

Kind-hearted and good with people – or skilled
professionals? Social work training
at the University of Liverpool

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Introduction

The University of Liverpool provided training for social workers for one hundred years: the School of Social Science was launched in January 1905¹ and it ceased to train social workers in 2005. For much of that time, particularly in the period to the end of the Second World War, it played an important part in the development of schemes of training. Because universities training social workers acted independently of each other, British training programmes came to be considered by social work professionals from countries with more centrally organised systems to be very complex and difficult to understand.² This may well have been the case, but although the lack of central direction contributed to a national pattern of provision which was characterised by variety and had little in the way of common elements, it also allowed experiment and innovation free of state interference. In this article, I shall attempt to position the University of Liverpool in the long debate about the essentials of social work training and argue that its influence, like that of other training schools, diminished after the Second World War as the forces of centralisation and standardisation made themselves felt within the

¹ Although locally it is assumed that the department could trace its origins to 1905, Eileen Younghusband, quoting Elizabeth Macadam, believed that direct connection with universities began in Liverpool a year earlier, E. Younghusband, *Report on the employment and training of social workers* (Edinburgh, 1947), p. 30.

² A. Salomon, *Education for social work* (Leipzig, 1937), p. 37.

emerging profession, bringing it more into line with continental models. As well as considering the sorts of courses they followed, and the ways in which Liverpool compared with other centres, questions will also be asked about the nature of the University of Liverpool social work students and their social and educational backgrounds.

The beginnings of professional education

Training courses for social work emerged in Great Britain as early as 1894, in advance of those in many other countries.³ And the Liverpool programme was one of the first. In his history of the University of Liverpool, Thomas Kelly claimed that the Liverpool Department of Social Science had its origins in the training of health visitors and sanitary inspectors at the end of the nineteenth century, when the University was still a university college, its role as a training place for social workers having developed as a result of its links with the Liverpool Central Relief Society and the Victoria Settlement for Women – a story that is told in inimitable fashion by Margaret Simey in her study of Frederic D'Aeth.⁴ Although the first complete extant student record is not until 1918, presumably because it was not until 1917 that it was fully integrated into the University, the department featured in the Vice-Chancellor's annual report for 1911-12, demonstrating that links with the University were already very close. It was reported that ten full-time and seventy-four part-time students had enrolled for the session. The part-time students were from very varied backgrounds and included clergymen and doctors, Poor Law officials and students enrolled at St Aidan's College (a local theological college) and the Liverpool Domestic Science College. Teaching members of the department in the early days included E. C. K. Gonner, who lectured on social economics,⁵ Cyril Burt, who

³ Salomon, *Education for social work*, p. 36. Some bodies, for example the Institute of Almoners, which was founded in 1895, set up their own training schemes largely outside the universities.

⁴ M. Simey (ed. D. Bingham), *From rhetoric to reality: A study of the work of F. G. D'Aeth, social administrator* (Liverpool, 2005), pp. 46ff.

⁵ Margaret Simey believed Gonner to be one of the initiators of the Department of Social Science, Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, p. 46. See also K. Tribe, 'Gonner, Sir Edward Carter Kersey (1862-1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of*

taught psychology,⁶ Frederic D'Aeth, who was lecturer in social work,⁷ and Elizabeth Macadam, who taught methods and practice of social work.⁸ Macadam, whose contribution to social work has sometimes been overshadowed by the reputation of her more famous friend, Eleanor Rathbone, was influenced by her experience of working in a settlement in London before training in social work at the Women's University Settlement in Southwark. In 1902, she became warden of the Victoria Settlement for Women in Liverpool, and was appointed by the University as the first lecturer on the methods and practice of social work eight years later.⁹ The teaching of public administration was the responsibility of Eleanor Rathbone who, also from the base of the Victoria Settlement, was busily engaged in the painstaking social research that was to inform much of her work for the next half-century.¹⁰ The University of Liverpool competes with the London School of Economics (LSE) for the distinction of being the first university-based training school for social workers: the department at the LSE was founded in 1912, although it had been associated with the Charity Organisation Society's short-lived School of Sociology from 1903¹¹ and, if the department is understood to have dated from that association, then the LSE wins by two years. Alexander Carr-Saunders, who was appointed to the University of Liverpool as Professor of

National Biography (ODNB), (Oxford, 2004), online edn, accessed 10 July 2006.

