%
Total		Count	97	112	268	477

Pearson Chi Square – 23.309. Df = 2. Significance <0.0001



**Figure 3.1 share of male and female authors by regime year (%)**

The variation seems unlikely to be linked to the gender of editors. We selected the final full year of each editorial regime in order to maximize the possibility of identifying any regime influences, were they to be present. However, the change is fairly linear over time (See Figure 1), whereas the gender of editor regimes has no trend pattern. The question whether the trend reflects in a realist way the standard of social work writing – such that women steadily write better and the quality of writing by men remains constant – is difficult to evidence either way. We have not noticed any argument in the literature relating to this interpretation. A more commonly encountered explanation might be that women are now less likely to be discriminated against in the review and editorial decision-making process. This is a complex question. We have no direct evidence, because review recommendations and editorial decisions were not available to the research team. However, in unpublished data from another unrelated study, preliminary analysis of review allocations and decisions comparing gender of both authors and reviewers, suggested that there may be some interaction between the two, such that articles by women were significantly more likely to be accepted when reviewed by women reviewers than those by male authors (whereas there was no association between the gender of authors and reviewers in articles reviewed by men). Why this may be so is not readily understood. For example, do reviewers successfully detect gender differences in authors, and make advisory reports in the light of these? We know only a limited amount about writing styles between men and women, although one analysis suggests that there are significant differences between male- and female-authored documents in the use of pronouns and certain types of ‘noun modifiers’. Argamon et al. (n.d.), for example, found that females use many more pronouns and males use many more noun specifiers. More generally, even in formal writing, writing by women

exhibited greater usage of features identified as ‘involved’ while male writing exhibited greater usage of features which have been identified as ‘informational’.

This question is one for which relevant data could be made available, especially in the era of online submission, review and decision-making. However, the sensitivity of the issue in both commercial terms and positions held within professional communities hitherto has left the evidence undisclosed, and we remain agnostic on the question.

#### *Country of author affiliation*

Within the documents and editor interviews much was said about the aspirations of the journal to become and be seen as an international journal, the actions taken and the outcomes of those actions. We consider this question further in the final chapter. However, as part of the journal’s profile we examined the country of affiliation of the first author of each article, taking this as a proxy for the country from whence the work had been done.<sup>44</sup> We grouped the countries as shown in Table 3.3. Several apparently straightforward inferences may be drawn, although in turn these raise further questions to which we return subsequently. First, it is largely a record of UK social work scholarship. Second, the interest in developing an identity for the journal within the USA seems relatively limited, insofar as this is measured by affiliation of authors. Third, the *BJSW* is far from being only a UK journal. More than one in four articles over its history have been first authored by those outside the UK.

**Table 3.3 International distribution of first authors**

Country and region		Frequency	percent
	UK	350	72.5
	USA	19	3.9
	Commonwealth	46	9.5
	Other countries	60	12.4
	Not specified	8	1.7
	Total	483	100.0

Can the persistent sensitivity to questions of international reach be illuminated from the analysis of journal content? Table 3.4 suggests that there has been a clear trend towards increased inclusion of articles by authors from outside the UK. We do not intend to be demeaning by merging so many countries under ‘Rest of the world.’ In addition to the articles that came from authors in Commonwealth countries, the other countries with the largest representation for the sampled years were Ireland (18) and Israel (13).

Interpretation once again catches our heels. It would make good sense, for example, to index such figures against the population of social work academics in a given country or at least the general population. Factor in populations of 65 million for the UK, five million for

<sup>44</sup> There are various reasons why the proxy may not be a one to one measure of country of origin. Authors from one country may move to another; first authors may be domiciled in a country other than where the research was undertaken. However, we believe the measure is good enough for our purposes.

the Republic of Ireland, and just under nine million for Israel, and the contrasts do not seem quite so dramatic.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 3.4 Trend by region of affiliation of first authors**

			Sampled regime			Total
			1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Region of author affiliation	UK	Count	83	89	178	350
		% within Sampled regime	83.8%	77.4%	66.2%	72.5%
	USA	Count	3	4	12	19
		% within Sampled regime	3.0%	3.5%	4.5%	3.9%
	rest of the world	Count	13	15	78	106
		% within Sampled regime	13.1%	13.0%	29.0%	21.9%
	Missing		0	7	1	8
	Total		99	115	269	483

Fisher's Exact Test = 30.645. Significance < 0.0001. Five cells have expected count of less than 5.

### Profiling journal content

What subjects come under the scrutiny of social work writers? What can we learn regarding social work research methods and practices? Do these subjects and methods fluctuate or change over time? In dealing with the content of the journal we adopted a relatively elaborate scheme. We distinguished the primary research focus and the primary issue or problem that was being addressed (*see Appendix 2*). 'Primary research focus' refers to people, not problems, and hence the judgement refers mainly to the 'subjects' of the research/scholarship.<sup>46</sup>

#### Research Focus

Turning more directly to the content, Table 3.5 gives information regarding those who were the primary research focus of the study.<sup>47</sup>

**Table 3.5 Primary Focus of Research**

<sup>45</sup> And of course factor in the USA population of almost 320 million and the USA presence of the journal seems tiny.

<sup>46</sup> Usually this will mean the people from whom data was obtained, but if it is clear that these are simply being used as 'proxies' for another set of people (e.g. practitioners being interviewed to learn about children, rather than to learn about practice with children) then the primary focus is children. Detailed guidance has been developed to apply the classification, which is available from the first author.

<sup>47</sup> This refers not only to articles that report original research.

	Frequency	Percent
Children, families, parents, foster carers	45	9.3
Young people (not offenders)	9	1.9
Young offenders/victims	5	1.0
Adult offenders/victims	11	2.3
Adults with housing, homelessness, education or employment difficulties	2	.4
People with mental health problems	6	1.2
Older people	4	.8
Adults/children with health/disability difficulties (including learning difficulties)	9	1.9
Adults/children who are drug/substance users	1	.2
<b>Service user/carers groups</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>19.0</b>
People as members of communities	11	2.3
Service user, citizen or carer populations	15	3.1
Women/men	12	2.5
<b>Citizen, user and community populations</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>7.9</b>
Social work practitioners/managers	84	17.4
Social work students/practice teachers/university social work staff	19	3.9
Social work and/or other researchers	3	.6
Policy, regulatory or inspection community	26	5.4
Members or students of other occupations	4	.8
Joint social work and other professional communities/agencies	37	7.7
<b>Professional and policy communities</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>35.8</b>
<b>Theorising that crosses categories; methodology</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>37.3</b>
Total	<b>483</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The research focus can be expressed more simply by grouping categories and the bold sum-totals in the table give those figures.

Leaving aside the high proportion of articles that, although sometimes taking a substantive context as the framework for the article, focused on more general theorizing or on questions of research methodology, the most frequent focus was on social work practitioners or managers. It may not be too much of a surprise that children, families, parents, and foster carers were most often the centre of attention when research concentrated on service user or carer groups. Comparisons, once again, are restricted, because this analysis has not been undertaken elsewhere to any great degree. However, there is some suggestion that quite striking differences in preoccupation exist between academic, practitioner and service user researchers. While this is not surprising, the extent is marked. For example, while only 19% of the *BJSW* articles focus primarily on service user groups, in a study of UK practitioner research the figure was 70% (Shaw, Lunt and Mitchell, 2014:9-10). No direct studies of these questions in user research are available, although more anecdotal evidence suggests that the 7.9% of studies looking primarily at service user and citizen populations in the *BJSW* would be much higher in user-research (c.f. Shaw, 2012: chapter 25).

A common-sense expectation might be that the weight of attention given to topics of research will vary over time. As measured by the distinction between service user groups, citizens, and professional or policy communities, there is a significant difference over time (Table 3.6), but it is modest and perhaps spasmodic when seen in linear terms.

**Table 3.6 Research Focus by Regime Periods**

	Sampled regime			Total
	1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
<b>Actual or potential service user or carer grouping</b>	21	15	55	91
	21.2%	13.0%	20.4%	18.8%
<b>Citizen, user and community populations</b>	5	3	29	37
	5.1%	2.6%	10.8%	7.7%
<b>Professional and Policy communities</b>	39	46	89	174
	39.4%	40.0%	33.1%	36.0%
<b>not applicable</b>	34	51	96	181
	34.3%	44.3%	35.7%	37.5%
<b>Total</b>	99	115	269	483
				100.0%

Pearson Chi Square = 14.245. D.f. = 6. Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) = 0.027. 0 cells have expected frequency less than 5.

#### *Research Problem*

The focus of the research tells us only so much. We naturally wish also to know something about the ways in which researchers seek to interrogate the question – what problems are they endeavouring to illuminate or resolve? The following Table 3.7 outlines the general picture when research is analysed in this way.

Drawing conclusions and inferences from these figures needs to be done with caution. This is not because they have doubtful validity. The scheme is relatively comprehensive and has been developed over some years. The main inference is that these figures represent probably the firmest available delineation of problems and questions addressed in social work scholarship. Earlier efforts, including those attempted in connection with national research assessment exercises in the UK and elsewhere, all have flaws (Shaw and Norton, 2007). It follows from this that we have very little evidence to know whether the range and spread of scholarly preoccupations in general and research in particular are different between journals in the UK, North America, mainland Europe, Asia and so on. Nor do we have much to go on regarding preoccupations of university-based social work, by and large represented in the *BJSW*, compared with those of practitioner or user researchers. The closest comparisons can be seen in earlier uses of this scheme, in relation to a specialist research journal (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013) and practitioner research (Mitchell, Lunt and Shaw, 2010; Shaw, Lunt and Mitchell, 2014).

The second general inference is that social work scholarship covers a wide range of kinds of problems and questions, although not too far short of half the articles dealt with either



understanding, developing, assessing or evaluating social work practices, or attempting to understand or explain issues related to risk.

**Table 3.7 Primary Research Problem**

	Frequency	Percent
Understand/explain issues related to risk etc.	69	14.3
Understand/explain issues related to equality etc.	37	7.7
Understand/assess/strengthen user/carer involvement etc.	12	2.5
Understand/promote the nature and quality of informal care etc.	2	.4
Describe, understand, explain, or develop good practice in relation to social work beliefs etc.	26	5.4
Understand/develop/assess/evaluate social work practices etc.	150	31.1
Understand/evaluate/strengthen social work/social care services etc.	19	3.9
Understand/explain practice or promote good practice in social work/social care organisations etc.	21	4.3
Understand/respond to issues of nationhood etc.	3	.6
Understand/respond to issues of gender etc.	3	.6
Understand/respond to issues about the form and significance of the family	33	6.8
Demonstrate/assess the value of inter-disciplinary or inter-professional approaches to social work services	32	6.6
Demonstrate/assess the value of comparative research etc.	3	.6
Develop theorizing	26	5.4
Understand/appraise/develop the practice and quality of social work research etc.	21	4.3
Understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career	26	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Social work research clearly includes an extensive range of questions and problems. The diverse verbs also indicate the different stances taken – understand, assess, develop, evaluate, explain, promote, strengthen, and respond to. In this sense the field covers a healthy diversity of issues and brings an equally vigorous multiplicity of standpoints and orientations.

The sample size and number of cells makes trend analysis difficult. We only can say that we considered ways of grouping the categories and carrying out analysis of association between research problems over time. There was no detectable association. It *may* possibly be the case that the substantive focus shifts over time but the underlying nature of the questions and issues remains stable. If so, that *may* imply a stable set of questions that represent the field. However, we were not satisfied that the research problems (Table 3.7) can be aggregated without losing essential distinctions. Neither would it be safe to conclude that, even if there is a stable set of questions that captures the identity of the field, similar sets of problems may not be present in other professional and social science domains. Hence it remains an open question how far the problems and questions that preoccupy social work researchers shift over time, or are distinctive to the field.

