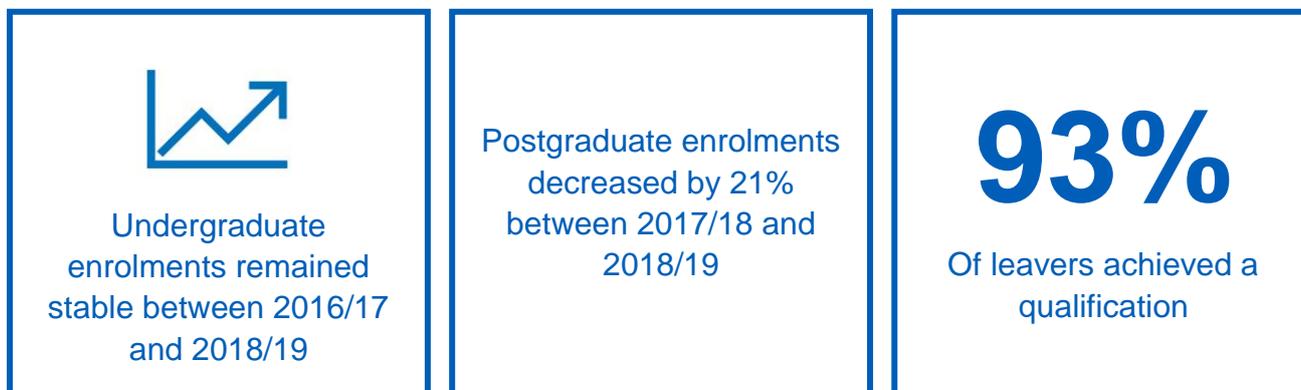


# Social work education 2021

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

This report presents information about social work education enrolments and qualifiers. For context and where appropriate, comparisons are made to social workers in the adult social care sector, using workforce estimates produced by Skills for Care using the Adult Social Care Workforce Dataset (ASC-WDS).

## Summary of key findings



## Enrolments

- 4,140 students enrolled onto social work courses in 2018/19. The number of enrolments has decreased by 12% in 2018/19.
- Postgraduate enrolments decreased by 22% in 2018/19, after previously rising each year since 2014/15.
- Undergraduate enrolments have remained stable for the previous three periods, after a sharp decline between 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- Social work students were older than average with around 60% of undergraduates aged 21 and above compared to 35% across all higher education.
- Around 33% of enrolments were individuals identifying as of a BAME ethnicity; 21% were Black, 7% Asian, and 5% Other.
- The majority of enrolments were people with British nationality (88%), 4% had an EU nationality and 8% had a non-EU nationality.

## Qualifiers

- Of the 4,250 leavers from social work courses in 2018/19, 3,960 (93%) achieved a qualification.
- The number of qualifying graduates has decreased by 16% from 4,700 in 2012/13 to 3,960 in 2018/19.
- The proportion of qualifiers has slightly increased from 91% in 2012/13 to 93% in 2018/19.
- Skills for Care modelling suggests that the number of leavers could be slightly lower in 2019/20, due to fewer enrolments this year.
- Postgraduate qualifiers were older than undergraduates on average, with around 54% aged 30 and above compared to 44%.

## 1. Introduction

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) were included.

This report includes student enrolments and graduates up to the academic year 2018/19 and therefore before 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 66 higher education institutions (HEIs) were included in the HESA dataset. As such, all total figures (e.g. enrolments, leavers, graduates) in this report represent the student population of these 66 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**

In previous reports, the destinations of social work graduates were analysed using data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

The DLHE 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.

The DLHE ended after collecting data from the 2016/17 graduating cohort and was replaced by the Graduate Outcomes survey, which launched in 2018, collecting data from graduates completing after August 2017.

The Graduate Outcomes survey measures outcomes at 15 months after graduation and is centrally delivered and quality checked by HESA.

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.

The government have continued to fund social work Teaching Partnerships (comprised of employers and HEI's), providing further resources and focussed work aimed at improving the quality of local workforce planning and practice education among other things.

## **Social Work Apprenticeship**

A 'trailblazer' group of employers, supported by Skills for Care, have developed an integrated degree-based apprenticeship route to becoming a social worker. The Apprenticeship standard and assessment strategy have been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships. This learning programme will integrate the on-programme learning and assessment with the independent 'end point' assessment made at the end of the apprenticeship. For more information please visit:

[www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/social-worker-degree/](http://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/social-worker-degree/)

This apprenticeship was approved for delivery in November 2018 and make up part of the enrolment's figures for 2018/19 shown in this report. There were 163 starts into this apprenticeship in 2018/19 and 660 starts in 2019/20. For more on social care apprenticeships, please visit <http://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 be separated 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 and the Department for Education.

**Frontline (463 starts in 2020):** 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. The largest increase by far was in July 2017, in which there were 82% more entrants than the previous year, where usually there are around 20% more each year.

In total there have been 1,211 graduates from the Frontline programme from a population of 1,392 entrants up to cohort 6.

**Step Up to Social Work (686 starts in 2020):** 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 686 in January 2020.

There have been 1,656 graduates from the Step Up to Social Work programme from a population of 1,744 entrants up to cohort 5.

The Department for Education found that the retention rate of cohort 1 of the Step Up to Social Work programme was 85% three years after qualifying, and 80% for those in cohort 2<sup>1</sup>.

**Think Ahead (109 starts in 2020):** 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 109 in July 2020. From the initial cohort, 93% qualified as social workers and this has hardly varied up

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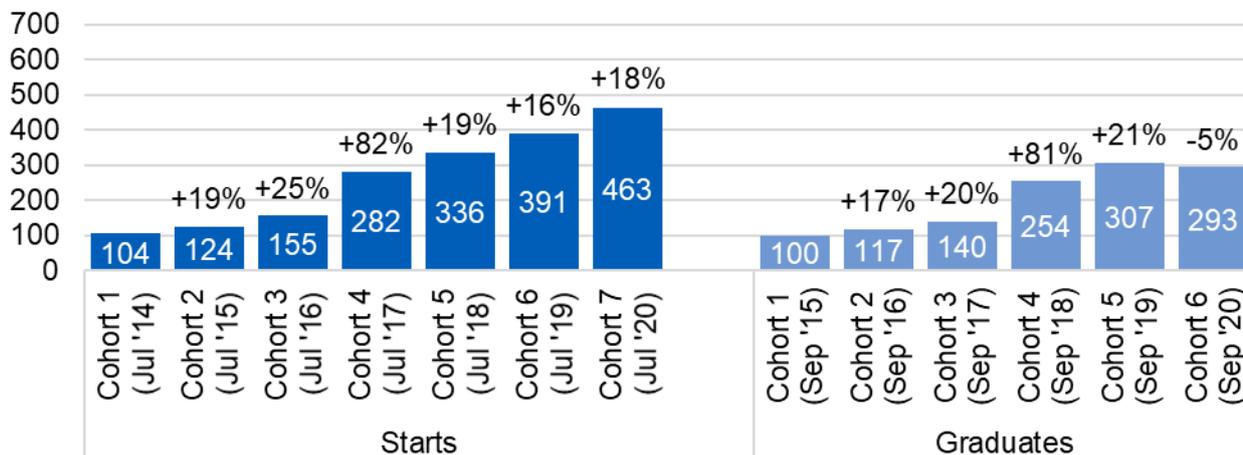
<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of Step Up to Social Work, Cohorts 1 and 2: 3-years and 5-years on. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/step-up-to-social-work-evaluation-after-3-and-5-years> - December 2018

to cohort 4 in July 2019 (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.