⁶ Burt, who was associated with the psychometric tests on children, gained considerable notoriety later in his life and after his death because of his possibly faulty methodology, P. Mazumdar, 'Burt, Sir Cyril Lodowic (1883-1971)', *ODNB*, accessed 23 June 2006.

⁷ Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, p. 53. Interestingly, Kelly does not mention D'Aeth in his history.

⁸ T. Kelly, *For advancement of learning. The University of Liverpool, 1881-1981* (Liverpool, 1981), pp. 143-44; Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, pp. 47ff.

⁹ S. Pedersen, 'Macadam, Elizabeth (1871-1948)', *ODNB*, accessed 23 June 2006.

¹⁰ Kelly, *For advancement of learning*, p. 144; S. Pedersen, 'Rathbone, Eleanor (1842-1946)', *ODNB*, accessed 23 June 2006.

¹¹ See A. Kidd, *State, society and the poor in nineteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 101; J. Lewis, *The voluntary sector, the state and social work in Britain. The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 26.

Social Science in 1923, completed the process of bringing the subject into the mainstream of University work.¹² Other training courses followed the London and Liverpool lead¹³ and instituted training courses for social workers, each of which reflected local conditions and the preferences and inclinations of local academics and social workers. The result was a very varied pattern of training for the collection of loosely related occupations that were beginning to coalesce as a new profession.

Mid-century reflections

Thirty years later, the confused pattern of social work training provision was so evident as to excite comment. As has already been noted, Alice Salomon had commented on the confusing variations as seen from continental Europe in the late 1930s, and in 1947 Eileen Younghusband, a lecturer from the LSE, anticipating the new developments which would result from the introduction of legislation inaugurating the post-war welfare state, reflected on the varied collection of courses that claimed to train students to be social workers. She produced an inventory of relevant British university departments and asked the question, which courses are training which students to follow which occupation? Her reflections demonstrate the mid-century uncertainty, not just about training but also about what constituted the role and tasks of social work. In a memorable comment, she noted that nobody really knew what social workers were, except that, like cats, they were traditionally female.¹⁴ Four years later, recognising that her comments related to a profession that was steadily and successfully making a space for itself within the range of existing health and welfare provision, she drew

¹² Kelly, *For advancement of learning*, p. 230.

¹³ For example, the Social Studies Department at the University of Birmingham was founded in 1908, the School of Social Study and Training at the University of Glasgow in 1912, the Department of Social Study and Training at the University of Edinburgh in 1918, the Department of Social Studies and Economics at Bedford College for Women, University of London in 1918, and Barnett House, under the auspices of the University of Oxford in 1919, Salomon, *Education for social work*, pp. 163ff.

¹⁴ Younghusband, *Report on the employment and training of social workers*, pp. 4-5.

attention to an additional uncertainty about its role that was exacerbated by new psycho-therapeutic developments introduced from the United States. She noted that the application of this currently fashionable form of social therapy, that claimed to lessen personal and social disharmonies, was something that social workers, already busily thinking out their relationship with doctors, health visitors, teachers and other 'welfare' workers with whom they had to cooperate, had no time to contemplate.¹⁵ With so much uncertainty about the role, the lack of agreement about appropriate training can occasion no surprise. Noting the wide variety of courses offered by universities, Younghusband reflected that 'the many differences between the curricula and the qualifications awarded by different universities still remain as puzzling as ever'.¹⁶ This was a situation that was neither easily nor quickly resolved. Commenting on changes to social work training courses proposed in 1984, Robert Pinker posed the same questions as Younghusband: which courses were training which students to follow which occupation?¹⁷

Eileen Younghusband's 1947 reflections provide a convenient vantage point from which to look back at social work training in the first half of the twentieth century and forward to the second. Written at the end of six years of unparalleled social disruption, with much of the post-war legislation anticipated but not yet in operation, it documents the state of an emerging profession on the brink of major change. For the purposes of this article, it is augmented by her 1951, 1959 and 1978 reports, as well as those by other commentators.¹⁸ The timing of Younghusband's

¹⁵ E. Younghusband, *Social work in Britain: A supplementary report on the employment and training of social workers* (Dunfermline, 1951), p. 3.

¹⁶ Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, p. 109.

¹⁷ R. Pinker, 'The threat to professional standards in social work education: A response to some recent proposals', *Issues in Social Work Education*, 4 (1984), p. 6.

