

A black and white photograph of a young man and an elderly woman walking together in a brightly lit hallway. The man is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt and a lanyard, and the woman is on the right, wearing a cardigan. Both are smiling warmly at the camera.

Social work education in England

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

March 2026

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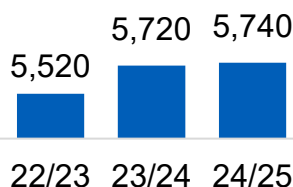
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Key findings

This report shows information about enrolments, leavers, and qualifiers from social worker courses in England that could lead to registration as a social worker with Social Work England.

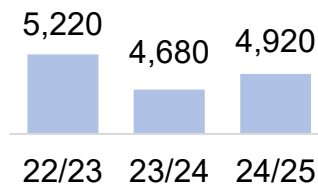
Enrolments

Undergraduate and postgraduate



Qualifiers

Undergraduate and postgraduate



Conversion rate

78%

of all qualifiers in **2022/23** were employed as social workers 15 months after graduating

Enrolments

- 5,740 students enrolled onto social work courses in 2024/25. This was an increase of 0.4% from 2023/24 (5,720 starts) and 4% from 2022/23 (5,520 starts).
- Undergraduate enrolments made up 61% of enrolments in 2024/25. This had increased from 58% in 2023/24. Postgraduate enrolments made up 39% of enrolments in 2024/25. This had decreased from 42% in 2022/23.
- The average age of an enrolling social worker undergraduate student was 28.3 years. On average social worker postgraduate enrolments were older, at 33.2 years.
- The majority of students enrolling onto social worker courses were female: 89% of undergraduate enrolments and 82% of postgraduate enrolments.
- Nearly three-in-five (57%) of enrolments were students of White ethnicities in 2024/25. This was higher among undergraduates (61%) compared to postgraduates (51%).
- The majority of enrolments in 2024/25 were people with a British nationality (83%). Around 12% of enrolments were people with a non-EU nationality and 5% with an EU nationality.

Leavers

- In 2024/25, 5,360 students left social worker courses in England. Of those, 4,920 qualified with either an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, an achievement rate of 92%.
- The number of leavers had increased from 2023/24 (5,060) but was not as high as in 2022/23 (5,720). The number of leavers in 2022/23 is likely linked to COVID-19 restrictions impacting higher education in the previous years, meaning students finished courses later.
- The Graduate Outcomes survey runs 15 months after students have left their higher education course. Of those social worker leavers from 2022/23 that responded to the survey, 78% were working as a social worker 15 months after graduating.

Introduction

This report has been compiled by the Skills for Care Workforce Intelligence team. The data presented in this report was provided by the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) and covers enrolments and leavers of social work courses up to 2024/25, along with the outcomes of graduates from 2022/23.

The figures in this report focus on student enrolments and leavers from regulated social worker education courses at higher education institutions (HEIs) in England, that can lead to registration as a social worker with [Social Work England](#). Post-registration social worker courses, such as those taken for further career progression, are excluded due to the focus of this report on social workers joining the workforce. 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.

HESA collect, assure, and disseminate data about higher education in the UK. Providing annual student record data to HESA is a statutory requirement for higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. Data provided to Skills for Care by HESA has undergone data quality checks and validations at source. For more information, visit: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/about/what-we-do>

Skills for Care is a producer of official statistics and our Workforce Intelligence Analysts are committed to the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. All official statistics produced by Skills for Care's Workforce Intelligence team will include oversight from the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#) (OSR), ensuring that we follow the Code of Practice for Statistics. Our other statistics that are not badged as accredited official statistics also voluntarily follow the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality, and value. You can read our full [statement](#) about this on our website.

To produce this report, Skills for Care have worked closely with Social Work England to identify eligible courses and exclude post-registration options within the HESA data. Social Work England's support in this area is greatly appreciated, allowing us to produce robust, trusted analysis for our readership.

Throughout this report, charts and tables will display rounded whole numbers and percentages unless otherwise stated. Charts and tables therefore may not always total to 100%.

Acknowledgment of delay

This report is produced annually in March by Skills for Care on behalf of the Department for Health and Social Care. It was last published in March 2023, informing on student enrolments and leavers in 2020/21, and graduate outcomes from 2019/20.

Availability of student record data for 2022/23 was significantly delayed by HESA. This was due to HESA revising their data collection and increasing their quality assessment processes. For more information, see the 'About this release' section of the [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2022/23 statistical bulletin](#).

Student record information for 2022/23 was released by HESA in August 2024, and data relating to 2023/24 was released March 2025. However, the specific data required for this report was not released for some time after each official release due to further delays in HESA quality assurance. We are pleased to have received student record data for 2024/25 and can therefore include all three academic years in this report. Graduate survey outcomes data has been unaffected by the changes to the student record data collection, and results from this survey have also been included here in Section 4 – Destination of social work graduates.

This therefore means that this edition of the social work education report shows the all the latest available information and findings from the past three years. The 2027 edition will again be a single year update, showing information from the 2025/26 academic year.

Coverage in the HESA dataset

The information shown in this report is based on Skills for Care's analysis of higher education student record and graduate outcomes data collected and provided by HESA. The data Skills for Care receives for use in this report is limited to those students and qualifiers with an element of Health and Social Care in their course subject. Comparison of social worker students to the wider student population are therefore limited, and do not include students studying other subjects.

The analysis focuses on the numbers of students starting and leaving social work courses only, no information can be given on course satisfaction or the student experience whilst studying. Student information in the analysis shown in this report is only included if the student enrolled onto, or left from, a social work course that was regulated by SWE. SWE have been regulating social work courses since 2020/21, prior to this courses were regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

To identify students within the HESA that are suitable for analysis for this report, we have worked with SWE looking at HEIs and courses that they regulate. We have cross-referenced this information with the HESA data but it should be noted that course titles vary between HEIs, and between SWE and the HEI data provided to HESA.

Data provided to HESA by HEIs; course titles are free text fields and there are options to select an accrediting body for each course. By combining this information with the list of HEIs and courses from SWE, we have selected students for inclusion in this report based on three factors:

- The HEI and course are listed by SWE as accredited for pre-registration and this is also flagged in the HESA data.
- The HEI and course are listed by SWE as accredited for pre-registration and the accrediting body is marked as 'unknown' in the HESA data.
- The HEI and course are not listed by SWE as accredited for pre-registration, but the accrediting body is flagged in the HESA data.

It is acknowledged that some students are eligible for inclusion in this report but have not been, due to limitations of the data used. Reasons for this can include:

- The course was regulated by The Nursing and Midwifery Council, not SWE.
- The regulatory body was not specified in the data provided by HESA or SWE.
- Some HEIs providing regulated social worker courses cannot be identified in the data; this particularly relates to some further education colleges providing degree level apprenticeships.

Destination of graduates

Destination of social worker graduates in this report is analysed using data from HESA's The Graduate Outcomes survey. This measures outcomes at 15 months after graduation and is centrally delivered and quality checked by HESA. It 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. 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 timescale 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, visit the [HESA website](https://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/) or: <https://www.graduateoutcomes.ac.uk/>

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. This includes 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 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. It should be noted that trended information shown in this report prior to 2020 refers to data where HCPC was 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.

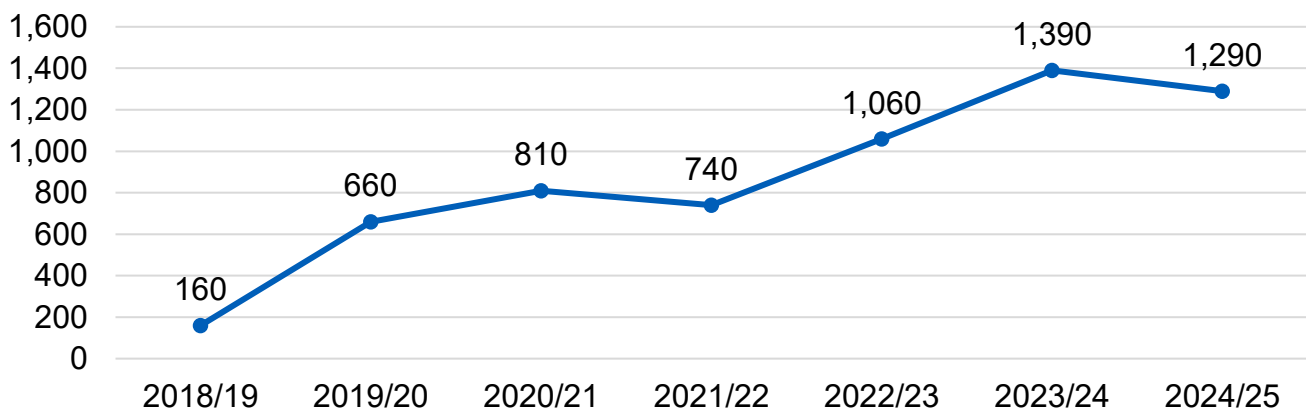
Social worker apprenticeship

The social worker apprenticeship is a Level 6 integrated degree apprenticeship standard and was launched in 2018/19. As such it can be provided at HEIs, either at a university or a further education college. Only those students enrolled onto social worker apprenticeship courses at HEIs have been included in this report, for more information see the 'Coverage in the HESA dataset' section of this introduction.

[Data from the Department for Education](#) shows that since its introduction, the number of starts onto the social worker apprenticeship have increased over time to a peak of 1,390 in 2023/24. In 2024/25, the number of starts decreased slightly to 1,290 as shown in Chart 1. This suggests the apprenticeship has become a popular route into the social worker profession.

Chart 1. Number of social worker apprenticeship starts, 2018/19 to 2024/25

Source: Department for Education



The social worker apprenticeship has recently been revised by Skills England. When social worker apprenticeships were first introduced, employers that engaged with them used it as a way of providing career progression to experienced social care workers, both in Adult and Children's Services. In recent years Skills for Care has received anecdotal evidence that employers are finding they have now trained the majority of their staff who wished to undertake an apprenticeship.

Information about the social worker apprenticeship, including a new assessment plan, can be found on the [Skills England website](#). Please note, the social worker apprenticeships was revised in March 2026, but these changes will not yet be captured in the starts information shown in this report.

For more on social care apprenticeships overall, including social worker apprenticeships, visit our [Apprenticeships webpage](#).

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is offered to all newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) 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 adults services, 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. Government departments provide some funding support to employers towards the delivery of ASYE programmes.

For more information on the ASYE, including employer benefits, support for SQSWs and assessment requirements visit the [Skills for Care website](#).

Funding for social worker courses

Funding to support students during their learning varies depending on their course level, either undergraduate or postgraduate. Graduate entry schemes also offer additional funding opportunities to their students, see Section 1.4 – Funding for graduate entry schemes.

Students on traditional social work courses can receive a basic bursary (non-means tested) if they meet eligibility criteria. In the 2025/26 academic year (current year at the time of writing), an [undergraduate Social Work Bursary](#) (SWB) value varies between £4,862.50 if studying outside of London and £5,262.50 if studying in London. These amounts include the Placement Travel Allowance (PTA) element of the SWB, which is £862.50 for full-time students towards placement travel expenses.

[Social Work Bursary for postgraduate students](#) are slightly different and can be means tested or non-means tested. In 2025/26, for non-means tested bursaries range from £3,362.50 if your university is outside of London and £3,762.50 if your university is in London. This also includes the PTA element of the SWB. Means tested bursaries are determined by taxable income of the student and their partner (where applicable), with values ranging from £2,721 if your university is outside of London and £4,201 if your university is in London.

Postgraduate social work students are also eligible for additional allowances including adult dependents allowance, placement travel allowance, parents learning allowance, childcare allowance, and disabled students allowance.

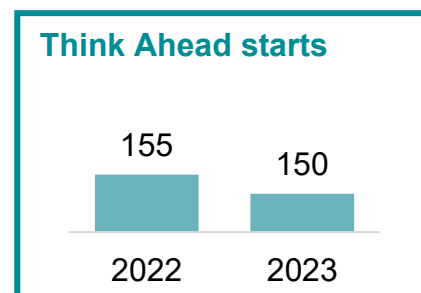
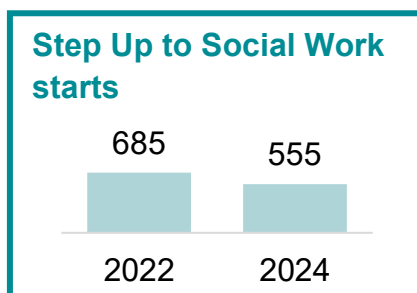
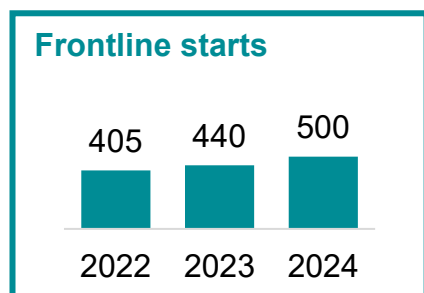
In February 2026, the Department of Health and Social Care opened a consultation for [proposed changes to the Social Worker Bursary \(SWB\) and the Education Support Grant \(ESG\)](#). The consultation is open until April 2026 and seeks views on options for reforming the SWB and ESG to ensure they continue to best support social work students. The outcomes of this consultation are likely to have an impact on current and future social worker students at

both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Skills for Care will monitor any changes as a result of this consultation and review its impact of future enrolments.

1. Graduate entry schemes



This section contains looks at information specifically relating to graduate entry schemes up to and including the 2023/24 academic year. The number of starters and graduates for graduate entry schemes was provided by Think Ahead and the Department for Education. **Please note, the information shown in this section is the latest provided to Skills for Care at the time of writing this report.**



Key findings

- Since the Frontline programme began in July 2014, there have been 3,650 starts and 2,800 graduates. Of those that started Frontline courses and left by September 2024, 89% graduated.
- The total number of Step Up to Social Work starts since the programme began stands at 3,670. As of March 2023, the number of graduates has reached 2,970, 95% of leavers had qualified.
- The Think Ahead graduate scheme has seen 1,140 starts since it launched in July 2016. The first cohort of leavers finished the scheme in July 2017. Since then, there have been 892 graduates in total, a qualifying rate of 91%.
- In 2023/24, 49% of graduate enrolments were onto traditional postgraduate courses. 21% of starts were on Frontline courses, 23% were starts on the Step Up to Social Work scheme and the remaining 7% were starts on the Think Ahead programme.