*Research Methods*

Focussing more directly on those articles where first hand data was reported, we looked in detail and also more generally at research methods employed. The question of whether social work research relies more heavily on certain methods than others comes to the fore in the UK, when universities undertake quinquennial research assessment assessments. It also surfaces when comparisons are made between the research cultures of social work in the USA, the UK, mainland European countries and elsewhere. Insofar as such differences may occur, this would have consequences for how one understands and evidences claims and aspirations for the *BJSW* to be an international journal.

Three out of five of all articles drew directly on empirical work. Table 3.8 shows that of these a little under sixty percent were wholly qualitative, and just over thirty percent wholly quantitative. Just over one in ten were mixed methods, in the limited sense of combining both qualitative and quantitative.<sup>48</sup>

**Table 3.8 Qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods**

		Frequency	Percentage of all articles	Percentage of research articles
	Qualitative	166	34.6	57.4
	Quantitative	91	19.0	31.5
	Mixed methods	32	6.7	11.1
	<i>Sub-total</i>	289	60.2	100.0
<b>Missing</b>	Not research	191	39.8	
		3		
<b>Total</b>		483		

There have been occasional laments that British social work research is weak in regard to quantitative methods.<sup>49</sup> Measured by volume of studies, it is certainly the case that qualitative methods form a clear majority of research based articles. However, the difference is not, perhaps, as all-embracing as may be thought. Almost a third of the research articles drew solely on quantitative data. Almost two in five articles contained no original research data. Whether this is thought to be a good or a bad thing will depend on the assumptions brought to the field.

Preferences and fashions in methodology change over time, and the dominant methodologies in *BJSW* articles also show signs of shifts. However, the change does not appear to be in a linear form. Leaving aside mixed methods, which move about but remain a minority in all periods, quantitative methods had a period of relative ascendancy in the middle years of the journal, but have fallen off rather dramatically since the turn of the century (Figure 3.2). Qualitative studies have changed in a mirror image, being dominant in

<sup>48</sup> The term ‘mixed methods’ ought to apply equally to research that draws on more than one qualitative or quantitative method (for example combining visual methods with focus groups), but we have kept to the customary usage.

<sup>49</sup> The 2008 Research Assessment Exercise concluded that ‘Quantitative research in social work is small in volume but of high quality. This is an area which would benefit from continued investment and development’ (Cited by Sharland. [http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Main\\_report\\_SW\\_and\\_SC\\_tcm8-4647.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Main_report_SW_and_SC_tcm8-4647.pdf) Section 4.3.3). Sharland concluded in her later report that ‘most consultants agreed that good examples are few and far between.’

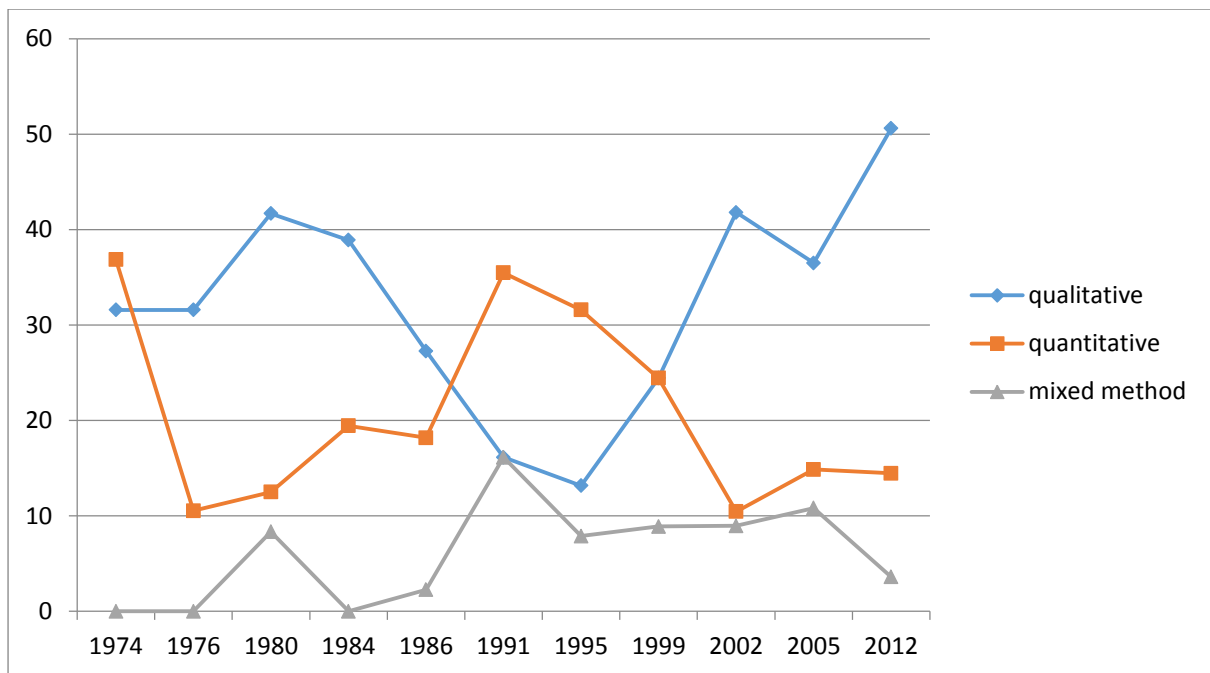
the early period, falling off considerably in the middle years, before rising again in the last decade. These are, of course, proportions. The actual *number* of quantitative social work studies has risen steadily, as the size of the journal has grown. But of course the rise in absolute numbers is even more striking for qualitative studies (Table 3.9).

**Table 3.9 Research methods by sampled regimes**

Sampled regimes					Total
		1974, 1976, 1980, 1984	1986, 1991, 1995	1999, 2002, 2005, 2012	
Research category	Qualitative	36	22	108	166
		63.2%	35.5%	63.5%	57.4%
	Quantitative	19	31	41	91
		33.3%	50.0%	24.1%	31.5%
	Mixed methods	2	9	21	32
		3.5%	14.5%	12.4%	11.1%
Total		57	62	170	289

Pearson Chi Square = 20.228. D.f. 4. Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) .000. Zero cells have expected frequency less than five.

Figure 3.2 depicts the distribution of methods by each editorial regime. While the figures are too small to permit statistical analysis, the data may suggest that the changes in qualitative methods were not due directly to conscious or tacit editorial policy. The proportion of qualitative studies fell steadily over four regimes between 1980 and 1995, only to take a fairly constant upward swing, reaching an all-time high of just over 50 per cent for the 2012 regime. The quantitative figures may be less easy to interpret. Between 1976 and 1980 there was a uniform increase in the numbers and proportion of *all* research-based articles. Quantitative articles rose initially slowly but in a constant upwards direction between 1976 and 1991 only to fall considerably whence from 2002 they have remained between ten and fifteen per cent. Despite the recent flurry of interest in and writing about mixed methods, social work had not reflected any increase in the frequency of such published research up to 2012. While it is not possible to offer a simple generalization, the marked changes in distribution of broadly-characterized research methods do suggest a volatility in the identity profile of the journal's output that may be unexpected.



**Figure 3.2 Research methods by editorial Regime.**

What does the picture look like when we examine the specific methods? Table 3.10 (page 76) gives a more detailed profile of research methods employed in social work research.

Moving left across the table discloses several ways of ‘reading’ the data. The first columns show the primary research method; the third and fourth columns give the further methods reported in the studies; the total is given both as percentages of the overall number of *methods* reported (n=447) and also as a percentage of the *research studies* (n=293).<sup>50</sup> On all measures there are four methods that stand out. *One-to-one interviews*, not perhaps surprisingly, dominate.<sup>51</sup> Just over half of all research studies employed one-to-one interview methods, and they accounted for just over one third of all methods employed. If various forms of group interview are included these figures rise to almost 60 per cent and 39 per cent.

*Sample surveys* were adopted in almost 23 per cent of research studies accounting for 15 per cent of all methods. *Observation* and *ethnographic methods* accounted for just over one in ten of the main methods and were present in just over 16 per cent of all research studies. In rather similar proportions, *organizational and administrative documents* were the main method in just over one in ten studies and present in 17 per cent of all research studies.

<sup>50</sup> Considerable caution is needed in interpreting these figures. While they have been prepared with care (and represent a considerable advance on any previous data), the risk is that the measurement units (i.e. ‘methods’) will be treated as of equal weight. This almost certainly is not the case. We have no means of measuring the research ‘effort’ or ‘volume’ represented by each occurrence of a method. By way of illustration, a subsidiary scanning of organizational documents would not represent equal effort or volume of work as an experimental design. Therefore, even when undertaking apparently ‘factual’ counts of this nature, the limitations of such methods need to be kept in mind.

<sup>51</sup> This is not special to social work. Many years ago Benney and Hughes remarked that sociology had become the ‘science of the interview’ (Benney and Hughes, 1956)

The significance one attaches to the figures is a matter of judgment, and should take into account the footnote regarding ‘effort’ and ‘volume.’ Case studies, ethnographies, experiments, systematic reviews and various forms of longitudinal studies often require extended investments, and small numbers may not do justice to the place they occupy. On the other hand there has been considerable talk, especially in qualitative research circles, of approaches such as visual methods, personal records, archival research and narrative. Yet taken together on the most optimistic figure one or other of these methods only appeared in 16 (7%) of all studies.<sup>52</sup>

### Understanding and explaining differences

Having sketched something of the characteristics of the journal content, and outlined some information regarding trends over time and authorship of articles, what more may we learn from the data? For example, having noted certain differences related to the gender of first authors, is it possible to illuminate these further?

#### *Gender, research interests and methods*

We remarked earlier on the probable patterning of gendered writing styles. The striking data in the following table (Table 3.11) suggests more general evidence regarding gender and social work research.<sup>53</sup>

**Table 3.11 Gender of First Author by Methodology**

			Gender of first author		TOTAL
			Male	Female	
Research methods	Qualitative	Frequency	65	98	163
		% within Research category	39.9%	60.1%	100.0%
	Quantitative	Frequency	55	36	91
		% within Research category	60.4%	39.6%	100.0%
	Mixed methods	Frequency	12	19	31
		% within Research category	38.7%	61.3%	100.0%
TOTAL		Frequency	132	153	285
		% within Research category	46.3%	53.7%	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square = 10.74. Df = 2 Asymp. Sig (2-sided) = 0.002.

The scale of the difference is considerable, but its meaning and consequences are less simple. For example, there have been arguments, sometimes from feminist science, suggesting that quantitative positions represent masculinist methodology. This is a difficult argument partly because it explains too much. Almost two in five quantitative articles in this study were first-authored by women. Speaking of her career Oakley says at one point that ‘I

<sup>52</sup> Shaw and Ramatowski (2013) report details of methods employed in qualitative research in all articles in the *Qualitative Social Work* journal, and offers evidence relevant to the discussions in this report.

<sup>53</sup> While the association of methods and gender was not examined by Shaw and Ramatowski, it is noteworthy that 69% of all articles had been first authored by women in *Qualitative Social Work* (Shaw and Ramatowski, 2013: 741)

discovered that in our excitement to dismantle patriarchy I and other feminist social scientists had mistakenly thrown at least part of the baby out with the bathwater. Women and other minority groups, above all, need “quantitative” research, because without this it is difficult to distinguish between personal experience and collective expression. Only large-scale comparative research can determine to what extent the situations of men and women are structurally differentiated’ (Oakley, 1999: 251). More recently she recalls how she came to understand that the alleged ‘crisis of epistemology’ of Western culture ‘is simply a trick of the mind invented by theorists who’ve got nothing better to do. Reality does exist and so does the real stress and pain that derive from a completely non-random (unfair) distribution of life chances’ (Oakley 2014: 258). But the gender difference, if not everything, is quite something.

