



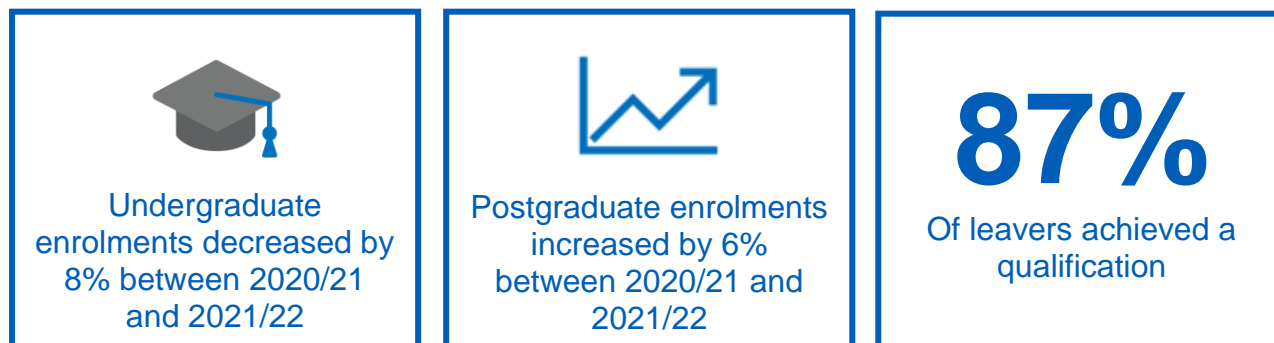
# Social work education

Skills for Care analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data

April 2023

This report presents information about social work education enrolments and qualifiers.

## Summary of key findings



### Enrolments

- 5,580 students enrolled onto social work courses in 2021/22. The number of enrolments has decreased by 2% in the last academic year.
- Postgraduate enrolments (making up 46% of enrolments) increased by 6% in 2021/22.
- Undergraduate enrolments (making up 54% of enrolments) decreased by 8% in 2021/22.
- The average age of a social work undergraduate student was 27 years old and postgraduate was 31 years old. This was younger than other higher education students, at an average age of 30 for undergraduates and 32 for postgraduates.
- Around 35% of enrolments were individuals identifying as having a Black, Asian and other minority ethnic background; 21% were Black, 7% Asian, and 6% other minority ethnic background.
- The majority of enrolments were people with British nationality (86%). Around 4% of enrolments had an EU nationality and 11% had a non-EU nationality.

### Qualifiers

- In 2021/22 there were 4,430 leavers from social work courses. Of these leavers, 3,860 (87%) achieved a qualification. This is a decrease of 1 percentage point from the previous academic year.
- The decrease in qualifiers in 2021/22 and 2020/21 was likely to be a result of the lower number of enrolments in 2018/19 and 2019/20. Skills for Care modelling suggests that the number of leavers could be higher in the next three years, due to the increase in enrolments from 2020/21 onwards.
- The number of qualifying graduates has decreased by 18% from 4,700 in 2012/13 to 3,860 in 2021/22.

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# Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

### Acknowledgment of data coverage

The data presented in this report was provided by HESA and covers enrolments in social work courses in 2021/22 and the outcomes of graduates from 2019/20. The figures in this report include enrolments and leavers from designated social worker education courses that were regulated and can lead to registration with Social Work England.

It is acknowledged that some social work students not included in this report were studying courses regulated by The Nursing and Midwifery Council or the regulatory body was not specified in the data provided.

The information in this report is based on Skills for Care's analysis of social work higher education data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Whilst acknowledging the importance of understanding the experiences of students and academics, this report focuses on the numbers of students starting and leaving courses. Only students that enrolled on, or left from, courses regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (pre-2019/20) and, Social Work England (post-2020/21) were included.

This report includes student enrolments and graduates up to the academic year 2021/22 and therefore during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, all those enrolled on courses during that period will have had their learning, especially the practice placements impacted by the circumstances brought about by the pandemic. This means that newly qualified social workers joining the workforce may have different learning needs to be considered in their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) than those that might have been originally expected.

For workforce planning to be as effective as possible, it is necessary to understand the take-up of social work education and the demographic profile of students. Further analysis relates to factors that could influence the 'success rates' of students in terms of course completion and academic achievement.

Data from 195 higher education institutions (HEIs) were included in the HESA dataset, with 69 reporting social work courses. As such, all total figures (e.g., enrolments, leavers, graduates) in this report represent the student population of these 69 HEIs. It is acknowledged that a number of social work students study at, and graduate from, further education colleges that provide courses accredited by higher education institutions that cannot be directly identified in the dataset, as well as from graduate entry schemes (see below).

### Destination of graduates

The Graduate Outcomes survey measures outcomes at 15 months after graduation and is centrally delivered and quality checked by HESA. This survey was launched in 2018, collecting data from graduates completing after August 2019.

The Graduate Outcomes survey replaced the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey which ended after collecting data from the 2016/17 graduating cohort. In previous reports, the destinations of social work graduates were analysed using the DLHE. This survey measured outcomes six months after students completed their course and was collected and processed by individual Higher Education providers. The data was then gathered to produce a single dataset.

Due to differences in the time-scale and method of collection, the results from the Graduate Outcomes survey are not comparable to those from the DLHE.

For more information about the Graduate Outcomes survey, please visit:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/graduates#about>.

### **Current social work policy context**

The Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education continue to implement policy initiatives focussed on continued improvement of social work services and the education and continuous professional development required to ensure social workers are well-trained and able to practise confidently. Social Work England became the regulator of the social work profession on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019, taking over responsibility from The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) for education and training standards and the approval of career entry courses. This report still refers to HCPC as the data being analysed dates back to when they were responsible for the regulation of social work.

Teaching Partnerships (comprised of employers and HEI's) continue to function in several areas, providing further resources and focussed work aimed at improving the quality of local workforce planning and practice education among other things.

### **Social Worker apprenticeship**

The social worker apprenticeship is a 'statutory integrated degree apprenticeship'. For more information please visit:

<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/social-worker>

The apprenticeship was approved for delivery in November 2018 and makes up part of the enrolment's figures for 2021/22 shown in this report. There were around 740 starts into this apprenticeship in 2021/22, a decrease of 9% from the previous year. For more on social care apprenticeships, please visit:

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/WIApprenticeships>

### **Assessed and Supported Year in Employment**

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is offered to all newly qualified social workers (NQSW) through their employer. It provides planned support and development as well as assessment against national standards (Post Qualifying Standards – formerly known as Knowledge and Skills Statements) in both adults and child and family services, and the overarching Professional Capabilities Framework. The ASYE enables

NQSWs to consolidate their degree learning, develop capability and strengthen their professional confidence in practice in their first employment situation. Both government departments provide some funding support to employers towards the delivery of ASYE programmes.

### Graduate entry schemes

Other current policy initiatives include the implementation of 'graduate entry' schemes where graduates with non-social work degrees can train to become social workers. Students of graduate schemes are included in the HESA student record used in the body of this report but could not be separately identified from other courses. Top-level figures are presented here to provide context from other sources. These are not in addition to the enrolment and qualifier figures reported in section 2 onwards. The number of starters and graduates for graduate entry schemes was provided by the Frontline organisation, Think Ahead and the Department for Education.

**Frontline (398 starts in 2022):** The Frontline programme begins with a five-week residential period developing the skills and knowledge to practice social work. Participants are then placed as groups of four within a local authority, working directly with vulnerable children and families, and supervised by an experienced consultant social worker.

After successfully completing their first year, participants attain a post graduate qualification and become registered social workers responsible for their own case load with continued support and continue to study towards a Masters qualification. Successfully completing their second year qualifies participants to join the Frontline Fellowship. For more information on Frontline programme please visit: [www.thefrontline.org.uk](http://www.thefrontline.org.uk)

The first cohort of the Frontline programme started in July 2014 with 104 entrants. In each consecutive year, the number of entrants has increased, reaching 463 entrants in July 2020 but decreasing slightly each year since (398 in July 2022).

In total there have been 2,050 graduates from the Frontline programme from a population of 2,305 entrants up to Cohort 9. This is an 89% qualifying rate.

**Step Up to Social Work (868 starts in 2022):** An intensive, 14-month programme offering placements for graduates (with a minimum 2:1 degree or a 2:2 degree plus a higher-level qualification) in local authority social work departments. Trainees work towards a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work and, upon successful completion, can register with Social Work England as a social worker.

The first cohort of the Step Up to Social Work programme started in September 2010 with 185 starts. The number of starts increased substantially in the following cohorts, reaching 868 in January 2022.

There have been 2,314 graduates from the Step Up to Social Work programme from a population of 2,430 entrants up to Cohort 6. This is a 95% qualifying rate.

**Think Ahead (156 starts in 2022):** A two-year programme for graduates to become social workers in mental health service settings. The programme begins with a six-week residential Summer Institute which prepares participants to enter the workplace. They then spend a year training within a community mental health service, in groups of four each led by a Consultant Social Worker.

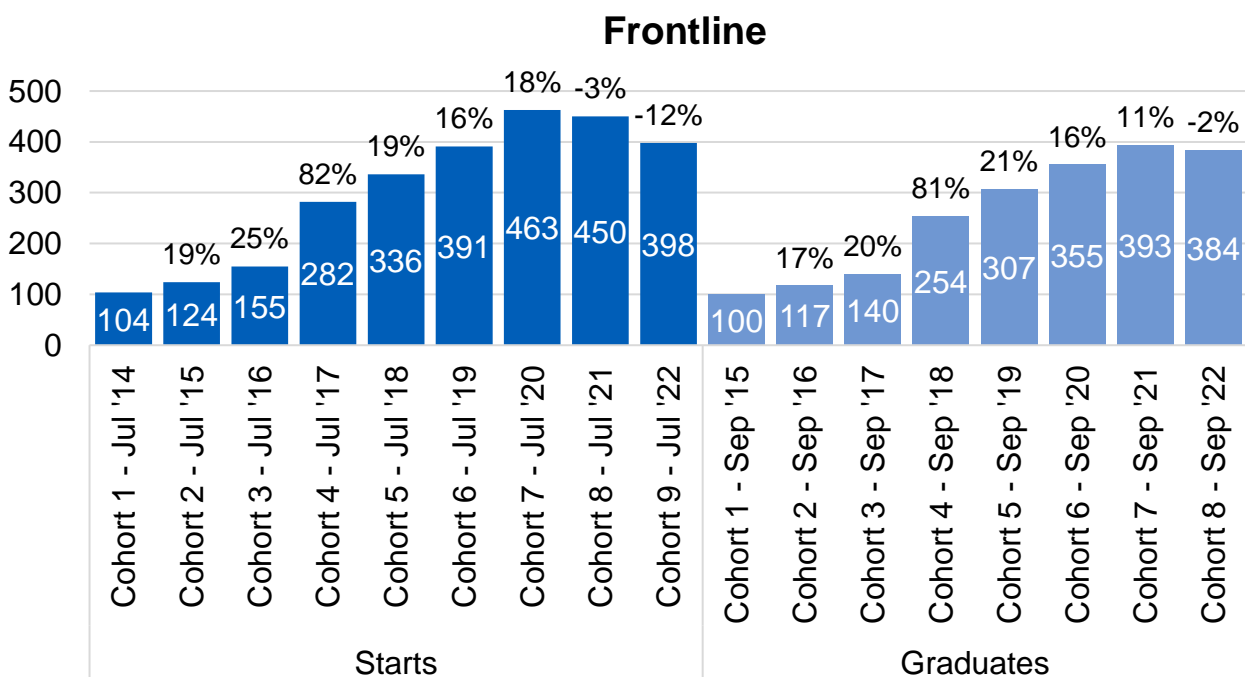
Each group takes a shared caseload, for which the Consultant Social Worker takes responsibility, which averages 21 cases half-way through the year and 35 cases during the second half of the year. At the end of the first year the participants gain a postgraduate diploma in social work and can register as social workers. In the second year they take up a paid role and complete a master's degree in social work.