In addition to the traditional routes of apprenticeship, undergraduate or postgraduate pre-registration social worker courses, an alternative option to train for social worker is to enrol onto a 'graduate entry scheme'. These schemes are a Government policy initiative design to attract graduates with non-social work degrees into the profession. At the time of writing there are three graduate entry schemes providing courses: Frontline (also known as 'Approach Social Work'), Think Ahead and Step up to Social Work.

Students of graduate schemes are included in the HESA student record data used in the body of this report but cannot be separately identified from other courses. Top-level figures are therefore presented here to provide context from other sources. These are not in addition to the enrolment and qualifier figures reported in 'Section 2 – Enrolments' and 'Section 3 – Qualifiers from social work education courses'.

Chart 2 below shows the proportion of graduate scheme starts out of all postgraduate enrolments from 2010/11 to 2023/24. This is the most recent year where all data has been provided to Skills for Care. 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.

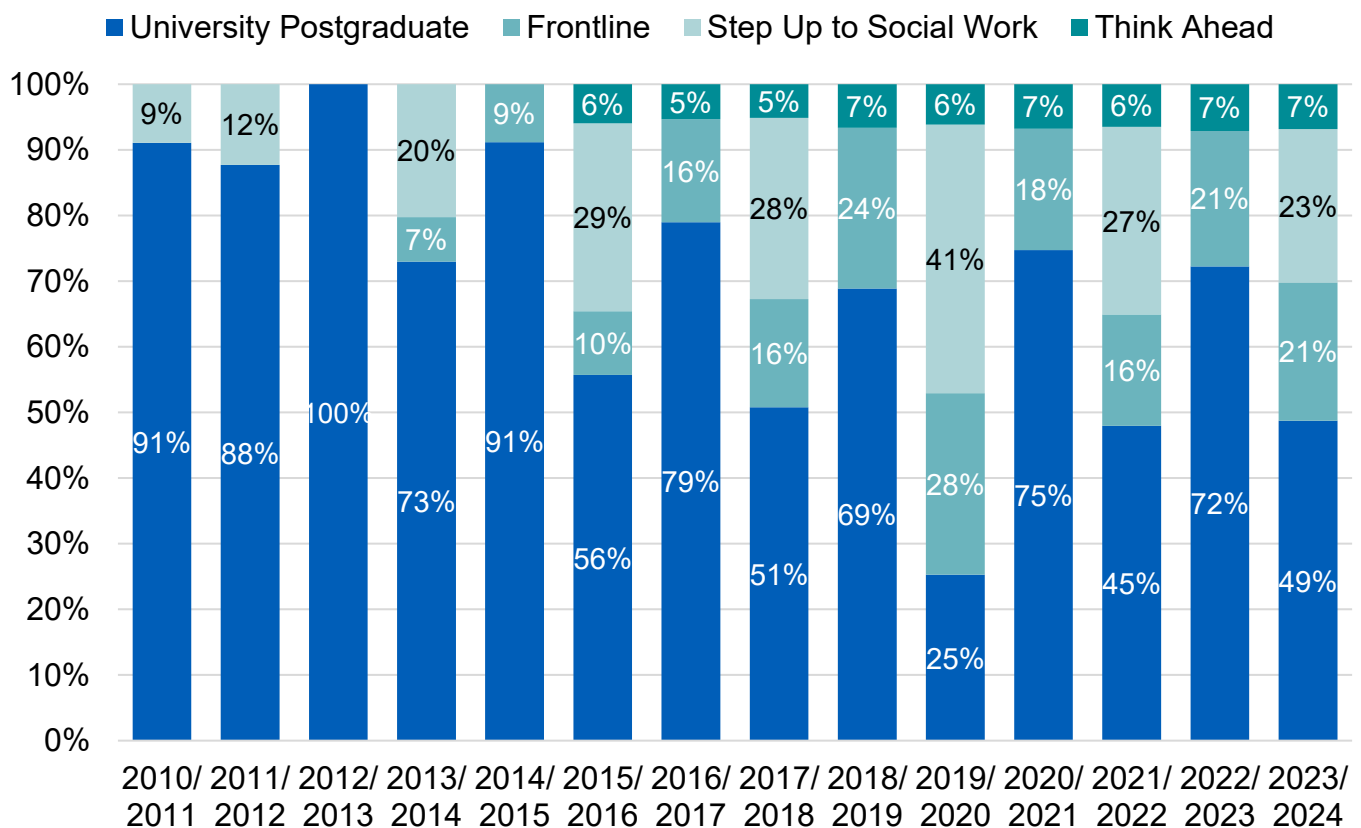
Frontline and Think Ahead entrants begin their initial residential training in July then continue onto their placement. Cohort 1 of Frontline entrants are included in the 2014/15 academic year in the chart below. Cohort 1 of Think Ahead entrants are included in the 2015/16 year. Entrants onto the Step 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.

In 2023/24, there were entrants to all three graduate entry schemes as well as traditional university postgraduate courses. Nearly half of all enrolments were for university postgraduate courses (49%), while the remaining enrolments were onto graduate entry schemes: 21% onto the Frontline scheme, 23% onto the Step Up to Social Work scheme and 7% started the Think Ahead programme.

Chart 2. Proportion of postgraduate and graduate scheme enrolments, 2010/11 to 2023/24

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



Step Up to Social Work only opens to new entrants in alternate years. The chart shows that the last time each of the three graduate entry schemes was open to new enrolments in 2021/22, a smaller proportion enrolled onto graduate entry schemes (48%) compared to in 2023/24 (51%). This suggests that the popularity of graduate entry schemes has grown, though the proportion of enrolments onto these schemes has not returned to previous levels.

Further information about the number of starts and graduates of each of these three schemes is shown in the following sections of this report.

1.1 Frontline

The Frontline organisation offers a programme that 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.

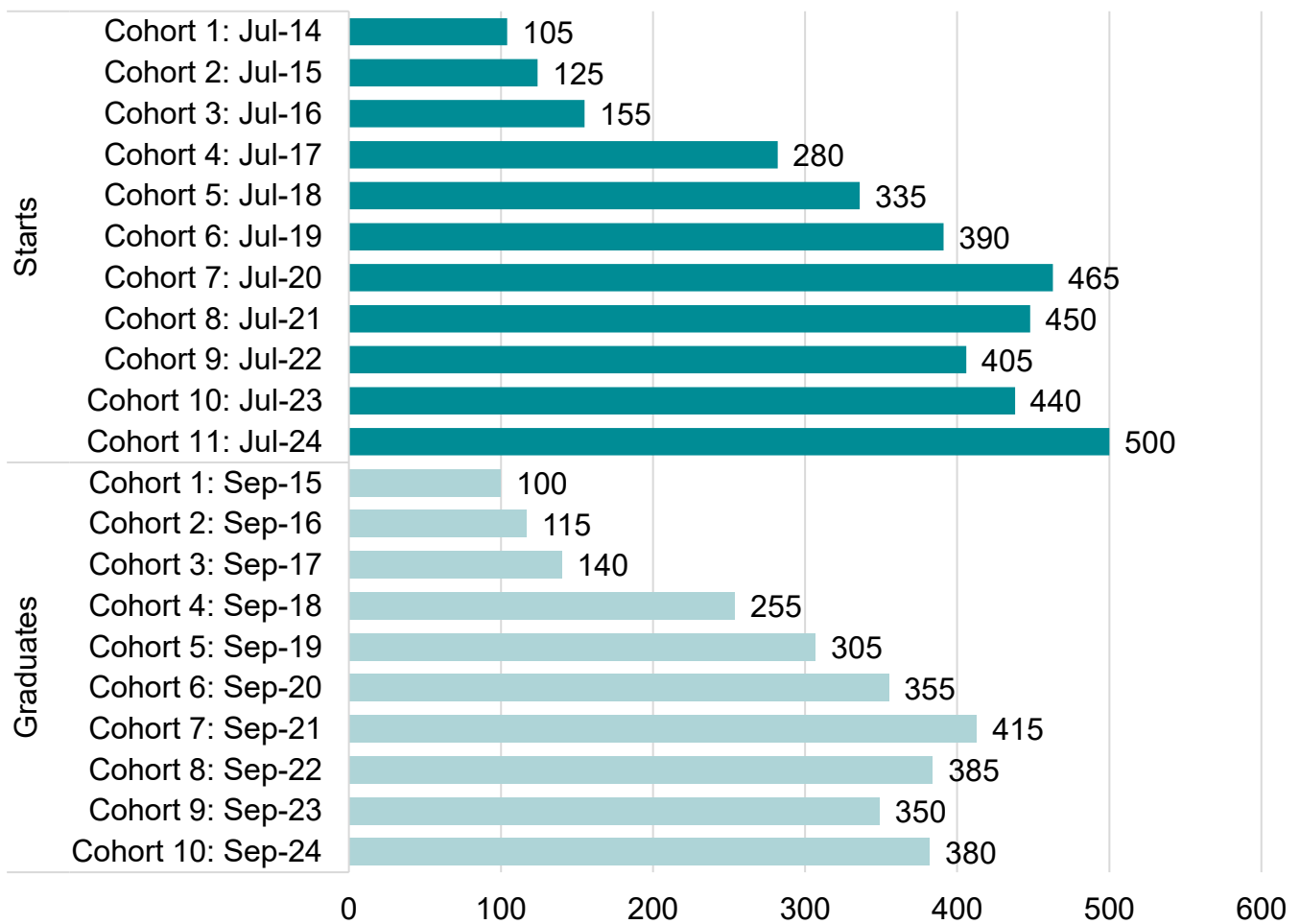
After successfully completing their first year, participants attain a post graduate qualification and become registered social workers responsible for their own case load with continued support and continue to study towards a Masters qualification. Successfully completing their second year qualifies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

The first cohort of the Frontline programme started in July 2014 with 105 starts. Chart 3 below shows that between 2014 and 2021, the number of starts increased each consecutive year. The number of starts decreased in 2022, when England was coming out of COVID-19 lockdowns. Since then the number of starts have again increased on an annual basis, rising to 500 starts in July 2024.

In total there have been 2,800 graduates from the Frontline programme from a population of 3,650 entrants up to Cohort 11. This is an 89% qualifying rate of all starts from July 2014 to July 2023.

Chart 3. Number of Frontline starts and graduates, 2014 to 2024

Source: Department for Education



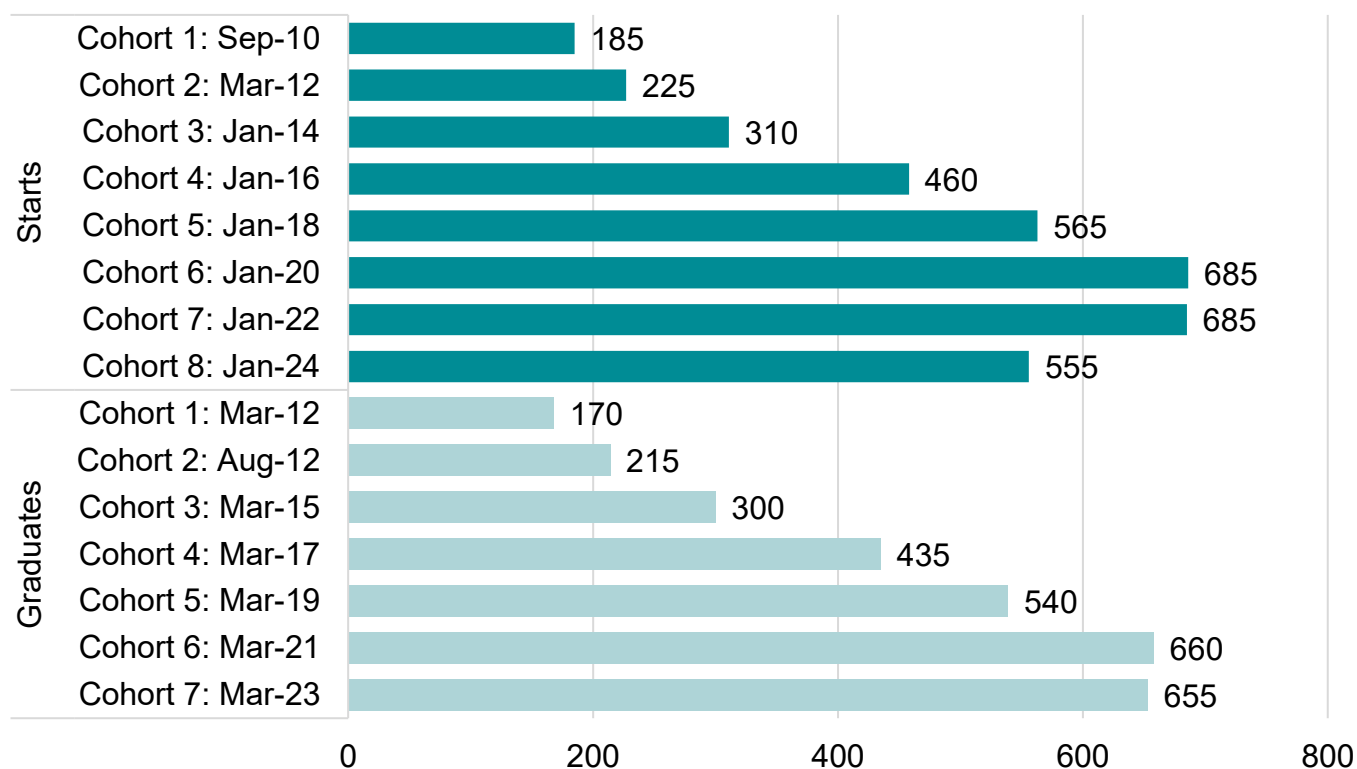
1.2 Step Up to Social Work

Step Up to Social Work is an intensive, 14-month programme offering placements for graduates in local authority social work departments. The programme opens to new entrants every two years and applicants must have a minimum 2:1 degree or a 2:2 degree plus a higher-level qualification. Trainees work towards a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work and, upon successful completion, can register with Social Work England as a social worker. This scheme has a focus on child and family social work only. For more information, visit the Government's [Step Up to Social Work webpage](#).

The first cohort of the Step Up to Social Work programme started in September 2010 with 185 starts. Chart 4 shows the number of starts increased substantially in the following cohorts, reaching 685 starts in January 2020 and January 2022. In January 2024, the number of starts had fallen to 555.

Chart 4. Number of Step Up to Social Work starts and graduates, 2010 to 2024

Source: Department for Education



There have been 2,970 graduates from the Step Up to Social Work programme from a population of 3,670 entrants up to Cohort 8. This is a 95% qualifying rate of all starts from September 2010 to January 2022.

1.3 Think Ahead

The Think Ahead was 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. This is followed by a year training within a community mental health service, in groups of four each led by a Consultant Social Worker. 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. For more information, visit the [Think Ahead website](#).