**Table 3.12 Research Focus by Gender of First Author**

		Gender of first author		Total
		Male	Female	
<b>Actual or potential service user or carer grouping</b>	Count	37	53	90
	% within research focus	41.1%	58.9%	100.0%
	% within Gender of first author	14.4%	24.1%	18.9%
<b>Citizen, user and community populations</b>	Count	12	23	35
	% within research focus	34.3%	65.7%	100.0%
	% within Gender of first author	4.7%	10.5%	7.3%
<b>Professional and Policy communities</b>	Count	86	87	173
	% within research focus	49.7%	50.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender of first author	33.5%	39.5%	36.3%
<b>Theorizing; methodology and other not applicable</b>	Count	122	57	179
	% within research focus	68.2%	31.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender of first author	47.5%	25.9%	37.5%
<b>Total</b>	Count	257	220	477
	% within research focus	53.9%	46.1%	100.0%
	% within Gender of first author	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square = 27.204. Df = 3. Significance <.0001

If the methodological orientations of men and women differ, does the same apply to authors’ attention to the people who form the primary focus of their inquiry? Table 3.12 (above) suggests ‘yes’ - and ‘no.’ There certainly are several variations by gender. For example, women authors account for almost two thirds of research studies regarding citizen, user and community populations. However the differences are less *within* research, but between research studies and those that deal, sometimes in a more general way, with methodology and theorizing. This *may* suggest that women are more likely to write about

work that involves at some stage direct focus on and perhaps contact with, people, but we would not wish to state this in too dogmatic a way.<sup>54</sup>

We endeavoured to see if a corresponding association by gender was noticeable in terms of the kinds of research question and problem that were addressed. There is an analytical challenge, already noted, arising from the probability that the categories of research problem cannot be aggregated in any theoretically plausible way. However, we explored various options and have developed a grouping of categories (See Appendix 2). While we would not want to argue too strongly against anyone who wished to suggest these categories have a somewhat arbitrary quality, Table 3.13 does seem to suggest that the questions and problems that authors bring to research and scholarship may have gendered features. Most of the variance is accounted for in terms of two group categories – Groups D and E. Looking at the constituent categories individually, there are several research problems where a gender difference appears to be present. Bearing in mind that 46 per cent of all articles were first authored by women, of the articles focussing on theorizing only three out of twenty-five (12%) were first authored by women; of those dealing with learning and teaching – pedagogic research – nineteen of the twenty-six (73%) were by women; and of those that focused on social work organizations fourteen of the twenty-one (67%) were by women.

The cautious conclusion to draw from these findings is that the research interests of men and women *do* seem to be different, in terms of the subject and field, the questions that are brought to the field, and the methods employed. But in just what ways and for what reasons, we still know little.

**Table 3.13 Research Issue/Problem by Gender of First Author**

		Gender of first author		Total
		Male	Female	
Group A	Frequency	58	61	119
	% within research issue	48.7%	51.3%	
Group B	Frequency	137	108	245
	% within Research issue	55.9%	44.1%	
Group C	Frequency	19	19	38
	% within Research issue	50.0%	50.0%	
Group D	Frequency	36	13	49
	% within research issue	73.5%	26.5%	
Group E	Frequency	7	19	26
	% within research issue	26.9%	73.1%	
Total	Frequency	257	220	477
	% within Research issue	53.9%	46.1%	

Pearson Chi Square – 17.075. Df = 4. Asymp significance (2-sided) = 0.002

<sup>54</sup> For example, we have an indicator of who the first author was and not who actually undertook fieldwork.

It is of more than curious interest to ask whether decisions regarding research methods are contingent in any way on the focus of research. Table 3.14 suggests that there may be some association, although it is not especially powerful. A disproportionate low proportion of quantitative studies existed in those studies where one or other service user or carer grouping was the focus of research, while a higher than expected proportion of quantitative studies occurred in cases where professional or policy communities were the focus of attention.

**Table 3.14 Research Methods by Focus of Research**

		Research category			Total
		Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	
<b>Actual or potential service user or carer grouping</b>	Count	53	20	14	87
	% within research focus	60.9%	23.0%	16.1%	100.0%
<b>Citizen, user and community populations</b>	Count	21	10	4	35
	% within research focus	60.0%	28.6%	11.4%	100.0%
<b>Professional and Policy communities</b>	Count	82	61	14	157
	% within research focus	52.2%	38.9%	8.9%	100.0%
<b>not applicable</b>		10	0	0	10
<b>Total</b>		166	91	32	289
	% within research focus	57.4%	31.5%	11.1%	100.0%

Pearson Chi Square = 15.813 Df = 6. P = 0.015

The report has moved inwards from its identity, variously understood, through to the practices that carry the journal, and the content between its covers. In the final chapter we move back outwards to the wider world the journal inhabits.



**Table 3.10 All Research Methods**

Research Methods	1 <sup>st</sup> method	Percent	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> methods	Percent of >1 method studies	Total	Percent of methods	Percent of research studies
One2one Interviews, inc telephone, couples interviews; co-interviews	90	30.7	61	51.5	151	33.8	51.5
Narratives, life history, (auto)biography, naturally occurring talk	1	.3	3	2.6	4	0.9	1.4
Focus groups and group interviews	10	3.4	14	12.0	24	5.4	8.2
Observation/ethnography	33	11.3	15	12.8	48	10.7	16.4
Action research and participatory cycles of research	11	3.8	2	1.7	13	2.9	4.4
Visual data. Photography; drawing; film	3	1.0	1	0.9	4	0.9	1.4
Personal records and documents – diaries, journals, letters	0	0	4	3.4	4	0.9	1.4
Historical archival research	3	1.0	1	0.9	4	0.9	1.4
Records and organizational or administrative documents	32	10.9	18	15.4	50	11.2	17.1
Case studies	14	4.8	5	4.3	19	4.3	6.5
Sample survey	59	20.1	18	15.4	67	15.0	22.9
Repeat and longitudinal surveys	2	.7	4	3.4	6	1.3	2.0
Experiment or quasi-experiment	13	4.4	4	3.4	17	3.8	5.8
Measurement scales	6	2.0	0	0.0	6	1.3	2.0
Syntheses, meta-analysis, systematic reviews and secondary analysis	16	5.5	4	3.4	20	4.5	6.8
Total	293	100.0	154	51.5	447		
No data <sup>55</sup>	190						
<b>Total</b>	<b>483</b>						

<sup>55</sup> Observant readers may puzzle over why there are 194 missing values for the summary of methods and only 190 in this more detailed table. This is because certain methods may be clear at one level but less so as to whether they are predominantly qualitative or quantitative. Administrative documents and some forms of interviews are cases in point.

### Box 3.1 Perceived Trends in *BJSW* Research Writing

'The standards expected of those who write for the journal have increased steadily in terms of we want papers that are well researched, rigorously referenced, and topical, new, original. So I mean in that sense the goal posts have steadily moved towards better quality papers... when you compare what's published now and what was published 40 years ago, yes, a remarkable change in style, quality, I think in all ways'

'I think it has become, my impression is, more inclined to publish material that's quite strongly empirically based.'

'It's become less kind of, probably less personal and anecdotal, that would be one thing, but again maybe another way of putting that is to say it's become more academically rigorous, more research based.'

'I think we were pretty heavy on research based articles, and that was partly because those were the ones that tended to be the better articles, that the academics who were involved in research tended to be the ones who wrote, and those were the papers that we had.'

'Writing in social work has become more likely to be empirically based now, more likely to be research oriented, more scholarly, less based on what sometimes gets called practice wisdom, less based on knowledge acquired through work in the field, more likely to be written by PhDs.'

'I'm pretty sure there's a strengthening of the different methodologies used ... there's a strengthening of the knowledge base as a result of that... Expectations have become higher, there's a greater expectation about the rigour, the rigour in terms of style, in terms of use of methodologies...'

## Chapter Four

### The *BJSW*'s World

Throughout the previous chapters we have encountered the inescapable realization that it is not possible to understand the *BJSW* outside its place in a wider world. We have heard the voices of the profession and publishers, and have heard how editors explain shifts and developments in terms of educational, policy and political ebbs and flows in social work. We have also come to appreciate how the reputations and rhetoric of the journal as, in important ways, 'international' surface in various unexpected quarters. In this final chapter relating to the results of the study we bring together these themes. We draw on the interviews, the archival documents, and the data regarding the journal's 'impact.'

#### A 'Society journal'

The journal is owned by the British Association of Social Workers. In a very approximate way the foundation of the journal, alongside the creation of a now defunct journal, *Social Work Today*, replaced the former journals *Social Work* and *Case Conference*. BASW members have an option to receive the *BJSW* at discounted rates, and in addition receive an in-house periodical, *Professional Social Work*. BASW also publishes the journal *Practice*. As of April 2016 977 BASW members were subscribed to the journal as part of the BASW's membership offer. This represents approximately five per cent of the then current membership].

But how do BASW regard the journal, and how do the other stakeholders in the journal regard BASW's interest? There were a good number of those to whom we spoke who simply expressed a positive view of the relationship between the journal and the BASW. The most explicit of such comments came as a publishers' view. Although sensitive to the reality that relationships of this kind have some volatility, this person affirmed:

'...if I was looking at a range of society journals that we publish, and if I wanted to come up with a model of how it can be done successfully, I think *BJSW* would be pretty close to being that model... It is often the case that the society and the editors are rather suspicious of the publisher getting involved in their sphere of influence, and that's a shame, because I think the publisher often has quite a lot to bring to the party, and I think so with *BJSW* it was recognized that OUP had a useful role to play, and yeah, if more journals were like that, that would be great.'

Staying with the professional association dimension for the moment, there were various generally appreciative remarks from across the years:

'there seemed to be a good working relationship between BASW and the publisher... I think BASW sees it as a really important part of the whole credibility of social work as a professional occupation.'

'I found them incredibly supportive of the journal'

'You know, all very serious, very committed...extremely conscientious I think.'

'BASW were brilliant throughout, I've been [...] ever since I started being a social worker I've been a member of the British Association of Social Workers, so I am biased. ...I still am, but they were, they were fine insofar as they never interfered

editorially, but they were very supportive of the journal, and I think we were helpful to them in terms of raising money.'

The BASW key informant to whom we spoke was unreserved: 'I saw it as the jewel in BASW's crown really, the *British Journal of Social Work*.'

Others went further to spell out the nature of the relationship. For example, some stressed the willingness of BASW to let the journal have its head. As we saw above, for one pair of co-editors 'they never interfered editorially.' More recent editors echoed this when speaking of the 'attitude they've taken, hands off, "You're the editors" attitude.' That was seen as a reciprocal mutual respect from BASW's perspective. 'They always gave me plenty of opportunity during the editorial board meetings to bring them up to date with what was happening in the association, so I had no, nothing other than a feeling that they wanted to work closely with me and the association to common goals.'

There was a more general sense that BASW gained from the ownership of the journal. 'I think it was quite important to them in terms of their professional credibility and their professional standing and status of social work.' More specifically, there were financial interests. Editors and publishers were aware of this though the details were slightly opaque. From across four decades we encountered comments of the following kind:

'It's quite a money spinner. Not quite sure how it all works, but they obviously get a lot of profit out of the journal, so you know, they have a lot of interest in supporting it and encouraging it.'

'There is some commercial connection, but I've forgotten how it was expressed at the time, and it was always a little bit odd.'

'BJSW was regarded as a very major asset, both in terms of the profession, the kind of intellectual assets, but also I think probably a material asset as well for BASW, because there does seem to be, although we aren't privy to the detail of any of this.'

The international question cropped up once again in this connection, as part of a considered reflection on the relationship between the journal and BASW. A North American associate editor was appointed in 2006, during an editorial tenure that was marked by various developments (Box 2.2). In her first report to the Board she set out her understanding of the rationale for the appointment:

'One goal of the appointment is to increase submissions and published papers by U.S.-based scholars. A second goal is to raise the general visibility of the *BJSW* in the U.S. by representing the *Journal* at professional conferences, encouraging subscriptions, promoting citation of *BJSW* articles, and working with the Co-Editors and publisher to make the *Journal* as accessible as possible to social work scholars in the U.S.'