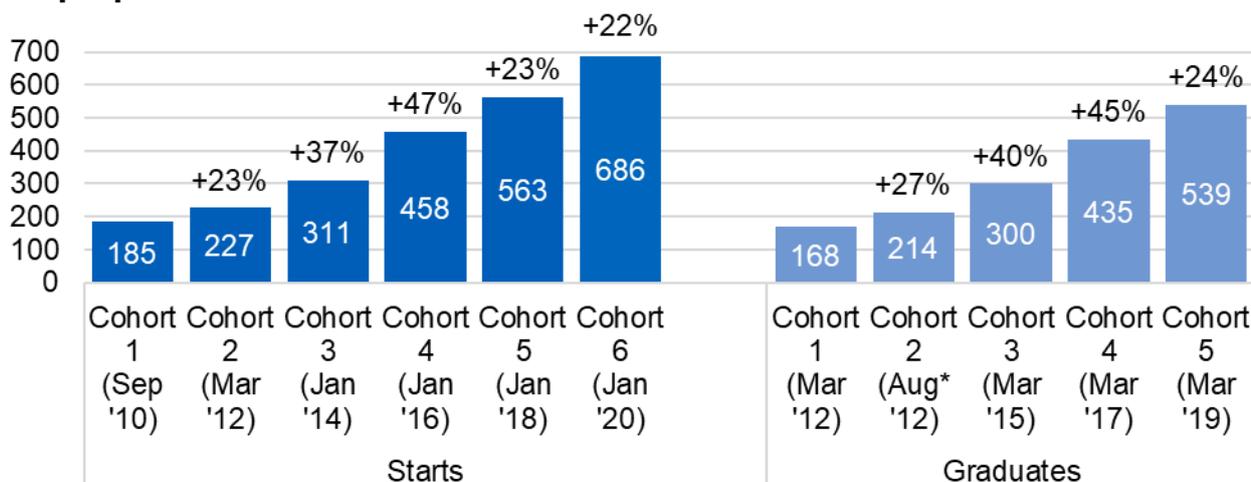
### Chart 1. Number of starts and graduates from Frontline, Step Up to Social Work and Think Ahead graduate schemes

Source: Department for Education, Think Ahead

#### Frontline



#### Step Up to Social Work



\*Precise date for cohort 2 of Step Up to Social Work not available

#### Think Ahead

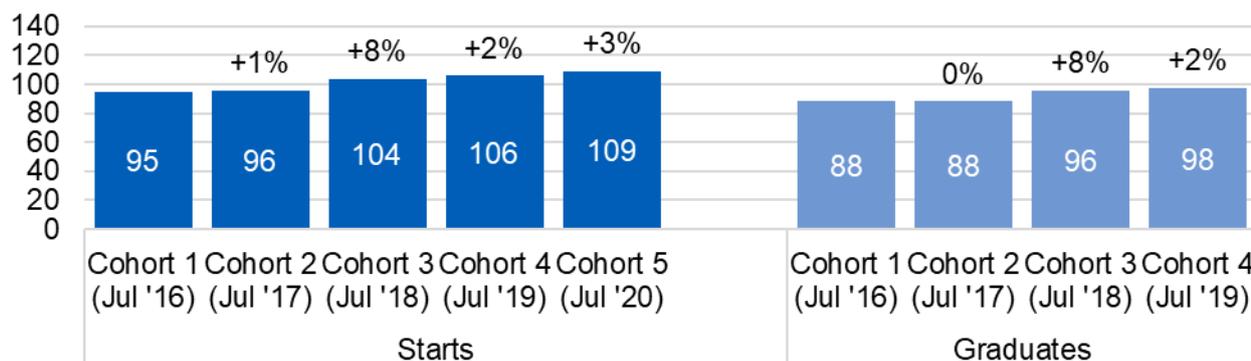


Chart 2 below shows the proportion of graduate scheme starts out of all postgraduate enrolments. The number of graduate scheme enrolments, provided by each organisation, were subtracted from the number of postgraduate enrolments shown in the HESA student record, and it is assumed all graduate scheme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

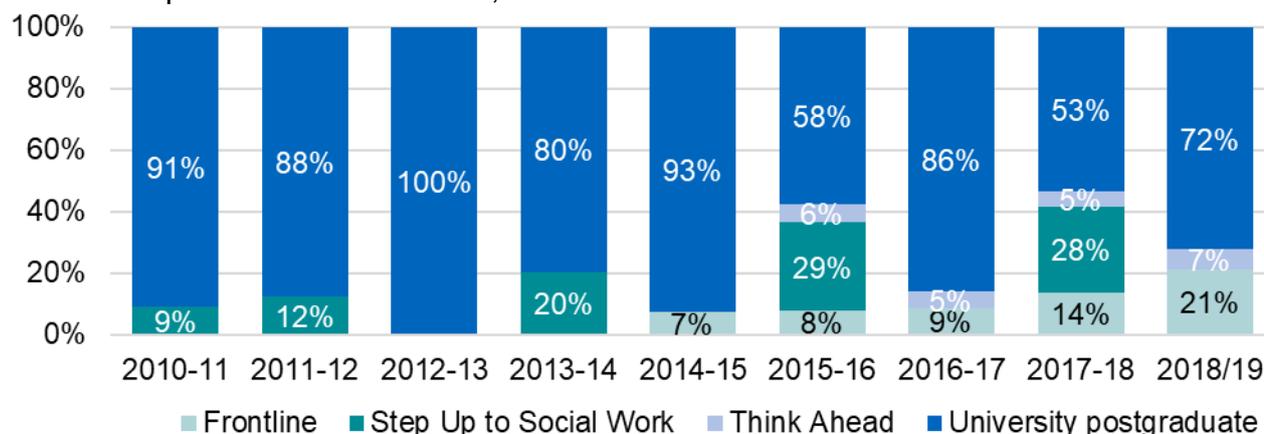
Entrants into the Step Up to Social Work programme began in September 2010, then March 2012 for cohort 2, then in January for each subsequent cohort.

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 a third of postgraduate enrolments in the academic years 2015/16 and 2017/18 (intake is every two years). In 2018/19, the Think Ahead programme accounted for 7% of enrolments whilst Frontline accounted for 21%.

## Chart 2. Proportion of postgraduate and graduate scheme enrolments, 2010/11 to 2018/19

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



## Funding

On the Frontline and Think Ahead graduate schemes, trainee’s qualification fees are paid for and they also receive a tax-free bursary of between £18,000 and £20,000 (depending on their location) for Frontline<sup>2</sup> and £17,200 to £19,100<sup>3</sup> for Think Ahead. In the second year of Frontline and Think Ahead trainees receive a newly qualified social worker salary (£21,000 to £30,000) rather than a bursary. Step Up to Social Work participants receive a bursary of £19,833<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Frontline Bursary and financial guidance – Frontline, 2019 - <https://thefrontline.org.uk/faqs/how-much-will-i-be-paid/>

<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-information-for-applicants#bursary>

For comparison, students on traditional undergraduate social work courses can receive a basic bursary (non-means tested) of between £3,362.50 outside London and £3,762.50 inside London.

Postgraduate students can receive the basic bursary as well as an income assessed bursary of between £2,721 outside London and £4,201 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>.

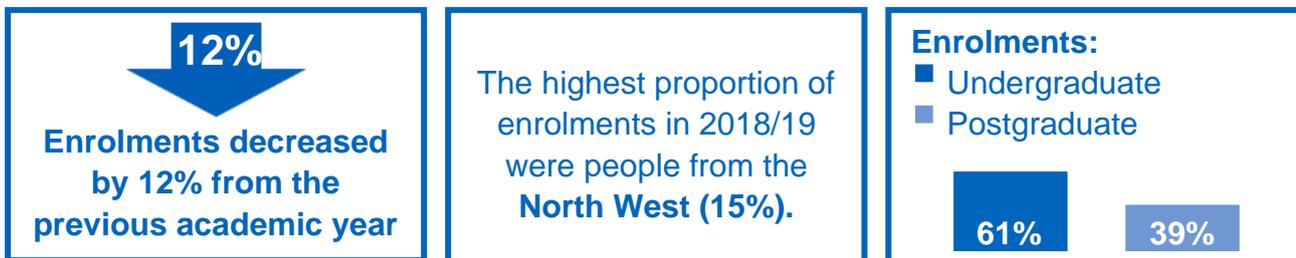
Skills for Care plans to monitor the impact of the increasing numbers of students going through graduate entry schemes and the different funding models available.

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<sup>5</sup> Your Guide to Social Work Bursaries – NHS, 2018/19 - <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Your%20guide%20to%20Social%20Work%20Bursaries%202018-19%20%28V1%29%2007.2018.pdf>

## 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 HCPC (subsequently Social Work England) 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 2018/19.



In 2018/19 there were around 4,140 enrolments onto courses that could lead to social worker registration. Undergraduate courses made up 61% of these enrolments and 39% were postgraduate courses.

The number of enrolments has decreased by an average of 3% since 2009/10, however this has varied over time. The sharpest decline was between 2010/11 and 2012/13 when enrolments decreased by 12% and 9% consecutively. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18, enrolments were more stable at around 4,600, but in 2018/19 there was another sharp decrease of 12%.