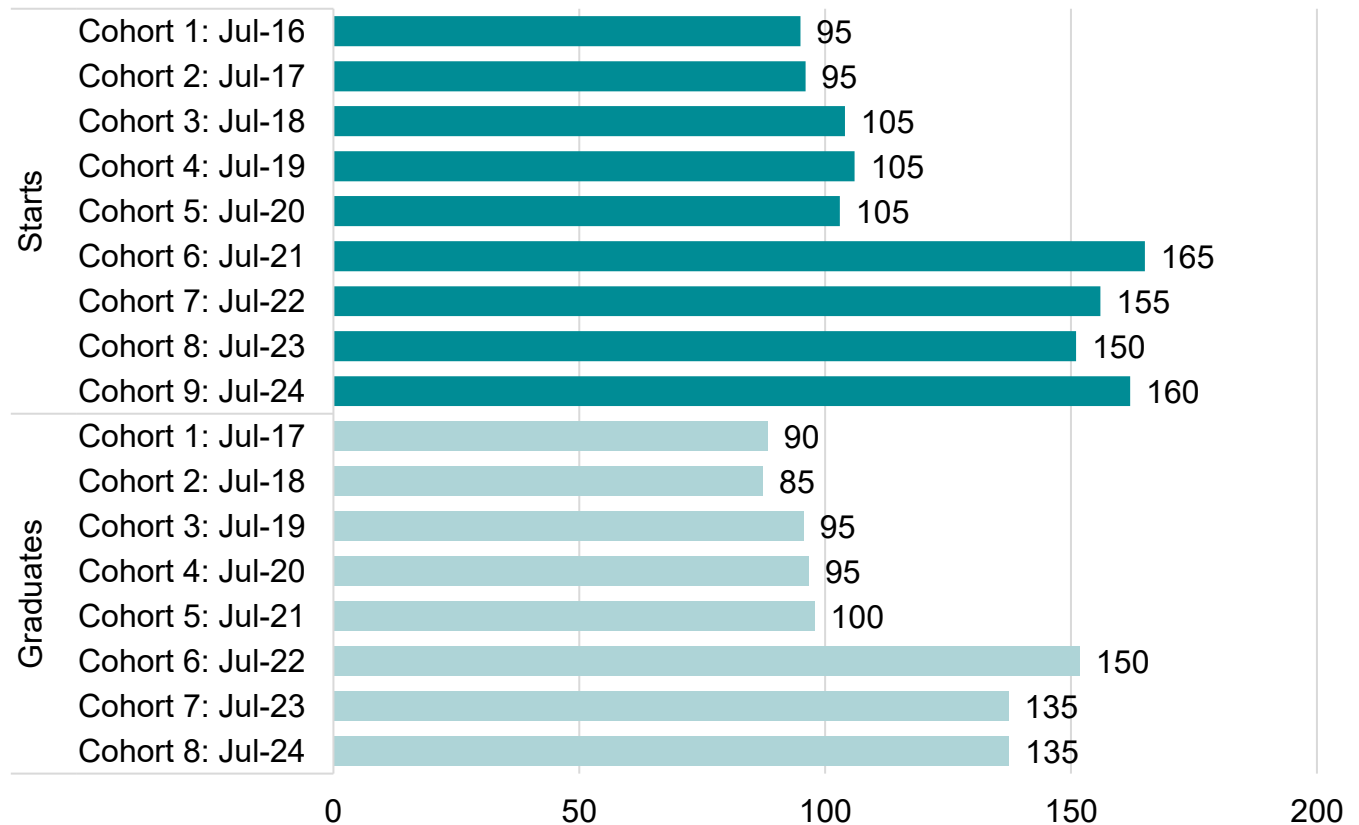
In 2026, the Think Ahead programme was closed. The programme will end when the last cohort of students that enrolled in 2025 have graduated. As this scheme was focussed on social work in mental health the effects of its closure may not be seen in the social worker workforce in these services for a few years.

Entrants to the Think Ahead programme 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. Cohort 1 started in July 2016, with 95 starts. Chart 5 shows the number of starts increase each year to a peak in of 165 in July 2021, before falling slightly to 160 in July 2024.

Chart 5. Number of Think Ahead starts and graduates, 2016 to 2024

Source: Think Ahead



From Cohorts 1 to 6, over 90% of students qualified as social workers. This fell slightly in Cohort 7, where 88% of students qualified as social workers after completing the course. The most recent graduating students were from Cohort 8 where 91% of students qualified as social worker.

Think Ahead also provided some information on number of students from their courses gaining employment as social workers after qualifying. From Cohorts 1 to 8, over 80% of the students in a given year were employed as social workers six months after qualifying. Over 76% of the students were still employed as social workers 18 months after qualifying, indicating a high retention rate among this group of graduates.

These students may also be included in the Graduate Outcomes survey run by HESA, for more information on this see Section 4 – Destination of social work graduates.

1.4 Funding for graduate entry schemes

Each of the three graduate entry schemes also offer additional funding opportunities to their students, as outlined below.

On the Frontline graduate scheme, tuition fees are covered by Frontline throughout the programme. In their first year, trainees will receive a tax and NI exempt bursary of £18,000 if they are based outside of London, or £20,000 if based in London. In their second and third years, trainees will earn the salary of a Newly Qualified Social Worker (NSQW) salary. Skills for Care reported that social workers employed by local authorities in England had an average (mean) full-time equivalent annual salary of £45,300 as at September 2025. For more information about additional funding for students on the Frontline graduate scheme, visit the [Frontline website](#).

The Think Ahead graduate scheme is a two-year programme. There are no programme fees for the scheme and all qualifications are fully funded. During the first year, a trainee receives a £18,250 tax-free training bursary (£20,250 with London weighting) which also covers costs for the Summer Institute. In the second year, trainees will be employed as a newly qualified social worker and receive a taxable salary, typically between £27,000 and £35,000. Exact salaries will depend on the employer, namely the NHS Trust or local authority. For more information, visit the Think Ahead [website](#).

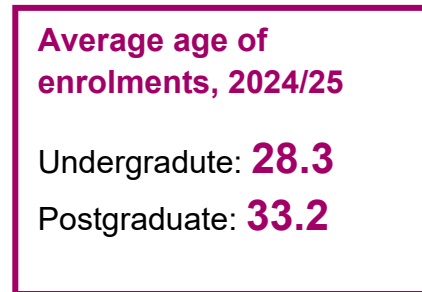
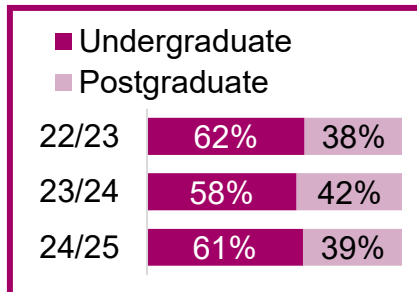
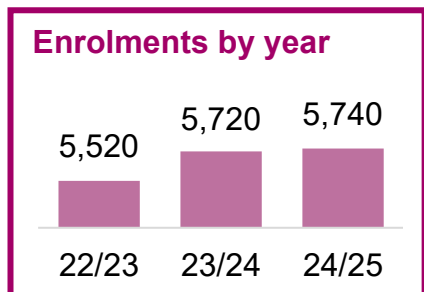
As noted above in Section 1.3, the Think Ahead programme has now closed and from 2026 will not be taking more enrolments. Therefore, all additional funding will end when the students that began the programme in 2025 graduate in 2027.

The Step Up to Social Work programme is fully funded and there are no tuition fees. Participants receive a tax-free bursary of £21,995 funded by the Department for Education. The value of this bursary does not vary by location and is not means tested. For more information, see the [government website](#).

2. Enrolments in social work



This section contains Skills for Care’s analysis of HESA student record data to describe individuals enrolling onto social work higher education courses regulated by Social Work England up to the academic year 2024/25. Only courses leading to registration as a social worker have been included, post-registration courses or additional courses for career development have been excluded from this report.



Key findings

- 5,740 students enrolled onto social work courses in 2024/25, an increase of 0.4% from 2023/24. Three-fifths of enrolments were onto undergraduate courses (61%), while two-fifths were onto postgraduate courses (39%).
- The number of undergraduate enrolments increased by 5% from 2023/24. The number of postgraduate enrolments decreased by 6% over the same period.
- In 2024/25, the average age of a social work undergraduate student was 28.3 years, and 33.2 years for postgraduate students.
- The majority of social worker enrolments were female (86%). This was more than amongst the social worker workforce in adult social care services in 2024/25 (82%).
- Less than three-in-five enrolments onto social worker courses were people of White ethnicities (57%). This cohort represents the most ethnically diverse since 2009/10. Nearly three-in-ten enrolments were students of Black ethnicities (27%).
- The majority of social worker enrolments in 2024/25 were students with a British nationality (83%). 12% were students with a non-EU nationality and 5% were students with an EU nationality.

Over the last three academic years, there have been a total of 16,970 enrolments onto social worker courses: 5,520 in 2022/23, 5,720 in 2023/24 and 5,740 in 2024/25. In each of these years, there have been a higher proportion of undergraduate enrolments compared to postgraduate enrolments. In 2024/25, three-in-five social worker enrolments were onto undergraduate courses (61%), while the remaining two fifths were onto postgraduate courses (39%). It should be noted that that postgraduate courses regulated by Social Work England for pre-registration are Masters courses and Postgraduate Diplomas only, this therefore excludes students studying for a PhD.

Table 1 below shows enrolments onto social worker courses between 2009/10 and 2024/25. Over time, our methodologies for identifying students within the HESA data for inclusion in this

report have changed and improved. We are unable to retrospectively update enrolment information, due to contractual requirements of the data we receive from HESA.

Up to 2021/22, aside from looking at newly enrolled students, methods for identifying eligible social worker students involved interrogation of the HESA data looking for cases that met the following criteria:

- The student was enrolled onto a social worker course.
- The course was flagged as accredited by the Health and Care Professions Council or Social Work England by the higher education institution.
- The course could be identified as not being post-registration i.e. the student was not already a social worker.

From 2022/23, a key methodology change took place whereby we worked with Social Work England (the regulatory body) to better identify students studying on pre-registration courses. This process allows for a more accurate analysis of students on relevant courses. For more information, see the [Coverage in the HESA dataset](#) of the Introduction of this report.

Table 1. Number of enrolments onto social worker courses*, 2009/10 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

	Total enrolments	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
2009/10	5,710	4,090	1,620
2010/11	5,850	3,780	2,080
2011/12	5,180	3,330	1,840
2012/13	4,690	3,060	1,640
2013/14	4,650	3,110	1,540
2014/15	4,440	3,040	1,400
2015/16	4,590	2,990	1,600
2016/17	4,440	2,640	1,800
2017/18	4,700	2,660	2,040
2018/19	4,140	2,540	1,600
2019/20	4,320	2,650	1,680
2020/21	5,710	3,280	2,430
2021/22	5,580	3,010	2,570
2022/23	5,520	3,400	2,120
2023/24	5,720	3,340	2,380
2024/25	5,740	3,500	2,240

* Between 2021/22 and 2022/23, the methodology for identifying students enrolling onto social worker courses changed. For more information, see the [Coverage in the HESA dataset](#) section of the Introduction of this report.

2024/25 marks the fifth consecutive year that enrolments have totalled over 5,000. This indicates that initiatives to promote social work as a viable career choice in recent years have been successful in attracting prospective students to enrol onto social worker courses. The

number of qualified social workers entering the job market in the next few years should also increase as these students graduate – Skills for Care will continue to monitor these trends.

The number of undergraduate enrolments has remained over 3,000 each year since 2020/21. Undergraduate enrolments had not been at this level since 2014/15. Between 2021/22 and 2022/23, the number of undergraduate enrolments increased by 13%, from 3,010 to 3,400. In 2023/24 the number of enrolments decreased slightly to 3,340 before rising again to 3,500 in 2024/25. This is the largest number of enrolments onto undergraduate social worker courses since 2010/11 (3,780).

Between 2019/20 and 2020/21, the number of postgraduate social worker enrolments increased from 1,680 to 2,430 (up 45%). Enrolments onto these courses have remained over 2,000 each year but have begun to fall since 2021/22. In 2022/23, the number of enrolments fell by 17% (down 450 enrolments, to 2,120). However, by 2024/25 this had risen to 2,240 post graduate social worker enrolments.

2.1 Enrolments by region

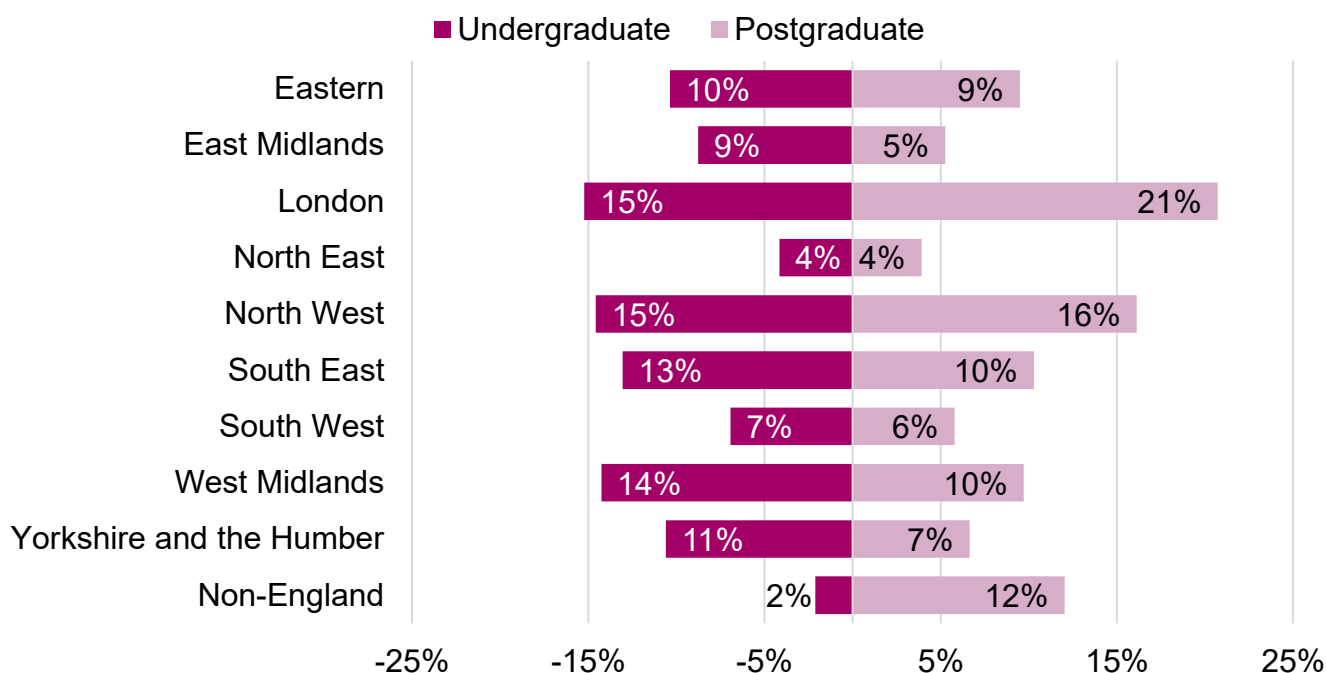
Social worker students can study at a variety of higher education institutions across England. As with other university courses, many students choose to move away to study while others prefer to remain within their home region. This can have an impact on where a graduate then looks for employment after qualifying.