Sixteen months into her role, she remarked 'Over the months, I have found this Associate Editorship to be among my most rewarding professional roles.' Asked if this move was commercial or academic someone replied:

'It was probably a combination of those things. So, I mean, so one of the things when Ian<sup>56</sup> started to take an interest in the journal from BASW's point of view, he

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<sup>56</sup> Ian is Ian Johnston, then General Secretary of BASW.

definitely regarded its commercial success as important to BASW. It provided quite a large amount of annual revenue to BASW, and I think definitely we would have considered the US subscription base as important to the journal....'

Hence 'any journal that has an international mission, as BJSW did, and does, should hope to take, should be wanting to take a good and increasing share of that particular market of, supply of, high quality papers.' There is a superficial paradox, that a national professional body should find their interests enhanced by the aspiration to internationalize the journal. But it was underscored by the former BASW key informant who believed that 'increasing the impact of the journal in the UK was obviously of prime importance, as well as its influencing its readership worldwide.' The lightly hidden status dimension of this was routinely explicit in reports to the Board by the Associate Editor, from January 2007 onwards, as, for example, early in 2008, where she says 'My role involves raising the visibility and prestige of the *BJSW* in the US and encouraging submissions from US-based authors.' Throughout the period of her office she appears to have been energetically committed to promoting the journal in various ways.

There were economic issues at play here, which probably interested both BASW and publishers. A former editor recalled,

'During those early years, a large number of personal subscribers (a) signed up to the *BJSW* and (b) gradually fell away. They had thought that it would be like *Case Conference*, etc., and as they realised that it wasn't quite what they had expected they began to not renew their subscriptions. I don't think this worried editors particularly because their focus was 100% on producing a 'pure' academic journal; but it must have worried BASW who can't have enjoyed seeing falling circulation figures, of course, and bore the brunt of the consequent losses - hence the eventual sell-out to OUP.'

The intertwining of interests is complex. It includes a more negative view of BASW's relationship with the journal. For some, it was a relationship of indifference and distance, and for others one in which potential conflicts of interest were present. In Box 4.1 we have brought together some of these interlaced, slightly vague, partly recollected and negative sense of distance.

*Box 4.1 Distance and a light touch - about here*

Similar reflections were expressed in greater detail by an earlier editor:

'I think one factor I never quite understood in a way was whether there was an influence from ... the British Association of Social Workers. It had a representative on the editorial board, and it always did, and there was a requirement, I presume it still is, that the editors be members of BASW ... and it seemed to me that in terms of actual interventions of the editorial board, the BASW presence was not effective, but whether there was something going on in the background I didn't know about, I'm not sure. I think there were occasional efforts to have more of a say from the professional association about what went into the journal but if that had ever existed I think it had eroded by the time I became involved with it.'

Our general interpretation of the diverse evidence on this question lies partly in endemic tensions and partly in the tides of influence on social work and the journal. There is always

likely to be some more or less ongoing tensions of the kind represented by the editors who said

‘because the journal is owned by a professional association, it has a sort of delicate balancing act to try and figure out what the politics of the profession is, and the politics of the time... We’re very clear, we tease them a bit, that they’re the Murdoch, as owners, and we’re the editors, and there is the kind of tension in there which they’ve been very clear they don’t see the *BJSW* as a mouthpiece for BASW.’

This may prove creative or sometimes more difficult as when ‘there was some discussion ... about the profession not having an appropriate journal, raising questions around what the role of BASW, or *BJSW* was, whether we were effectively expressing the profession in the way that we think we are.’ A variation of this kind of tension was expressed by an earlier editor who said ‘My guess is, that the journal was always viewed as a bit highbrow and a bit academic, and insufficiently geared to practice issues, by BASW. I think they always had some rather ambivalent feelings about it, but they let it go its own way and they contributed to it.’ In fact she echoed this later but with her own sense of a love/hate relationship - ‘I think it saw it as rather highbrow, but I think it was also quite proud of it.’

The actual playing out of these tensions between inclusion and rigour perhaps had a sharper edge than when ‘recollected in tranquillity.’ There is quite lengthy correspondence from the mid-1970s expressing the then editor’s consternation that a BASW Council member was being appointed to the Editorial Board without consultation. The inference is that the editor wanted chosen representatives who could bring academic rigour and seems to suggest that the Council member (a senior figure within an agency) would not be able to bring these abilities.<sup>57</sup> There is a linked correspondence that may suggest a wish on the part of the *BJSW* editor to distance the journal from *Social Work Today* – the BASW successor to *Case Conference*.

But also there were periods where partly external trends came to the fore. The economic elements are clearly important, and there was a period where BASW was weakened. From the BASW perspective ‘There was a very negative view of BASW... and people felt that the link between BASW and the journal was not healthy to the journal.’ In addition ‘people who were involved with the journal felt that BASW turned its back on the *British Journal of Social Work*, and hadn’t really kind of engaged with it properly, and hadn’t participated in the ... editorial advisory board or whatever the title of it was. So I was quite keen to change that.’ More broadly, ‘from my point of view I turned BASW around. It was on the way to extinction, ten years of deficit budgets and all the money was gone.’

This closely reflected the publisher’s take on that period. ‘At that time there was a pretty hands off relationship. I don’t think there was an awful lot of contact between OUP and BASW.’

‘... but Ian took a very different, I mean it was clear when Ian came on board that he, he made it clear that he wanted BASW to be more involved in the journal. He wanted it to be clearer to people that BASW felt the journal was an important asset... He must have looked at the cheques coming in every year, that were the profit from the journal to BASW.’

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<sup>57</sup> Modern Records Centre. MSS.378/BASW/2/246.

This had followed most of a decade when social work at the levels of the universities, professional programmes and within agencies was deeply influenced by radical thought. This doubtless had an influence on a period of decline for the professional body,<sup>58</sup> and it was well recalled by someone who had been editor of the journal during that time. We quote at some length:

‘there was an article by a pair called Rojek and Collins, called ‘Contract or Con Trick’,<sup>59</sup> and it was about the time when social workers were very keen on establishing contracts with their clients, and they suggested that this was really just a huge great con trick, and that sparked off quite a lot of controversy within the journal and I think it upset a lot of people in BASW as well. They felt that the journal was actually having a rather negative affect, which was making it quite difficult for people to operate positively in the particular political environment in which they found themselves... BASW found itself really in a very difficult position. It was trying to build up the professional profile of social workers, with a government that a lot of the social workers actually actively disliked.’

This returns us to the identity of the journal that we considered in the opening chapter. On the one hand it is possible to see the *BJSW* as in a strong way the voice of social work.

‘I think that’s a very important function of periodical literature, journal literature, particularly for the journals that are published affiliated with a professional body of some kind. I mean I don’t think that a commercially published journal, one that comes out from Sage, Wiley, or any other journal publisher, has that same mandate.’

But such a role is likely to come under fire in periods of questioning, collective doubt and radical movements.

### **Publishing a Society journal**

We have bracketed the role of publishers for long enough. As with BASW a liberal scattering of appreciative assessments were made of Oxford University Press. Over the last four decades remarks of the following kind can be heard:

‘The OUP people I thought were very helpful. I thought they were efficient, they were supportive, they provided good information at the editorial board meetings about, one thing was circulation and subscriptions, and that news at the time was usually not good, in that the number of subscriptions was going down rather than up.’

‘Oxford University Press I have to say were absolutely brilliant, they never interfered, not once, on anything, they let us publish what we thought should be published.’

‘The system is there and it’s got all the potential to work very, very well. I mean it’s a very slick, I’m talking about the organisation around us, through ... Oxford University Press.’

Editors were conscious to a greater or lesser extent that publishers had their own interests, and that these only partly overlapped editorial interests. Someone involved near the

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<sup>58</sup> The elements of this connection lie beyond our scope, but seem to have a clear importance for the wider questions of professional and disciplinary identity and change.

<sup>59</sup> The reference is to Rojek, C. and Collins, S. 1987. ‘Contract or con trick?’ *Br J Soc Work* 17 (2): 199-211. Google Scholar lists 32 citations of this piece so the attention may not have been long-lived.

beginning of the journal suggested, 'I think the publishers are probably more powerful now than they were in my time, and they'll want to influence any changes that editors might wish to make that they didn't like.' We have seen some of the ways such interacting influences may take shape when discussing the identity of the journal. To a publisher the relationship often may feel more straightforward.

'I suppose, from a publisher's point of view, one of the things that distinguishes journals from one another is the sort of relationship that you have with the owner of the journal. So... part of the conversation I would have had with my predecessor would have been the sort of relationship we had with BASW.'

Editors from a more recent period said 'I think one of the strange things about Oxford University Press is that *BJSW* is its only social work journal. It doesn't publish any other social work journal at all, so ... therefore in that sense it's ... part of the wider social sciences range of journals rather than being part of a smaller family of social work journals ...'<sup>60</sup>

Two co-editors told the story of how they believed another publisher had tried to 'poach' *BJSW* from OUP. On telling their OUP contact he 'gave quite a wry smile and said "Well, that's what we do in publishing."'

When speaking about the journal's identity we have heard one editor contrast 'Academic Press'<sup>61</sup>, who were very concerned with ... the whole scholarly quality; they wanted a journal ... that was acceptable in international terms, that fitted in with their academic publishing business, and on the other hand BASW I think, while it supported the journal certainly, was really more interested in things that had greater relevance for practitioners.'

This editor added that '... Academic Press certainly resisted a number of attempts to make the journal more like Community Care I suppose, to make it more, to reduce the sort of academic weight of it and make it a bit more user friendly, and Academic Press was very keen to keep it as a good, well thought-of academic journal. But I think there always was that sort of that tension if you like between the two.'

OUP came on the scene in the 1980s, no doubt following a growing realization that the initial contract with Academic Press was not satisfying mutual interests.<sup>62</sup> The move to OUP was congruent with their own interests. 'The 1980s were a time when I think it was a growth spurt for OUP. I think OUP had prior to the 1980s had a largely humanities based journals programme, and it was probably a slightly sleepy operation compared to the current state of play. And ... during the 1980s I know that we acquired a lot of journals.' The fit seems to work on both sides. In addition to snatches of evidence we have given earlier, the general image was portrayed by one former editor who concluded

'I do think the fact that it's been located with the Oxford University Press for some time also has, makes a difference. So I do think that it has that sort of Bank of England feel to it. It's solid, it's well produced, it's consistent, it's with a very high quality publisher. So ... it probably has a bit of a traditional feel to it, and I think that's a good thing. So yes, it probably has a bit of a traditional air, bit of a leather-bound air to it, but that's not a bad thing I don't think.'

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<sup>60</sup> OUP through its USA arm publishes *Social Work Research* but only from c. 2012.

<sup>61</sup> The publication of the *BJSW* was transferred from Academic Press to Oxford University Press in 1988.

<sup>62</sup> We have been given hearsay evidence that suggests the currency of such stories, but have no means of confirming these.



For most editors the OUP respect for editorial positions was valued. Even when this seemed passive, it was appreciated. 'OUP certainly didn't do anything, didn't influence the journal, they were very nice to us.' BASW may have preferred a more proactive stance by OUP. 'Oxford University Press were good in many respects, but I thought maybe could have done more about a different kind of marketing, getting it out there, so that the material in it was more widely distributed.'

### **A Board on Board**

The general view of the *BJSW* board was one of a comparatively active body. While it may be difficult to pin down actual changes that stemmed primarily through the board - 'nothing really absolute substantial' as two joint editors agreed – there was nonetheless an overall sense of a working unit. Asked what was shaping the journal at the time of her tenure one editor said 'it only ever felt like it was the editorial board. OUP sat on the editorial board, and so they would inject issues, important issues and interesting issues about the market and success, more numerical side of it, but the only way we seemed to be in touch with anything was through the editorial board.' As an earlier editor recalled, 'the editorial board was actually very active I think. It wasn't just a symbolic thing, it had a lot of ideas about how it wanted to see the journal go.' The following response to a discussion of review practices was hypothetical, but well illustrates how meetings might proceed:

'It's a very good example of the sort of thing that would have gone to the editorial board, and you would then have had a range of views, people experienced with other journals, with being published and reviewers themselves, and they would have given that long and hard and extremely fruitful discussion, possibly for more than one meeting, and you would have felt that you'd come out at the end of it with the right decision.'