**Chart 3. Number of enrolments between 2009/10 and 2018/19**

Source. HESA student record

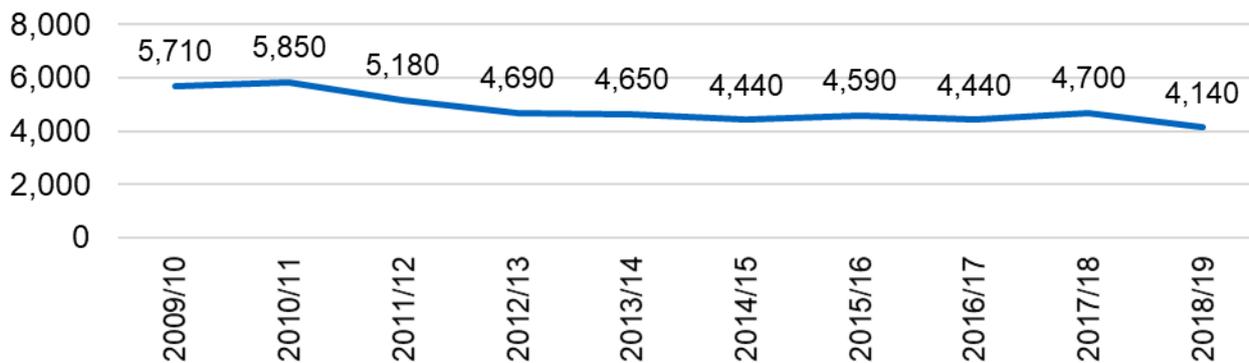
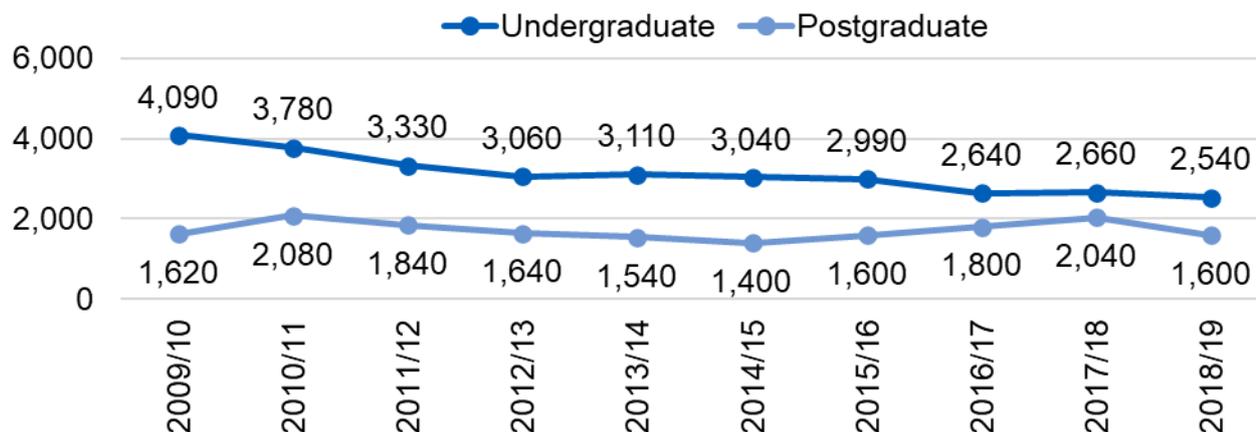


Chart 4 below compares enrolments between undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses. Undergraduate enrolments have decreased each year by an average of 5%. Postgraduate enrolments also decreased between 2010/11 and 2014/15 by around 32%, but the trend then changes to consecutive increases up to 2017/18, increasing by 45%. In 2018/19, postgraduate enrolments fell by around 400 (22%) whereas the amount for undergraduates was relatively similar to the previous year.

**Chart 4. Enrolments by course level, 2009/10 to 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record



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.

The reason for the decrease in postgraduate enrolments in 2018/19 is as yet unclear, we will continue to monitor this trend in the future.

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.

Chart 5 shows the proportion of enrolments in undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses by the student's home region. Undergraduate enrolments were more evenly dispersed geographically than postgraduate enrolments. Postgraduate enrolments showed a greater variation between regions as almost a fifth of enrolments were students from the North West (17%) and the same proportion were from London.

**Chart 5. Proportion of enrolments by home region and degree level**

Source: HESA student record

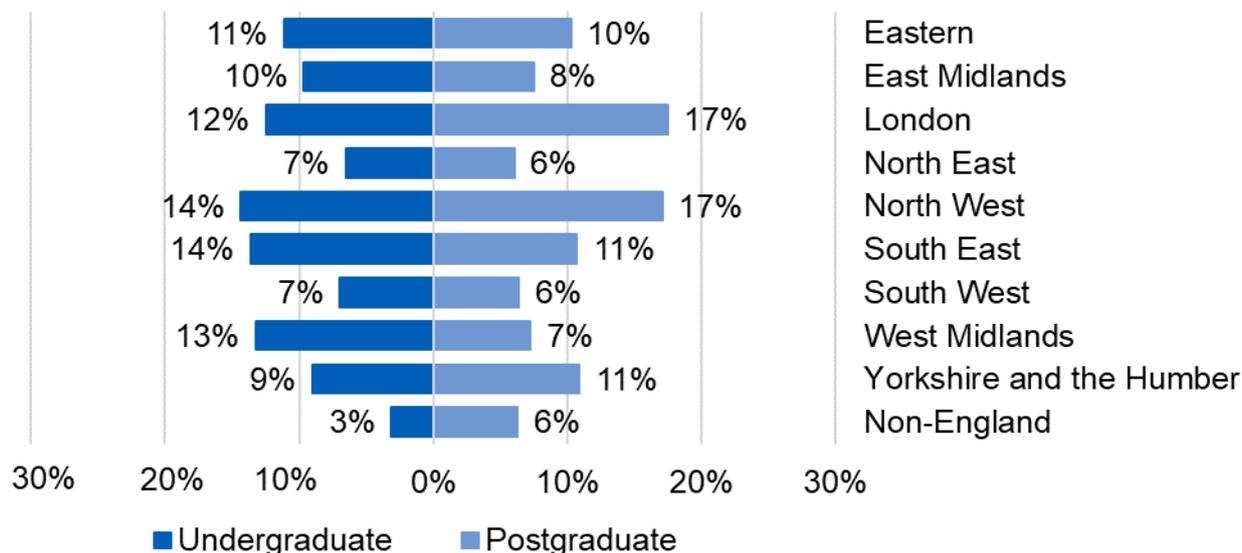
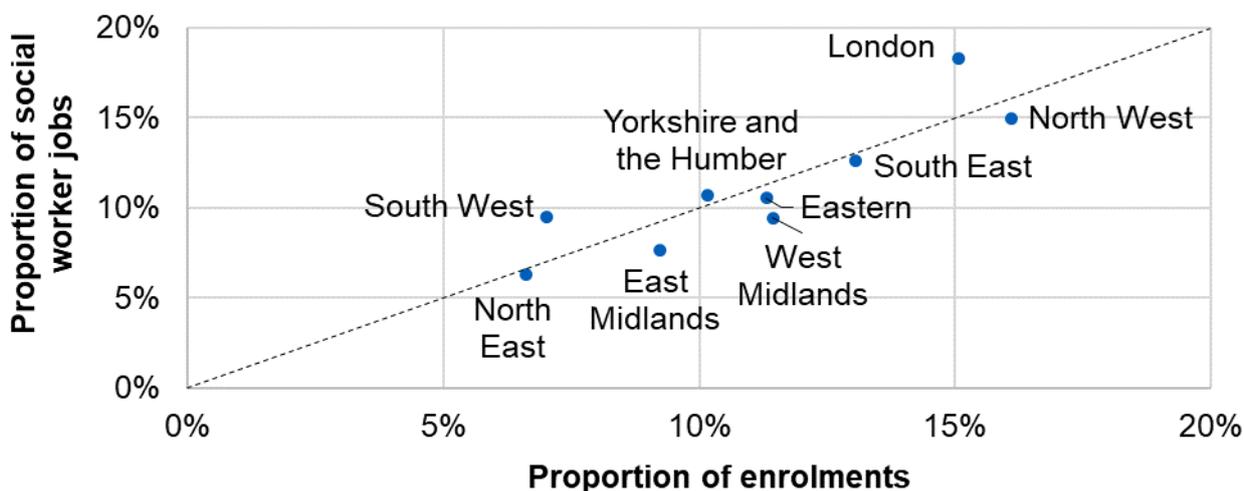


Chart 6 compares the proportion of enrolments in social work education to social worker jobs in the adult social care sector by their home region prior to enrolment. This allows a comparison between supply and demand of future graduates against current job and may help to determine if there is an over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

It is acknowledged that the number of vacancies and changes in the number of jobs are not included in this. It should also be noted that information includes **adult social care jobs 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 jobs by home region**

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates 2019/20



There was a strong correlation between social work enrolments and jobs in the workforce. Those 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 jobs. This may suggest employers may have to find social work graduates from other regions to meet demand.