Entrants typically hold a 2:1 undergraduate degree (unless mitigating circumstances apply) and are chosen using a three-stage selection process involving service users and social workers. Graduates of more than 60 universities have been represented amongst entrants.

The first cohort started in July 2016 with 95 entrants. This has risen each year to a peak in of 165 in July 2021, before falling slightly to 156 in July 2022. From the initial cohort, 93% qualified as social workers and this has hardly varied up to cohort 6 in July 2021 (92%). The initial cohort saw 85% employed as social workers six months after graduating, which fell to 81% in cohort 2, but increased to 91% in cohort 3 and has stayed at this level since.

**Chart 1. Number of starts, graduates and the relative percentage changes year on year from Frontline, Step Up to Social Work and Think Ahead graduate schemes**

Source: Department for Education, Think Ahead





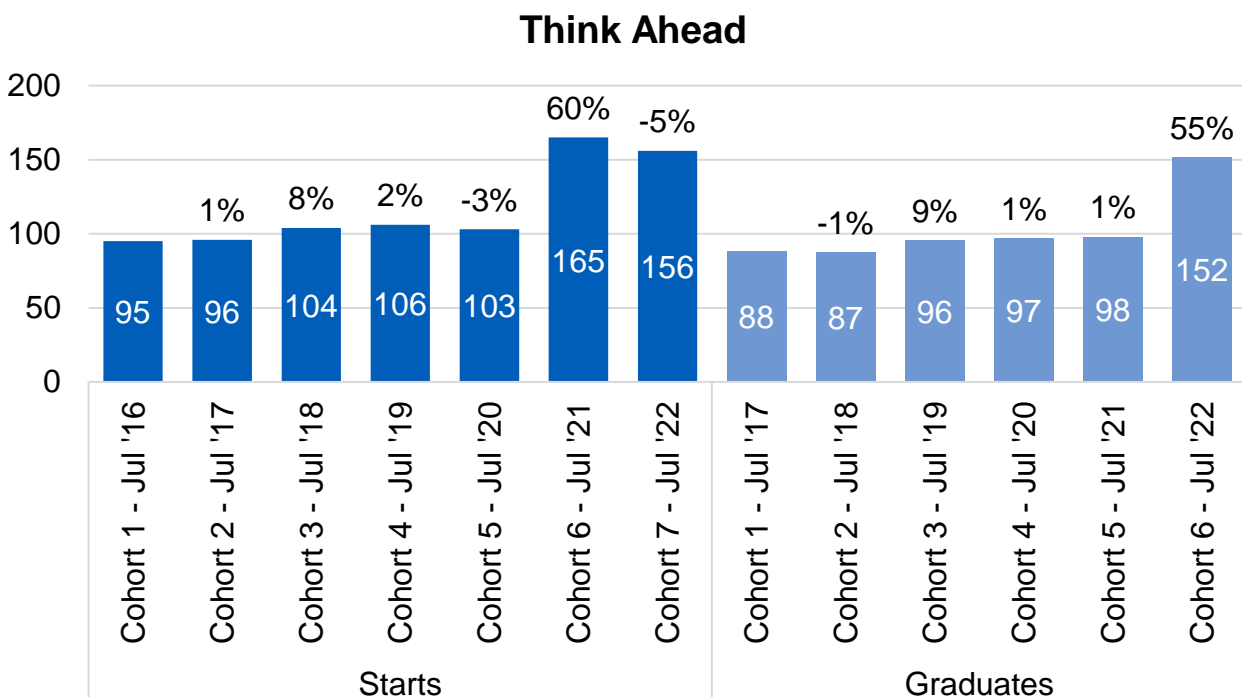
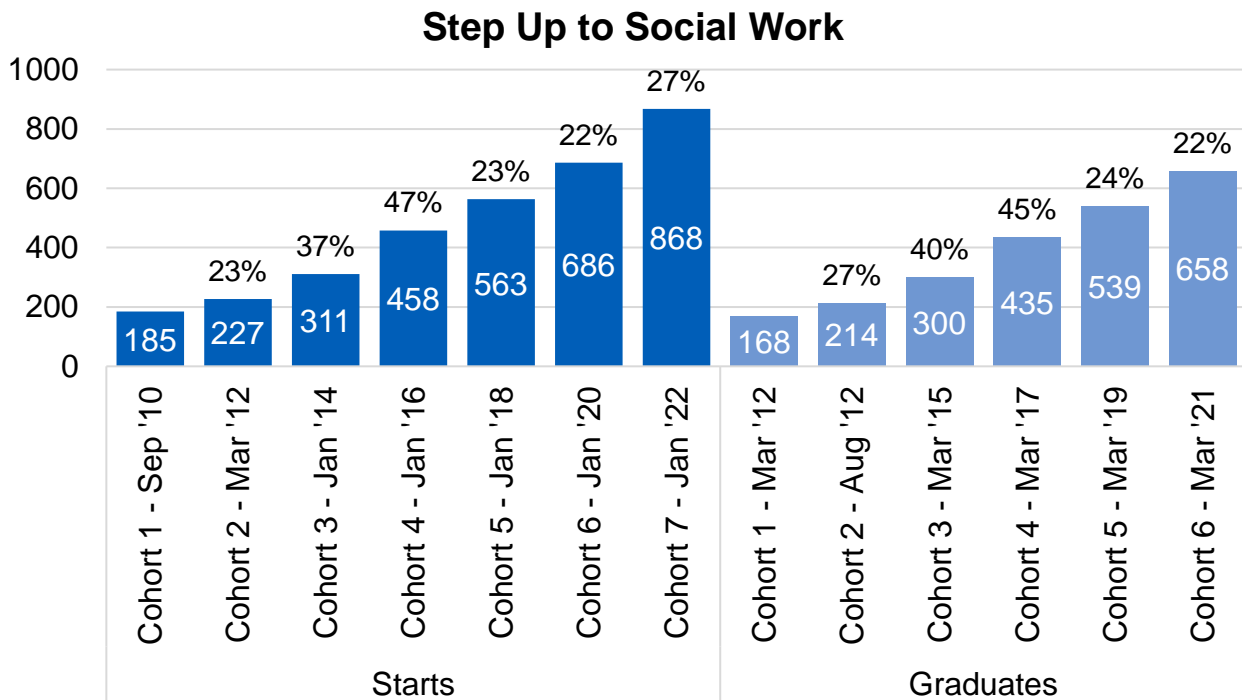


Chart 2 below shows the proportion of graduate scheme starts out of all postgraduate enrolments. The number of graduate scheme enrolments, provided by each organisation, were subtracted from the number of postgraduate enrolments shown in the HESA student record, and it is assumed all graduate scheme enrolments were in the HESA student record.

Frontline and Think Ahead entrants begin their initial residential training in July then continue onto their placement and therefore entrants to cohort 1 of these programmes were included in academic year 2014/15 in the chart below.

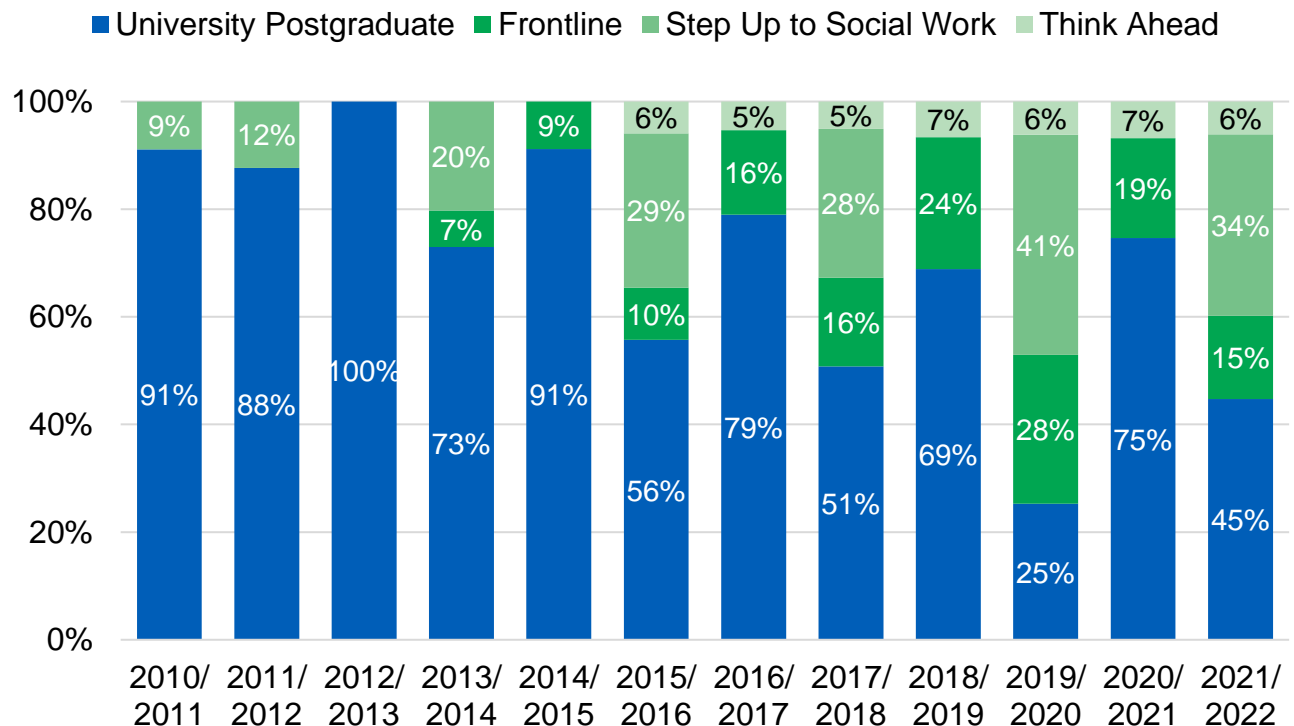
Entrants into the Step Up to Social Work programme began in September 2010, then March 2012 for cohort 2, then in January for each subsequent cohort.

Please note that the Frontline and Step Up to Social Work graduate schemes undertake their training within children's services settings only. The university postgraduate data refers to generic university-based programmes.

Entrants to the Step Up to Social Work programme accounted for around 34% of postgraduate social work enrolments in the academic year 2021/22 (intake is every two years). The Think Ahead programme accounted for 6% of enrolments whilst Frontline accounted for 15%.

## Chart 2. Proportion of postgraduate and graduate scheme enrolments, 2010/11 to 2021/22

Source: Department for Education, Think Ahead and HESA student record



## Funding

On the Frontline graduate scheme<sup>1</sup> trainees will, in their first year, receive a tax and NI exempt bursary which is paid monthly. In London the Bursary is £20,000 and other regions the Bursary is £18,000. In Year 2 trainees will earn the salary of a newly-qualified social worker salary. Social workers employed by local authorities in England had a median salary of £37,600 as at September 2022<sup>2</sup>. Tuition fees are covered by Frontline throughout the programme.

