



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**  
Social Care **Wales**



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# **Quality assurance of social work education and training annual report**

Academic year: 2020 to 2021



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### Other formats:

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## Introduction

Social work education has experienced an unprecedented year due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This has affected all educational programmes and everyone's lives.

Social work programmes needed to continually adapt to meet the challenges of the pandemic. Programmes have been provided through blended learning, with teaching taking place online and, on rare occasions, face-to-face, in line with Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidelines.

Placements also took place virtually, but this varied across agencies and some students were able to attend placements and meet people face-to-face. Partnership working has been essential for the continuation of the programmes in 2020 to 2021. Associated partners have engaged and worked with the programmes to support and promote student well-being.

We have worked with and supported programmes to make sure they were well-placed to respond to developments during the pandemic. During this crisis, we wanted students to continue to have the best opportunity to learn and develop as professional social workers, while prioritising their health, well-being and safety.

The annual monitoring process for this period has taken into account the additional activities programmes needed to put in place because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our quality assurance of all programmes has therefore been based on scrutinising the information given to us as part of the annual monitoring arrangements. If we needed additional information, we followed up with virtual meetings or telephone calls.

## 1. What we do

A part of our role is to make sure the social care workforce is suitably trained and fit to practise, so the public can have confidence that social care workers are highly-skilled to do their jobs.

We know that high-quality learning equips and supports people, so they have the right knowledge, skills, understanding and approach to practise. As the regulator of social work education and training in Wales, we set and promote standards for social work education and training. These are described in *The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2018* and *The Approval and Visiting of Post Qualifying Courses for Social (Wales) Rules 2018*<sup>1</sup>.

We also have a responsibility to make sure enough social workers are being trained. We work with employers and universities to assess how many social workers we'll need in the future and use this information to decide how many training places are needed.

### Our approach to regulating social work education and training

There are five principles that underpin our approach to the regulation of social work education and training:

**Consistency** We are consistent in the way we interpret and apply the rules and requirements that set the standards for professional social work training.

**Transparency** We have a transparent system for approving and quality assuring programmes. We will share the outcome of our regulatory activity with learning providers within the stated timeframes and publish an annual quality assurance report.

**A commitment to continuous improvement** Our quality assurance processes will focus on how approved programmes can show continuous improvement and a commitment to improving quality. We will also regularly review regulation processes to make sure they remain fit-for-purpose and reflect best practice.

**Proportionality** We do not want to place an unnecessary burden on programme providers to meet regulatory requirements. To avoid duplicating work, we will use the programmes' own quality assurance systems where possible.

**Inclusivity** We involve students, employers, people who receive care and support, and carers in the quality assurance of approved social work programmes. This helps us make sure we consider a range of perspectives when we scrutinise programmes.

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1. Available at: [socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/regulation-of-social-work-education-and-training](https://socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/regulation-of-social-work-education-and-training)

## Our work

Our work involves approving, monitoring, reviewing and inspecting programmes at qualifying and post-qualifying levels. All courses must meet required standards, so they result in confident and competent practitioners.

We continue to approve:

- eight social work degree programmes provided at seven universities.

These include:

- five undergraduate programmes (one of which is a distance-learning route)
- three master's level programmes.

The Experienced Practice in Social Work, Senior Practice in Social Work and Consultant Social Work programmes were provided for the final time this year. These were due to finish at the end of 2020, but were granted an extension because of the pandemic, so students submitting work wouldn't be disadvantaged.

We're currently working with a range of stakeholders to develop a new framework for post-qualifying programmes. This work is being carried out in consultation with social workers across Wales.

We currently approve:

- two Consolidation of Practice programmes
- five Assessing and Supervising Social Work Students programmes
- one Approved Mental Health Professional qualification (AMHP)
- one Postgraduate Certificate in Managing Practice Quality in Social Care (TMDP).

All our quality assurance activities have been carried out by desktop analysis for this period, based on the annual monitoring information submitted.

We have continued to be engaged with the Alliance as the final year of the above programmes was provided and final submissions for assignments continued to the end of September 2021.

This year we set one condition and made 15 recommendations to programmes at qualifying level.

For post-qualifying programmes, we made 17 recommendations. Two of the assessing and supervising social work students' programmes did not complete the annual monitoring review activities. One programme suspended studies because of the pandemic, so had not completed a yearly cycle. The other programme is on hold, as it was suspended last year because of a lack of uptake.