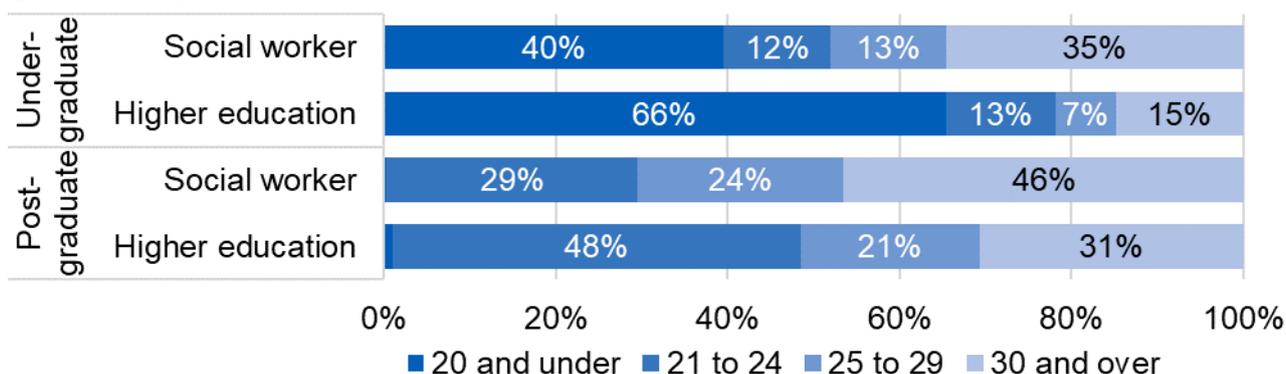
Chart 7 below compares the proportion of enrolments by age group between social work and all higher education enrolments. Students enrolling on undergraduate social work courses were older than the general undergraduate population, as 35% of social work undergraduates were aged 30 and over compared to 15% on all higher education courses.

Students enrolling on postgraduate social work courses were also older than their counterparts on other courses. Around 46% of social work postgraduates were aged 30 and over, compared to 31% within all higher education courses.

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 31.7 years old.

### Chart 7. Enrolments by age group and degree level, 2018/19

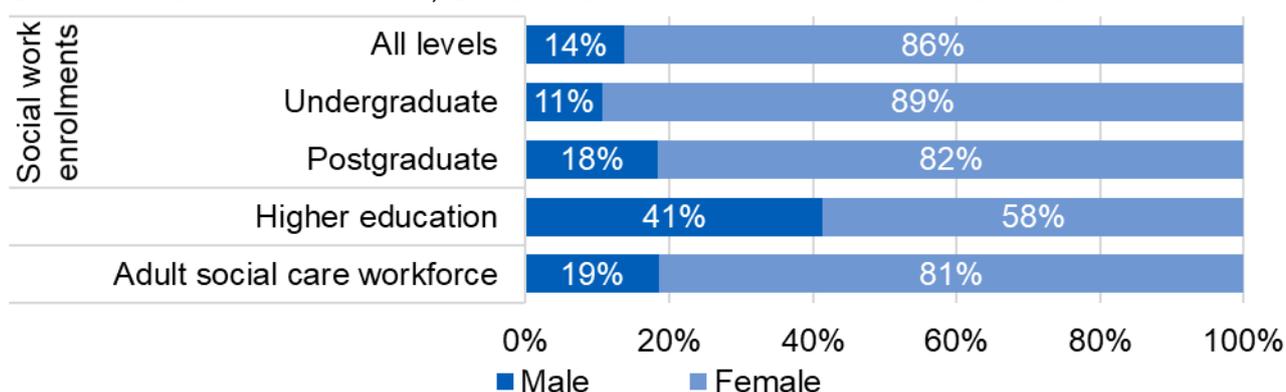
Source: HESA student record



Most people enrolling on social work courses in 2018/19 identified as female (86%). This proportion has been steadily increasing over time from 84% in 2009/10. The proportion of females enrolling into social work courses was much higher than the equivalent proportion from higher education generally (58%), although it was in line with the gender distribution across the adult social care workforce in which 81% of social workers were female.

### Chart 8. Enrolments by gender compared to all higher education and adult social care workforce

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates 2019/20



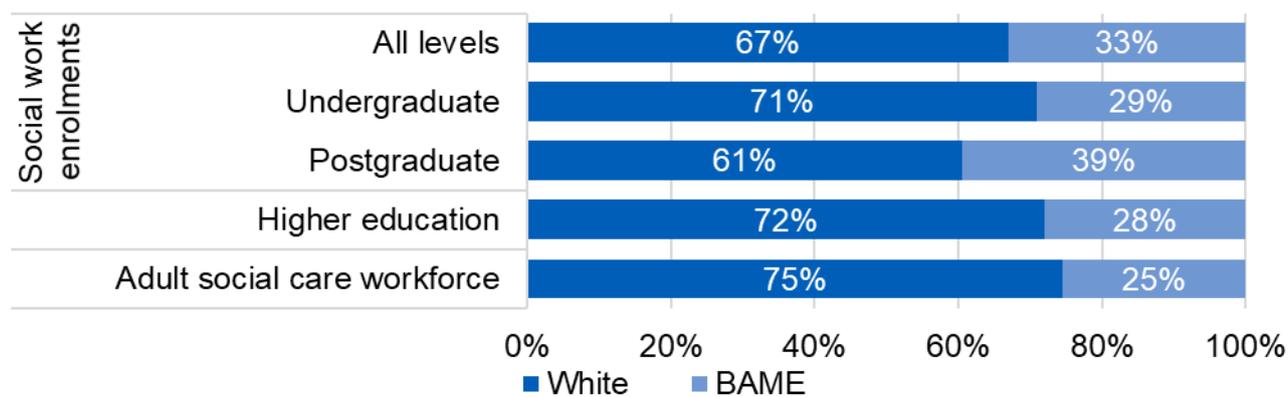
The ethnicity distribution of students enrolled on social work courses in 2018/19 was 67% White and 33% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). This ethnic diversity has increased over time as the proportion of BAME students has increased from 29% in 2009/10. Within this period, there was also an increase in the ethnic diversity of social workers in the adult social care workforce, which increased from 20% BAME in 2012/13 to 25% in 2018/19.

For more information about the adult social care workforce, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof).

Social work enrolments had a greater proportion of people from BAME backgrounds than the average across all higher education (28% BAME) as well as social workers across the adult social care workforce (25% BAME).

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

Source: HESA student record, Skills for Care workforce estimates



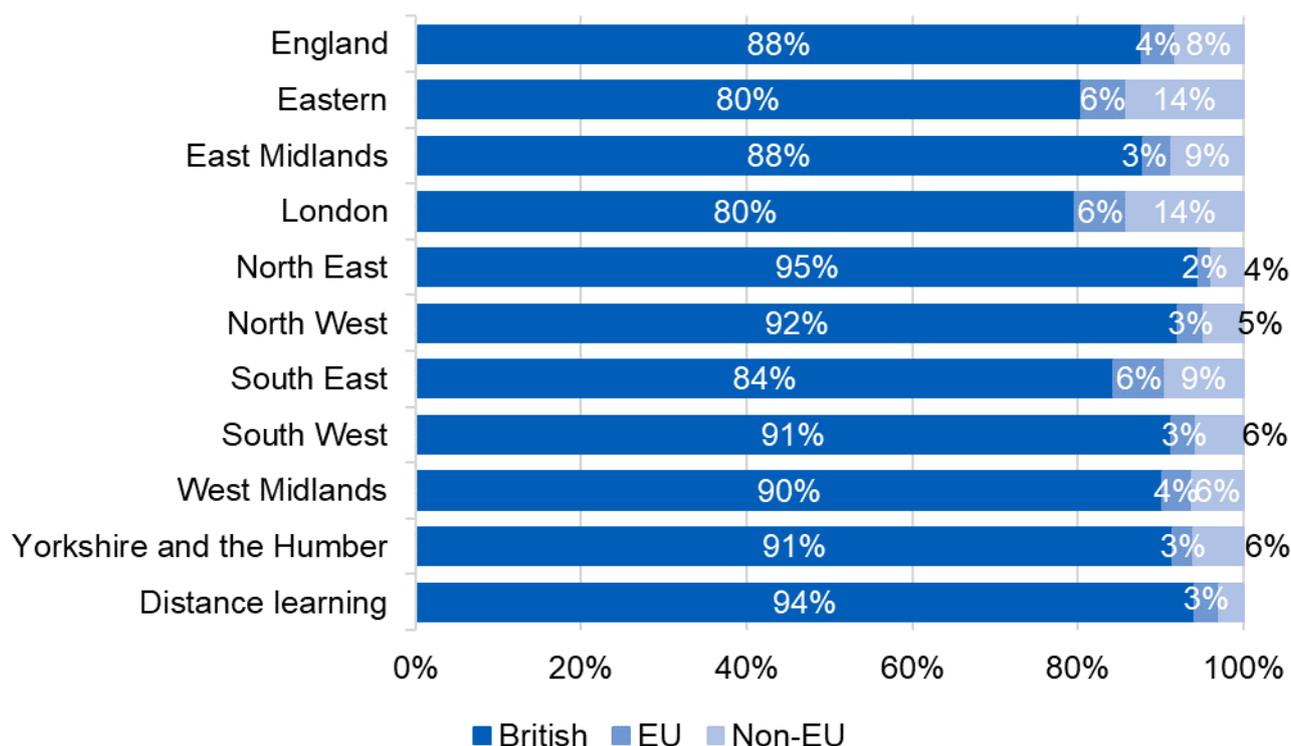
In 2018/19, 18% of people enrolling considered themselves to have a disability and this proportion has risen from 12% of enrolments in 2009/10.