On the Think Ahead graduate schemes<sup>3</sup>, trainee's receive a tax-free training bursary for the Summer Institute and Year One. This is around £18,000 (£20,000 with London weighting) paid monthly. In Year Two, trainees will be employed as a newly qualified social worker and receive a taxable salary. Your exact salary will depend on the NHS Trust or Local Authority employing you. There are no programme fees, and all qualifications are fully funded.

Step Up to Social Work participants receive a bursary of £19,833<sup>4</sup>.

For comparison, students on traditional undergraduate social work courses can receive a basic bursary (criteria do apply and non-means tested) of between £4,862.50 outside London and £5,262.50 inside London.

Postgraduate students can receive the basic bursary as well as an income assessed bursary of between £3,362.50 outside London and £3,762.50 inside London as well as additional allowances including adult dependents allowance, placement travel allowance, parents learning allowance, childcare allowance and disabled students allowance<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thefrontline.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011592538-How-much-will-I-be-paid->

<sup>2</sup> [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/workforce-employed-by-adult-services-in-England](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/workforce-employed-by-adult-services-in-England)

<sup>3</sup> <https://thinkahead.org/about-the-programme/how-the-programme-works/#how-you-will-be-paid>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/step-up-to-social-work>

<sup>5</sup> Your Guide to Social Work Bursaries – NHS, 2021/22:

<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/SocialWorkBursaries.pdf>

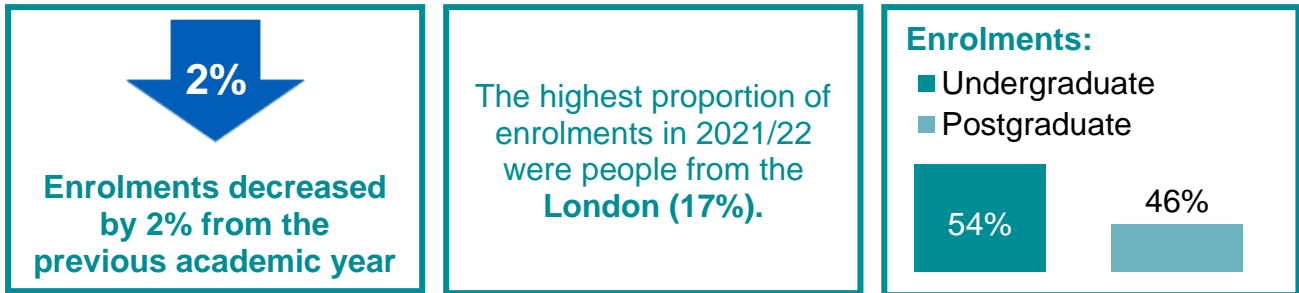
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# Enrolments in social work education

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## 2. Enrolments in social work education

This section contains Skills for Care's analysis of HESA data to describe individuals enrolling onto social work higher education courses. Only courses that were regulated by Social Work England (previously HCPC) and could lead to registration as a social worker have been included in these tables. These include undergraduate, postgraduate, and graduate schemes up to the academic year 2021/22.



In 2021/22 there were around 5,580 enrolments onto courses that could lead to social worker registration. Undergraduate courses made up 54% of these enrolments and 46% were postgraduate courses. The number of enrolments had slowly decreased overtime, followed by a notable increase in 2020/21. However, enrolments had dropped again by 2% from 2020/21 to 2021/22.

**Chart 3. Number of enrolments between 2009/10 and 2021/22**

Source. HESA student record. Values have been rounded.

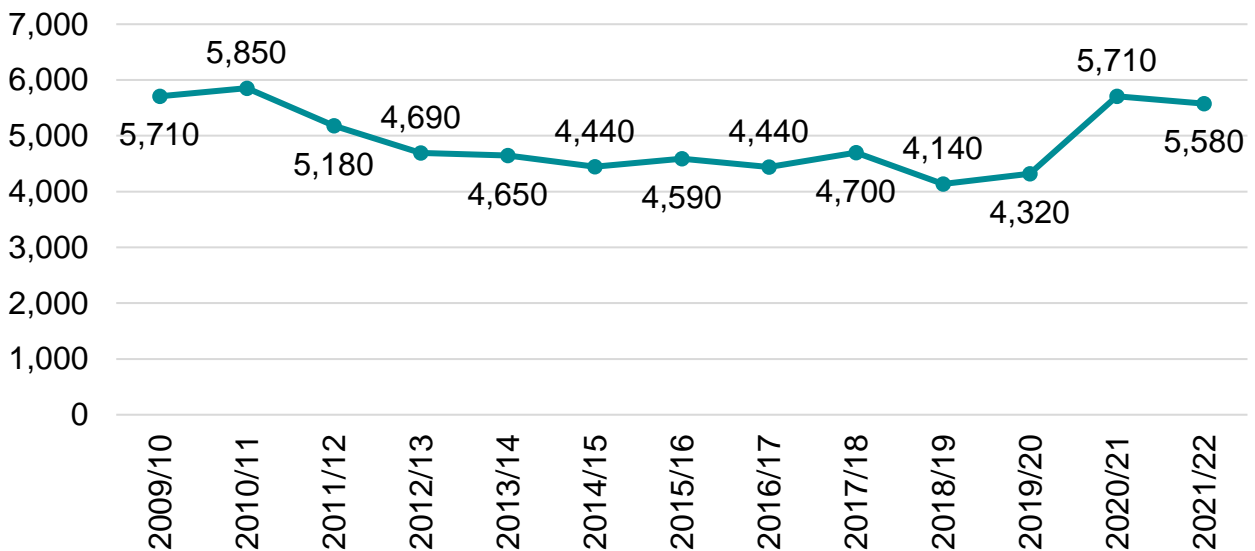
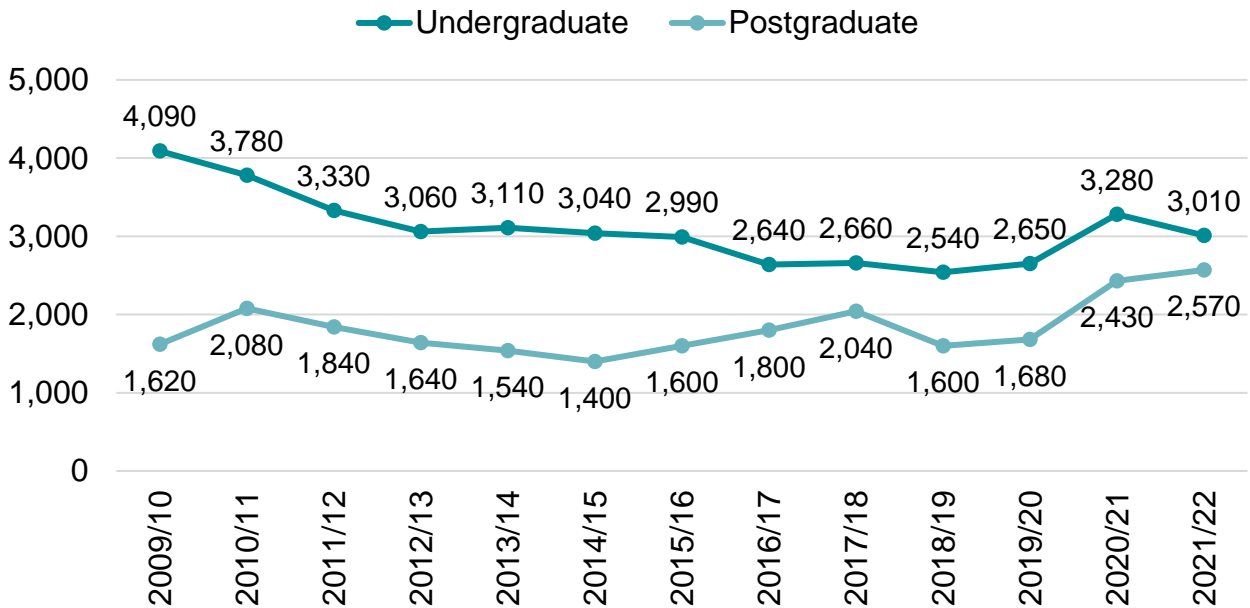


Chart 4 below compares enrolments between undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses. Undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments have both seen an increase in the last couple of years. Between 2009/10 and 2016/17 undergraduate enrolments decreased each year by an average of 6%, since that year, enrolments had been consistent, until an increase of 24% in 2020/21 followed by an 8% decrease in the last academic year.

Postgraduate enrolments have increased and decreased a few times over the period shown below. Enrolments have been increasing since 2018/19, and by 6% in the last academic year.

**Chart 4. Enrolments by course level, 2009/10 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record. Values have been rounded.



This increase in postgraduate enrolments between 2014/15 and 2017/18 may be related to the funding available to students which varies between academic levels. Postgraduate social work students could apply for a bursary throughout each year of their course, which included a non-means tested basic grant paid to the student and a contribution to the tuition fees paid to the university. Additional funding was also available from a maintenance grant (means-tested), adult dependents allowance, parents' learning allowance, childcare allowance, and disabled student's allowance. Undergraduate students were entitled to apply for a bursary in their second and third years but were not entitled to contributions towards their tuition fees or additional funding as was available to postgraduate students.

At this time, reasons for the increase in enrolments in 2020/21 are largely unknown. Skills for Care will continue to monitor the data to see if this trend continues. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic might have had an impact. However, this increase in enrolments should see an increase of graduates and social workers entering the workforce over the next few years.

Chart 5 shows the proportion of enrolments in undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses by the student's home region. Six of the ten regions have a relatively even split of undergraduate and postgraduate enrolments. London saw the highest proportion of both undergraduate and postgraduate students (16% and 18%). Meanwhile there was geographical variation in the lowest proportion of enrolments, with Non-England making up 4% of undergraduates and the South West region making up 4% of postgraduates.