¹⁸ Younghusband, *Report on the employment and training of social workers*; Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*; Younghusband, *Report of the working party on social workers in the local authority health and welfare services* (London, 1959); Younghusband, *Social work in Britain, 1950-1975* (2 vols, London, 1978); S. Clement Brown & E. Gloyne, *The field training of social workers* (London, 1966); H. Jones, *Towards a new social work* (London, 1975); B. Heraud, *Training for uncertainty: A sociological approach to social*

first report comes as no surprise. The Second World War, in universities as in all other aspects of life, marks a caesura. Although some were called up to serve in the armed forces before they could complete their courses, social work students continued to be trained in Liverpool during the war. By the end, the world in which they were to pursue their careers had changed. The murder of Dennis O'Neill by his foster father in 1945 prompted the setting-up of the Curtis Committee, which was charged to examine the care of children outside their own homes. It reported in 1946. Although guarded in its language, it told a sorry tale of poor provision, and in some cases considerable cruelty, experienced by children in the care of both institutional children's homes and foster parents,¹⁹ and provided the context for the 1948 Children Act. The Act assumed the need for trained workers, and Eileen Younghusband's 1947 and 1951 reports were published at the beginning of the slow but inexorable process towards the achievement of that aim. And, as Younghusband herself noted, the need for adequate evaluation of training became more urgent in the wake of the vacuum created after the Poor Law Examination Board ceased to exist in 1948,²⁰ the inevitable consequence of the long-drawn-out withering of the Poor Law machinery. The setting up in 1947 of the Central Training Council in Child Care, responsible for the selection of candidates and for organising courses for the training of boarding-out officers and staffs of children's homes; the Children Act of 1948; and the appointment to local authorities of senior staff as Children's Officers all indicate the new importance attached to statutory authorities and agencies. The Home Office, for example, and the Ministry of Health began to take an active part in the selection and monitoring of students for specific courses – child care and probation – incidentally reducing the independence enjoyed by the universities in the inter-war period. Selection and training were not the only functions affected by the new arrangements.

work education (London, 1981); B. Butler & D. Elliott, *Teaching and learning for practice* (Aldershot, 1985).

¹⁹ M. Curtis, *Report of the care of children committee presented by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education, to Parliament* (London, 1946).

²⁰ Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, p. 203.

Increased state intervention also brought about a dramatic change in the provision of services. Charitable organisations, such as Dr Barnardo's Homes and the Church of England Children's Homes, began to lose their pre-eminent position as both employers and trainers of social workers as local authority Children's Departments began their work – something that came as an unpleasant shock to the charities and signalled the gradual but unrelenting centralisation in the imposition and monitoring of standards in training, something that ran in parallel with an increased demand for expert social work services and would come to affect both the voluntary and the statutory sectors throughout the second half of the twentieth century.²¹

Social work students at Liverpool

While official and semi-official commentary on these developments provide the basis of this article, the records of students who trained at the University of Liverpool will be used to give colour and detail. A selection of these records, housed in the University's Department of Special Collections and Archives, comprises a small group from the period 1917 to 1939; a larger number from the 1940s and early 1950s, with surnames beginning with A and B (held thanks to an anonymous deposit of records); and continues with a systematic selection from 1948 until 1983. For the post-Second World War period, it has been possible to augment that selection by consulting the records of Liverpool students doing placements with voluntary social work agencies, particularly with Family Service Units, from 1940 to the mid-1980s. At one level, the use of these records is inherently problematic. Students themselves did not have access to them and played no part in their compilation; assessments of their work, which constituted much of the material recorded in the files, was made by their teachers and supervisors, and shared between them and with potential employers. Nevertheless, although the files cannot accurately enable us to reconstruct student experience,

²¹ P. Starkey, *Families and social workers: The work of Family Service Units, 1940-1985* (Liverpool, 2000), pp. 175-76. See also Lewis, *The voluntary sector, the state and social work*, pp. 101ff.

they can give us some idea about the day-to-day outworking of decisions taken about course structure.

The oldest extant file refers to a small group of female students doing practical work with Dorothy Keeling, at the Liverpool Council of Voluntary Aid, a body set up by Elizabeth Macadam, Eleanor Rathbone and Frederic D'Aeth, and which became the Liverpool Council for Social Service in 1922.²² However, little is said about what they are doing there. One student, studying for the Certificate in Social Science, was reported to be 'doing office work with Miss Keeling',²³ which sounds pretty dull. But it may not have been so. Dorothy Keeling was not dull. She was an able, if idiosyncratic, social worker who was responsible for putting the Liverpool Personal Service Society (PSS), which had started life as the Office of Friendly Help, on the map as Liverpool's foremost social work agency in the inter-war period.²⁴ But one of the details on this otherwise unremarkable document enables us to begin to answer the question, who were the students?