Of enrolments on social work courses in 2018/19, 88% of students had a British nationality, 4% had an EU nationality and 8% 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 14% from non-EU nationalities.

The North East had the highest proportion of enrolments from people with British nationalities (95%). This regional variation follows the nationality profile of people working in the adult social care sector where the proportion of non-British workers was also highest in London.

### 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 can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme and acquire either ‘Settled’ or ‘Pre-settled’ status depending on whether or not they have accrued five years of continuous residency in the UK.

In Summer 2021, the Government will launch the Graduate Route for non-UK students. This route will be 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>.

### 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.

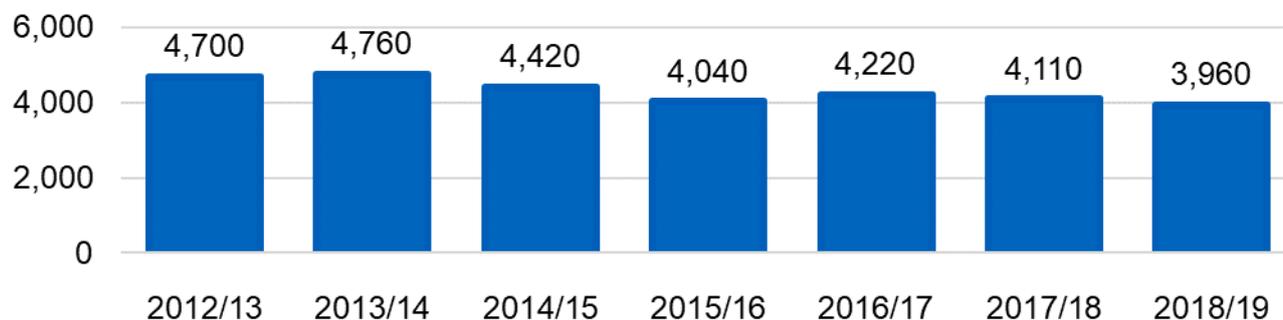


In 2018/19 there were around 4,250 leavers from higher education social work courses. Of these, 52% achieved an undergraduate qualification, 41% achieved a postgraduate qualification and 7% left without obtaining a qualification. This equated to around 3,960 qualifying leavers.

The number of qualifying graduates has decreased by an average of 2.7% each year since 2012/13 when there were around 4,700. In 2018/19, there were around 3.8% fewer qualifying graduates compared to the previous year.

**Chart 11. Number of qualifying graduates, 2012/13 to 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record. Values have been rounded.



Since 2012/13 the proportion of students that left without obtaining a qualification has decreased from 9% to 7% in 2018/19. Undergraduates have made up a decreasing proportion of qualifiers whereas postgraduates have accounted for more, increasing by 14 percentage points, between 2012/13 and 2018/19. Chart 12 highlights these changes. This trend is a result of the decreasing enrolment numbers observed in Section 2.

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. Given the trend in enrolments, Skills for Care modelling forecasts that the number of qualifiers will continue to decrease in 2019/20, when the data becomes available.

### Chart 12. Course leavers by qualification obtained, 2012/13 to 2018/19

Source: HESA student record

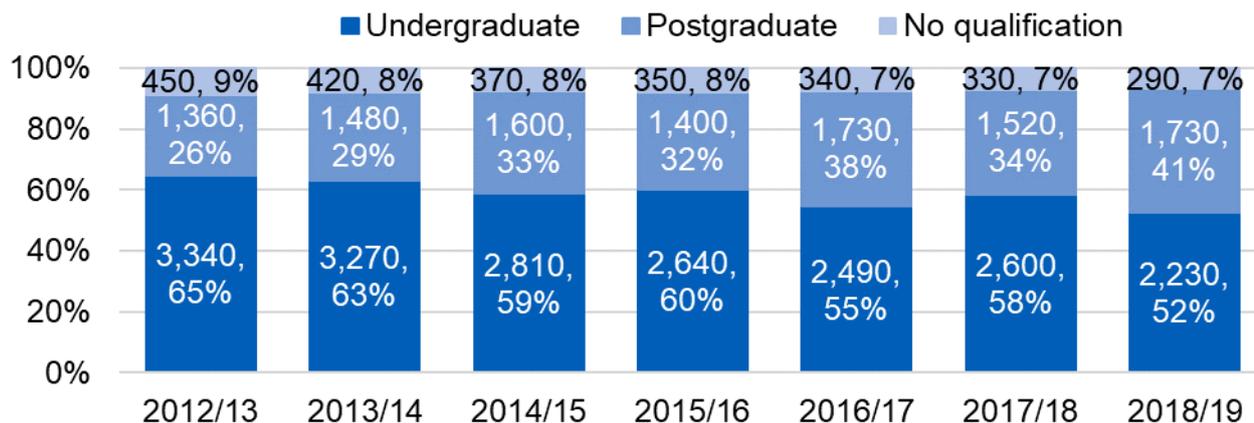


Chart 13 below shows the proportion of leavers that achieved their course aim (the type of course they started) between 2011/12 and 2018/19. In 2018/19, the proportion of undergraduates that achieved their course aim was 91% which was slightly lower than postgraduates at 96%. For each group, there was very little variance over time.

### Chart 13. Achievement rate of leavers by course aim, 2012/13 to 2018/19

Source: HESA student record

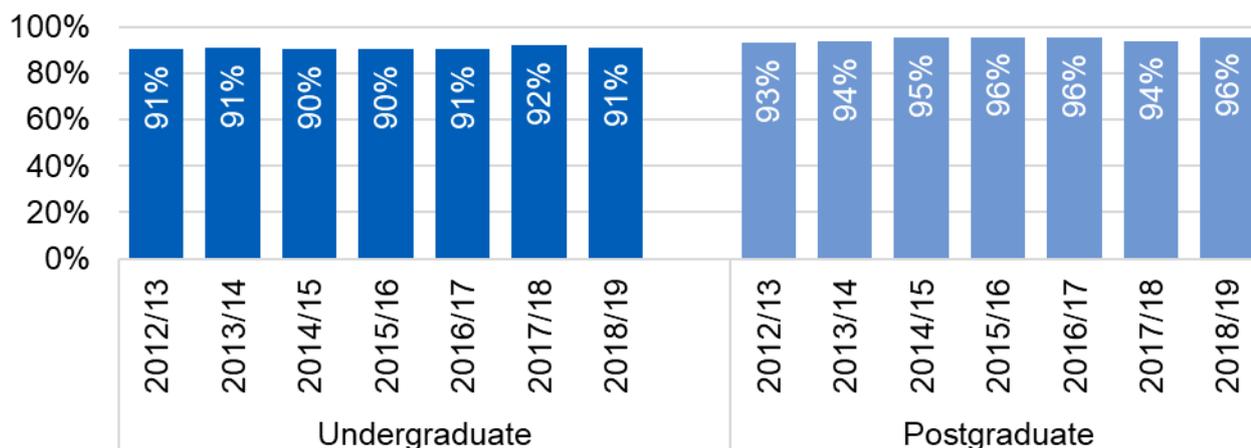
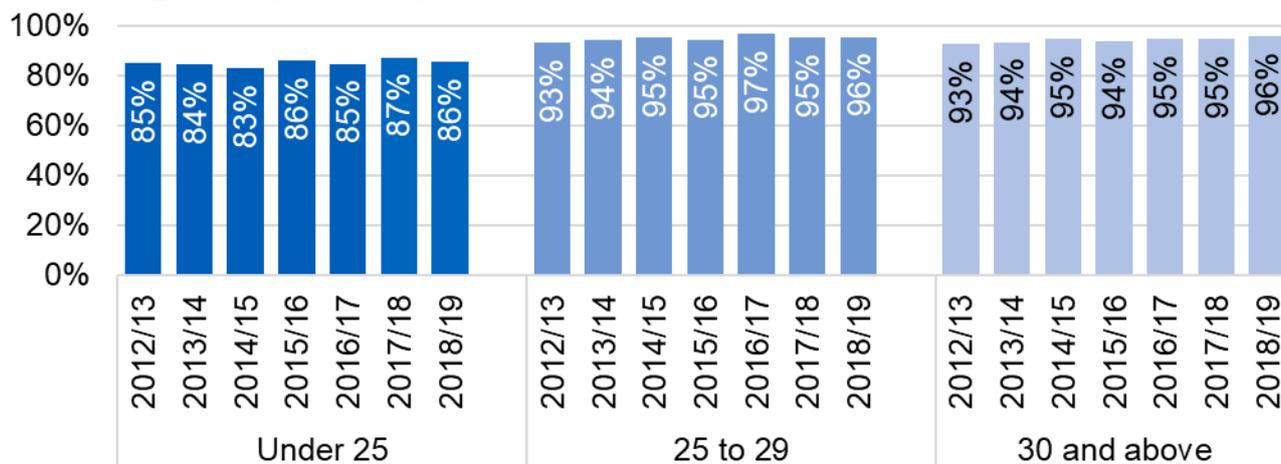