More recent editors concluded, perhaps with an implied slightly odious comparison, 'Increasingly it's been more collaborative and more shared responsibility with the board ...The board is unlikely to return to being fairly much a kind of civilised [...] club.'

#### *Box 4.2      Active Support – about here*

This general editorial view about the board was understandably reflected in a number of positive assessments (Box 4.2). But it was not the whole picture. There was a sense, as with other aspects of the *BJSW*'s history, that there were highs and lows. For example, 'After I'd taken over (I) started to make changes. A publisher with whom I was working on other things said that two of the names who had appeared on the inside front cover had actually been dead for some period of time! So there certainly wasn't a feeling of a wide range of influences.'

There were also occasional recognitions that all had not always been well. One comment from someone who had not been a core editor was to the effect that 'there were issues from time to time, some issues about people being rejected...quite difficult issues I would seem to remember at board meetings, where people were unhappy with being rejected.' Someone else said 'They've had these positions called international advisory board members I think, and I don't know that those people have ever been very successfully hooked in with the journal.' The reports from these members supports such a perspective, with the general view being expressed that they 'could do more' in their role if given sufficient guidance and communication from the Board. A theme of these reports to the Board is giving suggestions

for comparative papers/issues and querying why the journal is not including more of these kinds of papers given the professed outward-facing identity of the journal. A more general critical assessment of the professional ethos of the Board was offered by one person, in terms that perhaps reflects the identity of the journal as a professionally owned venture:

‘the board meetings I think tended to spend rather a long time, I would suggest probably too long, on discussing who should be appointed to the board... So every meeting there would be a lot of paperwork about nominations to the board, and of course when we came to appoint new editors, a lot of paperwork about editors, and I recall there were occasionally candidates would come up that certain member of the board ... obviously had issues with, and quite often we’d kind of skirt around those issues in a slightly... or they might be blunt about them. But yeah, I remember there were occasionally people were making quite strong cases as to why a particular individual shouldn’t be appointed to the board.’

The same reason may account for those instances as when ‘we had a bit of a delinquent board member, only in the sense that he was likely to go off at a tangent, but we managed him all right.’

A professionally owned journal probably always is open to influences from beyond the formal editorial processes and structures. The example most often mentioned in this connection was the late Jo Campling. Understanding her role was sometimes a puzzle to those to whom we spoke. One very positive former editor, speaking of the 1990s, recalled in following terms.

‘I also had the advice and support of a lovely person called Jo Campling... She was very interested in social work publishing. She created a whole series of social work text books for Palgrave Macmillan Publishers... although Jo was a very strong second wave feminist she was however not a separatist, so she didn’t back away from supporting people like myself... I’ve always very much appreciated Jo Campling’s advice all those years ago, that it would both be something I could give something to but also learn a lot from.’

Relating this to the editorial appointment s/he said ‘I think Jo had a bit of an influence as well, because I was trying to weigh up quite what I could do, and she sort of said well, you know, editing work may not get you one sort of credit but it gets you a lot of other benefits in terms of your academic career.’

Someone else also had positive memories. Recalling Campling’s presence at a conference, ‘She had come to my paper presentation, which was about why US social work should not be a model for the rest of the world, and I know she liked the presentation; she gave me her card at the time and suggested that I submit it to the BJSW.’ When it came to the journal seeking to make a specific appointment ‘I think she probably remembered having met me.’

Capturing her role sometimes left people struggling. Speaking before her death a former editor said ‘she’s kind of an agent, publishers’ agent, or an agent for publishers, which makes it, it hugely underestimates how important she has been to the growing confidence of social work as an academic discipline.’ Another key informant had a similar understanding.

‘She played a role somewhere between the academic editorial board members and OUP the publisher, because she obviously, she had a hand in the publishing business. I think she ... represented authors ... I think she was a publishing agent... for authors.

So she ... had one foot in the publishing area, and she also had connections with other publishers; so I know she had connections at (two major publishers). I think she had involvement with the journals.'

Weighing up the part she played, one person concluded,

'She was an important voice in the journal at that time... I think that she was generally viewed as a very helpful, useful and active member of the board. I think there were occasions... when there were queries about, how did Jo get on the board, and why is she effectively a permanent member of the board, because I think she was effectively a permanent member of the board. ... I think she had this kind of odd status, I think she went under the title of consultant or something like that, but ... she was effectively a permanent fixture, until her death.'

Editorial appointments, editorial mentoring, suggesting and facilitating other developments, and all in the role of agent for academics in relation to a number of different publishers. For example, 'I remember she was very keen on the idea of the Rebecca Hegar appointment (as US editor, I think she was very much behind that.' Key actors who are present in non-formal capacities may not be easy to work with. 'She was, as you know, a very opinionated woman... to be perfectly honest there were occasions where she strayed on to the publishing territory and I didn't necessarily always agree with her.'

### **A journal in the 'outside' world**

The British Association of Social Workers, Oxford University Press and the Board members of the journal all are situated in a wider national and to some extent international environment. Nationally it is the world of politics, policy, social work practice and universities that impinge most recognizably – and sometimes painfully – on the journal, but not only, of course, in a passive way. Indeed, the general rationale for this project is premised on the expectation that the journal represents in some way the identity and direction of the field of social work, as a profession, occupation and discipline. In the paragraphs that follow we look at the worlds of politics, policy and practice, touching as we do so on the way the internationalizing agenda of the journal continues to push and pull the journal. We then shift to look at the university world in general and the progressively growing influence of government funded exercises to assess the quality and relevance of university research. We expand that to a fuller discussion of the question of journal impacts.

#### **Politics, policy and practice**

Editors and others were united in regarding the general environment at different times as at best demanding and often negative. Coming from a USA perspective someone said

'I became much more aware of some of the politics surrounding social work... in Britain. You know, this new college of social work, which took me a while to figure out wasn't a college in the American sense; ongoing issues about the *BJSW* and its ... perception in the UK; and struggles with government regulation and ... curriculum mandates. I became more aware of what schools of social work go through over there for what we would call reaccreditation, and more about how people qualify to be social workers in the UK, but all of that was pretty new to me.'

Asked about professional, academic, social or political influences on the journal, two editors saw the context as one where

‘The politics of the United Kingdom has moved towards a more federal system... UK has many more diverse academic voices as a result of increasing regional politics in the UK, and helps us understand the international dimension... Increasingly those regional politics have emerged in the character, characteristics of papers that are published in the journal and we are encouraging that.’

Earlier editors spoke of a different political context. ‘We were conscious that we were taking over at a time that was likely to be difficult for social work, given its close relationship within Britain to the public sector and social democratic ideology... we took over and maybe in the middle, particularly around this case called Baby P.’<sup>63</sup> Others wryly remarked that ‘The journal’s had to operate in ... a largely negative political environment, because whichever government we’ve ever had in, certainly in my lifetime as a social worker, has not been as supportive to social work as we think it ought to have been. So in that sense I think we’re always working ... in a less than ideal political environment.’

Some were aware that the journal had come under fire at different stages. One story told us from BASW’s view of things was as follows:

‘At one stage Denise Platt<sup>64</sup> was critical of the *British Journal of Social Work*, publicly ... I thought that was very, very unfair, because I think that the *British Journal of Social Work* represents the best in social work.’

She alleged ‘it was a sort of stuffy academic sort of [...], it wasn’t like sufficiently oriented to service users and practice.’ He in some respects understood that criticism and suggests it ‘could be more accessible ... Like a lot of things in social work, it’s a missed opportunity, in making sure that, when each edition is published, that what was done about highlighting in the media, in *The Guardian* and so on, some of the things that were coming out. There should have been conferences that were linked to the journal.’ Also on the special editions of the journal, ‘maybe they weren’t used as much as they might have, sent copies of that to the key politicians.’ He also suggested the ‘need to establish an observatory for social work.’

An earlier editor told another tale that was to similar effect when she referred to ‘a very important man in the voluntary field and he’s got a knighthood.’ ‘He had an idea which Academic Press very much liked, for inviting senior politicians to address a lunchtime seminar at the Reform Club, and the idea was this would be under the auspices of the journal and we’d then publish the seminar papers that they gave. And it went on for a while but in fact either what they said just wasn’t publishable, or else we just never got the papers to publish, so it dropped after a while, but they were very interesting seminars.’

From the USA perspective the potential for professional influence through the journal was significant. ‘I think as ... the unified voice for the profession, then through editorials and through what gets submitted to the journal, the *BJSW* can influence social work practice and

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<sup>63</sup> 17 month old Peter Connelly was killed in 2007, leading to a major child protection inquiry.

<sup>64</sup> Denise Platt is at the time of writing Chair of the Commission of or Social Care Inspection and made this comment in 2007. In response to her comments, the next editorial of the *BJSW* commented: ‘We are happy for the British Journal of Social Work to be judged on its merits and we believe that the Critical Commentary and the eight substantive papers in this issue uphold the British Journal of Social Work’s enviable tradition for material that is both scholarly and relevant’.

social policy in the UK, in a way that it would be hard for any US journal to do.' Editors seemed less sanguine. 'It is rare but not unknown for an article in the *BJSW* to have a wider practice influence, I think it has happened but I think it happens fairly rarely.' Longer term trends in British social work were seen as having mixed implications for the journal's mission. On social work more generally, compared with when the journal was founded,

'It's lost that excitement. It's become overly bureaucratic. I suppose ... maybe there have been some changes for the better in the sense that one of the things that was around at that time was too much of a concern about some of the basic principles like emotional involvement and so on at quite a clinical model of social work practice, that I think was over the years, and as part of the social work drive I suppose, replaced by community social work aspirations. Well not replaced, but engaged with it, softened that up.'

Social work had also been 'accompanied by increasing specialisation.'

Comments on policy, politics and practice were generally limited to the UK. Social work in the UK was seen by someone as 'a small discipline in a small country, albeit with a rather inflated ego.' The same person stressed the importance of developing diverse counter-cultures. 'We no longer, and we should never accept - and sometimes North American and UK academics somehow believe this - that their language, their discourses, their paradigms somehow trump other paradigms in other parts of the world or other continents.'

Some brand of internationalization was aspired to by others. As early as 1973 Olive Stevenson was pressing the BASW Publications Committee on subscriptions to the effect that although the coverage of universities in the UK was good, there was 'scope for a substantial increase in circulation to universities in the United States.'<sup>65</sup> The publishers referred to how 'getting increasing usage in the States would also increase citations. There are a lot of US social workers so they will, they would be also a supply of citations.' Asked subsequently about an apparent general fall in impact scores, he replied that what mattered to OUP was how a journal stood relative to others, rather than the actual impact measure as such.

A broader understanding was represented by the editor who said that the journal 'fulfils a really important task for me, which is of keeping social work international, and by international I don't mean just overseas, I mean non-national... There are a variety of social works, and we shouldn't try, we shouldn't only think of it in national terms. So it's supranational rather than international, and I think that's a real strength of the journal.' This is consonant with the remark we noted earlier that the *BJSW* is a British journal of social work and not a journal of British social work.

Here are clear tensions between the value placed on indigenous forms of social work and research and a supranational or non-national mission. How far the journal ever has resolved these tensions we are not sure.