The student working with Miss Keeling is identified as an officer's wife, who employed a nurse to look after her small child. Possibly she was a war widow. But it is interesting to note that her father's occupation is also listed. He was an insurance specialist. The importance of parents, even in cases where students are over the age of twenty-one, and even if they are married, is very striking in the inter-war period and even beyond. For example, the occupation of the father, not the husband, of a twenty-six-year-old widow, admitted to the course in 1945, is recorded.²⁵ Moreover, this recording of paternal occupation is a practice that continues into the 1970s, even in cases where the applicants are already graduates, often having been in employment or in the armed forces before deciding to train as social workers. It is most

²² See Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, pp. 61ff; M. Simey, 'D'Aeth, Frederic George (1875-1940)', *ODNB*, accessed 10 July 2006. Susan Pedersen, in her *ODNB* entry on Dorothy Keeling, mistakenly appears to suggest that the LCVA became the Liverpool Personal Service Society, S. Pedersen, 'Keeling, Dorothy Clarissa (1881-1967)', *ODNB*, accessed 27 June 2006.

²³ University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives (ULSCA), A200.

²⁴ Pedersen, 'Keeling, Dorothy Clarissa (1881-1967)', *ODNB*.

²⁵ ULSCA, A200.

marked in the case of young women. But the paternal occupation of a man, probably in his mid-thirties, who had been working as a social worker for more than a decade before enrolling as a student in 1959, is also solemnly noted.²⁶ Perhaps we should not be surprised that this information was sought from those who were under twenty-one and, therefore, technically under-age – until relatively recently, this was information requested by UCCA/UCAS forms. But for manifestly mature students? And why? There is no evidence of the information being used as the basis of any sort of research. It may be that it was just a question that remained on the application forms and nobody – least of all those aspiring to be students – thought to challenge it as the forms were copied. After 1970 the practice is followed only in exceptional cases on University of Liverpool social work application forms. A notable example is the case of the student from inner-city Manchester who went from a convent school to an undergraduate course at another university, before applying to Liverpool to train as a social worker. Her father was a lollipop man and this is duly noted – an early example of widening participation, perhaps!²⁷

Students seeking admission to the department normally had to matriculate: the occasional applicant who had failed to pass School Certificate Latin found herself in some difficulty and nearly always had to re-take it.²⁸ Applicants would also have been interviewed before being offered a place – Younghusband commends the Liverpool interviewing process, which generally entailed two separate meetings with different members of staff – and in some cases required to write an essay. Many came from the North West, and north and mid-Wales, but others had travelled from elsewhere in the country. Predominantly, but not entirely, female, they were from middle-class homes – doctors' daughters and clergy daughters are well represented – and had been educated at independent schools or grammar schools.²⁹ Just

²⁶ ULSCA, A200.

²⁷ ULSCA, A200.

²⁸ See, for example, ULSCA, A200.

²⁹ In her description of the Liverpool department in November 1935, Alice Salomon notes that there were seventeen first-year students, three of whom

occasionally, a record tells of a student who was taught at home by a governess. None of this should surprise us. Before the war, university students by and large had parents who could afford full fees and maintenance, a socially narrow base that Younghusband noted with regret in 1951.³⁰ Exceptions were those who had won major county scholarships, those few who qualified for grants to do youth leadership courses – they were entitled to apply for Ministry of Education grants – or would-be probation officers, to whom a grant might have been paid by the Home Office. But even they would have needed extra resources. Although levels varied between universities, at mid-century the total annual outlay per student would have been between £250 and £300 – of which fees would account for about £31.50 (thirty guineas). Fees were, of course, the same for men and for women, but the maintenance grants differed; in 1947 those paid to probation students were £78 a year for men and £63 for women.³¹ This prompts questions about whether men ate more, were routinely charged more for accommodation or whether, as has been suggested, the differential anticipated the unequal pay scales that would be applied when students left university and began to work as government servants.