Chart 14 shows the proportion of leavers that achieved their course aim by age group. Those aged under 25 were less likely to leave higher education with a qualification than those in older age groups. In 2018/19, 86% of those aged under 25 left having qualified compared to 96% of those aged 25 to 29 and 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. Leavers aged under 25 showed more variability between years than older age groups, but these ranged by three percentage points over the period. The average age of an undergraduate qualifier was 31 years old and 34 years old for postgraduate qualifiers.

**Chart 14. Proportion of qualifying leavers by age group, 2012/13 to 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record



The qualification rate of leavers varied little by gender. In 2018/19, students identifying as female had a slightly higher qualification rate (93%) than males (92%). These rates showed little variation over time.

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 increased from 91% in 2012/13 to 93% in 2018/19, whereas the qualification rate of non-British students showed more variability over time. Please note that 90% of leavers were British, 3% had an EU nationality and 7% had a non-EU nationality.

**Chart 15. Proportion of qualifying leavers by nationality, 2012/13 to 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record

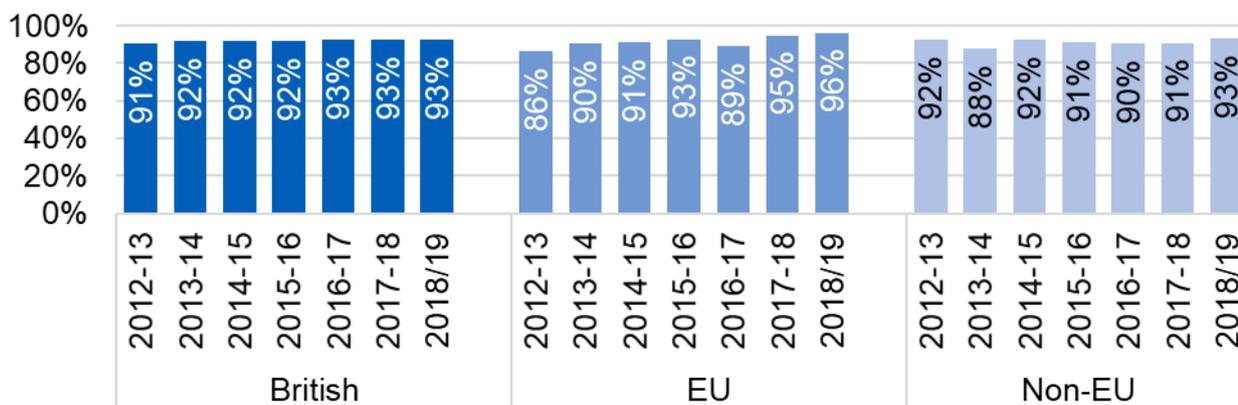
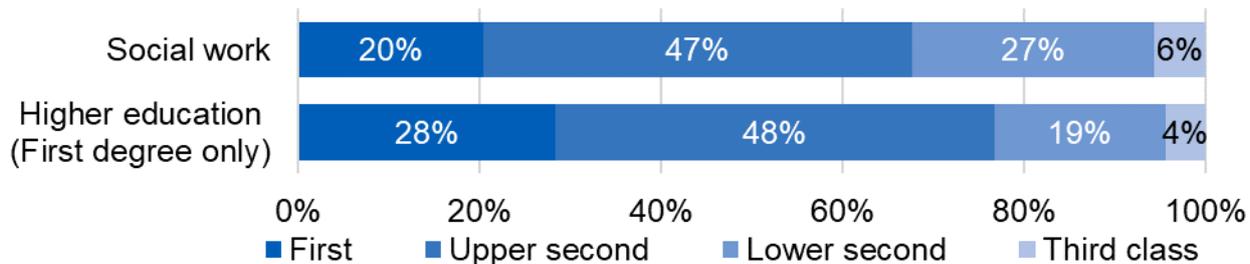


Chart 16 shows the classification of degree achieved by qualifying leavers from undergraduate social work courses. The majority of qualifiers in 2018/19 had achieved an upper second-class honours degree (47%), followed by those achieving a lower second-class honours degree (27%) and those having achieved a first-class degree (20%). Social work students were less likely to achieve a first-class undergraduate degree than the average across all higher education (28%).

**Chart 16. Undergraduate qualifiers by classification of degree, 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record

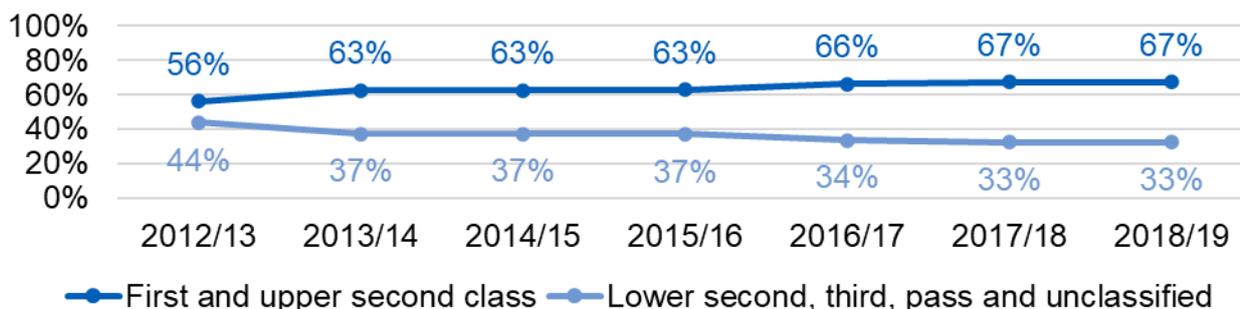


The proportion of undergraduates achieving a first or upper second-class degree increased in recent years. This pattern is also seen across higher education. Social work has historically had slightly lower proportions of students achieving a first or upper second-class degree compared to all higher education.

Chart 17 shows that the degree classifications achieved for social work undergraduates increased in 2013/14 then remained stable until 2016/17 when it increased again.

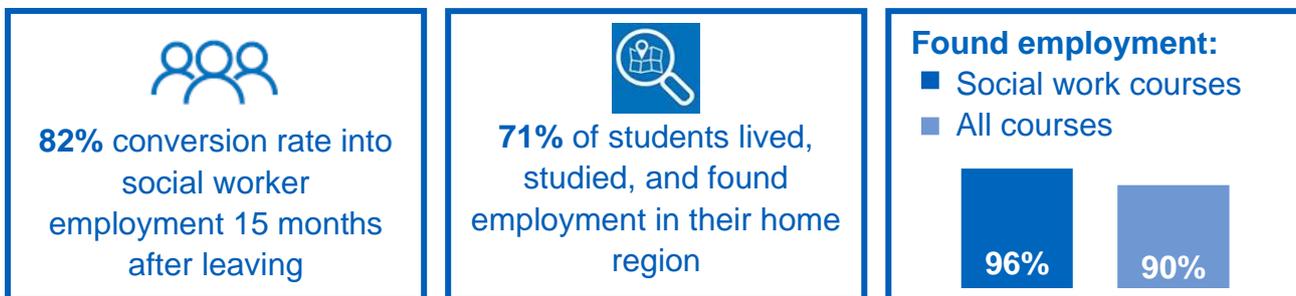
**Chart 17. Undergraduate qualifiers by classification of degree, 2012/13 to 2018/19**

Source: HESA student record



## 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 2017/18, 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 4,110 qualifying social work graduates from 2017/18, we found a survey response rate of 53% for a graduate's job and 55% 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 2017/18, 82% of graduates went on to become social workers, and 10% went into another role in social care. A further 1% obtained roles in the health sector and the remaining 7% 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

Source: HESA student record and Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey

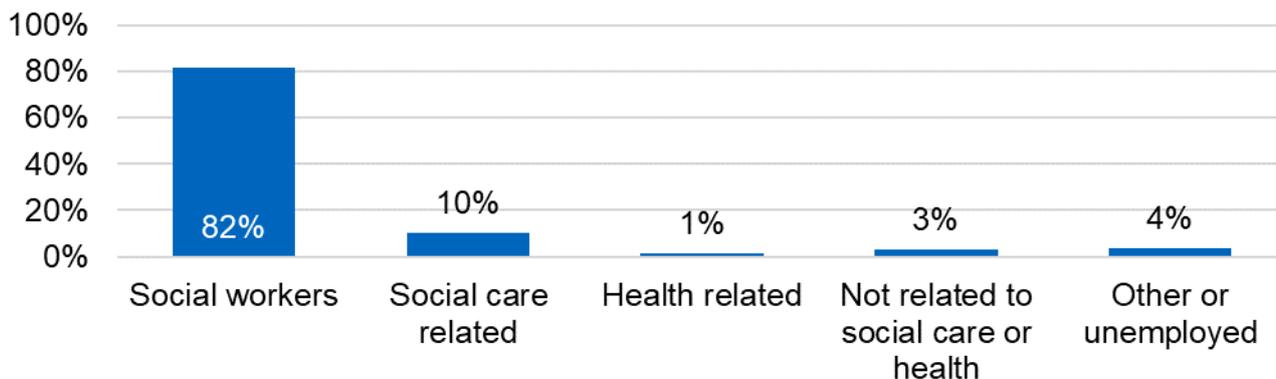


Table 1 below shows the conversion rate by the region of the higher education institute. Graduates from the West Midlands had the highest conversion rate into social workers (88%), and the North West region had the lowest at 76%.

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

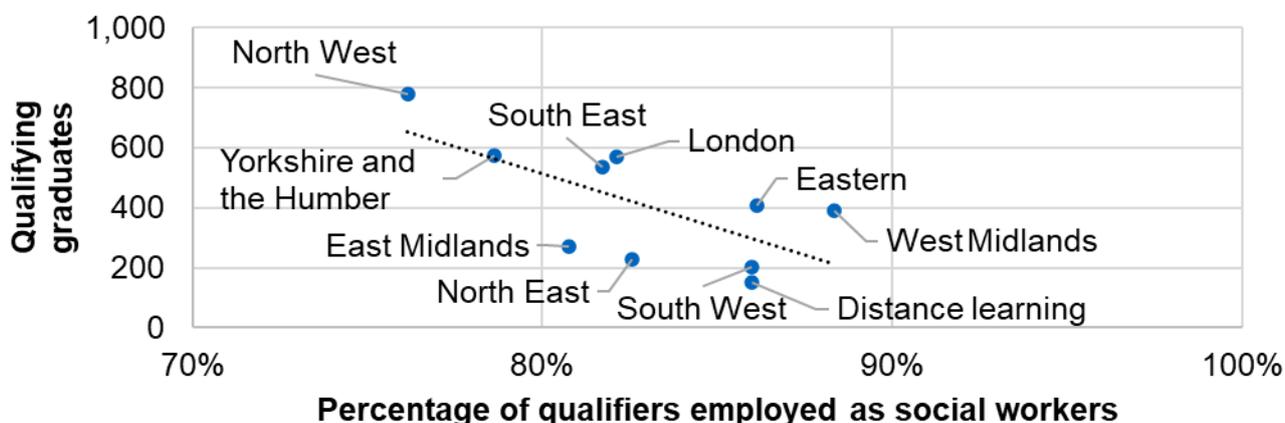
Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

	2017/18	
	Graduates	Conversion rate
<b>England</b>	<b>4,110</b>	<b>82%</b>
Eastern	410	86%
East Midlands	270	80%
London	570	82%
North East	230	83%
North West	780	76%
South East	540	82%
South West	200	86%
West Midlands	390	88%
Yorkshire and the Humber	580	79%
<i>Distance learning</i>	150	86%

Chart 19 below shows the relationship between the number of qualifying graduates and conversion rate of graduates into social workers. On the far left of the chart is the North West, where qualifying graduates are high, and the conversion rate is relatively low.

**Chart 19. Number of graduates and proportion working as social workers 15 months after graduation by HEI region, 2017/18**

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



Those in regions with larger numbers of graduates were less likely to find employment in social work. This may be due to a supply and demand mismatch at regional or local level, whereby the proportion of all newly qualified social workers (who are available to take up employment) may be greater in one area than the relative demand. Further analysis in this report shows some graduates move between regions to find work as a social worker (Chart 22) and some find employment outside of the sector (Chart 18).

The funding of Social Work Teaching Partnerships by Government is seen as 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.

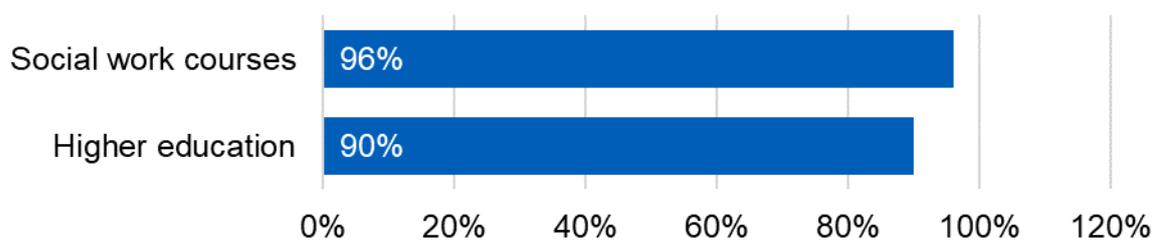
This 'localised' partnership approach will likely address the regional variances in the supply of social work graduates, although careful national coordination will be necessary to avoid shortages caused by any reduction in numbers trained in areas which traditionally export social work graduates.

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 2017/18, 88% of qualifying social work graduates were working and a further 8% were combining work with studying 15 months after leaving their course.

This proportion was slightly higher than the 90% 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 work graduates may have a broader range of applications to employers, and that social work 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, 2017/18**

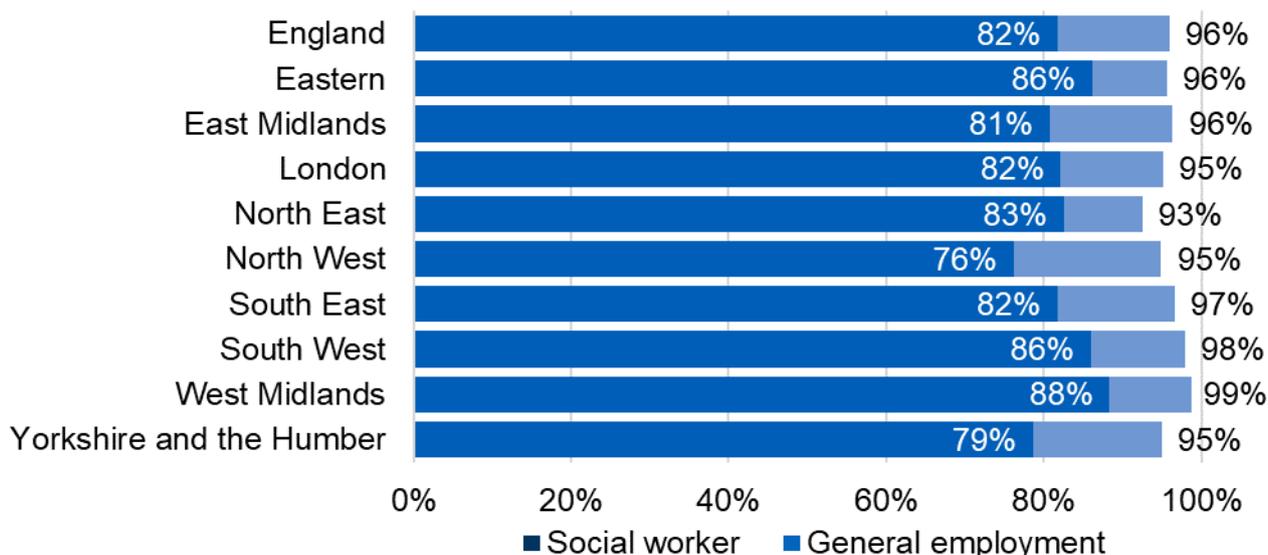
Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey



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. The general employment of social work graduates was shown to vary less than the proportion that are employed as social workers. Again, this suggests that social work graduates are well equipped to find employment if they are unable or do not choose to find a social worker role.