Chart 6 shows the proportion of enrolments of undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses by the student's home region in 2024/25. Students whose home address is located outside of England, including Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, have been grouped into a 'Non England' category for ease of analysis.

Students from London and the North West accounted for the largest proportion of undergraduate social worker enrolments in 2024/25, both 15%. Students from London also accounted for the largest proportion of postgraduate enrolments, at 21%. Very few students travelled from outside of England to enrol onto undergraduate social worker courses (2%), while a much greater proportion of students enrolling onto postgraduate courses had come to England to study (12%). The North East saw the lowest proportion of both undergraduate and postgraduate social worker enrolments, at 4% for each course level.

Chart 6. Proportion of enrolments by home region and degree level, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

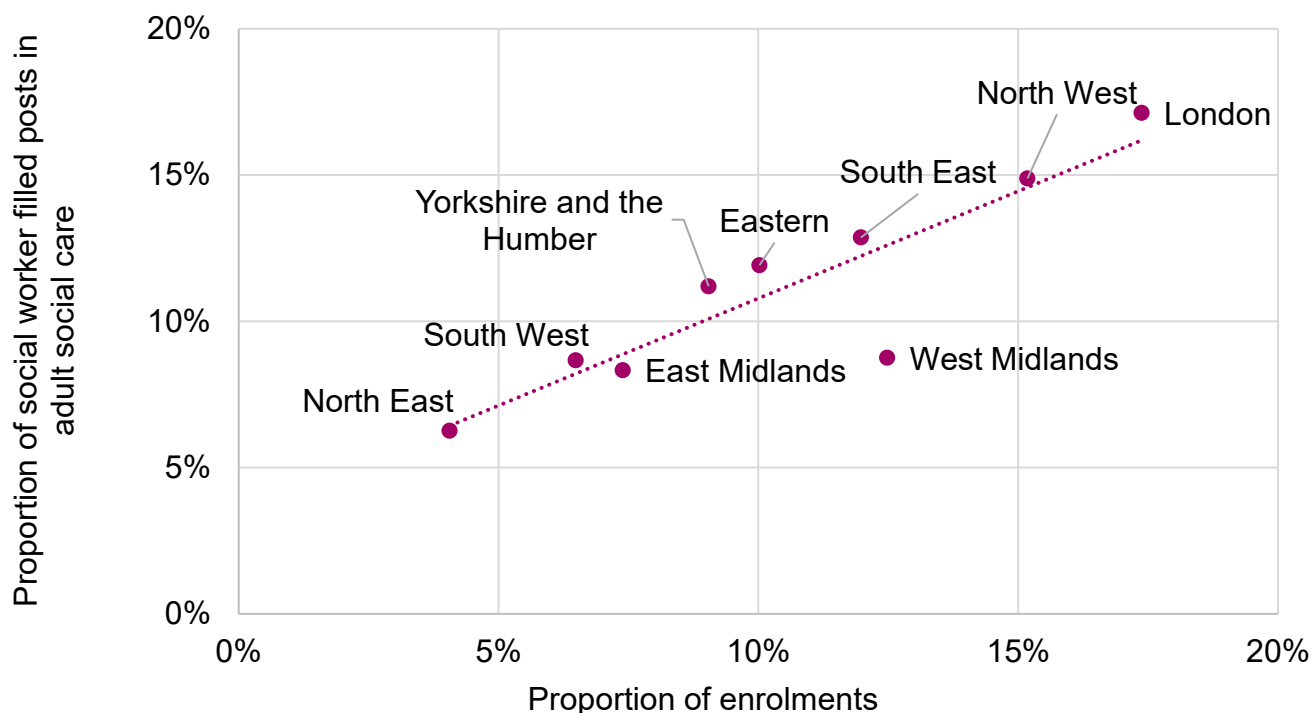


After graduation, many students may return to their home region to seek employment. However, students regularly also look for work near to where they studied, or travel to a new location entirely. Chart 7 below compares the proportion of enrolments onto pre-registration social worker courses to social worker posts in the adult social care sector by the student’s home region. 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 analysis. It should also be noted that information includes adult social care filled posts only; it does not include social workers children’s social care services. There are significantly more social workers in children’s services and, as such, a large proportion of graduates gain employment in this sector. Please see Section 4 – ‘Destination of social work graduates’ of this report for information about the destination of qualifying social work graduates.

Chart 7. Comparison of enrolments to adult social worker filled posts by home region, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care estimates



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 West Midlands, had a higher proportion of enrolments. This may suggest that students from this region leave the area to find employment as a social worker when they graduate. Those above the line, such as Yorkshire and the Humber, 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 a relatively equal proportion of enrolments and filled posts. This suggests that graduates do not necessarily need to leave their home region to find employment as a social worker.

2.2 Enrolments by student demographics

This section looks at the demographic information of the students that enrolled onto social worker courses in 2024/25, including their age, gender, ethnicity group, disability status, and nationality group. Where appropriate this information has been compared to all students captured in the HESA dataset and to social workers employed in adult social care. It should be noted that the HESA dataset captures only students on higher education courses with an element of Health and Social care in their studies.

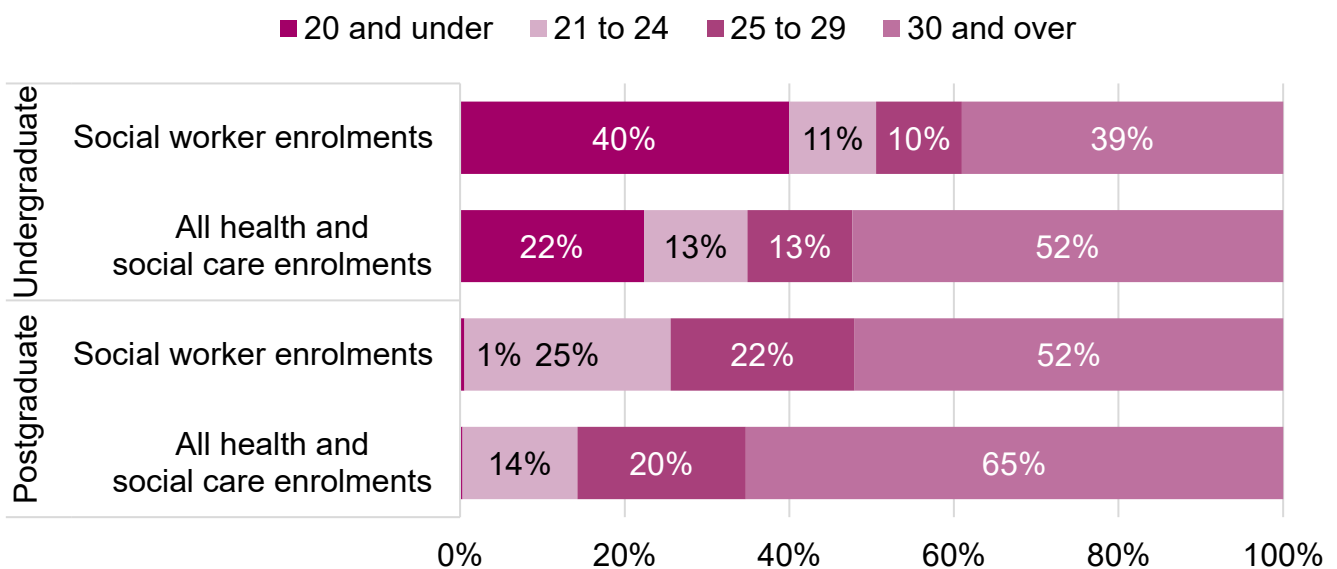
2.2.1 Age

The average age of an undergraduate social worker student that enrolled in 2024/25 was 28.3 years. This was slightly younger than the average of enrolling students in 2023/24 (29.1 years) and in 2022/23 (28.9 years). For postgraduate students, the average age of those enrolling onto pre-registration social worker courses in 2024/25 was 33.2 years. Like undergraduate enrolments, the average in 2024/25 was very slightly younger than postgraduate social worker enrolments in 2023/24 (33.4 years) and 2022/23 (32.7 years).

Overall these trends suggest that social worker students are starting their courses at a slightly younger age. Chart 8 shows the comparative age distribution of students enrolling onto social worker courses compared to all health and social care related higher education enrolments in 2024/25. Students enrolling onto social worker courses had a higher proportion aged under 30 across undergraduate (61%) and postgraduate courses (48%), compared to students enrolling onto all courses with a health or social care element (48% undergraduate, 35% postgraduate).

Chart 8. Age distribution of social worker and all health and social care enrolments by degree level, 2024/45

Source: HESA student record



2.2.2 Gender

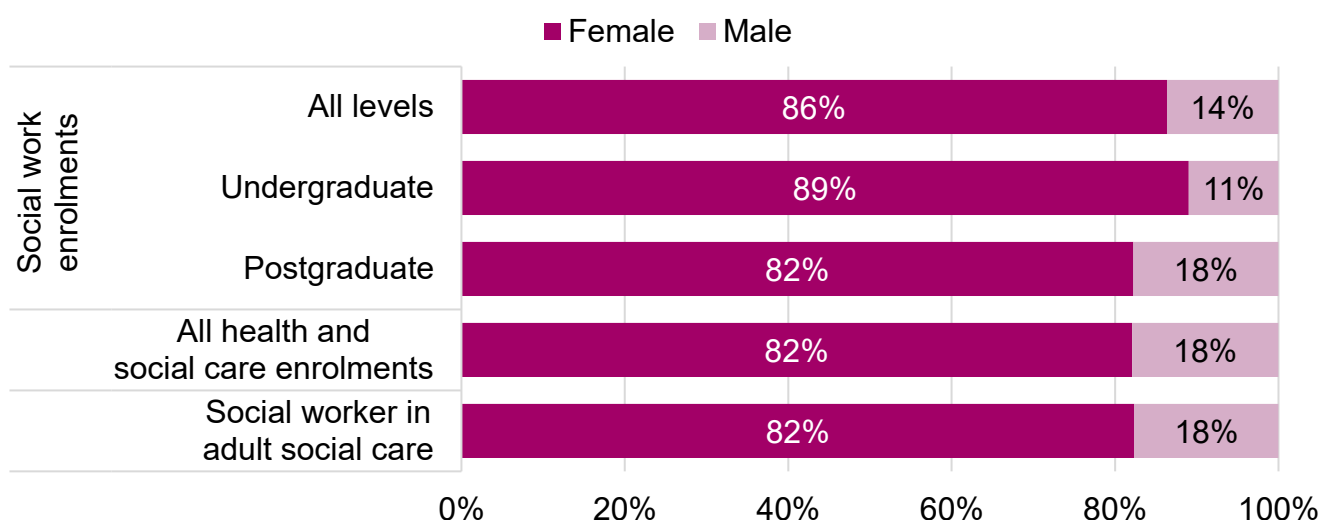
The information in this section relates to the HESA variable “Sex identifier”, where the question is asked “what is your sex?”. The response options include ‘female’, ‘male’, ‘other’, ‘information refused’ or ‘information not available’. Only known responses have been included in analysis shown here and it should be noted that no student was recorded as ‘other’ in the data we received from HESA. For more information on the collection of this particular data, see the [HESA data dictionary](#).

In 2024/25, the majority of students enrolling onto social worker courses were female (86%). This was a decrease of 1 percentage point from 87% recorded in 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. Prior to this, the proportion of females had been increasing from 84% (recorded in 2009/10).

Chart 9 shows that in 2024/25, there was variation between degree levels, with undergraduate enrolments having a higher proportion of female students (89%) compared to postgraduate enrolments (82%). The proportion of female social worker enrolments was slightly larger than the gender distribution across all enrolments onto any health or social care related higher education course, and social worker filled posts in the adult social care workforce (both 82%).

Chart 9. Social worker enrolments by gender compared to all health and social care enrolments and adult social care social worker filled posts, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care estimates



2.2.3 Ethnicity

The ethnicity data collected by HESA is grouped into five groups: ‘White’, ‘Asian’, ‘Black’, ‘Mixed or multiple ethnic background’ and ‘Any other ethnic background’. Respondants were also given the option to refuse to provide this information. In the ASC-WDS, users can choose from 18 different ethnicities and these have been grouped for this analysis to allow for comparison to the student record information.

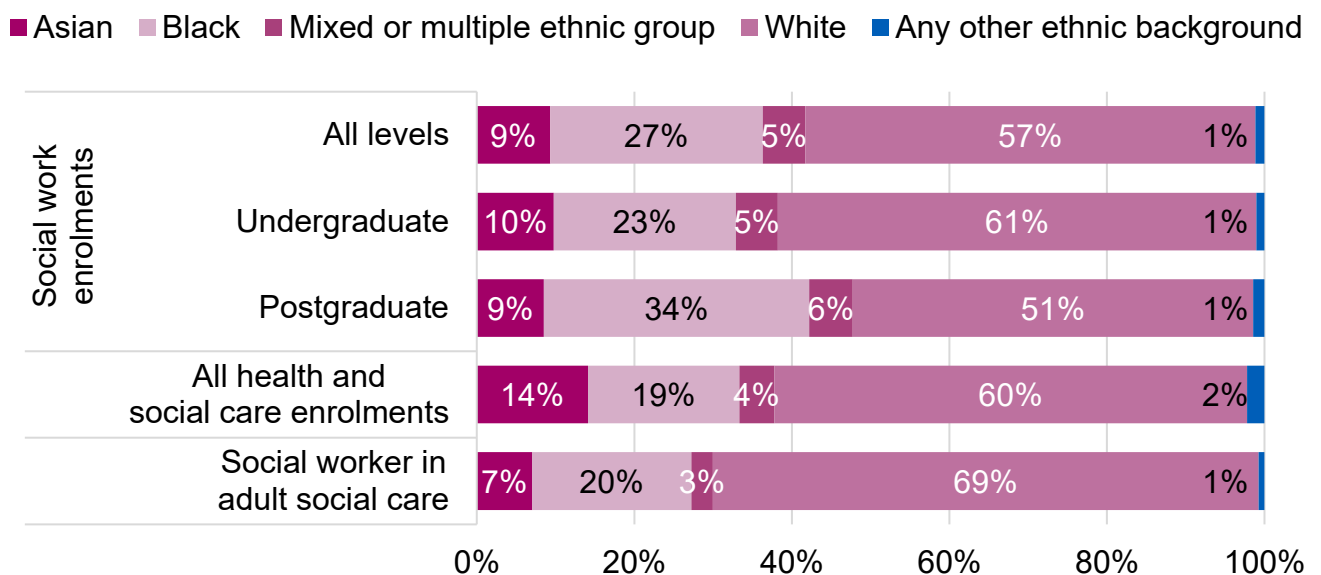
The ethnicity distribution of students enrolled on social work courses in 2024/25 is shown below in Chart 10. 57% of social worker enrolments were students of White ethnicities, this was a decrease from 63% in 2023/24 and 2022/23. This follows a longer trend of increasing ethnic diversity among social worker enrolments since 2009/10, when the proportion of enrolling students of White ethnicities stood at 71%.