**Chart 5. Proportion of enrolments by home region and degree level, 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record

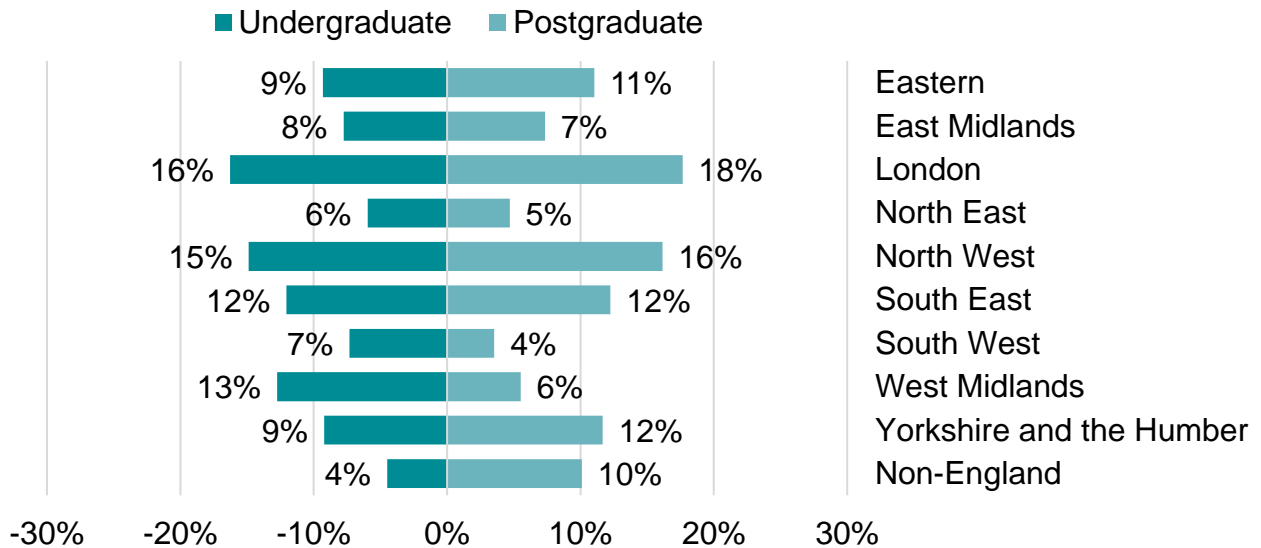
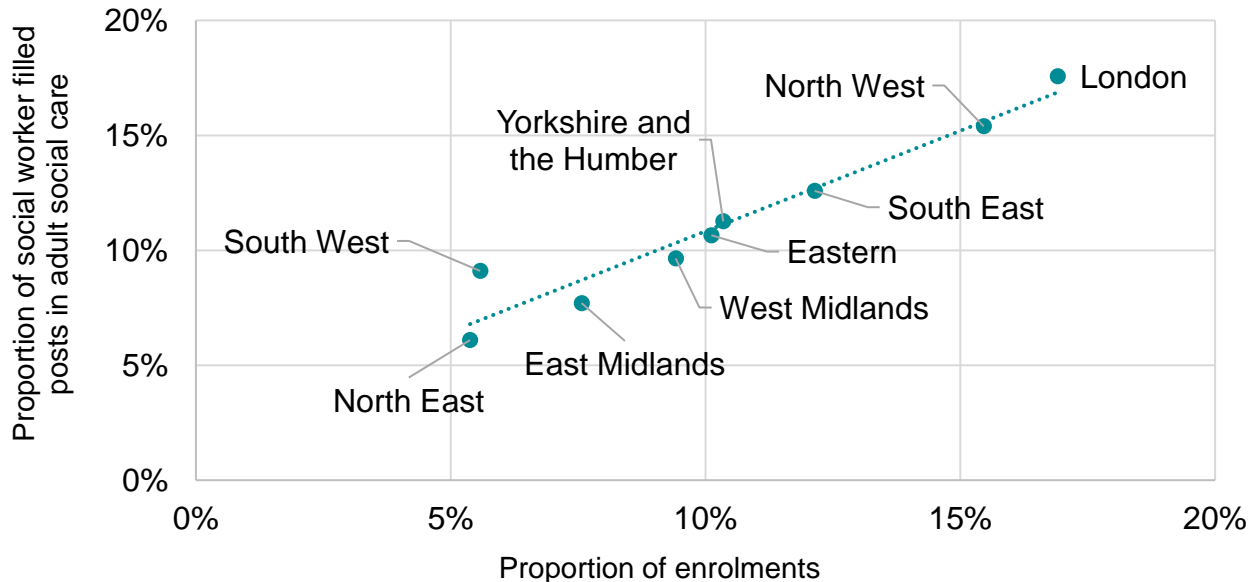


Chart 6 compares the proportion of enrolments in social work education to social worker posts in the adult social care sector by their home region prior to enrolment. This allows a comparison between supply and demand of future graduates against the current job market and may help to determine if there is an over or under supply of social workers in the future.

It is acknowledged that the number of vacancies and changes in the number of filled posts are not included in this. It should also be noted that information includes **adult social care filled posts only** and does not include children's social workers. There are significantly more social workers in children's services and, as such, a large proportion of graduates obtain positions in this sector. Please see Section 4 of this report for information about the destination of leavers.

**Chart 6. Comparison of enrolments to adult social worker filled posts by home region, 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates 2021/22



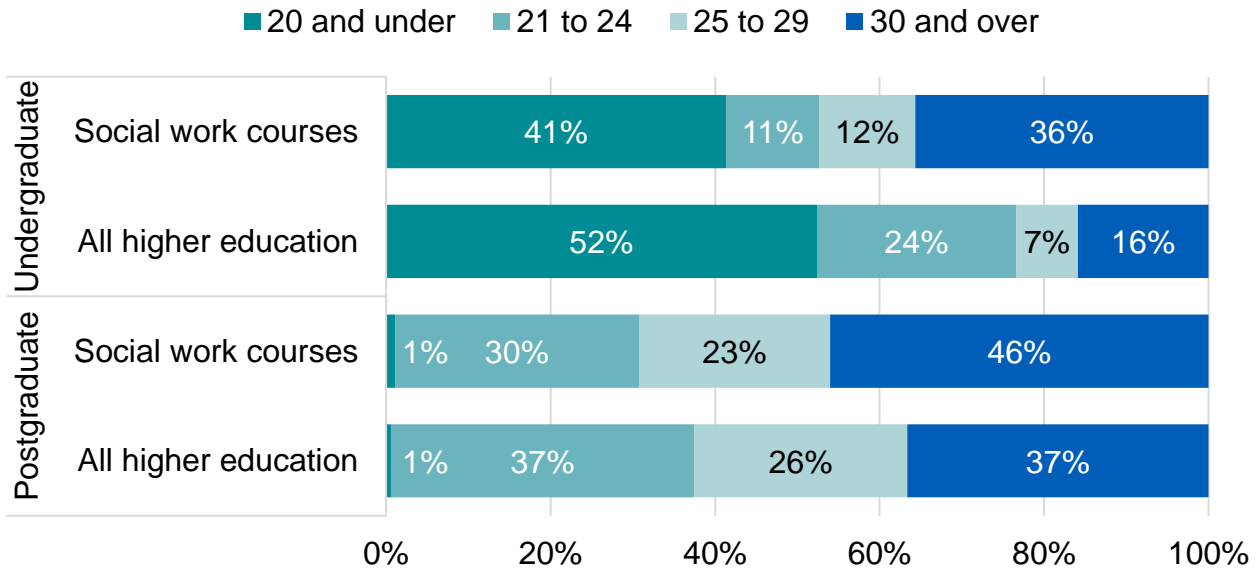
There was a strong correlation between social work enrolments and filled posts in the workforce. Those regions below the line in the chart above, such as the East Midlands, had a higher proportion of enrolments. This may suggest that students from this region must leave the area to find employment as a social worker when they graduate. Those above the line, such as the South West, had a higher proportion of social worker filled posts. This may suggest employers may have to find social work graduates from other regions to meet demand. However, as most regions sit either on or close to the trend line it can be assumed that the majority have an equal proportion of enrolments and filled posts. This suggests that graduates do not need to leave the area they studied in to find employment as a social worker.

Chart 7 below compares the proportion of enrolments by age group between social work courses and all higher education enrolments. The average age of an undergraduate student in social work was 27 years old, whereas the average age of students enrolling in postgraduate social work courses was 31 years old.



**Chart 7. Enrolments by age group and degree level, 2021/22**

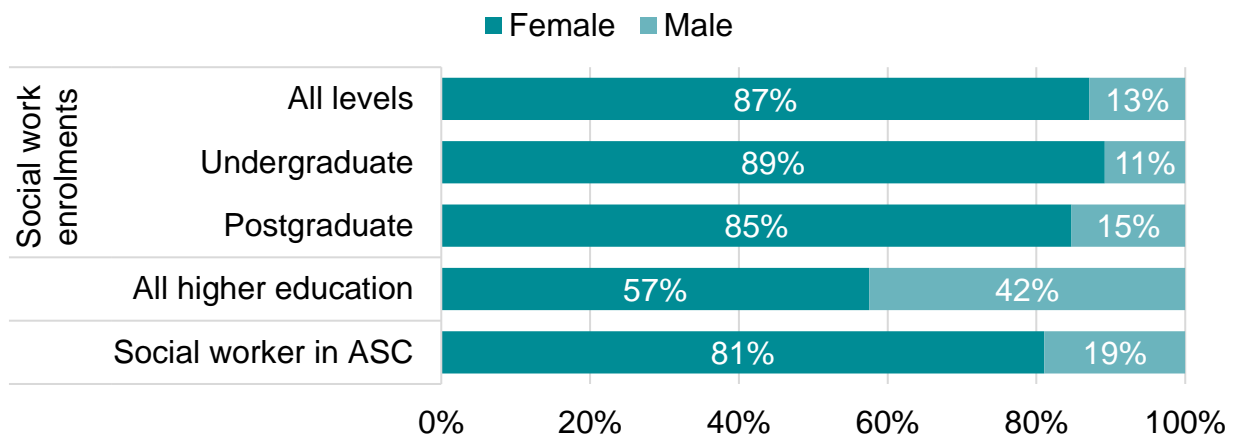
Source: HESA student record



Most people enrolling on social work courses in 2021/22 identified as female (87%) and the proportion has been steadily increasing over time from 84% in 2009/10. This was in line with the gender distribution across the adult social care workforce in which 81% of social workers were female. However, enrolments across all higher education were more evenly distributed between genders, with 57% that identified as female and 42% as male.

**Chart 8. Enrolments by gender compared to all higher education and adult social care workforce, 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates 2021/22

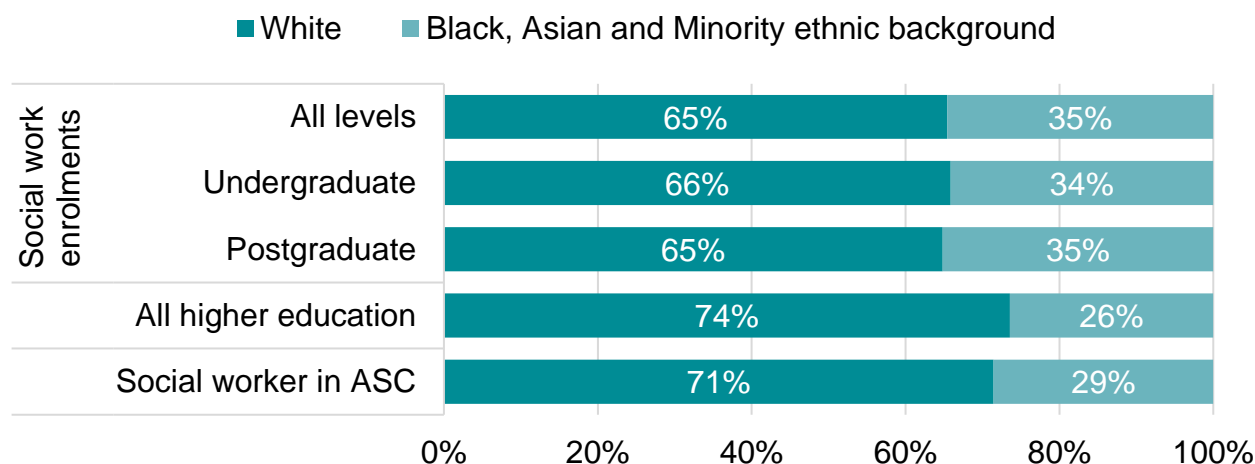


The ethnicity distribution of students enrolled on social work courses in 2021/22 was 65% with a white background and 35% with a Black, Asian and Minority ethnic background. This ethnic diversity has increased over time as the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority ethnic students has increased from 29% in 2009/10.