#### *BJSW as an International Journal: Authors and Readers*

When considering the content of the journal earlier in the report we briefly recorded the regions of the world from whence first authors came. We suggested that first, it is overwhelmingly a record of UK social work scholarship. Second, the interest in developing an

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<sup>65</sup> Modern Records Centre. MSS.378/BASW/2/246 Publications Committee Minutes

identity for the journal within the USA seems relatively limited, insofar as this is measured by affiliation of authors. Third, the *BJSW* is far from being only a UK journal.

However, this does not exhaust what may be said about the international identity of the journal. Take, for example the question of how research methods may vary from one part of the world to another. There are widespread, if rather under-developed, arguments to the effect that scientific cultures between the USA and Europe may differ. It certainly is the case that one is likely to encounter considerable preoccupation in the social work community in the USA regarding the merits of a scientific status within social work (e.g. Brekke, 2012, 2014). Delegates to the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research conferences will note the prevalence of structured, quantitative methods in both presentations and posters. It also is the case that research writing in the USA is to a very great degree self-referential and not at all mindful of social work research undertaken, for example, in Nordic countries (Shaw, 2014b). Differences of a slightly lesser but similar kind also can be noticed between the UK and mainland Europe. Insofar as research in Asia, the Middle East or South America is influenced by developments elsewhere, these distinctions may exist more widely.

What may be said, therefore, regarding the research methods of *BJSW* authors from different parts of the world? The following Table (4.1) gives a summary picture.

**Table 4.1 Research methods by region of affiliation**

		Region of affiliation					Total
		UK	USA	Common -wealth	Rest of world	Not specified	
Qualitative	Frequency	110	6	22	27	1	166
	%	53.1%	66.7%	91.7%	60.0%	25.0%	57.4%
Quantitative	Frequency	71	2	1	16	1	91
	%	34.3%	22.2%	4.2%	35.6%	25.0%	31.5%
Mixed methods	Frequency	26	1	1	2	2	32
	%	12.6%	11.1%	4.2%	4.4%	50.0%	11.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	Frequency	207	9	24	45	4	289

Fisher's Exact Test = 21.193 Significance = 0.003

Once again the data yields the unexpected. The cell sizes are small but the appropriate test<sup>66</sup> does signal that a clear association exists between broad methodological approaches and the region of domicile of first authors. But the variance is hardly in the pattern that might be anticipated by the debates in the literature. Articles by authors in Commonwealth countries are overwhelmingly qualitative in orientation. Those from the USA and also the larger number from other countries both slightly exceed the proportion of qualitative articles from UK authors. As with some other tables, we caution against over-interpretation. However, one conclusion, even with small numbers, seems clear. The few USA articles in no way

<sup>66</sup> Fisher's exact test is not influenced by the number of frequencies in each cell

reflect what is known regarding USA-authored social work research more generally. A straw in the wind that may support this inference can be seen from the fact that of the thirteen experimental or quasi-experimental studies in the sample, ten were from the UK and none from the USA. One relatively plausible explanation may be that articles submitted to the *BJSW* by authors in USA universities are untypical. This may be due to some kind of selection bias, for example following from a conscious decision that USA qualitative papers may obtain a more positive response from a UK-based journal. In addition – and this was hinted to us in one interview by a well-placed key informant – it is possible that USA authors submit to the *BJSW* after unsuccessfully sending to a USA journal.

We pursued this line of analysis further, to find that there was no apparent relationship between the focus of research or the research questions addressed and the region of domicile of first authors. While this may seem surprising – surely, one might think, research topics in Hong Kong are different from those in the UK – it is quite likely that this represents another instance of selection and choice, such that writers submit to journals that are thought to favour work of the kind dealt with in their articles. Just as USA-based authors seem untypical of USA social work research as a whole, so may be true for *BJSW* authors from elsewhere in the world.

Moving from authors to readers, we can see that the journal was viewed as having an international presence in terms of where readers are domiciled. The Board reports from a recent editorial regime have the editors commenting that *BJSW* ‘has long had an international readership and profile’. In particular, the appointment of a North American Editor was seen as ‘a great success in increasing the visibility and marketing of the journal in North America, and provides a possible model for similar appointments in other parts of the world where the journal’s influence might be increased’. Indeed, in 2010 a number of International Advisory Board Members were recruited in a similar capacity, although as noted earlier, their role has been limited. Conscious that there is a recurrent rhetorical claims-making regarding the internationality of the journal, there is little we can say about the actuality of international readership, but what we do know points to interesting correlations between authorship and readers. Firstly, there are the institutional subscriptions described as part of the technological developments that influenced the growth of *BJSW*. As noted in that part of our report, the greatest source of growth in subscriptions came from outside the UK, primarily in Europe (26% of total in 2011 as compared to 15% in 2000) and what is classed as the ‘Rest of the World’ (46% of total in 2011 as compared to 9% in 2000). The figures for North America are relatively small (averaging 15% of total across this time period). Institutional subscriptions tell us something about *possible* readership, but not necessarily about who in geographical terms accesses the journal. Here we can draw from the figures for online visits to the journal provided by OUP to the Board. These show that by far the greatest number of visits to the *BJSW* website emanate from Europe, consisting of 65% of all visits in 2011. OUP note that the majority of those visits are from the UK. North America comes second, with 20% of visits in 2011. As with authorship then, it appears that readership for the journal is UK oriented, but with a developing profile elsewhere.

### **Universities and ‘excellent’ research.**

Social work often takes a contested role in British universities. We have seen in some detail how the *BJSW* was established in part to promote the research reputation of the field. However

‘in many universities the social work is still regarded as a very kind of junior discipline, and the real disciplines are sociology or social policy, psychology, whereas social work is regarded, a lot of academics in university regard the social work part mainly as a training element within the university, rather than research and having academic credentials.’

Another early editor recalled, in words that closely echo the experience of one of the report writers,

‘I don’t mind telling you this, on the record if you want, that I was told to stop editing the *British Journal of Social Work* by the incoming head of my department, because it didn’t carry enough, you know, it was better to write articles myself, and books and things, than to edit, and I actually told him it was none of his business, but that was how the world was changing then, the academic side.’

In the late 1980s a national exercise to assess the UK’s university research and to allocate research funding crept almost unnoticed into the world. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE. Latterly the Research Excellence Framework, or REF) developed to become a yardstick of institutional and individual research achievement aspired to and reviled in almost equal measure. Someone who had been editor of the journal in the early days of the RAE remembered

‘When I was initially working in university in the seventies, eighties ... it seemed to be accepted that a lot of the social work teachers actually didn’t produce research or publication in journals very much. That was left to the people in social policy and sociology to do that.’

For this person the RAE had yielded some benefits. ‘I think that the changing culture in terms of the research exercise meant that many universities have actually put considerable pressure on social work academics to ... be productive in terms of research and publication in journals, so I think that that will ... produce a wider range of material.’

This was not a widely shared view. Someone lamented that ‘the short-termism of the way in which university funding and strategizing takes place is not really at one with the rhythm of the production of sound, reliable, usable knowledge. So yes, it does influence it; all of it’s bad.’ There were also complaints about how university culture limits and constrains scholarship. ‘It makes people work to horizons that aren’t natural horizons. In that, for example, I’ve just done [...] project on domestic violence.... I’m of an age now where I actually don’t give a damn one way or the other, but the natural rhythm of that would be to produce publications for next year, which is after the Research Assessment Exercise census date. And the temptation..., for someone like me, would be to write these pieces quickly, without really spending the time with the data, get them into journals with a 2013 date on them...Had I been 15 years younger and worried about my promotion I might have been tempted to just rush these things through.’ Someone else shifted tack to say ‘You mentioned about standardisation. I don’t think that’s come from, directly from, an increased use of “revise and resubmit” - I think it’s much more to do with the perception that the research assessment process more or less demands that papers appear in what are seen as being high quality journals.’ At the more individual level ‘young academics get, I mean driven to neurosis really by the pressure on them to produce published research articles.’

## **Research ‘impact’**



It is not possible to discuss the influence of journals without saying something about the growing and far from simple field of journal impact measures. There is an increasing number of systems for measuring journal impact, although the front runner at the time of writing is still Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports. Table 4.2 gives selected entries among the 39 'social work' journals for 2013, listing the rank order, the journal title, and the two year impact factor<sup>67</sup>. Our purpose in selecting these titles is to locate the *BJSW* but also to make general points about what measurements of this kind gauge and what they seem to mean.<sup>68</sup>

*Table 4.2 about here – Extracts from Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Report for 'Social Work', 2013*

Scattered thoughts invite question upon question. Does this represent a measure of good work? Where are the great majority of journals in languages other than English? What do the figures mean? Assuming they measure something about reputation, do we believe the relative positions of different journals? What do we think of the way some highly regarded journal publishers gently encourage editors to commission articles that seem to have higher citation rates? If all publicity is good publicity, are we content that articles cited only to severely criticise them have equal weight with those that are cited approvingly? How do we regard the collective self-referencing character of journal rankings?

Blyth et al (2010) have reviewed critically the nature and significance of journal metrics. They remark, for example, that

There can be no automatic assumption that citation is equivalent to either approval or value. Citation per se may, for example, indicate that a paper (a) is controversial/bad; or (b) that other authors refute its contents... Similarly there can be no automatic assumption that citation means the original paper has even been read by the person citing it! Simkin and Roychowdhury...report a method for estimating what percentage of those who cited a paper had actually read it and conclude that about 20% only of citers read the original. Lawrence ... reviewed the 48 citations of a paper of which he was co-author...and claims that of these, only eight were appropriate... (Blyth et al, 2010: 132f)

The remarks of Blyth and his colleagues move from citations combined into impact factors to index a journal's standing, to citations as measures of individual achievement, but once again little is disclosed. Compared to other fields, social work citations as proxies for classic reputations are very low on visibility. The main citations are of textbooks, and the work of leading research scholars is lowly cited. Readers may select someone they consider the major social work research scholar of a generation ago and take one of the standard citation resources, only to find that their citation levels are only a fraction of those for textbooks by well-known writers for the student market.

Earlier in this report we set out what we know regarding downloads and citations for the *BJSW*. Here we think more broadly about the 'impact' of the *British Journal of Social Work*,

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<sup>67</sup> The score for a specific journal is calculated as follows. For any given year the number of times articles published in that year have cited articles in the journal in the previous two years is counted. Suppose there were 15 and 10 citations respectively, making 25. Then the number of articles published in that journal for those same years also is counted. Let us suppose this was 50 articles. The first number is divided by the second number which gives us 0.5.

<sup>68</sup> 2014 metrics became available as this report was completed, and the *BJSW* impact factor had risen slightly, but as our interest is in more general questions the 2013 figures serve our purposes equally well

and how this is reflected in documents and in the understanding of the key informants to whom we have spoken. Drawing on Table 4.2, and from wider experience of journal editing, the following observations seem reasonable. First, were we to compare scores for social work journals with those for, for example, medicine or the traditional sciences, social work would look relatively very small. Second, while we have no direct evidence of the respective weight of honorific and critical citations, any citation, positive or negative, counts towards the score. Third, citations tell us nothing about the impact of articles on readers rather than writers. It is possible, as we noted earlier in the report, that *download* figures tell us more about reader interest than *citations*. Fourth, rankings reward established journals and exclude new ones. Linked to this, fifth, what kinds of articles most get cited? It may be the case that genuinely innovative work, that may fit nowhere in how social work is currently understood and taught, (and sadly there is all too little of it in social work, Phillips and Shaw, 2011), is less likely to get cited. Impact targets push both editors and publishers to try to secure citable articles, and it is probable that the most heavily cited articles are review pieces rather than original empirical work. Indeed, in a report to the Board by OUP it is noted that ‘citations are not the sole measure of an article’s worth. However, this sort of data might be useful in terms of drawing out general patterns in the types of articles and topics that are more or less likely to be cited, which may in turn help to inform editorial policy’. This is the familiar point we know about measurement-led indicators - that they alter behaviour. Sixth, the relationship between *journal* impact and the impact of any given author’s work is marginal. It has been reported that about 90% of *Nature*’s 2004 impact factor was based on only a quarter of its publications.<sup>69</sup> We do not know if this is true for social work but one may expect it to be so. Thus the importance of any one publication will be different from, and in most cases less than, the overall number. Furthermore, the strength of the relationship between impact factors of journals and the citation rates of the papers therein has been steadily decreasing since articles began to be available digitally. This means that we should not judge the quality of an individual paper or its author by the journal’s impact factor. Finally, a comparison of the recent scores with those of previous years suggests that in the social sciences, including social work, impact scores may on average be falling or at least ebbing slightly.