The chart also shows that the enrolling student population across social worker courses and all health and social care courses was more ethnically diverse than social workers employed in adult social care services in 2024/25. In particular, 20% of social worker posts in adult social care were filled by people of Black ethnicities, 23% of enrolling undergraduates and 34% of enrolling post graduate students were people of Black ethnicities.

Similarly a larger proportion of enrolling social worker students were people of Asian ethnicities (10% undergraduate and 9% postgraduate), compared to 7% of the social worker workforce in adult social care. This therefore suggests that in a few years, it is reasonable to assume that the ethnicity distribution of social workers in adult social care overall will continue to diversify as fresh graduates join the workforce. For more information about the ethnicity of social workers in adult social care, visit our [website](#).

Chart 10. Social worker enrolments by ethnicity group compared to all health and social care enrolments and social worker filled posts in adult social care, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care estimates



2.2.4 Disability

In 2024/25, 27% of people enrolling in a social worker course considered themselves to have a disability across both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. This was an increase from 24% in 2023/24 and 22% in 2022/23. The increasing trend has been seen since 2009/10, when the proportion of enrolling social worker students that considered themselves to have a disability stood at 12%.

In contrast, in 2024/25 only 18% of all students enrolling onto courses with an element of health or social care considered themselves to have a disability. However, this again is an increase from the previous two years: 17% of enrolments in 2023/24 and 16% of enrolments in 2022/23 considered themselves to have a disability.

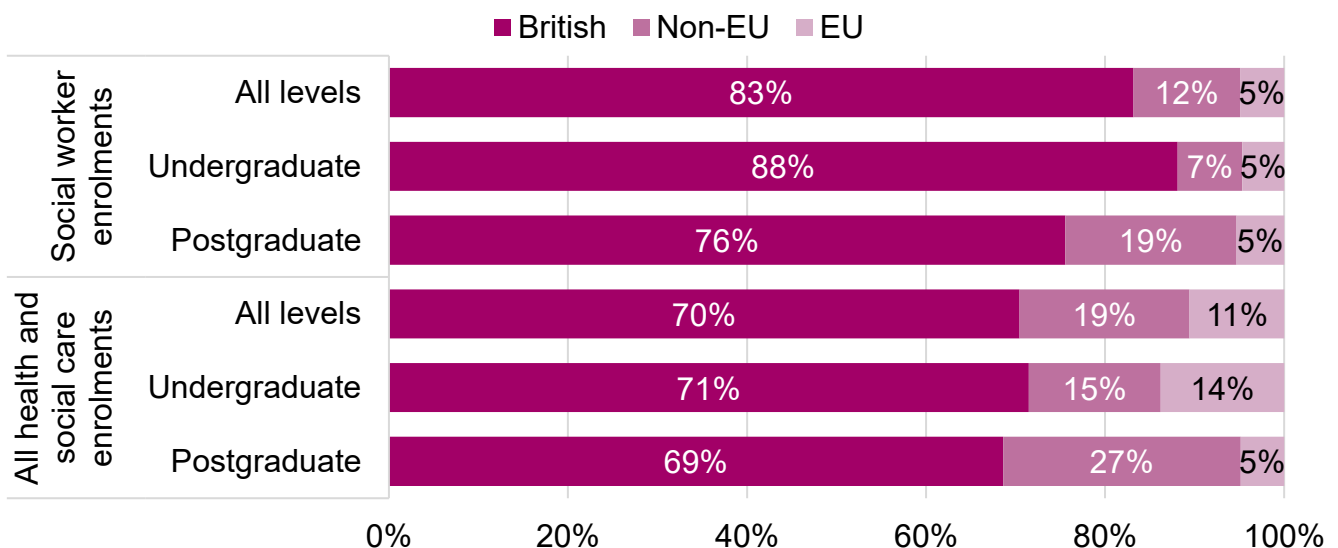
2.2.5 Nationality

Higher education institutions in the England attract students from the UK and around the world. Students travelling from overseas to study may require visas and be subject to higher tuition fees.

In 2024/25, the majority of enrolments onto social worker courses were students with a British nationality (83%). This was higher among undergraduate enrolments (88%) compared to postgraduate students (76%). Chart 11 shows that a larger proportion of social worker enrolments were British, compared to enrolments onto courses with a health or social care element (70%). However, in both cases postgraduate students had a higher proportion of students with a non-EU nationality suggesting that students are more likely to come to England to study at this level.

Chart 11. Social worker enrolments by nationality group compared to all health and social care enrolments, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



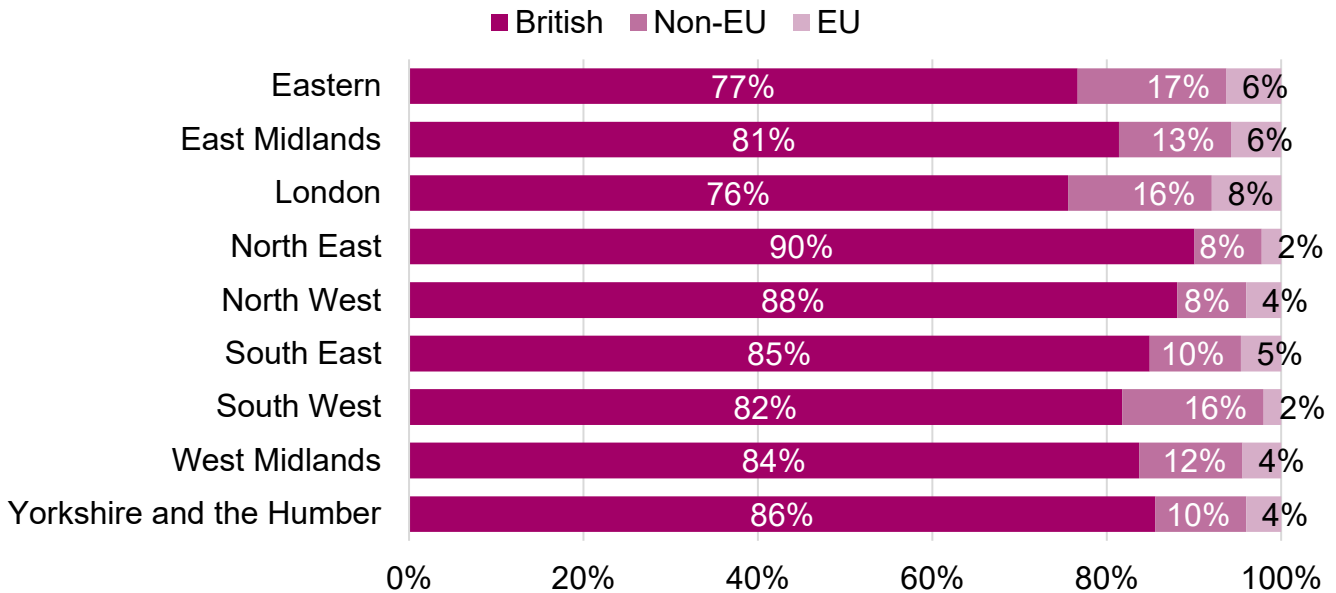
The proportion of social worker enrolments by nationality group has remained relatively stable over time. There are differences however when looking at the regional variation across England. Chart 12 below shows the regional variation based on the location of the higher education institute. The North East had the highest proportion of enrolling social worker with a British nationality at 90%, while London had the smallest proportion at 76%.

As shown in Chart 11 above, across England in 2024/25 a higher proportion of enrolments were students with a non-EU nationality (12%) compared to an EU nationality (5%). This can be seen in each of the nine regions, with the Eastern region having the highest proportion of enrolling students with a non-EU nationality (17%), followed by London and the South West (both 16%).

The region with the highest proportion of enrolling students with an EU nationality was London (8%).

Chart 12. Social worker enrolments by nationality and higher education institute region, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



This regional pattern was reflected in the social worker workforce in adult social care in 2024/25. The North East region reported the highest proportion of social workers with a British nationality (96%) while London had the lowest at 74%. For more information, see our [Regional comparison data visualisation](#) which allows for comparison of social worker nationality and other demographic information.

On 1 January 2021, the UK Government introduced changes to immigration legislation. These changes affected all people coming to the UK, including students. Students coming from outside the UK to study at a higher education institution are required to obtain a [Student visa](#) before arrival. For students aged over 18, the Student visa is dependent on the following conditions:

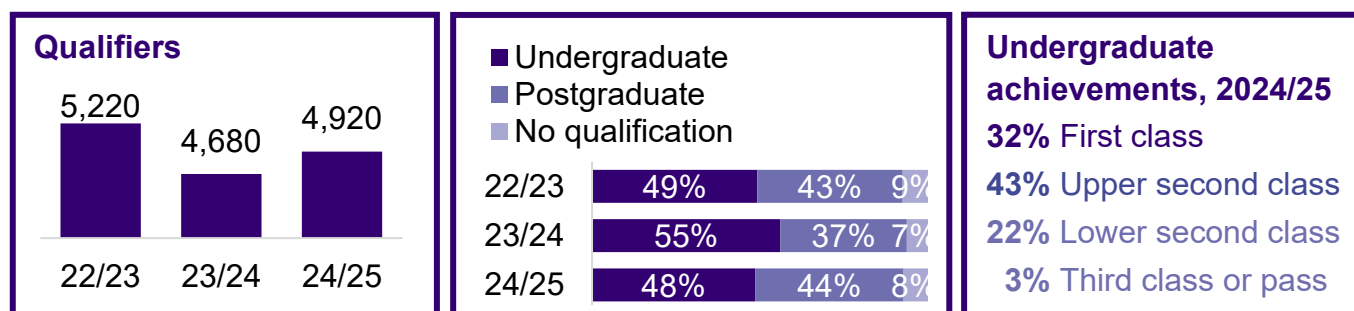
- The student has been offered a place on a course by a licensed student sponsor.
- The student has enough money to support themselves and pay for their tuition.
- The student can speak, read, write, and understand English.

Students on the visa are usually eligible to stay in the UK for five years if they are studying for a degree. An extension may also be possible if required to cover an extended study period. In Summer 2021, the Government launched the [Graduate visa](#) 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. For most graduates, this visa will allow them to stay in the UK for 2 years if an application is made before 31 December 2026. After this date, the graduate visa will only allow the recipient to stay for 18 months. Students that complete a PhD or other qualification can stay in the UK for 3 years.

3. Leavers from social work education courses



This section presents the attainments and course outcomes of social work higher education students leaving their course in 2024/25. 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.



Key findings

- There were 5,360 leavers from social work courses in 2024/25. This was an increase from 5,060 leavers in 2023/24 but a decrease from the 5,720 leavers recorded in 2022/23.
- Not all students leave their course with a qualification. In 2024/25, 4,920 of the 5,360 leavers achieved a qualification (92%) across all degree levels.
- The overall achievement rate of social worker leavers has remained consistent over previous two academic years (93% in 2023/24 and 91% in 2022/23).
- The achievement rate of social worker leavers in 2024/25 was higher among postgraduate qualifiers (94%) compared to undergraduate qualifiers (89%).
- Among undergraduate social worker qualifiers, between 2022/23 and 2024/25, the largest proportion of qualifying students achieved an upper second class honours degree.

For the purposes of this report, a leaver is defined as a student who left their course in the given academic year. Leavers from social worker courses fall into one of three categories: qualifying undergraduate, qualifying postgraduate, or leaving the course without obtaining a qualification.

In England, an undergraduate degree typically takes three academic years to complete while the length of postgraduate courses varies. Enrolments cannot be directly linked to leavers in a particular year due to the differing lengths of study but, in general, enrolment figures have the largest impact on leaver figures two years later (for example, a student starting a three year undergraduate degree in 2010/11 would finish their course at the end of the 2012/13 year).

In 2024/25, there were around 5,360 leavers from higher education social work courses that lead to pre-registration with Social Work England. This was an increase from the number of leavers in 2023/24 (5,060) but a decrease from the number of leavers in 2022/23 (5,720). Table 2 below shows the number of qualifying leavers from pre-registration social worker courses since 2012/13.

When looking at trended leaver and qualifier information in recent years it is important to note the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown restrictions, changes from in-person to online

learning, and a reduced student experience impacted many people. As a result, students were known to delay enrolling onto courses, leave courses early, or pause their studies before returning to complete at a later date.

Students on social worker courses were equally affected by these changes. The number of qualifiers from social worker courses was lowest during the height of the pandemic in 2020/21, at 3,360. However, by 2022/23 the number of qualifiers had increased to 5,220 (up 56%). This was the highest number of leavers from social worker courses since our records began in 2009/10.