Social work enrolments had a greater proportion of people from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic background (35%) than the average across all higher education (26%) as well as social workers across the adult social care workforce (29%).

### Chart 9. Enrolments by ethnic group compared to all higher education and adult social care workforce, 2021/22

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates 2021/22



In 2021/22, 20% of people enrolling in a social worker course considered themselves to have a disability and this proportion has risen from 12% of enrolments in 2009/10. In contrast, only 11% of all higher education enrolments in 2021/22 considered themselves to have a disability.

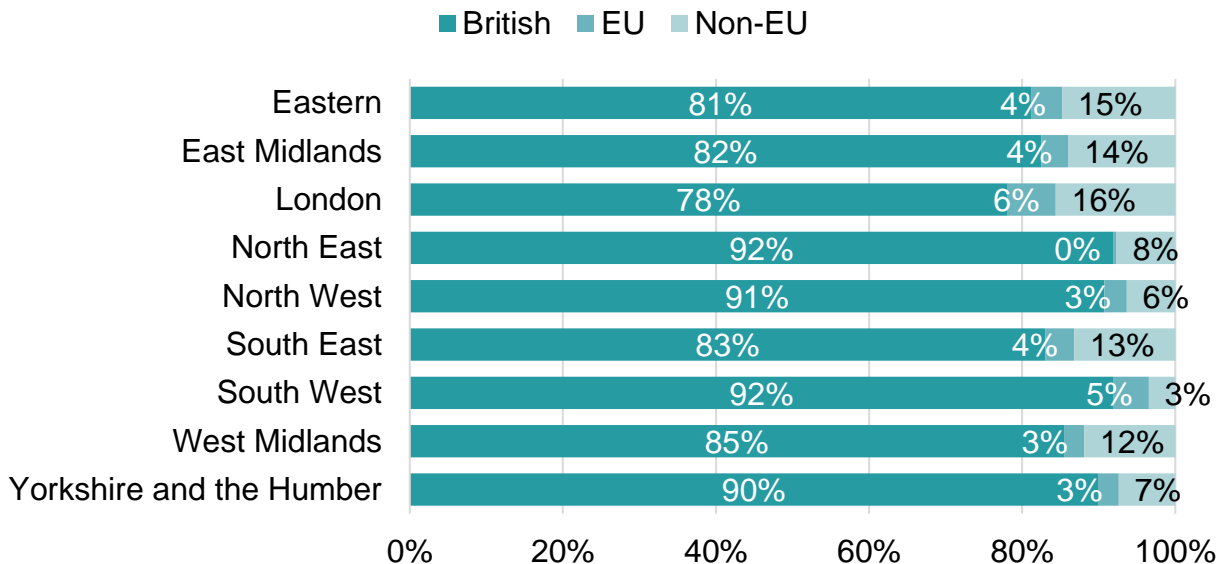
Of enrolments on social work courses in 2021/22, 86% of students had a British nationality, 4% had an EU nationality and 11% had a nationality outside of the EU. These proportions have changed very little over time although there were variations found between regions. The highest proportion of enrolments by people with non-British nationalities was at higher education institutes in London with 6% from the EU and 16% from non-EU nationalities.

The North East and South West had the highest proportion of enrolments from people with British nationalities (both 92%). London had the lowest proportion of enrolments with a British nationality at 78%. This regional pattern was reflected in the social worker workforce in adult social care in 2021/22<sup>6</sup>. The North East region reported the highest proportion of social workers with a British nationality (97%) while London had the lowest at 73%.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof>

### Chart 10. Enrolments by nationality and higher education institute region

Source: HESA student record



On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, the UK introduced a new points-based immigration system. Students entering the UK to study after 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 are required to have 70 points as designated by the Student Route criteria. This includes sponsorship from a licenced provider, demonstration of English language capability and the ability to support themselves in the UK.

EU students who were living in the UK before this date were able to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme and acquire either 'Settled' or 'Pre-settled' status depending on whether they had accrued five years of continuous residency in the UK.

In Summer 2021, the Government launched the Graduate Route for non-UK students. This route is unsponsored and grant graduates who have successfully completed their degree a limited period of leave to work, or look for work, in the UK. This period will be two years for undergraduate and master's degree graduates and three years for PhD graduates.

For more information, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-points-based-immigration-system-further-details-statement>.

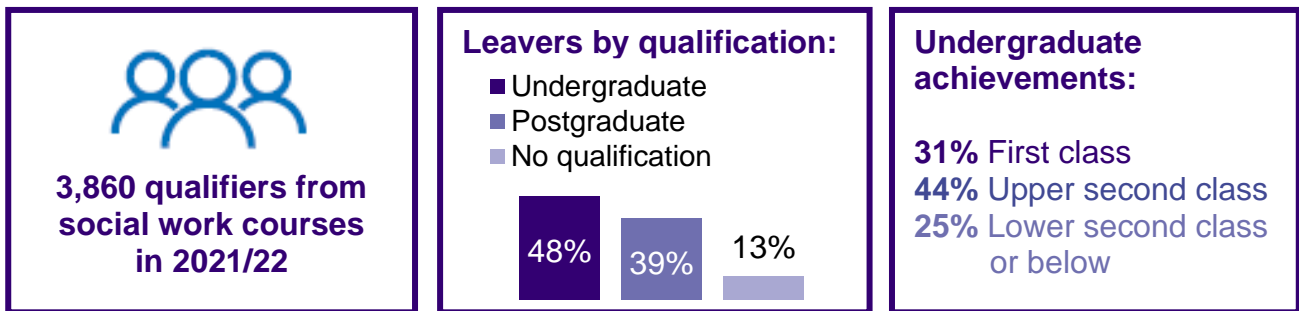
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# Qualifiers from social work education courses

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### 3. Qualifiers from social work education courses

This section presents the attainments and course outcomes of social work higher education students. Total numbers and types of qualifications achieved by leaving students are shown. The demographic profile of students leaving and, where applicable, factors affecting rates of successful qualification, are described.

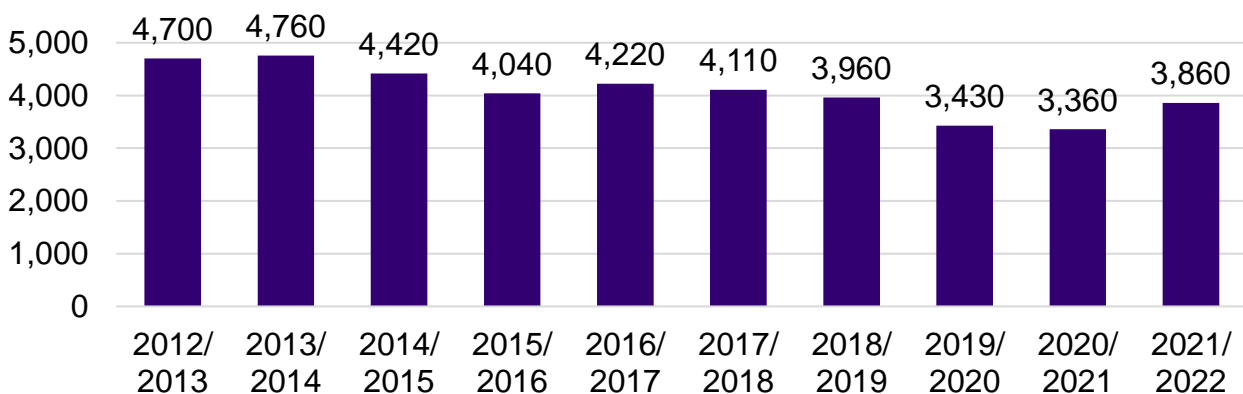


In 2021/22 there were around 4,430 leavers from higher education social work courses. Of these, 48% achieved an undergraduate qualification, 39% achieved a postgraduate qualification and 13% left without obtaining a qualification. This equated to around 3,860 qualifying leavers.

The number of qualifying graduates has decreased by 18% from 2012/13 but increased by 15% from the previous academic year (2020/21). The decrease in qualifiers in 2020/21 was likely to be a result of the lower number of enrolments in 2018/19.

**Chart 11. Number of qualifying graduates, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record. Values have been rounded.



Skills for Care modelling suggests that the number of leavers could be higher in future, due to the higher number of enrolments this academic year. Enrolments cannot be directly linked to leavers in a particular year due to differing lengths of study but, in general, enrolment figures have the largest impact on leaver figures three years later.

From 2012/13 to 2019/20 the proportion of students that left without obtaining a qualification ranged from 9% to 6%. However, this number increased by almost double in

2020/21, with 12% of leavers not obtaining a qualification, and continued to 13% in 2021/22. This trend is likely due to the effects of the pandemic on higher education.

Undergraduates have made up a decreasing proportion of qualifiers whereas postgraduates have accounted for more. Chart 12 highlights these changes. This trend is a result of the decreasing enrolment numbers observed in Section two of this report.

**Chart 12. Course leavers by qualification obtained, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record

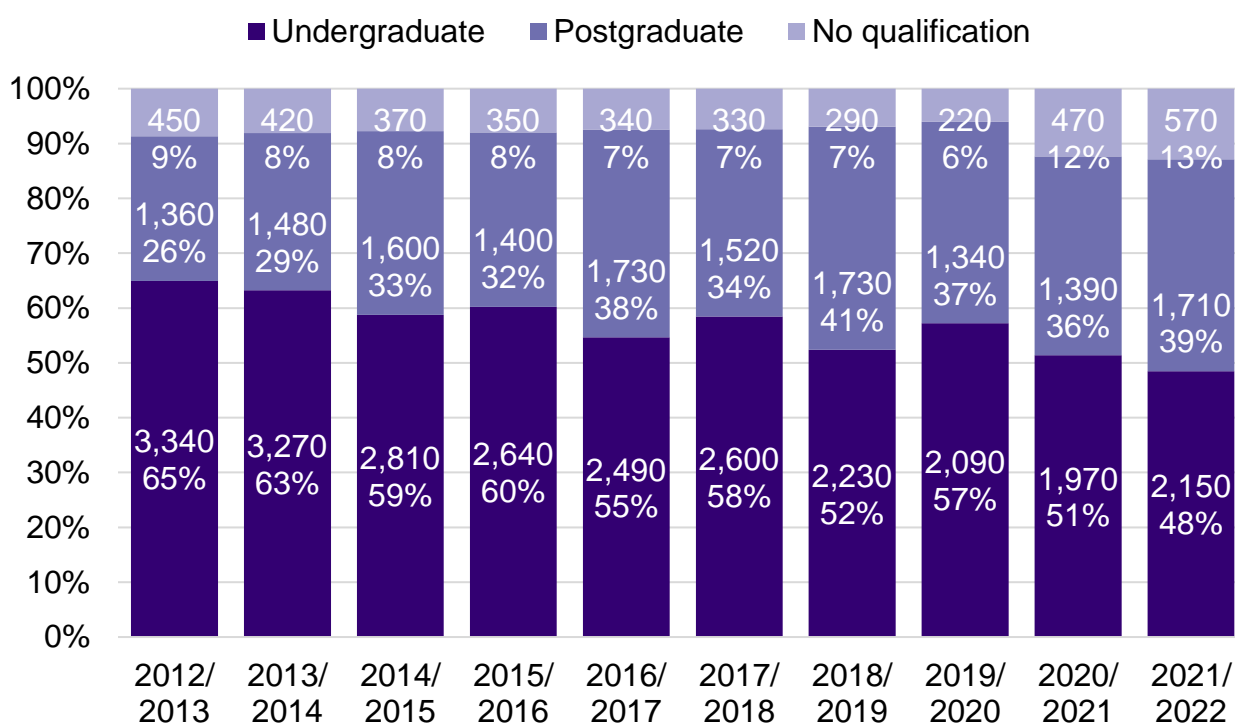


Chart 13 below shows the proportion of leavers that achieved their course aim (the type of course they started) between 2012/13 and 2021/22. For each group, there was very little variance over time until 2020/21, this decrease was likely due to the pandemic.