On the journals listed in Table 4.2 it is apparent that the top ranked journals fall in the same broad field, and probably have associations with medicine and health science interests. Also, although two prominent USA social work journals fall below the mid-point in the rankings, this may not convince readers that this reflects a real measure of their importance.

Yet despite serious reservations regarding such indices of the worth of science in social work (c.f. Blyth et al, 2010), they have a dangerously seductive quality. Two joint editors remarked to us that:

‘... at the moment officially the impact of the journal doesn’t necessary matter, but I find that a bit hard to believe really... (so), much as we are sceptical about impact factor and league tables ... at the end of the day they are the rules of the game and if people want to prosper in the game they have to play by the rules, whether they think they’re crazy or not’

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<sup>69</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact\\_factor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impact_factor)

We find ourselves wanting to say ‘No – and yet...’ We feel uncomfortable with the language of ‘impact’, and share the position of someone speaking as part of a study to understand the kinds and quality of social work research, when s/he said

‘If it’s methodologically poor research that has a large impact then I would judge it as not useful because it’s actually influenced moves in the wrong direction. It’s added to confusion and misunderstanding and bad policy rather than the reverse.’ (Shaw and Norton, 2007: 45)

‘Impact’ is, though we rarely acknowledge it, a metaphor, taken primarily from the field of dynamics, to refer to the striking of one body in momentum against another. Being ‘hit’ by research is perhaps too common an experience. There is a danger that the rush to measure is also hastening to reduce and simplify. This leads, as the sociologist Ben Baumberg observes<sup>70</sup>, to ‘untruthful truth’ such that no-one believes the impact scores but everyone uses them. It promotes what Baumberg calls *unhelpful reflection* – reflection that is not helpful for application.

However, we noticed earlier that the journal publishers value citation and impact measures, albeit not so much for what they tell us about any intrinsic worth of the publications<sup>71</sup>, but as a way of climbing the rank-order table of publisher repute. OUP comparative analysis of impact factors became a regular feature of Board reports over the last decade, and not only in relation to what could be classed as other ‘social work’ journals. For example it was approvingly noted that:

‘The latest citation and impact factor data show a very encouraging increase in *BJSW*’s total citations and impact factor, resulting in an increase in its ranking to 9th in the Social Work category. In fact this understates *BJSW*’s ranking in the social work field because several of the journals in the top 10 are not strictly social work journals. And some are more specialist than *BJSW*. In terms of general social work journals, *BJSW* is ranked third behind Social Work Research and Social Service Review’.<sup>72</sup>

Though two recent editors say they have noticed that the journal is ‘slipping down the impact...’, they still judge that ‘the OUP and BASW and the editors had come increasingly aware of the importance of citation type metrics in terms of how journals are viewed by the academic world.’ However, in terms more combative but substantively similar to the argument made by Blyth and colleagues (Blyth et al, 2010), one former editor pronounced, with little attempt at nuance,

‘There’s a proliferation of journals that don’t mean anything, and lots of proxy measures that don’t mean anything. I mean you know, citation indices, I mean if you write the world’s worst article you will get an enormous number of citations... It’s just such a nonsense, you get huge citations if you write rubbish, because people will cite your article as an example of rubbish. And impact factor, ... working out the impact

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<sup>70</sup> In a lecture at the University of York in 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Although it appears that quality and impact could be linked; in an OUP report to the Board following a fall in impact, it was noted that ‘given the high level of submissions and the associated tendency for volumes to increase in size, there may be a case for reviewing and tightening the acceptance criteria, which should have an upward effect on impact factor’. But as we suggest below, the evidence for this is less certain.

<sup>72</sup> There is a volatility about rankings that has not been much discussed. These relative rankings are radically different in the most recent reports.

factor seems to me to be ... more magic than science, and so much seems to be around... popularity contests in terms of how people rate journals.'

What can be said about citation figures for the *BJSW*? The evidence to hand is fuzzy to say the least. The best set of figures we were given related to the period 2005-09 and for citations in that period for fifteen 'most cited' articles that were published in the journal in those years.<sup>73</sup> For this four or five year period the number of citations per article ranged from five to 32. Citations reached double figures for seven of the fifteen articles were cited. A total of 188 citations were made, averaging for these most cited articles, just under thirteen citations per article.

Preoccupations with impact may not be worth too many sleepless hours. The UK's Research Excellence Framework gave no weight to them<sup>74</sup>, but rather asked for narrative case studies to evidence impact outside the university. One thoughtful early editor speculates

'You could say "OK, as the numbers of academics have gone up in the world of social work, why don't we stick to the size of journal that we always had, and simply raise the bottom line that aspiring academics have to reach in order to be published?" The problem in a subject like social work is that it's never quite as easy as that. It's a much more controversial discipline than, certainly than the natural sciences or even than academic sociology or psychology, so it would be hard to hold that line. But what makes it impossible is the pressure from the publishers who really like to see expansion.'

The problem is not easy for evidential reasons as well as publisher pressure. To take one example, the Chicago journal *Social Service Review* has remained at four issues a year, while the *BJSW* has expanded until the number of published articles each year is now four or five times the number when it first was published. But if the impact factor scores mean anything, the *Social Service Review* remains languishing in the Thomson-Reuters doldrums, despite the general agreement that since this American journal was first launched in 1927 it has maintained high standards of rigour.

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<sup>73</sup> The caveats that apply here are twofold. First, the period chosen does not map on to the two year citation period adopted by Thompson-Reuters, so no comparators can be calculated. Second, the figure relate only to articles first published in that period. Individual articles may be cited many more times over their 'life-time.' Life time citations are of more value for estimating the impact of the work of particular *authors*, while the formula for *journal* impact is better limited to a short period.

<sup>74</sup> Nor did the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

#### **Box 4.1      Distance and a light touch**

‘I don’t think BASW played much role actually, I don’t remember the BASW people having a major part in, though they were present at the editorial meetings, I can’t remember.’

‘BASW - I was never quite clear, as I say, what the input was. I think occasionally ... there’s a kind of commercial tension maybe between them and OUP, I’m not sure... I don’t think the fact that there was a BASW interest ever really impinged on our work as editors.’

‘BASW ostensibly still had an influence through Jo Campling being on the board, but I don’t think that was very real in terms of any continuing or two-way communication going on... BASW had a very light touch involvement, because it was nominally through Jo Campling.’

‘Ordinary BASW people had no sense that this was their journal... even if people running BASW knew it, they weren’t communicating it to their members.’

#### **Box 4.2      Active support**

‘I think it’s a much more active board, and much more involved in the running the journal, making decisions about the journal, then other editorial boards of which I’m aware...I think that’s fairly unusual in the US context, so I was just always extraordinarily pleased that it happened, I know I wrote a report for every board meeting for seven years and then I was personally present at the summer board meetings. I found it a very accountable and responsible process, and very worthwhile.’

The Board were ‘lovely people all the way through. Very sharp with what you needed to have, very gentle, but it was all about the marketing side.’

‘BASW was very light touch, OUP stuck to what it was required to be feeding back on, circulation, and things like that, and everything else was very well respected academic members of the board, so the best was being discussed by the best I would say.’

‘They didn’t give us direction in that sense... it was always very direct, very honest, and that was always very constructive and creative. We used to genuinely look forward to the meetings, they were really good days out’

**Table 4.2 Extracts from Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Report for 'Social Work', 2013**

<i>Rank Position</i>	<i>Journal Title</i>	<i>2 Year Impact Factor</i>
<b>1</b>	Trauma Violence & Abuse	2.939
<b>2</b>	Child Maltreatment	2.706
<b>3</b>	Child Abuse & Neglect	2.135
<b>7</b>	British J of Social Work	1.162
<b>13</b>	Res on Soc Wk Practice	0.905
<b>17</b>	Qualitative Social Work	0.836
<b>19</b>	Child and Fam Soc Wk	0.824
<b>20</b>	Social Service Review	0.791
<b>22</b>	J of Social Work	0.709
<b>25</b>	Australian Soc Wk	0.591
<b>27</b>	Social Work Research	0.535

## Conclusion

We have aimed to illuminate the role and significance of the *British Journal of Social Work* as the major and at periods of its history the only significant repository of social work scholarship in the UK. In doing so, we have kept to the fore the wider question of social work as a field which has taken and found shape/s within the journal over approaching half a century. In this particular sense the journal *is* a journal of record. The study is not quite one of either a journal or a professional and scholarly field, but of one as the embodiment of the other.

We have used the term ‘field’ through the report, although not in the self-conscious way we do so here. Whether social work is a discipline, has discipline-like qualities, or is a field with boundaries enclosing diverse borrowings, applications and adaptations, is not a straightforward question, nor usually one helpfully pursued at least as a way of arguing some encompassing claim. While we have not worn any theorising on our sleeves, we might say that our use of the term ‘field’ owes something to Bourdieu’s much discussed ideas of social field and the social game. Much of his focus was on scientific inquiry, scholarly language, the ways academics talk and write, and how through reflexive work we must study the way we study. If a short-hand term is needed we may call this, in the subtitle of the report, a case study of applied scholarship.

‘Conclusion’ has two meanings – an ending and an inference. We have been cautious about inferences. The data, even though relatively comprehensive, is not complete. We were disappointed that it was not possible for us to have access to anonymised and group data regarding review decisions, or to information about the character and composition of the review community. Perhaps this may be reconsidered at some point. But it is incomplete in a more enduring sense, for there is no reason to imagine that the *BJSW* now is in some finished state of arrival.

As for inferences and recommendations, our approach has been more in terms of mapping and understanding the strongly applied scholarship that the journal characteristically includes. But although recommendations seem out of place, we would say *something*. We have been struck by the strong sense of continuity – in terms, for example, of how those to whom we spoke understood the journal’s identity, the ways in which editorial successions have been managed, and in our empirical analysis of what has found place between its covers.<sup>75</sup> We also have been impressed by the capacity of the journal to incorporate and embody changes - writing voice, technology, size of operation, and so on. These changes have typically been marked by conservative incrementalism.

We also have noticed the presence – indeed we might say *essential* presence – of tensions, manifested in the deployment of rhetorical arguments and pleas. The classic example of this lies in the question of if and how the journal is or ought to be ‘international.’ Always sought – it was Olive Stevenson who first gave voice to this ambition – but rather marginally accomplished. It will remain, in the apt terms we quoted earlier by a key informant from across the Atlantic, the *British Journal of Social Work*, rather than the *Journal of British Social*

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<sup>75</sup> Scarcely any key term can be used without at least some element of metaphor. For contemporary readers the ‘covers’ of journal issues are rarely seen or felt. Though the actual ‘cover’, which has shown little marked change in range of colour or format, speaks to the journal’s continuity of identity.