The highest number of students leaving their course without achieving a qualification was recorded in 2021/22, at 570. In 2024/25, this had decreased to around 450 students leaving social work courses without obtaining a qualification. This equates to 8% of all leavers from social worker courses in the 2024/25 academic year, a return to proportions seen before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Number of leavers and qualifiers from social worker courses, 2012/13 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

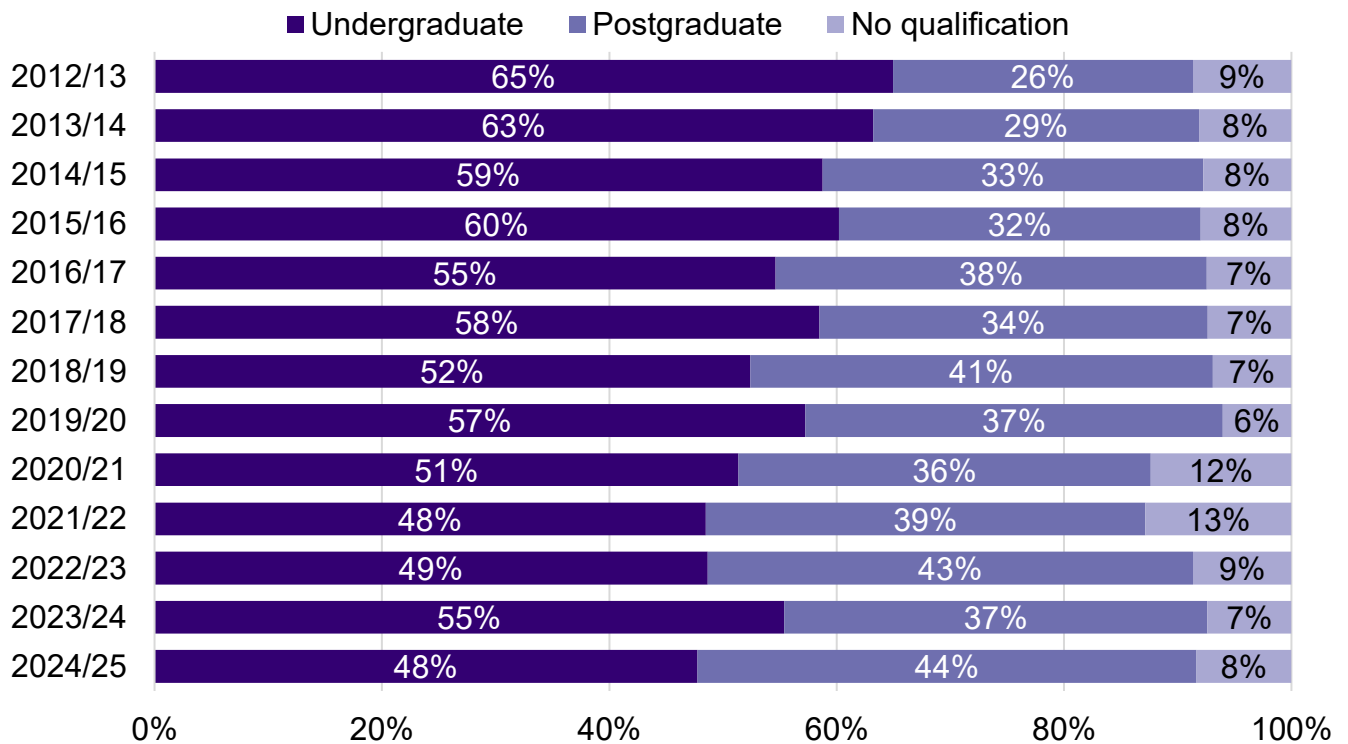
Year	Total	Qualifiers	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	No qualification
2012/13	5,150	4,700	3,340	1,360	450
2013/14	5,180	4,760	3,270	1,480	420
2014/15	4,790	4,420	2,810	1,600	370
2015/16	4,390	4,040	2,640	1,400	350
2016/17	4,560	4,220	2,490	1,730	340
2017/18	4,440	4,110	2,600	1,520	330
2018/19	4,250	3,960	2,230	1,730	290
2019/20	3,650	3,430	2,090	1,340	220
2020/21	3,830	3,360	1,970	1,390	470
2021/22	4,430	3,860	2,150	1,710	570
2022/23	5,720	5,220	2,780	2,440	500
2023/24	5,060	4,680	2,800	1,880	370
2024/25	5,360	4,920	2,580	2,340	450

The proportion of students qualifying from social worker courses with an undergraduate degree is typically higher than the proportion qualifying with a postgraduate degree. This reflects the pattern of enrolments onto these course types.

Of the 5,360 leavers in 2024/25, the majority left with either an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification (92%). Nearly half (48%) achieved an undergraduate degree, while 44% achieved a postgraduate degree. Chart 13 below shows that the proportion of leavers qualifying with an undergraduate degree decreased from 2023/24 (55%), however the proportion of qualifiers obtaining a postgraduate had increased by 7 percentage points (from 37%).

Chart 13. Proportion of qualifying leavers from social work courses by degree level, 2012/13 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



In addition to overall numbers of students leaving social worker courses, it is important to consider how many students left their course having achieved their degree. That is, those students that finished their course and did not leave early. This is termed here as the achievement rate.

Table 3 below shows the achievement rate of students leaving social worker courses. In 2024/25, the achievement rate of undergraduates was 89%, but the postgraduate achievement rate was higher at 94%. These were the same figures as recorded in 2022/23. In 2023/24 the undergraduate achievement rate increased to 92% but this has since fallen.

Table 3. Achievement rate of social worker course leavers by degree level, 2012/13 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

Year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
2012/13	91%	93%
2013/14	91%	94%
2014/15	90%	95%
2015/16	90%	96%
2016/17	91%	96%
2017/18	92%	94%
2018/19	91%	96%
2019/20	93%	96%
2020/21	87%	88%
2021/22	86%	89%
2022/23	89%	94%
2023/24	92%	94%
2024/25	89%	94%

Overall, achievement rates have remained relatively consistent over the last three academic years. In 2020/21 and 2021/22, achievement rates did fall likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, achievement rates are nearly back to pre-pandemic levels.

3.1 Leavers by student demographics

This section looks at the demographic information of the students that left social worker courses in 2024/25, including their age, gender, ethnicity, and nationality groups.

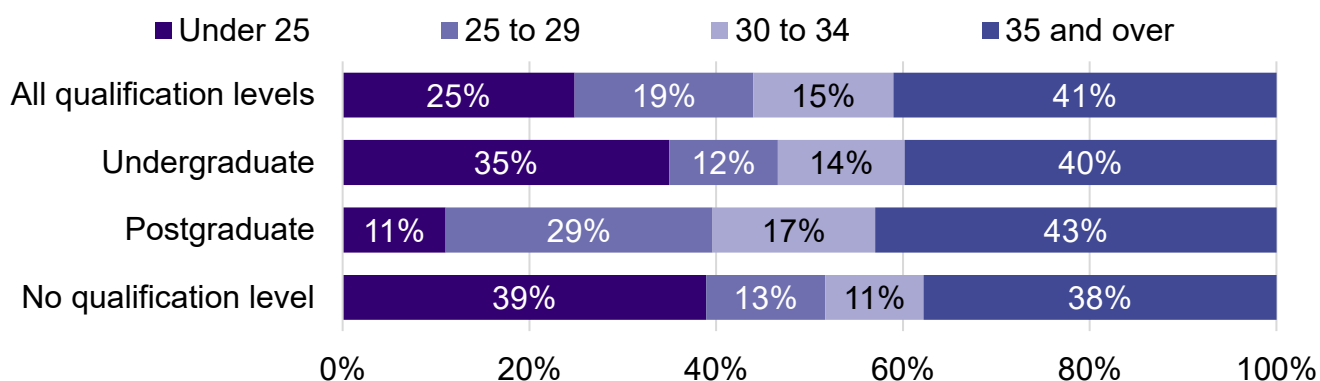
3.1.1 Age

A typical undergraduate course lasts three years, therefore a student enrolling at the age of 18 will be 21 years old when they leave their course if they complete it. In 2024/25, the average of a qualifying social worker undergraduate was 32.5 years; this was older than qualifiers in 2023/24 (31.9 years) and in 2022/23 (32.0 years). Postgraduate students are typically older, in 2024/25 the average age of a postgraduate qualifier was 34.4 years. This was similar to the average in 2023/24 and 2022/23 (34.2 and 34.0 years respectively).

Chart 14 shows the age distribution of social work course leavers in 2024/25. Over a third of undergraduates qualified before the age of 25 (35%), and a further 12% qualified before the age of 30. Only one-in-ten (11%) of postgraduate students qualified before the age of 25, but a much larger proportion qualified between the ages of 25 and 29 (29%).

Chart 14. social worker course leavers by qualification level and age distribution, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



Students who left social worker courses without a qualification in 2024/25 were typically younger: nearly two fifths (39%) left their course before turning 25. Over half of all undergraduate students that left their courses without a qualification were aged under 25 (53%). Only 9% of postgraduate social worker students that left their course without obtaining a degree were aged under 25.

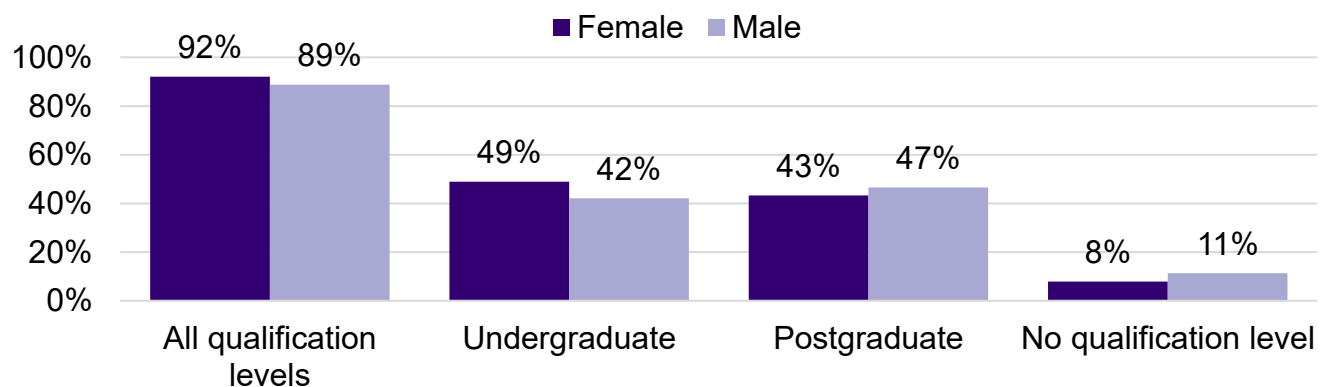
3.1.2 Gender

In 2024/25, there was a higher proportion of female students leaving social worker courses (88%), compared to male students (12%). This reflects the gender split of enrolments outlined in Section 2.2.2 (Enrolments - Gender).

The achievement rates of female and male students leaving social worker courses in 2024/25 are shown in Chart 15. A higher proportion of female students left having achieved an undergraduate degree (49%) compared to male students (42%). However, a higher proportion of male students achieved their postgraduate degree (47%), compared to female postgraduate leavers (43%). A larger proportion of male leavers also left their course without obtaining a qualification (11%), compared to female students (8%).

Chart 15. Social worker course leavers by qualification level and gender, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



Over time, the proportion of female qualifiers has increased from 86% of qualifiers in 2009/10 to 92% in 2024/25. This suggests that more females are choosing to finish their studies to gain their qualification in social work. However it should also be noted that over this period, there has been an increase in female enrolments which is also driving the increase in female qualifiers.

3.1.3 Ethnicity

The ethnic diversity among students enrolling onto social worker courses in 2024/25 was shown in Section 2.2.3 (Enrolments – Ethnicity). Chart 10 showed that across all social worker enrolments, 9% were students of Asian ethnicities, 27% were students of Black ethnicities, 5% were students of Mixed or multiple ethnicities, 57% were students of White ethnicities and 1% were of another ethnicity.

In contrast, ethnic diversity of students leaving social work courses having gained a qualification in 2024/25 was slightly different. A larger proportion of leavers from social worker courses were students of White ethnicities (64%). In addition, a lower proportion of leavers were students of Black ethnicities (21%).

Table 4 shows the achievement rate of leavers by their ethnicity in 2024/25. Overall achievement levels are created by combining achievements of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Across each ethnicity group, a higher proportion of students left their course having achieved their qualification aim compared to those that left without obtaining a qualification.

Table 4. Social worker course leavers by qualification level and ethnicity group, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

	All qualification levels	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	No qualification level
Asian	90%	52%	38%	10%
Black	89%	44%	46%	11%
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	91%	47%	44%	9%
White	92%	52%	40%	8%
Any other ethnic background	93%	41%	51%	7%

3.1.4 Nationality

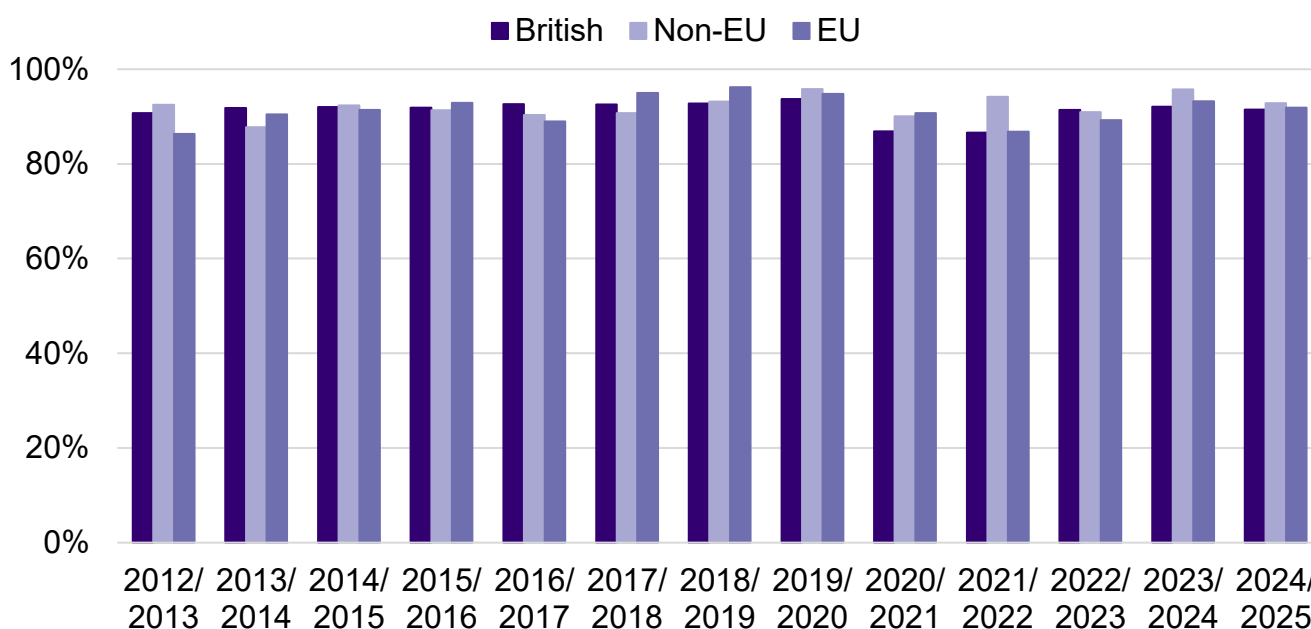
In 2024/25, 84% of leavers from social worker courses were students with a British nationality, 11% were students with a non-EU nationality and 4% were students with an EU nationality. This correlates with the nationality of students enrolling onto social worker courses during the same academic year, for more information see Section 2.2.5 (Enrolments – Nationality).