**Chart 13. Achievement rate of leavers by course aim, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record

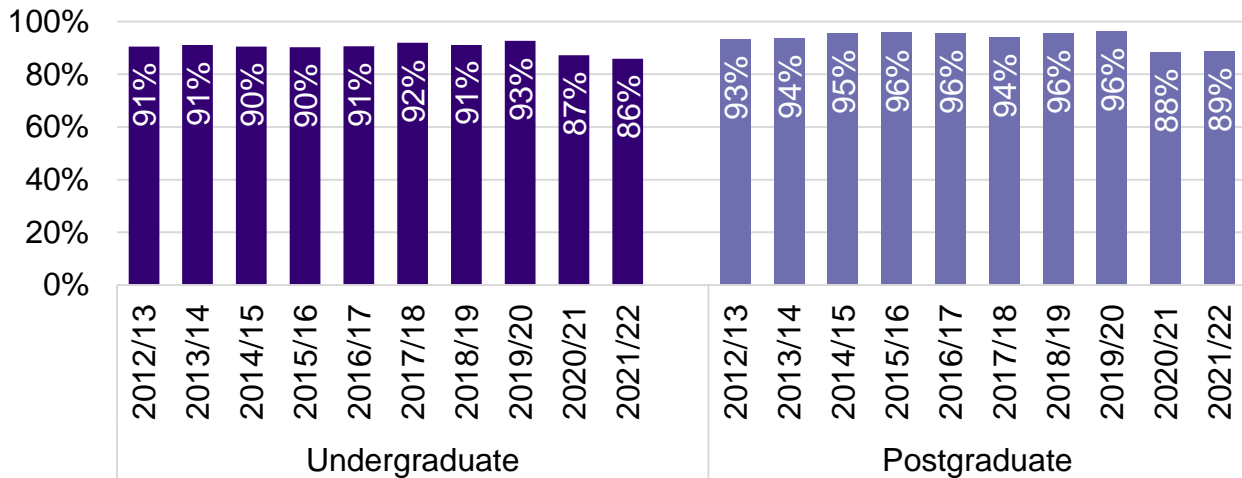
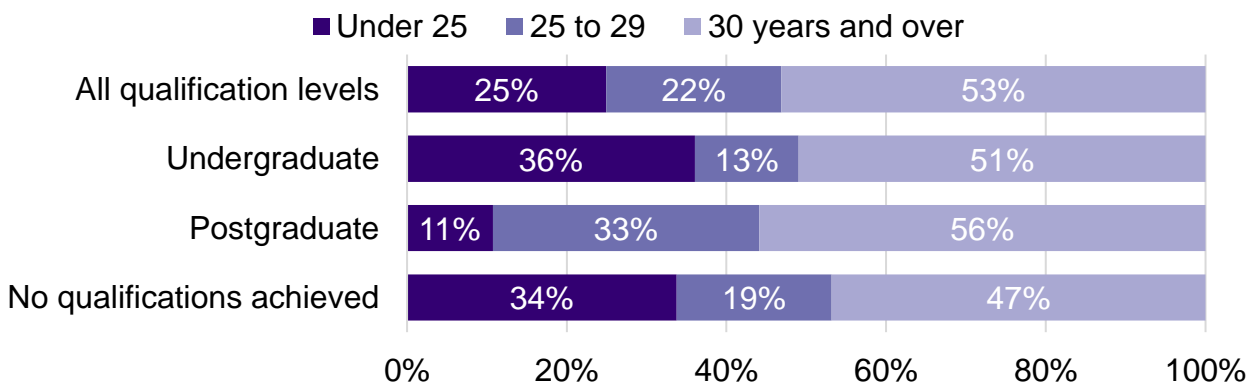


Chart 14 shows the proportion of leavers that achieved their course aim by age group. Those aged 30 years and over were more likely to leave higher education with a qualification than those in younger age groups. In 2021/22, 25% of qualifying leavers were aged under 25 compared to 22% aged 25 to 29 and 53% of those aged 30 and above. Since 2012/13, there has been little variation in the proportion of leavers that achieved a qualification by age group. The average age of an undergraduate qualifier was 32 years old and 34 years old for postgraduate qualifiers.

**Chart 14. Proportion of qualifying leavers by age group, 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record



The qualification rate of leavers varied little by gender. In 2021/22, students identifying as female had a slightly higher qualification rate (82%) than males (80%). The overall percentage of male qualifiers had decreased from 14% in 2009/10 to 12% in 2019/20 and has remained at 12% each year since. The overall proportion of female qualifiers is much higher but has remained at a similarly consistent level. 86% of qualifiers in 2009/10 were female, rising to a peak at 88% in 2020/21, then decreasing to 87% in 2021/22.

Chart 15 shows that the qualification rates of students had little variation between nationality groups. Within each group around 90% of students left having achieved a

qualification. The qualification rate of British students decreased from 94% in 2019/20 to 87% in 2020/21 and 2021/22, whereas the qualification rate of non-British students showed more variability over time. Please note that 87% of leavers were British, 4% had an EU nationality and 9% had a non-EU nationality.

**Chart 15. Proportion of qualifying leavers by nationality, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record

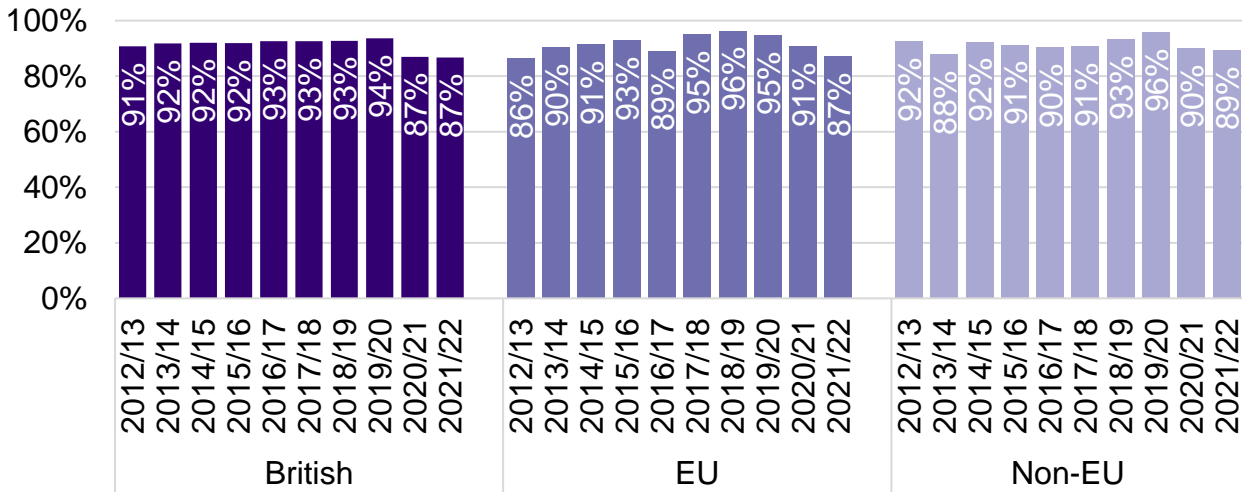
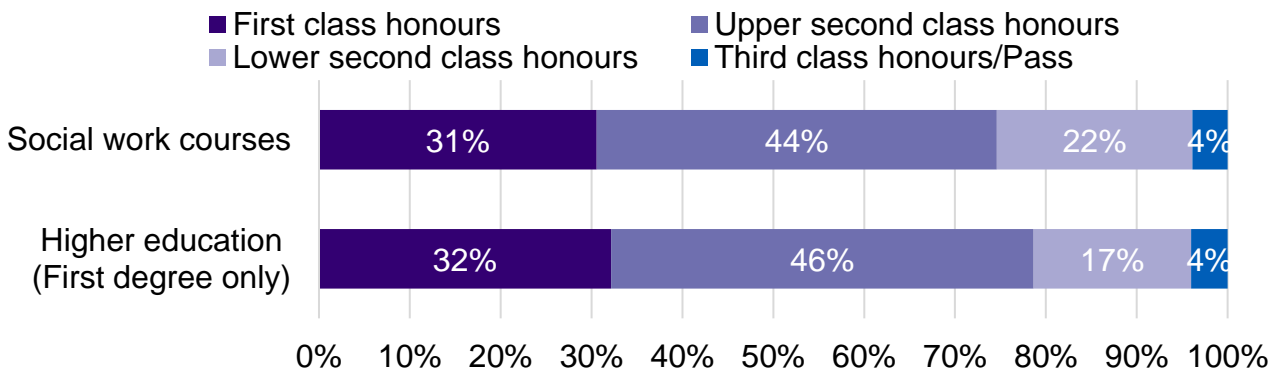


Chart 16 shows the classification of degree achieved by qualifying leavers from undergraduate social work courses. The majority of qualifiers in 2021/22 had achieved an upper second-class honours degree (44%), followed by those having achieved a first-class degree (31%) and those achieving a lower second-class honours degree (22%). Undergraduate social worker students were slightly less likely to achieve a first/upper second class compared to undergraduates overall.

**Chart 16. Undergraduate qualifiers by classification of degree, 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record



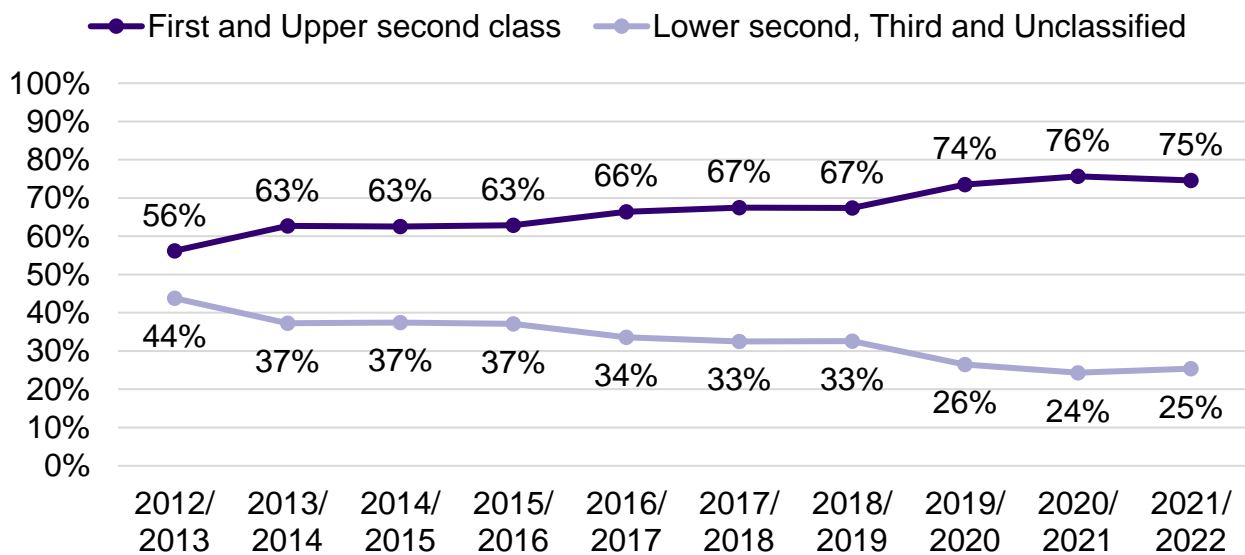
The proportion of undergraduates achieving a first or upper second-class degree has increased in recent years. This pattern is also seen across all higher education. Social work has historically had slightly lower proportions of students achieving a first or upper second-class degree compared to all higher education.