Students were, of course, almost all white. Two exceptions in the extant files are a Nigerian man in the early 1950s and, in the mid-1940s, a woman who had grown up in the West Indies, where her father was a Methodist minister. She was evidently one of the best students of her year and earned first-class marks for both her theoretical and her practical work. The practical elements, like those of most of her contemporaries, had been very varied and had included time spent in a mother and baby home, the Juvenile Employment Bureau, a local Probation Office, the local Moral Welfare Association, National Children's Homes and an Approved School in the Midlands. With such wide experience and so satisfactory a record, she was astonished to find that her application for a post with London County Council

were male, and nineteen second-year students, one of whom was male, Salomon, *Education for social work*, p. 174.

³⁰ Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, pp. 143–44.

³¹ See Younghusband, *Report on the employment and training of social workers*, pp. 131ff; Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, pp. 143ff.

(LCC) was turned down, even though she had been told at interview that she was the best candidate for the job. When asked for an explanation, LCC officials claimed that her colour would make it difficult for her to get on with the police (not they with her) and that they therefore considered that it would be unfair to her to appoint her. As a result of her request that he protest on her behalf, Professor T. S. Simey, then head of department, and someone who had spent the war years in the West Indies, wrote what must be a model letter of its time, demonstrating the legacy of colonialism, internalised even in someone who would probably have been astonished – even horrified – to think that his words could be read as racist. Requesting that the appointment board reconsider, he argued that the woman is

not the usual sort of coloured person one meets who is over here from the colonies in so far as she is 'English coloured' and so far as her personality is concerned not colonial in any sense ... her sensitivity about her colour does not produce the extremes of aggressiveness as it so often does in colonials ... She is, of course, a risk, but she is a good risk.³²

The LCC chose not to re-consider her application. Most other students appear to have experienced little difficulty in finding employment, even the one on a Home Office grant who, in 1952, failed his examinations but still became a child welfare officer in a Midlands town.³³

The student files also shed light on the courses followed by these mostly white and middle-class young people. A two-year curriculum is described in the minutes of the Executive Committee for the School of Social Science and Training in 1906,³⁴ and until the late 1940s, students worked towards the Certificate in Social Science or the Diploma in Social Science,³⁵

³² ULSCA, A200.

³³ ULSCA, A200.

³⁴ See Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, p. 55.

³⁵ As Simey points out, although the award was supposed to be called a certificate, the terms certificate and diploma appear to be used interchangeably in the records, and the student files do not appear to distinguish between them, Simey, *Rhetoric to reality*, p. 55.

designed to equip students, who may or may not already have a university degree, for employment as social workers. It appears to have had core elements of psychology, social history and principles and practice of casework. Students may have been permitted to exercise a degree of choice; for example, those who did not want to do social statistics could opt for sociology of industry or extra psychology or ethics.³⁶ Both the Diploma and the Certificate were two-year courses and students spent some time during the term, and also a considerable part of their vacation, on practical placements: a minimum of 110 days. There would have been little time for earning money in the vacation – something that underlines the suggestion that the student constituency was relatively well-heeled – because it was expected that students would gain experience by working in social work agencies for two months over the summer break. The range of placements appears surprisingly wide, and by no means all of them were to be found in the Merseyside area; the list of organisations prepared to offer practical experience included approved schools and residential situations, particularly for children, throughout the country. Locally, the Juvenile Employment Bureau at Bootle took students on a regular basis, as did the Liverpool Child Welfare Organisation, the Diocese of Liverpool Board of Moral Welfare (usually in its Mother and Baby Home) and Birkenhead Council of Social Service, personnel departments of various stores and factories, the Liverpool women police patrols and a range of others from time to time. The Liverpool Personal Service Society appears to have taken more than any other local agency – not surprising, given its high reputation and close links with the department.³⁷

For those studying for a vocational qualification, 110 days a year seems a reasonable amount of practical experience. It is more of a surprise to find that placements were also followed by those studying for a B.A., even though the subjects studied for the degree were mostly conventional academic ones, and it would appear that the degree was not primarily designed to provide vocational training. For example, one student in the early 1940s

³⁶ Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, p. 199.