Chart 16 below shows that the achievement rates of students leaving social worker courses across undergraduate and postgraduate courses by their nationality group. In 2024/25, there is very little variation between the three groups; students with a non-EU nationality had the highest achievement rate at 93%, while students with a British nationality had the lowest achievement rate at 91%. Leavers with an EU nationality had a similar achievement rate of 92%.

The achievement rate of British students has increased from 87% in 2020/21 and 2021/22, almost back to levels seen prior to COVID-19 (94% in 2019/20). The achievement rate of EU students has also been increasing in recent years from a low of 87% in 2021/22. Students with a non-EU nationality maintained higher achievement rates than British or EU students on average since 2018/19.

Chart 16. Achievement rate of social worker leavers by nationality group, 2012/13 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record

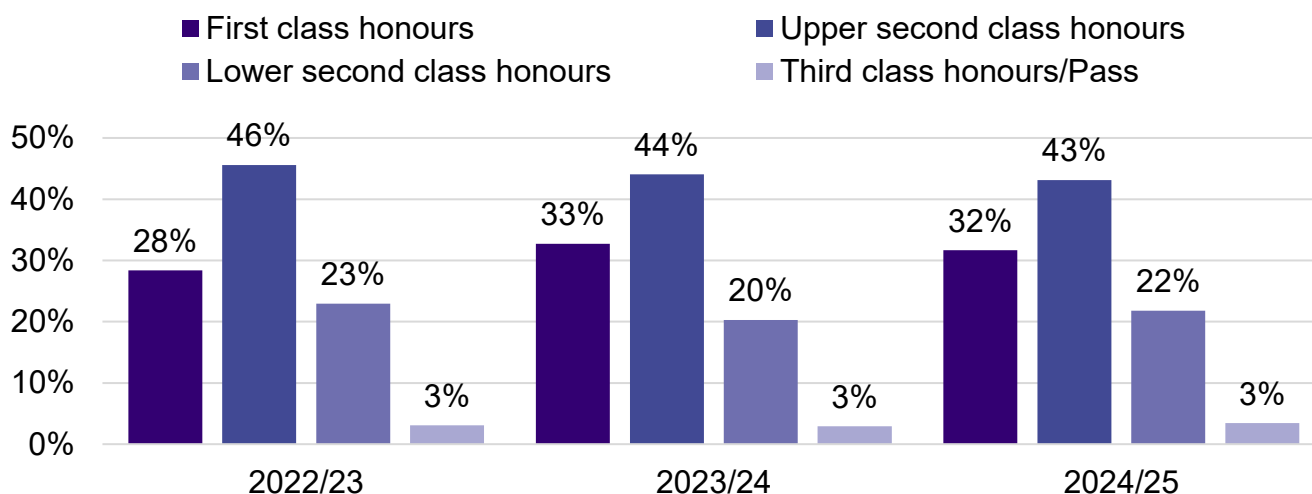


3.2 Undergraduate qualifiers by degree classification

Nearly half of all undergraduate qualifiers from pre-registration social worker courses in 2024/25 achieved an upper second class honours degree (43%). This was a decrease from 2023/24 (44%) and 2022/23 (46%), as shown in Chart 17. Nearly a third of undergraduate qualifiers from social worker courses achieved a first class degree (32%), a decrease from the previous academic year (33% in 2023/24). One-in-five undergraduate qualifiers from social worker courses in 2024/25 achieved a lower second class honours degree (22%). This was an increase from the previous year (20% in 2023/24).

Chart 17. Proportion of students qualifying from social worker undergraduate courses by degree classification, 2022/23 to 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



The proportion of undergraduates achieving a first or upper second-class degree has increased in recent years. Table 5 below shows this pattern is also seen across all higher education courses. [Analysis by HESA of the student record dataset](#) shows that the proportion of students qualifying with a first class or upper second-class degree fell in 2021/22 but has since been increasing.

Social work has historically had slightly lower proportions of students achieving a first or upper second-class degree. In 2012/13, there was a 11 percentage point difference between the proportions of undergraduates achieving a first or upper second class honours degree among social worker courses compared to all higher education undergraduate courses. In 2024/25, the difference had reduced to 3 percentage points, suggesting again that a larger proportion of social worker students were achieving higher degree classifications at the end of their courses.

Table 5. Proportion of undergraduate qualifiers by degree classification, 2012/13 to 2024/25

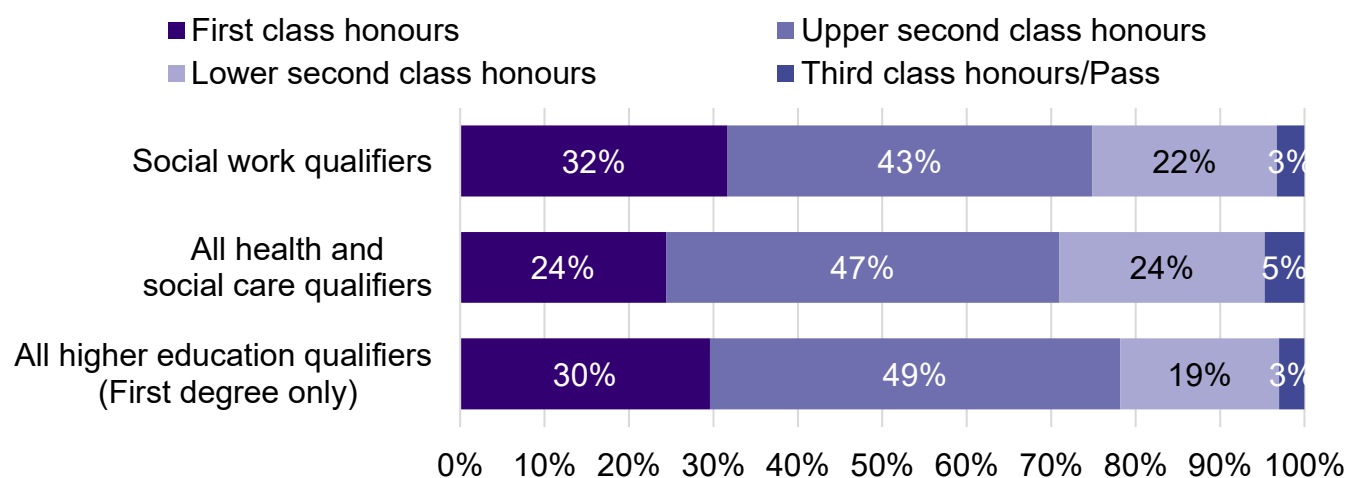
Source: HESA student record

	Social worker undergraduates		All higher education undergraduates	
	First and Upper second class	Lower second class and Third class	First and Upper second class	Lower second class and Third class
2012/13	56%	44%	68%	32%
2013/14	63%	37%	70%	30%
2014/15	63%	37%	71%	29%
2015/16	63%	37%	73%	27%
2016/17	67%	33%	74%	26%
2017/18	68%	32%	76%	24%
2018/19	68%	32%	76%	24%
2019/20	74%	26%	82%	18%
2020/21	76%	24%	82%	18%
2021/22	75%	25%	78%	22%
2022/23	74%	26%	77%	23%
2023/24	77%	23%	76%	24%
2024/25	75%	25%	78%	22%

In 2024/25, a larger proportion of qualifying undergraduates completed social worker courses having achieved a first class honours degree (32%) compared to all high education courses (30%). Chart 18 below shows that among undergraduate qualifiers from other health and social care courses only 24% achieved a degree of this classification. Social worker undergraduate qualifiers therefore left university with a higher level of attainment than the overall average in England.

Chart 18. Undergraduate qualifiers by classification of degree, 2024/25

Source: HESA student record



4. Destination of social work graduates



The following section presents analysis of the Graduate Outcomes survey collected by HESA. The survey collected information from student that graduated in **2022/23**, 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.

78%

conversion rate into social worker employment 15 months after leaving

67%

of students lived, studied, and found employment in their home region

89%

of social worker qualifiers found employment of some form 15 months after graduating

Key Findings

- The majority of social worker qualifiers in 2022/23 went on to gain employment by the time of their Graduate Outcomes survey (89%). 78% were working as social workers 15 months after graduating.
- Conversion rates (those that studied and then became social workers) were higher for students qualifying from distance learning courses at The Open University (93%), compared to those studying at traditional higher education institutions.
- Two thirds (67%) of social worker graduates lived, studied, and stayed in their home region after graduation.

The term 'destination of social worker graduates' in this report refers to the employment status (or alternative) of those students that previously graduated from a social worker courses regulated by Social Work England. As such, the student was eligible for registration as a newly qualified social worker after graduation.

The data used for this analysis has been collected by HESA, from [The Graduate Outcomes survey](#). This measures outcomes at 15 months after graduation and is centrally delivered and quality checked by HESA. It 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. This survey measured outcomes six months after students completed their course and was collected and processed by individual higher education providers. Due to differences in the timescale and method of collection, the results from the Graduate Outcomes survey are not comparable to those from the DLHE.

It has not been possible to obtain Graduate Outcomes survey data from 2020/21 that can reliably be correlated with the enrolments and leavers information shown in this report. Therefore, this report looks at survey responses from graduates of 2022/23 only. Graduate Outcomes data from graduates in 2023/24 are not yet available.

The Graduate Outcomes survey is not mandatory. 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.

Out of around 5,220 qualifying social work graduates from 2022/23, we found a survey response rate of 52% for a graduate's employment and 54% for their general activity after studying. Interrogation of the survey results for this year shows that response rates between employment and activity varied and some responses were contradictory – this has been noted when showing analysis of the charts and tables below.

4.1 Employment of social worker graduates

This section looks at survey responses in relation to the graduates occupation or alternative employment status. Responses in the HESA data provided for this report are shown using the [Standard Occupational Classification \(SOC\) codes](#) as of 2020 – as defined by the Office for National Statistics.

As referenced above, this part of the survey results from those students that left and qualified from pre-registration social worker courses in 2022/23 had a response rate of 52%. Analysis of these responses is shown in Chart 19: over three quarters (78%) had gone on to become social workers and further 4% were employed in a role in social care, though not as a social worker. 2% were employed in a health related role and 10% had found employment outside of health and social care. 6% were not employed when surveyed.

Chart 19. Occupation of social work graduates 15 months after graduating, 2022/23

Source: HESA student record and Graduate Outcomes survey

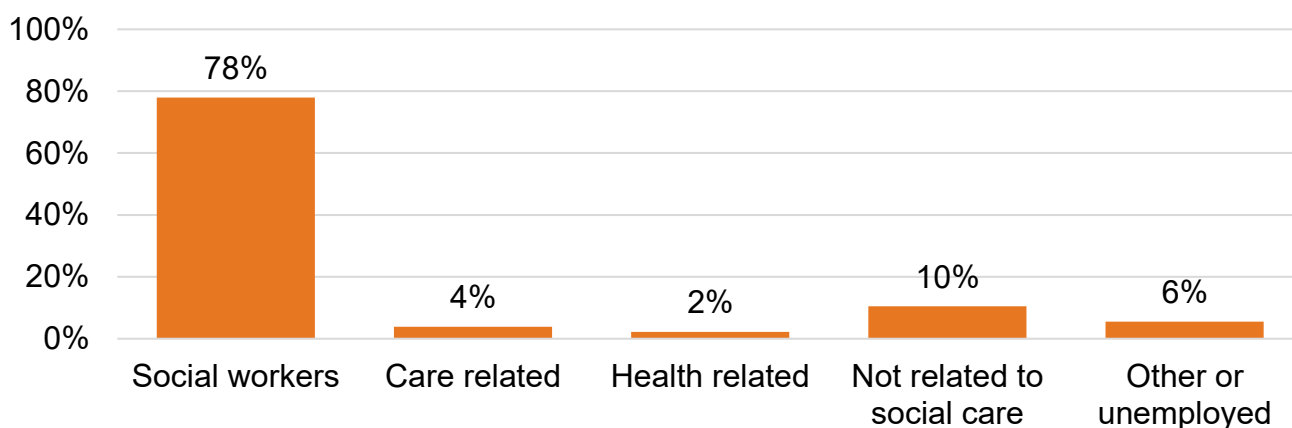


Table 6 shows the conversion rate of graduates from social worker courses into employment as social workers. The table is broken down by the region of the higher education institute and shows that while on average across England 78% of social worker graduates found employment as social workers, the conversion rate was highest in the North East region at 86%. London had the lowest at 69%.

Distance learning in this instance refers to The Open University only – this does not include students who may have received distanced or virtual learning during the COVID-19 lockdowns or subsequent restrictions. Social worker graduates in 2022/23 that studied with the Open University had the highest conversion rates (93%), suggesting that this type of course was less affected by the COVID-19 restrictions to learning seen in traditional higher education institutions.

Table 6. Number of social worker graduates and proportion working as social workers 15 months after graduation by higher education institution region, 2022/23

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

	Graduates	Conversion rate
England	5,220	78%
Eastern	450	78%
East Midlands	250	82%
London	670	69%
North East	240	86%
North West	1290	79%
South East	830	76%
South West	290	83%
West Midlands	570	76%
Yorkshire and the Humber	470	77%
Distance learning	160	93%

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.

4.2 Activity of social worker graduates

This section looks at survey responses in relation to graduate activity. Response options for this question can be found on the [HESA website](#) and have been grouped for the purpose of analysis shown here.

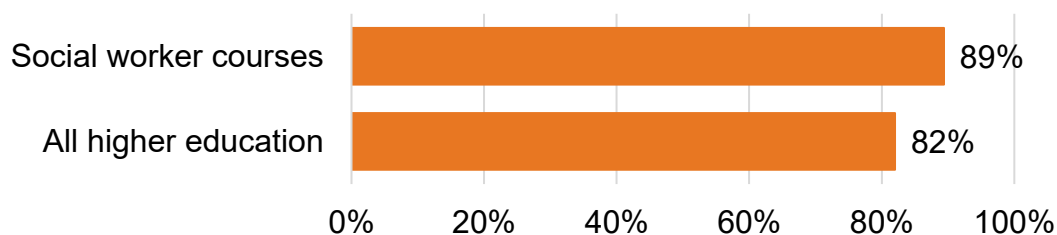
It should also be noted that around 120 responses to this question suggested the respondent was neither working nor studying. However, we can see that these respondents did list an employment profession with a corresponding SOC code. Therefore, the responses to this activity question cannot be directly compared to the employment question shown above.