Chart 17 shows that the higher degree classifications achieved for social work undergraduates increased steadily from 56% in 2012/13 to a peak of 76% in 2020/21.

**Chart 17. Social work undergraduate qualifiers by classification of degree, 2012/13 to 2021/22**

Source: HESA student record



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# Destination of social work qualifiers

04

#### 4. Destination of social work qualifiers

The following section presents analysis of the Graduate Outcomes survey collected by HESA. The survey collected information from student that graduated in **2019/20**, 15 months after leaving higher education. As the survey is non-mandatory, not all leavers respond, therefore some of the data presented in this section has been weighted to represent all leavers as opposed to just those who had responded.



Previous publications of this report presented information from Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) between 2011/12 and 2016/17. This survey ended in 2016/17 and was replaced by the Graduate Outcomes survey. Due to differences in the point of collection (DLHE was at six months after graduation) and the method of collection (Graduate Outcomes is distributed and collected centrally by HESA) these two surveys are not comparable.

The Graduate Outcomes survey is not mandatory. Out of around 3,430 qualifying social work graduates from 2019/20, we found a survey response rate of 56% for a graduate's employment and 58% for their general activity after studying. A higher response rate means the survey results will more accurately reflect the target population. Skills for Care has weighted the responses to ensure that the survey is as representative of all leavers from higher education courses in social work as possible.

Chart 18 shows the occupation of graduates from social work courses 15 months after leaving education. In 2019/20, 83% of graduates went on to become social workers, and 3% went into another role in social care. A further 1% obtained other roles in the health sector and the remaining 13% moved into a role outside of health and social care or were not in employment when surveyed.

**Chart 18. Occupation of social work graduates 15 months after graduating, 2019/20**

Source: HESA student record and Graduate Outcomes survey

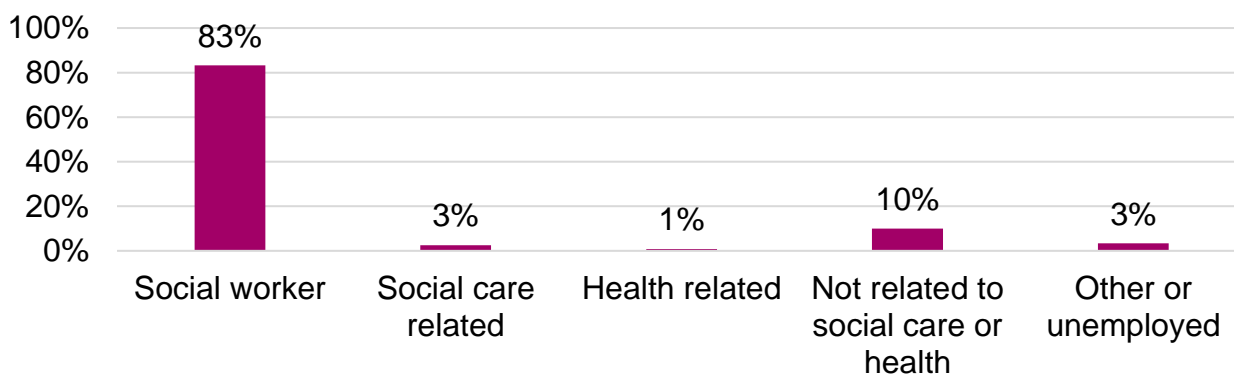


Table 1 below shows the conversion rate by the region of the higher education institute. Graduates from the South West region had the highest conversion rate into social workers (89%), and London had the lowest at 70%.

**Table 1. Number of graduates and proportion working as social workers 15 months after graduation by HEI region**

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

|                          | 2019/20      |                 |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
|                          | Graduates    | Conversion rate |
| <b>England</b>           | <b>3,430</b> | <b>83%</b>      |
| Eastern                  | 370          | 85%             |
| East Midlands            | 200          | 86%             |
| London                   | 470          | 70%             |
| North East               | 200          | 86%             |
| North West               | 580          | 83%             |
| South East               | 460          | 86%             |
| South West               | 200          | 89%             |
| West Midlands            | 360          | 84%             |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 480          | 86%             |
| <i>Distance learning</i> | 140          | 86%             |

Chart 19 below shows the relationship between the number of qualifying social work graduates and conversion rate of graduates into social workers. The trend indicates that where there are more graduates, then fewer become social workers.

Graduates in 2019/20 in the London HEI region however had a much lower proportion moving into social worker roles after qualifying (70%) than elsewhere in England. London also had the highest proportion of graduates taking up roles not related to social care (19%) which may indicate that other job roles in the region have had a greater appeal after graduating.

**Chart 19. Number of graduates and proportion working as social workers 15 months after graduation by HEI region, 2019/20**

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



The overall graduate conversion trend across the regions could be due to a supply and demand mismatch at regional or local level, whereby the proportion of all newly qualified social workers (who were available to take up employment) may have been greater in one area than the relative demand. Because of this, the funding of Social Work Teaching Partnerships, by Government, had a key policy in driving forward reforms in social work education through engaging Partnerships to focus on a range of issues on a local basis. One clear criterion for Teaching Partnerships is improvements in workforce planning to inform the required number of social workers to be trained for the future and ensuring that the necessary resources including practice placements are available.

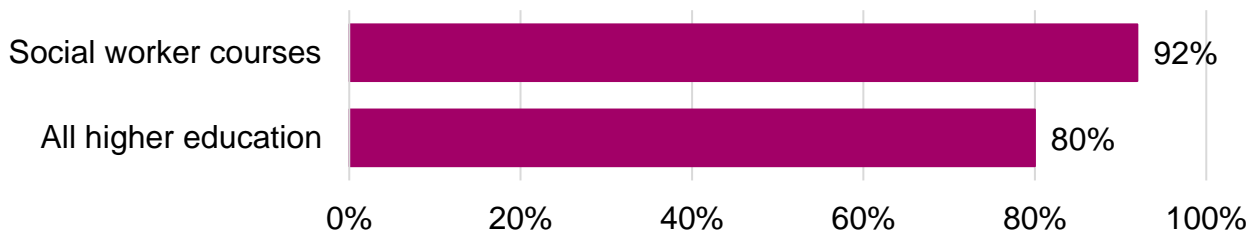
The 'localised' partnership approach aimed to address the regional variances in the supply of social work graduates. Chart 22 shows that around a fifth of social worker graduates in England moved out of their university region to find employment.

Chart 20 below shows the percentage of graduates who find any type of employment after leaving university or continue to study in further education in combination with employment. In 2019/20, 85% of qualifying social worker graduates were working and a further 7% were combining work with studying 15 months after leaving their course.

This proportion was higher than the 80% of graduates across all higher education who were employed or combining work with studying 15 months after graduating. This suggests that the skills acquired by social worker graduates may have a broader range of applications to employers, and that social worker students are more likely to have made a vocational career choice prior to starting their studies.

### Chart 20. Comparison of employment between social worker and all higher education graduates, 2019/20

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



As discussed above, the conversion rate from social work graduates to employed social workers varied by region. Chart 21 below compares the proportion of graduates that became social workers and those that found general employment between regions.

### Chart 21. Proportion of social worker graduates in employment 15 months after graduation by HEI region, 2019/20

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



Other than regional effects, a number of factors have been identified that can affect the likelihood of a graduate's post-qualifying employment. One such factor is the level of the qualification obtained, shown in Table 2 below.

Of the 1,340 postgraduate qualifiers in 2019/20, around 86% were employed as social workers 15 months after graduating. This compares to 81% of the 2,110 undergraduates. These figures demonstrate that postgraduate qualifiers have a slightly higher employability than undergraduates.

**Table 2. Occupation (category of role) of social worker graduates 15 months after graduation by qualification level, 2019/20**

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

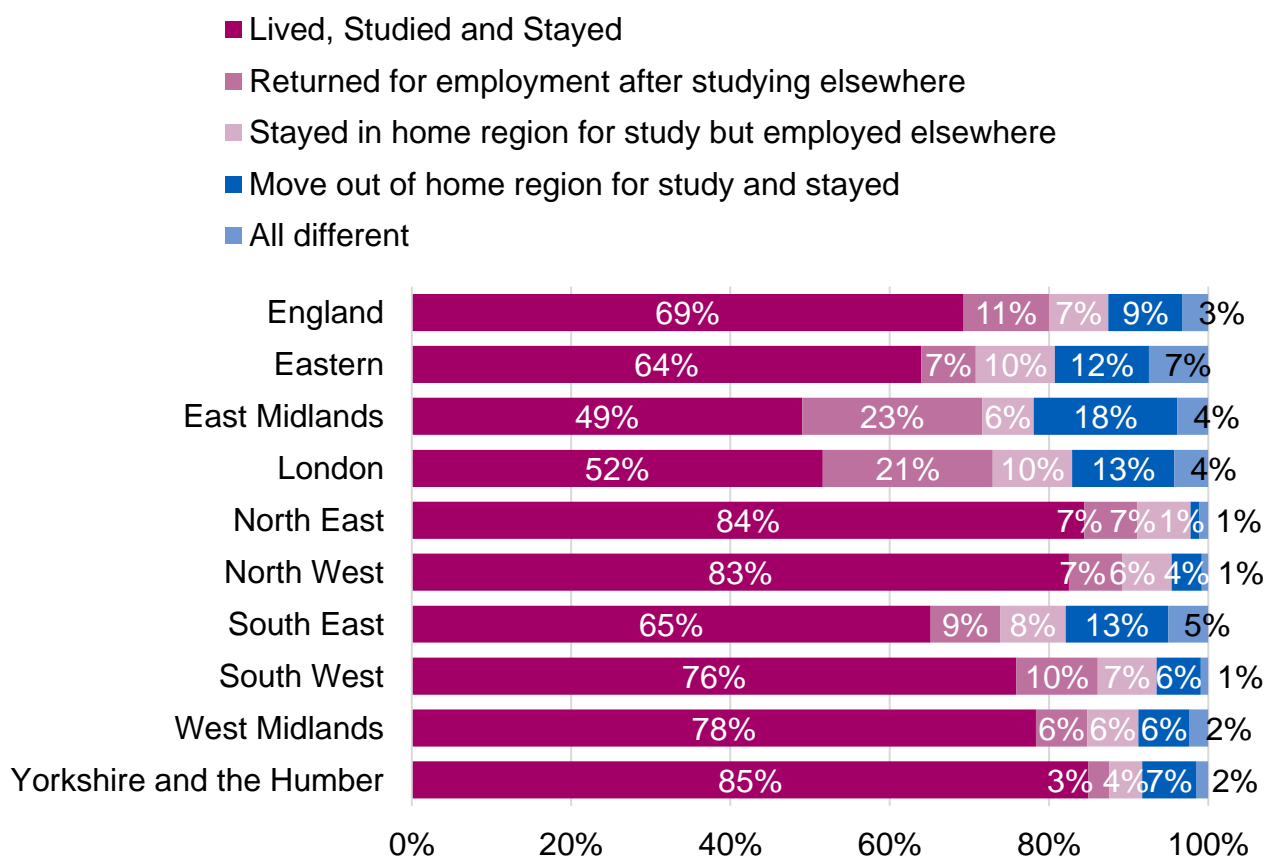
|   | Undergraduate | Postgraduate |
|---|---------------|--------------|
| <b>All qualifiers</b>                             | <b>2,110</b>  | <b>1,340</b> |
| Social workers                                    | 81%           | 86%          |
| Social care / health related                      | 4%            | 3%           |
| Not working / working in a non-care related field | 15%           | 11%          |

The relationship between a leaver's home region, where they studied and where they found employment is shown in Chart 22. Respondents to the Graduate Outcomes survey were asked where they were currently employed. These responses, where possible, were grouped into regions.