³⁷ ULSCA, A200.

studied French, history, social science and psychology – and also completed a number of assessed placements including those at the Merseyside Hospitals after-care service, the welfare department of Johnson's the Cleaners and a spell at the Juvenile Employment Bureau. Another took time out from his undergraduate course to study Cantonese at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, before writing a thesis on the Liverpool Chinese community. (It was suggested to him that he might like to apply for a research post in the department, but he wisely decided that he did not 'want to face crucifixion on the Calvary of academic penury'.)³⁸

Changes and courses

It is this slightly confused course design – common, it would appear, to all universities teaching would-be social workers – that prompted Eileen Younghusband's study in 1947. She identified sixteen universities or university colleges which offered training for social work. She singled out the University of Liverpool B.A. and the corresponding University of London degree (taught at the LSE) as providing an excellent basis for later vocational training, assuming, presumably, that students would go on to study for either the Certificate or the Diploma, but notes that in other centres prospective social workers attended lectures designed for different sorts of students and that little attention was given to the planning of the social work syllabus as a whole. The teaching of psychology was impugned as generally unsatisfactory, with most courses condemned as either useless or dangerous.³⁹ Well ahead of other commentators, Younghusband identified the need for nationally-recognised elements in a coherent body of knowledge designed to equip all social workers for the task they were to undertake, regardless of their training school.

By 1951, when Younghusband wrote her supplementary report, many changes had taken place and she believed that she could detect improvements in course design, in itself a revolutionary concept. Her 1959 report, with its recommendations

³⁸ ULSCA, A200.

³⁹ Younghusband, *Report on the employment and training of social workers*, p. 31.

for non-graduate courses, marked a further development, at a time when most social workers were still without any sort of professional training.⁴⁰ This is not the place to describe the flurry of activity from the 1960s, as new forms of training were set up outside the universities, except to note that by 1960, at a time when fewer than half of those working as social workers in the field had received any training at all, the LSE and the University of Liverpool accounted for over a half of all students doing professional social work courses,⁴¹ and therefore of those trained workers active in the field. So-called 'Younghusband courses', which were introduced into colleges of further education and polytechnics in the wake of the 1959 report, helped to swell the numbers of qualified staff, and the end of the decade and the 1970s saw the inauguration of the British Association of Social Workers, the Council for the Training of Social Workers and later the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers, which assumed responsibility for the development and oversight of training for the whole country and awarded the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work from 1972.⁴² The effects of these changes on the size of the student intake were noted by Brian Heraud, who claimed that, whereas there were ninety-eight students on courses leading to a recognised professional social work qualification in 1950, there were over 3,700 in 1979.⁴³

If the pre-war social work students at the University of Liverpool had been overwhelmingly white, middle class and well-educated, were their post-war counterparts any different? Given the nature of the Liverpool course, which became a postgraduate qualification after the war, the simple answer is no. Looking through their files, the student photographs feature almost entirely white faces – until the mid-1980s, brown and black ones appear only infrequently. The predominantly white intake was confirmed by a revealing comment from someone who had been a student at the University in the 1970s. When asked about black students on

⁴⁰ E. Younghusband, *Report of the working party on social workers in the local authority health and welfare services* (London, 1959).

⁴¹ Heraud, *Training for uncertainty*, p. 31.

⁴² Heraud, *Training for uncertainty*, pp. 36ff.

⁴³ Heraud, *Training for uncertainty*, p. 2.

her course, she said that there were none – and then added, quite unselfconsciously, ‘They would have gone to the course at the Poly’. The existence of this two-tier system of training is noted by Brian Heraud, who pointed out that social work students in universities at the beginning of the 1980s were still predominantly middle class;⁴⁴ working-class students went to the polytechnics or colleges of further education, where they could do the non-graduate courses. While Younghusband had preached the value of designing courses for people with the potential to be effective social workers in spite of their relative lack of formal qualifications, it is difficult to believe that she had anticipated so sharp a divide on the lines of class and race.

In addition to the divisions between social work students and social workers resulting from differing educational experiences, another significant feature of both social services departments and universities and colleges in the early 1970s was what one commentator has characterised as their polyglot nature.⁴⁵ Two unrelated developments contributed to this. First, the recommendations of the Seebohm Committee on Local Authority and Allied Social Services in 1968 resulted in the re-organisation of local authority social service provision in 1971, a process that involved the closure of specialist departments like Children’s Departments and the inauguration of generic Social Services Departments.⁴⁶ Inevitably, this brought together social workers and workers in training who had hitherto been identified with particular branches of the profession – child care, psychiatric social work and care of the elderly, for example – something that luminaries like Younghusband had been recommending for at least two decades.⁴⁷ Academics, and perhaps practitioners, may have found the transition confusing. Some clearly felt threatened by what they perceived to be an erosion of the standards associated with their particular sub-discipline. This was especially

⁴⁴ Heraud, *Training for uncertainty*, pp. 28ff.