### Chart 21. Proportion of social work graduates in employment 15 months after graduation by HEI region, 2017/18

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 1,520 postgraduate qualifiers in 2017/18, around 84% were employed as social workers 15 months after graduating. This compares to 81% of the 2,600 undergraduates. These figures demonstrate that postgraduate qualifiers have a slightly higher employability than undergraduates.

**Table 2. Occupation (category of role) of social work graduates 15 months after graduation by qualification level, 2017/18**

Source: HESA Graduate Outcomes survey

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
<b>All qualifiers</b>	<b>2,600</b>	<b>1,520</b>
Social workers	81%	84%
Care/health related	13%	10%
Not working/working in a non-care related field	7%	6%

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.

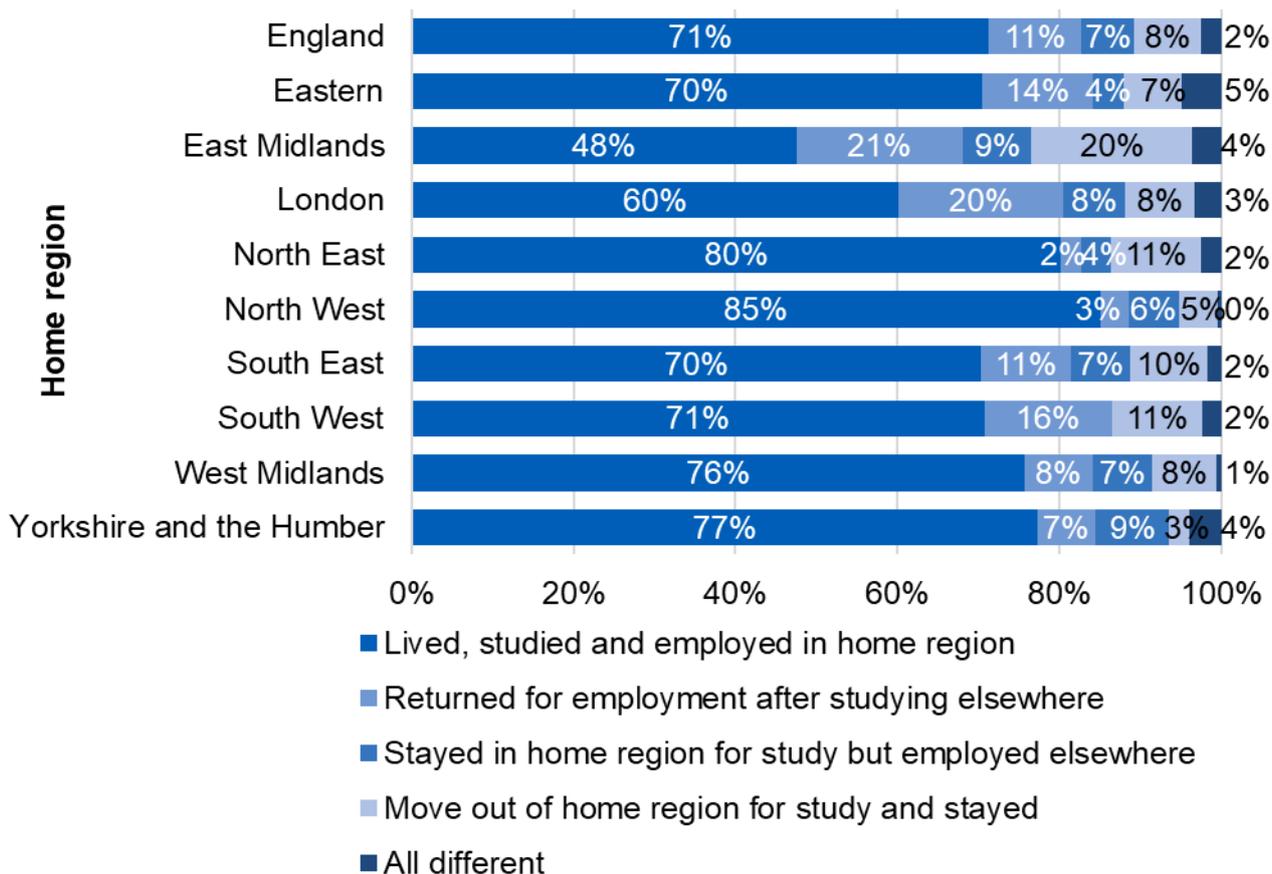
These figures may be useful in terms of workforce planning. Across England, the majority of graduates (71%) had remained in their home region for study and employment after leaving. Therefore, the impact is being made where the investment is being applied.

In most regions the second highest proportion were graduates finding employment in their home region after studying elsewhere, therefore the skills they have acquired are pulled back into their home region. This group was shown to be lower in the North East and North West regions with 2% and 3% of graduates respectively.

Relatively few graduates stayed in their home region for studying but found employment in another region. The proportion of those that move out of their home region to study and stay there into employment were much higher in the East Midlands (20%) and much lower in Yorkshire and the Humber region (3%).

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

Source: HESA student record and Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey



## 5. Social worker jobs 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 jobs by sector between 2013 and 2019. The number of social workers employed by local authorities has increased by 22% over the period from 41,390 in 2013 to 50,320 in 2019. Those working in adult social services increased by 6% whereas those working in children's services increased by 32%.

NHS Digital data shows there were around 2,800 social workers employed by the NHS (including adults and children's services) which has increased by 84% since 2013. 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 workers job by sector, 2013 to 2019**

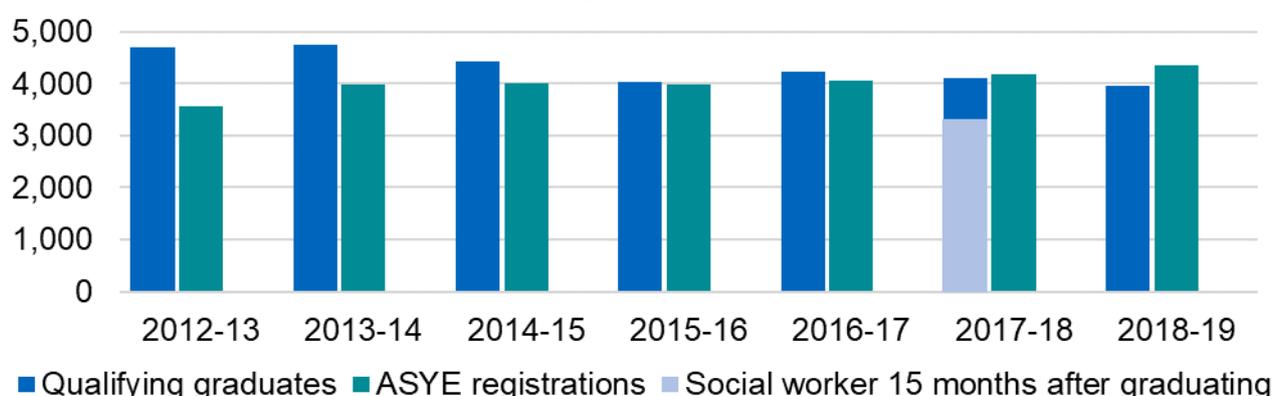
Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2019/20, DfE February 2020. Values have been rounded.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Local authority	41,390	42,510	44,670	46,030	46,870	48,720	50,320
Local authority - adults' services	16,500	15,700	16,100	16,100	16,200	17,000	17,400
Local authority - children's services	24,890	26,810	28,570	29,930	30,670	31,720	32,920
Independent sector - adults' services	1,300	950	1,100	950	950	950	1,900
NHS	1,500	1,700	1,800	2,100	2,400	2,600	2,800

Chart 23 shows the number of qualifying graduates, the number of ASYE registrations and the number of surveyed graduates working as social workers 15 months after graduating. 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 4,340 (22%) between 2012/13 and 2018/19. This suggests that the demand for newly qualified social workers has increased significantly over the period. 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 16%. 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, however if supply continues to decrease then ASYE registrations could start to fall and no longer meet the demand for new social workers.

## 6. Acknowledgment of data coverage

The data presented in this report was provided by HESA and covers enrolments in social work courses in 2018/17 and the outcomes of graduates from 2017/18. The figures in this report include enrolments and leavers from designated social worker education courses that were regulated and can lead to registration with the Health and Care Professions Council in 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.

## 7. Workforce intelligence publications and data uses

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.

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

This report 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 report, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure).

*Latest version, August 2020*



### Regional reports



These nine regional reports provide an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region. Each of these nine reports examines regional findings in light of the findings for England as a whole, which are presented in this report. To access these, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports).

*Latest version, October 2020*

## **Local authority area reports**

This collection of summary reports gives an overview of the adult social care sector and workforce in each of the 151 local authority areas in England. They are accompanied by two interactive visualisations which look at individual areas in greater detail. To access these reports, please visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries).

*Latest version, October 2020.*