As noted at the start of this section above, this part of the survey results from those students that left and qualified from pre-registration social worker courses in 2022/23 had a response rate of 54%. Chart 20 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 2022/23, 81% of qualifying social worker graduates were working and a further 8% were combining work with studying 15 months after leaving their course.

This proportion was higher than the 82% of graduates across all higher education who were employed (72%) or combining work with studying 15 months after graduating (10%), as [outlined by HESA](#). 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 pre-registration social worker graduates and all higher education graduates, 2022/23

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

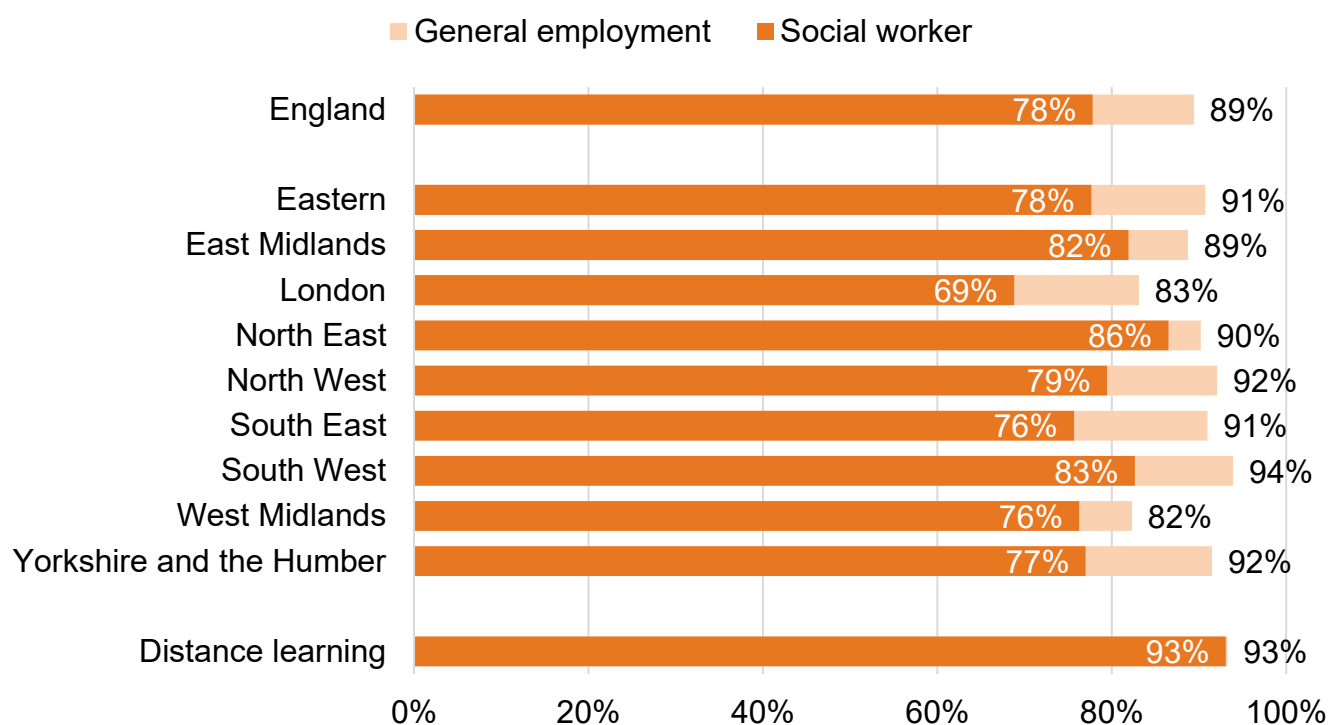


* Employment shown here includes those that are working, and those that are working alongside further study.

As shown in Table 6 above, the conversion rate from social work graduates to employed social workers varied by region of the higher education institution. The chart below compares the proportion of graduates that became social workers and those that found general employment between regions. Each of the nine regions in England saw a higher proportion of graduates employed in any role, compared to just those that found a job as a social worker.

Chart 21. Proportion of social worker graduates in employment 15 months after graduation by higher education institution region, 2022/23

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 7 below.

Of the 2,440 postgraduate qualifiers in 2022/23, around 80% were employed as social workers 15 months after graduating. This was slightly higher than the 76% of the 2,780 undergraduate qualifiers from the same year. These figures demonstrate that postgraduate qualifiers have a slightly higher employability than undergraduates.

Table 7. Occupation (category of role) of social worker graduates 15 months after graduation by qualification level, 2022/23

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
All qualifiers	2,780	2,440
Social workers	76%	80%
Social care / health related	7%	5%
Not working / working in a non-care related field	17%	15%

4.3 Graduate migration

Respondents to the Graduate Outcomes survey were asked where they were currently employed (where applicable). These responses, where possible, were grouped into regions. These figures may be useful in terms of workforce planning, as it shows the movement of graduates as they enter the workforce.

The relationship between a leaver's home region, where they studied and where they found employment is shown in Table 8. Across England in 2022/23, over two thirds of graduates (67%) had remained in their home region for study and employment after graduating. Therefore, the impact is being made where the investment is being applied.

Table 8. Regional movement of graduates between home, study, and employment, 2022/23

Source: HESA student record and Graduate Outcomes survey

	Lived, Studied and Stayed	Returned for employment after studying elsewhere	Stayed in home region for study but employed elsewhere	Move out of home region for study and stayed	All different
England	67%	20%	4%	7%	3%
Eastern	66%	16%	6%	7%	5%
East Midlands	48%	25%	7%	15%	4%
London	70%	10%	7%	10%	3%
North East	88%	2%	2%	7%	0%
North West	60%	30%	2%	4%	3%
South East	61%	27%	4%	6%	2%
South West	84%	5%	1%	9%	1%
West Midlands	69%	16%	7%	6%	2%
Yorkshire and the Humber	77%	12%	2%	7%	2%

5. Social worker filled posts and ASYE registrations



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

55,600

social worker filled posts
in local authorities
(adult's and children's)
in 2024/25

4,920

qualifying graduates in
2024/25

2,630

ASYE registrations in
child and family services
in 2024/25

Key findings

- In 2024/25, there were 55,600 social worker filled posts in local authorities. These were split between adults' services (19,200 filled posts) and children's services (36,400 filled posts).
- Between 2013/14 and 2024/25, the number of social worker filled posts in local authorities in England has increased by 12,300 (28%).

Once a social worker student has graduated, they are able to seek employment and gain registration with a regulatory body: the body varies depending on the home nation of the employer. In Scotland the regulatory body is the [Scottish Social Services Council](#), in Wales the regulatory body is [Social Care Wales](#) and in Northern Ireland the regulatory body is the [Northern Ireland Social Care Council](#).

This report focuses on the social work education journey in England – the regulatory body for social workers in England is [Social Work England](#). Social workers in England can work in both adults' or children's services, across social care and medical settings.

The following sections look at the social worker workforce across these different settings and the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme which is offered to newly qualified social workers joining the workforce.

5.1 Social worker filled posts

Table 9 below shows the estimated number of social worker filled posts by sector between 2013/14 and 2024/25. Over this period, the majority of social worker posts were employed in social care compared to the NHS.

In 2024/25, 92% of the social worker workforce were employed in social care. Predominantly social workers were employed in local authority children's services (58%), but nearly a third (31%) were employed in local authority adults services. 4% of the workforce were employed in adults services in the independent sector and 8% were employed in the NHS.

The total number of social worker filled posts employed in local authorities has risen from 43,300 in 2013/14 to 55,600 in 2024/25, this is an increase of 28% over the period. In the NHS, the number of social workers has increased by 3,400 over the period but still represents a smaller proportion of the overall social worker workforce.

Information about social workers in local authorities is collected in different ways depending on the service. Data about social workers working in adults' services are collected by [Skills for Care](#), we showed that the number of social worker filled posts increased by 17% between 2013 and 2024 (up 2,700 filled posts). Data about social workers in children's services are collected by the [Department for Education](#), which reported that the number of social worker posts increased by 36% (up 9,600 posts) over the same period.

[Data from NHS Digital](#) (now part of NHS England) shows there were around 4,900 social workers employed by the NHS (adults services only) in 2025. This is an increase of 3,400 (223%) 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 9. Social worker filled posts by sector, 2013/14 to 2024/25

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates, Department for Education, NHS workforce statistics

	Total local authority sector (LA)	LA adults' services	LA children's services	Independent sector adults' services	NHS adults' services
2013/14	43,300	16,500	26,800	1,400	1,500
2014/15	44,200	15,700	28,600	1,200	1,700
2015/16	46,100	16,100	29,900	1,200	1,800
2016/17	46,800	16,100	30,700	1,100	2,100
2017/18	46,900	16,200	30,600	1,100	2,400
2018/19	48,700	17,000	31,700	1,200	2,600
2019/20	50,300	17,400	32,900	1,600	2,800
2020/21	51,400	17,500	33,900	1,600	3,300
2021/22	51,900	17,300	34,600	1,800	3,700
2022/23	51,000	17,300	33,700	2,100	4,000
2023/24	53,700	18,500	35,200	2,400	4,300
2024/25	55,600	19,200	36,400	2,300	4,900

5.2 ASYE registrations

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) is offered to all newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) through their employer and can cover both adults and children's services.

ASYE registrations as reported here relate to the number of NQSWs who were registered with Skills for Care or the Department for Education by their employers. ASYE registrations are made of NSQW applications and new registrations within the last year at the time of writing.

Table 10 shows that between 2013/14 and 2024/25, the number of qualifying social worker graduates has increased from 4,760 to 4,920 (up 3%). However, it should be noted that between 2018/19 and 2021/22 there were fewer than 4,000 qualifying social worker graduates each year.

Between 2013/14 and 2021/22, the number of ASYE registrations has followed a similar trend to the number of newly qualified graduates, though it should be noted that the numbers can differ due to graduates from previous years registering for the ASYE. From 2022/23 onwards only the number of ASYE registrations relating to child and family services were provided for this report. Therefore, a total number of ASYE registrations cannot be shown.

Table 10. Number of qualifying social worker graduates and ASYE registrations

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

	Qualifying graduates	Total ASYE registrations	Registered child and family NQSW
2013/14	4,760	3,980	2,830
2014/15	4,420	4,190	2,630
2015/16	4,040	3,950	2,810
2016/17	4,220	4,070	2,830
2017/18	4,110	4,190	2,910
2018/19	3,960	4,340	2,800
2019/20	3,430	4,260	3,050
2020/21	3,360	4,000	2,840
2021/22	3,860	4,360	3,200
2022/23	5,220	*	2,600
2023/24	4,680	*	2,830
2024/25	4,920	*	2,630

The relationship between qualifying graduates and ASYE registrations up to 2021/22 suggests that there was high demand for NQSWs, but the supply had decreased. However, since between 2021/22 and 2024/25 time the number of qualifiers has increased by 27% indicating that many NQSWs could be joining the workforce.

The vacancy rate for social workers in England in 2024/25 stood at 8.8%, nearly back to rates reported before the Coronavirus pandemic. These falling vacancy rates indicate that fewer workers are leaving their roles (creating vacancies) however there are still opportunities for NQSWs to join the workforce.

2026/27 will be the last year that ASYE for children's services is supported by the Department for Education. From September 2027, support will move to the Early Career Development

programme which will run for a two year period (ASYE runs for one year). As yet, the impact of this change on the workforce and future recruitment of NSQWs into children's services is unknown. Skills for Care will continue to monitor these changes.

Further resources

As a producer of official statistics, we provide outstanding workforce intelligence that 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. This section provides an overview of some of the reports and resources published by our Workforce Intelligence team. To access these reports and visualisations, please refer to the relevant pages on our [Workforce Intelligence website](#).

Our workforce intelligence publications

The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

This report provides in-depth analysis of the workforce in the adult social care sector in England. This includes further detail on the size and structure of the workforce, as well as information on workforce characteristics, trends, and future projections.

To access this information, visit <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof>

The workforce employed by adult social services departments in England

This report provides information on the workforce employed in the local authority sector only. This includes analyses on the size and structure of this part of the adult social care workforce, as well as data on workforce characteristics and trends.

To access this information, visit [our website](#).

Headline social worker information

This report provides information on social workers employed by local authorities (this accounts for the majority of social workers in adult social care). This includes focussed information on the number of social worker filled posts, information on their workforce characteristics and trends.

To access this information, visit [our website](#).

Regional information

There are three pages of [regional information](#) on our website, providing an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region:

- a visualisation looking at the workforce in each region area, one at a time
- our comparison report comparing key variables across the nine regions
- individual regional written summary reports, summarising the workforce statistics.

Local area information

There are various pages on our website showing [local area information](#). These are split by either local authority area or NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) geographical area.

- individual local authority or ICB area pages: looking at the workforce in each individual area
- our comparison reports comparing key variables across local authority or ICB areas
- individual area written summary reports, summarising the workforce statistics
- our 'My ICB area (MH and LD&A)' report showing the latest information from the ASC-WDS for the mental health and learning disability and/or autism workforces, split into ICB areas.

Key topic areas

We also produce information on popular topic areas. Each topic includes a summary of the workforce information available, and signposts to other relevant resources.

- workforce tracking of key metrics
- learning disability and/or autism workforce
- apprenticeships
- pay rates
- individual employers and personal assistants
- nurses in social care
- recruitment and retention
- registered managers
- social work
- workforce nationality and international recruitment
- factors affecting staff turnover.

To access these topic pages, visit [our website](#).

Our values as producers of official statistics

Skills for Care is guided by core values. Throughout everything we do, we are 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, visit the [Skills for Care website](#).

All analysts leading on the production of this report 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 is no risk of misuse or confidentially breach. When creating outputs, we always adhere to statistical disclosure controls.

As a Workforce Intelligence team, we:

- help people to understand what is already available without commissioning our services and what options are available
- are not selling the data - we are selling our analysis and sector expertise
- conduct 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.

In 2023, Skills for Care became an official statistics provider, having been added to the [Official Statistics Order 2023](#). We, Skills for Care's Workforce Intelligence team, are committed to the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality, and value, as well as to the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Visit our website for our full [statement](#).

For more information about the services listed above, please email: analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk.



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