⁴⁵ H. Jones, ‘Introduction’, in H. Jones, ed., *Towards a new social work* (London, 1975), p. 2.

⁴⁶ For a detailed description of the process of reorganisation see E. Younghusband, *Social work in Britain 1950-1975: A follow up study* (2 vols, London, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 239ff.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Younghusband, *Social work in Britain*, p. 109.

true of two groups, psychiatric social workers and child care workers, who had traditionally been perceived as the best-trained of all social workers. But students at the time, if an unscientific poll of people who were students in Liverpool in the 1970s is anything to go by, suggests that for them the move to generic social work was an exciting development.

Universities and colleges had to adjust the content of their courses to equip students for the changed nature of the local authority departments in which they would be employed. But the polyglot nature of academic departments was not just the result of changing structures and the amalgamation of courses. The different 'languages' were also a function of a fundamental debate about the nature of social work. There was a tension between those who had held sway during the 1950s and 1960s – the psycho-therapeutically leaning workers, whose influence had been noted by Youngusband in the late 1940s – and the so-called radical social workers, influenced by a sociological understanding of the potential of structural causation for individual distress, whose theoretical position began to assume dominance in the 1970s. In 1975, Howard Jones claimed that as 'never before social workers are unsure of their professional identity: what as social workers they were aiming to do, and by what methods they might seek to achieve their aims'. He was clearly highlighting the potential for confusion in academic departments when social work students found themselves being taught by tutors with diametrically-opposed views.⁴⁸ Another commentator suggested that the arguments about the essential components of the social work educational process 'resembled theological debates'.⁴⁹ It is easy to see the potential for confusion, but students in Liverpool may not have experienced some of the more acute tensions, anyway, in the University department. Radical social work teachers were thin on the ground here in the early 1970s and any challenge to more traditional thought that they might have met would have occurred during their practical experience. This is borne out by reports on individual student placements, where the divide is sometimes demonstrated very clearly. For example, a student

⁴⁸ Jones, 'Introduction', p. 1.

⁴⁹ Heraud, *Training for uncertainty*, p. 128.

placement supervisor in one branch of a voluntary agency wrote a report on her student that concentrated as much on the student's inner life as on the clients she dealt with; she appeared to be expected to take cognisance of the state of intimate areas of their lives – even if they had only asked for social work help in order to get a grant for a new cooker. Another supervisor from a different branch of the same agency, on the other hand, ignored the inner life of both student and client and described his tutee's participation in various sorts of social activism – like leading a community protest against infrequent emptying of rubbish bins – as evidence of effective social work.⁵⁰

Liverpool and its contribution

Although emphases were changing, all university departments by the 1970s recognised the authority of central professional bodies, so that courses adhered to similar curricula and aimed to equip students with the same basic skills. That had not been the case during the inter-war period. It is clear from Younghusband's account of social work training in the first half of the century that Liverpool's course contained elements that were not necessarily found in other courses. For example, Dorothy Keeling, the training secretary of the Liverpool Personal Service Society (PSS), was also a member of the academic staff of the department, where she lectured on social work principles and conducted regular case discussions. She also conducted tutorials for medical students. Keeling seems to have been quite a power in the land. A letter dated December 1918 shows that she was consulted about training placements for individual students and may even have organised them. Her successor at PSS played a similar role in relation to the university. Younghusband, with her concern for the quality of practical training and integrated course design, commended this as good practice. Although the LSE had a comparable arrangement, whereby a senior psychiatric social worker from the Maudesley Hospital was also a full-time member of the academic staff, her work was entirely with the students studying in preparation for careers in the mental health field. At Bristol and Birmingham, the wardens of the university settlements

⁵⁰ ULSCA, D495(HQ)M5/3.

were also tutors in practical work, but it appears that that tutorial supervision was done within the settlement and that they were not considered to be members of the academic staff.