*Work*. In that sense the *BJSW* is distinct from, and we think more to be esteemed in this regard than, its USA cousins,<sup>76</sup> where scholarship remains parochial and inward looking, albeit across a very large ‘parish’, and shows little aspiration to be ‘international.’<sup>77</sup>

In summary our conclusions are:

- i. The journal *is* a journal of record, as the only significant repository of social work scholarship in the UK over a period of more than forty years.
- ii. Whether or not social work is a discipline, has discipline-like qualities, or is a field with boundaries enclosing diverse borrowings, applications and adaptations, it makes sense to understand the content of the *BJSW* as a case study of applied scholarship.
- iii. We have been struck by the strong sense of continuity – in terms, for example, of how those to whom we spoke understood the journal’s identity, the ways in which editorial successions have been managed, and in our empirical analysis of what has found place between its covers. But there is no reason to imagine that the *BJSW* now is in some finished state of arrival.
- iv. The journal demonstrates a sustained capacity to incorporate and embody changes - writing voice, technology, size of operation, and so on. These changes have typically been marked by conservative incrementalism. More rapid change is only likely to occur when there is a (perhaps fortuitous) coincidence of interests between the editors and the publishers, but these always will be influenced by the nature of the *BJSW* as a professionally owned journal.
- v. We have noticed the presence – indeed we might say *essential* presence – of tensions in the identity and development of the journal. The classic example of this lies in the question of if and how the journal is or ought to be ‘international.’
- vi. The journal is the home of *British-led* applied social work scholarship, and is likely to remain so, though this is not the same as saying that it is simply a British journal

The scale and range of this report perhaps exceeds what was anticipated by parties to the original commission. We have endeavoured to deliver the kind of empirical and analytic study we believe is badly needed across social work. Yet while we have eschewed the honorific ‘let us now praise famous (wo)men’ study, we believe honour *is* due. Social work scholarship, at least in the UK, would have been dispersed and more fragmented without the home base that the journal has provided over its history.

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<sup>76</sup> *Social Work, Social Work Research, Social Service Review and Research on Social Work Practice*.

<sup>77</sup> This study does, however, owe a debt to the USA, at least to sociology, as it was Abbott’s study of the *American Journal of Sociology* that first inspired the present project (Abbott, 1999).



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## Appendix 1

### Contents Pages of *Social Work* April, July and October 1970

# Social Work

The British Quarterly Journal incorporating **ACCORD**

Vol. 27 No. 2 April 1970

Five Shillings

**Editor:** Peter Leonard

**Deputy Editor:** Colin Akhurst

**Editorial Board:** Keith Bilton, John Davies,  
Michael Laxton, James Lindon, Ian Page.

**Secretary:** Mary Elford.

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*The views expressed in this Journal do not necessarily reflect those of the Association of Child Care Officers or the Association of Family Caseworkers.*

Articles and correspondence to Peter Leonard, Editor, SOCIAL WORK, Mary Ward House, 5-7 Tavistock Place, London, W.C.1. Book reviews to Colin Akhurst, Stevenage College, Stevenage, Herts. Subscriptions and advertisements to SOCIAL WORK, c/o Mrs. M. Elford, 107 The Park, Redbourn, Herts.

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## Appendix 2

### Dual Dimension Classification of Research

<b>Actual or potential service user or carer groupings</b>	1. Children, families, parents, foster carers
	2. Young people (not offenders)
	3. Young offenders/victims
	4. Adult offenders/victims
	5. Adults with housing, homelessness, education or employment difficulties
	6. People with mental health problems
	7. Older people
	8. Adults/children with health/disability difficulties (including learning disabilities)
	9. Adults/children who are drug/substance users
	10. Equal focus on two or more different user and/or carer groups
<b>Citizen, user and community populations</b>	11. People as members of communities
	12. Service user, citizen or carer populations
	13. Women/men
<b>Professional and policy communities</b>	14. Social work practitioners /managers
	15. Social work students/practice teachers/university social work staff
	16. Social work and/or other researchers
	17. Policy, regulatory or inspection community
	18. Members or students of other occupations
	19. Jointly social work and other professional communities/agencies
<b>Not applicable</b>	20. For example, theorising that crosses categories; methodology

### What is the primary issue or problem focus of the research?

Original categories	Grouped categories
1. Understand/explain issues related to risk, vulnerability, abuse, identity, coping, challenging behaviour, separation, attachment, loss, disability or trauma.	Group A
2. Understand/explain issues related to equality, oppression, diversity, poverty, employment, housing, education and social exclusion.	
3. Understand/assess/strengthen user/carer/citizen/community involvement in social work; community organization, partnership; empowerment.	
4. Understand/promote the nature and quality of informal care, carer activity, volunteering, and their relationship to formal care.	
5. Describe, understand, explain, or develop good practice in relation to social work beliefs, values, cultural heritage, political positions, faith, spirituality or ethics.	Group B
6. Understand/develop/assess/evaluate social work practices, methods, or interventions, including their recording/documentation.	
7. Understand/evaluate/strengthen social work/social care services, including voluntary/independent sector.	
8. Understand/explain practice or promote good practice in social work/social care organisations, programmes and/or management.	
9. Understand/respond to issues of nationhood, race, ethnicity, racism.	Group C
10. Understand/respond to issues of gender, sexism, the role of women, the role of men.	
11. Understand/respond to issues about the form and significance of the family	Group B
12. Demonstrate/assess the value of inter-disciplinary or inter-professional approaches to social work services.	
13. Demonstrate/assess the value of comparative, cross-national, cross-cultural research; and of cultural distinctiveness/awareness.	Group D
14. Develop theorising.	
15. Understand/appraise/develop the practice and quality of social work research (including user/carer involvement in research; uses of research, practitioner research, scientific practice, feminist research; anti-racist research methods).	Group E
16. Understand/promote learning and teaching about social work or related professions, and entry to career.	

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Editorial Tenures included in the Study**

Olive Stevenson (1971-1974)

Phyllida Parsloe (1975-1977)

Martin Davies (1977-1980)

Ron Walton (1981-1984)

Margaret Yelloly (1985-1987)

Pauline Hardiker (1987-1991)

Richard Hugman and David Smith (1992-1995)

Audrey Mullender (1996-1999)

Mark Drakeford and Ian Butler (2000-2004)

Eric Blyth and Helen Masson (2004-2010)

John Pinkerton and Jim Campbell (2010-2015. Part of)



## Appendix 4 Consent Arrangement for Persons Interviewed

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

DEPARTMENT OF

SOCIAL POLICY AND

SOCIAL WORK

Heslington, York YO10 5DD

Telephone (01904) 430000

Direct telephone (01904) 321260

24 June 2013

To: Former and present editors of *BJSW*

Dear friends and colleagues,

### **'History of British Journal of Social Work' – Implementation Arrangements**

We suspect you will have concluded that this project had come to a halt since my last update letter in January. However, I am glad to say that after greatly protracted negotiations with Oxford University Press and BASW we have now exchanged contracts, and have made an offer of appointment to someone to undertake the core of the fieldwork. We are ready to proceed. This letter has several important steps for which we need your consent and advice. Please check the action points later in the letter.

The project is being led by myself and Hannah Jobling. Hannah completed her social work training at York, and followed that with her MRes training and PhD. She is at the final stages of her PhD and has just accepted a post on the staff at York. Hannah and I have had contact for some years and I am delighted that she is on board. The researcher joining us on the project is Ann Ramatowski. Ann is a graduate social work student from the University of St Louis. She has worked with me on a related small project last year, and we have co-authored a forthcoming paper on trends and patterns of qualitative research, using basically the same content classification scheme that will be employed in the present study (if you want to see that paper just ask). Despite the fact that she is across the Atlantic, we are very pleased to have her involved.

This is how I see it proceeding from here on. Ann will lead on the interviews with you, and we hope to complete these by the end of the summer. She is six hours behind you, and knows that the interviews will need to take account of this time zone difference. As soon we hear back from you we will pass your details to Ann and give you her own contact.

Wherever possible we want to undertake the interviews using Skype. In cases where you were involved in a co-editorship we are happy for the interviews to be joint or separate – your choice. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I am attaching an ethics consent form to this letter. Could you please let us have a record of your consent some time prior to the interview. Unless we hear to the contrary we will continue in the expectation that you will be happy to give informed consent to the project.

BASW is hoping that some initial results will be available in time for the summer conferences next year, but we will pace the project to suit the schedules of those involved. It may help if I include a brief extract from the project specification, so that you know where we are going with this. This is on the follow-on page to this letter.

We will be working on the interview schedule in the next days and our intention is to signal in advance the kinds of questions we want to talk through with you, so that you can mull them over. They will work more like key informant interviews. You may be interested to know that we plan to sample and analyse the *BJSW* content by looking at the final twelve months of issues of each editorial regime. This may help us identify not only any general trends but differences between editorial regimes.

The following ACTION points are needed on your part.

1. If you will not be available at any period between July 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> **please let me know by reply by return.**
2. I know several of you kindly confirmed that Skype would be fine. Can you – just for the record – confirm this again? If so **please give me your Skype address** so that we can set up links. If you do not have Skype access or prefer to do the interview by phone, please let me have a contact number. Where convenient we will prefer Skype if only because the phone calls would be trans-Atlantic! In such cases it may be Hannah or me who does the interview
3. Likewise, where you were co-editors can you **let us know if you prefer to be interviewed together or individually.**
4. Please **complete and return the informed consent form** included with this letter. If you have any qualms about the ethics issue do of course raise them with us.

I would like to let each of you know who else is involved – I have included this in the ethics note. We will only do this, of course, if we have 100% agreement.

We continue to look forward keenly to engaging with you for this project. If a phone conversation would help please feel free to ring me. I work at home much of the time so best to try me on 01347 810512.

Good wishes

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ian Shaw', with a horizontal line underneath.

Ian Shaw

### Extract for Project Specification

Professor Ian Shaw and Hannah Jobling, in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York, are leading a small project during 2013 and 2014 to prepare a history of the emergence, development and professional and scholarly role of *The British Journal of Social Work*. The journal was founded in 1971. The purpose of the project is to map and understand the history of the journal in the context of the development of social work as a research-related field in the UK.

*BJSW* offer an apt focus for such a study for several reasons:

- It has an uninterrupted history stretching back more than forty years.
- It has an established role as the property of the British Association of Social Workers, and hence in the wider social work community.
- For much of that period it was the only prominent social work journal published out of the UK.
- It has been published by Oxford University Press throughout, so shifts and developments are more likely to be explainable in terms of shifts in social work rather than independent changes in the identity of the journal.
- Many of the people who have been associated with the editorial direction of the journal are still alive.
- We understand that part of its purpose is currently understood to be 'a journal of record', by which we take it to include acting as a representative depository of the writing of the field, in particular in the UK.

The fieldwork for the project will consist of three aspects:

1. A purposively sampled content analysis of the journal. This will enable us to address three questions about *BJSW* content:
  - a) What *research problems* have been the focus of social work writing in the journal?
  - b) What *services, agencies and people* have been manifest in social work writing?
  - c) What *research methods* have been used in social work?

2. Key informant interviews by Skype/phone with former and present editors of the journal, and several others who have been central to the strategic development of the journal.
3. Archival analysis of committee and editorial board documents, and papers held by the British Association of Social Workers and at the University of Warwick.

# History of *The British Journal of Social Work*

## Ethics Consent Form

This consent form relates only to the interviews. An agreement form with Oxford University Press is to be completed in relation to the extraction of material from the *BJSW* journal.

The interviews will be recorded and digital recordings stored in secure, password-protected folders in the co-investigators' file space.

Interviews will be anonymised and transcribed. Hard copies will be stored in lockable cabinets in the investigators' rooms, to which only they have access.

Files will be deleted once final reports and publications from the project have been completed.

The project will explore general patterns and in no case will report data that can be used to infer the identity of any of the participants.

---

I give my consent to be interviewed for this project ☐

I give my consent for my interview to be recorded, transcribed and stored according to the terms described above

☐

I am happy to show to the research team any papers related to my tenure as editor of the *BJSW* that may be in my personal files. ☐

I agree to the research team sharing my name with other interview participants

☐

*If you were a co-editor please tick one option below:*

1. I prefer to be interviewed jointly with my co-editor ☐
2. I prefer to be interviewed individually ☐
3. I am happy to be interviewed either jointly or individually ☐

Name (please PRINT and SIGN):

.....

Date: .....

Please return your form to Hannah Jobling at the address at the letter head. If sent by email it should go to [hjls500@York.ac.uk](mailto:hjls500@York.ac.uk).