These figures may be useful in terms of workforce planning. Across England, over two thirds of graduates (69%) had remained in their home region for study and employment after graduating. Therefore, the impact is being made where the investment is being applied.

**Chart 22. Regional movement of graduates between home, study, and employment**

Source: HESA student record and Destination of Leavers from HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



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# Social worker filled posts and ASYE

05



## 5. Social worker filled posts and ASYE

This section presents information on the number of working social workers, qualifying graduates, and registrations on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).

Table 3 below shows the estimated number of social worker filled posts by sector between 2013/14 and 2021/22. The number of social workers employed by local authorities has increased by 20% over the period from 42,510 in 2013/14 to 50,990 in 2021/22. Those working in adult social services increased by 10% whereas those working in children's services have increased by 26%.

NHS Digital data shows there were around 3,700 social workers employed by the NHS (adults services only) which has increased by 147% since 2014. This could be due to the integration of health and social care services as part of the Sustainable Transformation Plans first announced in 2015 and an increase in NHS Trusts directly employing social workers in integrated services in addition to those seconded or transferred from the local authority.

**Table 3. Social worker filled posts by sector, 2013/14 to 2021/22**

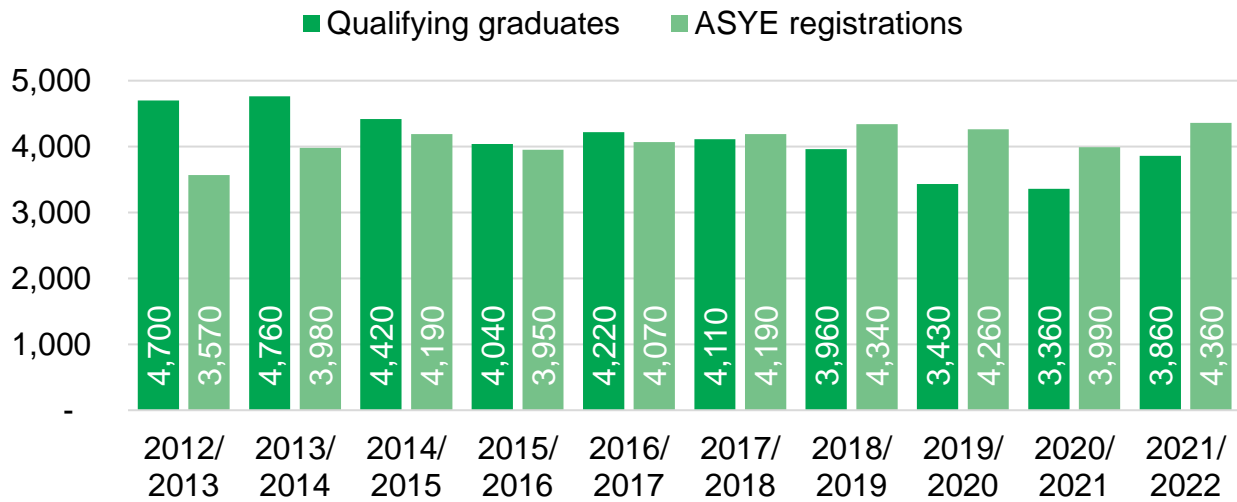
Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2021/22, DfE December 2021. Values have been rounded.

|         | Local authority | - adults' services | - children's services | Independent sector<br>- adults' services | NHS   |
|---------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--|-------|
| 2013/14 | 42,510          | 15,700             | 26,810                | 1,400                                    | 1,500 |
| 2014/15 | 44,670          | 16,100             | 28,570                | 1,200                                    | 1,700 |
| 2015/16 | 46,030          | 16,100             | 29,930                | 1,200                                    | 1,800 |
| 2016/17 | 46,870          | 16,200             | 30,670                | 1,300                                    | 2,100 |
| 2017/18 | 48,720          | 17,000             | 31,720                | 1,200                                    | 2,400 |
| 2018/19 | 50,320          | 17,400             | 32,920                | 1,300                                    | 2,600 |
| 2019/20 | 51,470          | 17,500             | 33,970                | 1,800                                    | 2,800 |
| 2020/21 | 51,980          | 17,300             | 34,680                | 2,000                                    | 3,300 |
| 2021/22 | 50,990          | 17,300             | 33,690                | 2,500                                    | 3,700 |

Chart 23 shows the number of qualifying graduates and the number of ASYE registrations. It should be noted that ASYE registrations as reported here relate to the number of newly qualified social workers who were registered with Skills for Care or the Department for Education by their employers.

### Chart 23. Qualifying graduates and ASYE registrations

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey, Skills for Care ASYE data



The number of ASYE registration has increased from 3,570 to 4,360 (22%) between 2012/13 and 2021/22. This suggests that the demand for newly qualified social workers has increased significantly over the period. Vacancy rates for social workers in adult social care in England also increased to 9.4% in 2021/22 from 7.7% in 2012/13. The number of ASYE registrations can differ from the number of qualifying graduates employed as social workers due to graduates from previous years registering for the ASYE.

Over the same period the number of qualifying graduates has decreased by around 18%. Therefore, the supply of potential new qualified social workers has decreased. These two factors (lower supply and higher demand) may increase the conversion rate of graduates to social workers, yet if supply continues to decrease then ASYE registrations could start to fall and no longer meet the demand for new social workers. However, as enrolments onto social work courses have dramatically increased in 2020/21 and 2021/22, it is reasonable to expect that the number of qualifying graduates will also increase over the next few years as these students complete their courses.

## Further resources

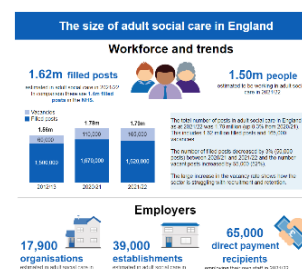
We provide outstanding workforce intelligence which the Government, strategic bodies, employers, and individuals rely upon to help them make decisions that will improve outcomes for the people who use care services. The ASC Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS) is recognised as the leading source of workforce intelligence for adult social care. This chapter provides an overview of some of the reports and resources published by our Workforce Intelligence team.

### Workforce intelligence publications

#### The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

This data visualisation provides estimates of the number of organisations and establishments involved in providing or organising adult social care, as well as the size and structure of the workforce, including people and job estimates, trend data, and future projections. To access this webpage, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure).

*Latest version, July 2022. Updated information is due in July 2023.*



#### Regional information



We have published nine data visualisations which provide an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region. Each page contains key findings, the interactive visualisation, and a short summary report. Also available is a regional comparison data visualisation.

To access these, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports).

*Latest version, October 2022. Update due October 2023.*

#### Local area information

There are five pages of local area information:

- 'Local area comparison', where you'll find the local authority comparison interactive visualisation which allows you to compare two or more local areas in England.
- 'My local area' page is a detailed interactive visualisation showing local areas in England one at a time, and summary reports for each area.
- 'My ICS area', showing the latest information from ASC-WDS split into Integrated Care System (ICS) areas.
- 'ICS comparison area' a page where you can compare two or more ICS areas in England.
- 'My ICS area (MH and LD&A)' showing information for the mental health and learning disability and/or autism workforces split by ICS areas.

To access these data visualisations and reports, please visit

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries).

*Latest version, October 2022. Updated information is due in October 2023.*

## Key topic areas

The Workforce Intelligence website includes information on the following popular topic areas. Each topic includes a summary of the workforce information available, and signposts to the latest publications and relevant resources. Many of the topic areas include an interactive visualisation:

- Monthly tracking of key items
- Learning disability and/or autism workforce
- Apprenticeships
- Pay rates
- Personal assistants
- Nurses in social care
- Recruitment and retention
- Registered managers
- Social work
- Workforce nationality.

To access these topics, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/topics](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/topics).

## Commission our services

Our Workforce Intelligence team are the experts in adult social care workforce insight. The data we collect in the ASC-WDS gives an unrivalled overview of the adult social care workforce in England. We have over 15 years of experience in analysing and interpreting social care data - it's what we do.

Beyond the wealth of information already available publicly on our website you can commission the services of the Workforce Intelligence team to produce bespoke reports and analysis for your organisation or area.

## How we can help you

- We can partner with you or form part of your project team on tenders and bids. By using our expertise and sector knowledge we can add value to your research or project.
- We can use advanced analytics techniques to help you understand how key outcomes such as CQC scores, turnover and vacancy rates can be improved.
- We can produce bespoke reports and analysis and help you solve problems and provide data solutions to help you improve your services.
- We can provide a detailed analysis into the adult social care workforce in your local area or look at performance in comparison to other areas.
- Request a feed of data to enhance or improve a product or service.

## Our values

Skills for Care is guided by core values. Throughout everything we do, we're inclusive, motivated, passionate, ambitious, collaborative and trustworthy. For more information about the Skills for Care strategy, our vision, mission, values and plan to achieve our mission, please visit [strategy.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://strategy.skillsforcare.org.uk).

As a Workforce Intelligence team, we,

- help people to understand what's already available without commissioning our services and what options are available

- aren't selling the data, we're selling our analysis and sector expertise
- carry out bespoke work in particular areas that we can't cover in general outputs
- have a 'good for the sector' aim on all projects we work on
- channel any money we earn straight back into the sector

All our analysts are certified statisticians, meaning we work to the standard of the 'five safes'. We always make sure that our research and outputs are appropriate and trustworthy, and that there's no risk of misuse or confidentially breach. When creating outputs, we always adhere to statistical disclosure controls.

The Skills for Care Workforce Intelligence team are committed to the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality and value, and principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. To learn more about our values and read our full statement please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/WI-values](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/WI-values).

### Keeping informed



To be kept up to date with Workforce Intelligence news, please join our mailing list by registering with us and selecting 'Workforce Intelligence publications'. You can also follow us on Twitter @SfC\_Data or @skillsforcare or visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/contactWI](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/contactWI).



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