Another distinguishing feature of the Liverpool course was that the University was part of a well-developed coordinating organisation, unique to the city, called the Practical Advisory Executive Committee and composed of representatives from both the academic department and the agencies where students had done their practical training. This body was consulted before any local agency was accepted for training purposes, it developed policy and it received reports on every student. It was this committee that was responsible for awarding marks for practical work. While it was not the only body which aimed to encourage high standards in training placements – the Joint Committee on Family Casework Training springs to mind – it appears to have been the only one so tightly tied into university departmental practice. A further feature of the Liverpool department, and another that it shared with the LSE, was a tutor in personnel management, which is an indication of the very wide definition of ‘social work’ in the first half of the century and must explain why students are found doing placements at local department stores, Johnson’s the Cleaners and Dunlops (where one of the students reported as being on placement is expressly described as making rubber and canvas shoes).⁵¹

As well as its close links with PSS, the department also fostered links with other voluntary organisations. Its students did practical placements with National Children’s Homes and Diocesan Moral Welfare agencies, for example. But one of Liverpool’s most interesting – and arguably most influential – links was with Family Service Units which, as Pacifist Service Units, had started life in the city in 1940. Family Service Units (FSU) were credited with pioneering work with the poorest families in the city, many of them victims of the blitz in 1941. They received considerable publicity for their intensive family casework, which aimed to keep families together and to inculcate good standards of housewifery and child care.⁵² David Caradog

⁵¹ ULSCA, A200.

⁵² See Starkey, *Families and social workers*, pp. 77ff.

Jones, a member of the department and the editor of an influential sociological study of Merseyside published in 1934,⁵³ was an early enthusiast for the work of the young pacifists and introduced them to his particular, eugenicist, view of the pathology and prognosis of what he called the 'social problem group'; Penelope Hall, whose book on the social services in England and Wales was an authoritative text for generations of student social workers and who moved to Liverpool from the University of Manchester, was another supporter, as was T. S. Simey. As the organisation grew in the 1950s and 1960s, its units around the country received Liverpool students on placements. In the immediate post-war period FSU workers who had been 'trained' in Liverpool were keenly sought by the newly-appointed Children's Officers to work in their departments. Barbara Kahan, one of the first Children's Officers appointed in 1948, whose initial appointment was in Dudley, from where she moved to Oxfordshire in 1951, was one of the first to do this, and long after her retirement was to be heard enthusing about the intensive casework practised by Family Service Units.⁵⁴ (It is worth noting that these 1940s conscientious objectors turned social workers were themselves almost completely untrained in any formal sense, although the next generation of FSU workers did undergo formal training.) FSU placements were thought by students in the 1950s and 1960s to be especially prestigious and a list of workers and students in the organisation in the third quarter of the century reads like a roll call of significant people in the profession. To take just one example of many – David Jones, the first National Secretary of FSU, who became Principal of the National Institute of Social Work, was one of the original war-time Liverpool workers and enjoyed close links with the department, although he was never formally a student there. Although FSU would argue that the originality of its methods was not entirely due to its links with the university, the informal consultancy role that individual members of the department undertook in the 1940s and 1950s played no small

⁵³ D. Caradog Jones (ed.), *The social survey of Merseyside* (3 vols, Liverpool, 1934).

⁵⁴ Personal communication, May 1990, Starkey, *Families and social workers*, pp. 100-01.

part in the development of its distinctive approach to so-called problem families.

Conclusion

The title of this article drew attention to the split in popular perception, highlighted by Eileen Younghusband, about the status and role of social workers – were they kind-hearted and good with people – or skilled professionals?⁵⁵ Whatever the situation on the streets, the student records make clear that, from its earliest days, the department at the University of Liverpool aimed to produce skilled professionals. Its standards appear to have been rigorous – not all students passed the assessments. The reports on their practical work are detailed and sometimes harshly critical. Unlike many of the departments listed by Younghusband in 1947, Liverpool appeared to have achieved some sort of balance between practice and theory – almost certainly because it employed a local social worker as a member of the department. Although she does not quite get as far as saying that the Liverpool training was better than that offered by the LSE – she was, after all, on the staff of the latter – it is clear from her 1947 and 1951 reports that the department offered a training of which she heartily approved. She was instrumental in the development of generic courses and standardisation and from late 1970s had less to say – because there was less to say – about the merits or demerits of particular courses at particular universities. But from her earlier critiques of social work courses, it is clear that the University of Liverpool played no small part in setting standards of training that were eventually to be incorporated into nationally approved curricula and assessments. And during its one hundred years of history, it contributed to the debate about the solution of social problems and the training of those who aimed to help to solve them at an individual and family level.

⁵⁵ Younghusband, *Social work in Britain: 1950-1975*, vol. 1, p. 22.