We received:

- five applications to make minor modifications to programmes so they could meet the placement requirements for the social work degree, which were disrupted by the pandemic
- we didn't receive complaints or cause for focused investigation.

We have continued to support programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic, through the partnership meetings and on a one-to-one basis when needed. We kept our flexible approach, basing our

decisions on the principles of fairness and proportionality, while making sure competency and standards weren't compromised.

We completed a review of our rules, which have been ratified. This means that if there's a national crisis in the future that's likely to affect the provision of social work degree programmes, we can change the requirements for approval of degree programmes in social work to allow students to progress.

## 2. Data analysis

As part of our annual monitoring, approved programmes must give us information about several aspects of their programme management and provision. While this informs our annual monitoring activity, it also allows us to make sure we are providing enough social work education and training places to meet the future needs of the social work workforce.

### a. Qualifying training

#### Intake

In 2020 to 2021, 360 places were offered by approved social work qualifying programmes – 72 per cent of these were initially accepted and taken up.

Figure 1 reflects the number of students who enrolled on programmes and have completed their first academic year.

**Figure 1**

Social work qualifying programmes intake										
Programme	Route	2018-19			2019-20			2020-21		
		Approved places	In-take	% of approved places taken up	Approved places	In-take	% of approved places taken up	Approved places	In-take	% of approved places taken up
Bangor University MA	2-year FT	21	22	105%	21	15	71%	21	19	90%
Cardiff University MA	2-year FT	50	48	96%	50	38	76%	50	31	62%
Swansea University MSc	2-year FT	20	19	95%	20	20	100%	20	16	80%
Cardiff Metropolitan University UG	2-year FT	39	26	67%	39	30	77%	39	25	64%
Cardiff Metropolitan University (Bridgend) UG	3-year FT	16	16	100%	16	15	100%	16	7	44%
Glyndwr University UG	3-year FT	36	36	100%	36	33	92%	36	26	72%
Open University Wales UG (distance learning)	3-6 year	48	48	100%	65	60	92%	70	70	100%

Social work qualifying programmes intake										
Swansea University UG	3-year FT	30	33	110%	30	30	100%	30	28	93%
University of South Wales UG	3-year FT	32	22	69%	35	28	80%	35	22	66%
<b>Total</b>		<b>292</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>77%</b>

During 2020 to 2021, 244 new students accessed the social work degree programmes, a decrease of 25 students on last year's figure.

This meant programmes filled 77 per cent of the 317 approved places available. This supports the feedback we received and the data we captured that showed a decline in the number of students accessing the programmes. There is a growing challenge across the UK to recruit to the profession.

We have therefore commissioned research to review the education system for social work. The aim is to give recommendations for a social work student qualifying framework through different routes that's fit for future-purpose and can inform future national policy and funding decisions.

This will cover levels of funding to support qualifying training, including:

- fees
- bursaries
- salaries for employed status routes
- incentives to train
- a revised approach to the allocation of approved qualifying social workplaces.

Social work degree intake numbers are influenced by several factors, including the:

- number and quality of applicants
- selection criteria
- capacity of programme partners to provide practice learning opportunities
- approval numbers we set.

There has been a decline in the number of students accessing the full-time academic study route. However, there's a continued increase in students seconded by employers, as part of 'grow your own' workforce development schemes through distance learning.

This year we again increased the approval number for the distance learning route to 70, to meet the demands of employers and support the recruitment of student social workers.



## Student social worker demographic profile

Figure 2 provides an overview of the demographic data we hold about the student social workers who are registered with us. It compares the four most recent cohorts of students.

The demographic profile of student social workers has been consistent in recent years, but it's encouraging that the number of men undertaking social work training has risen by 3.7 per cent over the last four student cohorts. The Welsh language ability of students who can use some / are fluent in Welsh has also increased by 6.2 per cent compared to last year.

**Figure 2**

Category	2017 to 2018 cohort	2018 to 2019 cohort	2019 to 2020 cohort	2020 to 2021 cohort
Average age	32 years	31 years	32 years	32 years
Gender				
Female	88.4%	86%	84.8%	84.7%
Male	11.6%	14%	15.2%	15.3%
Ethnicity				
Black, Asian and ethnic minorities	6.4%	6.5%	5.5%	8.3%
White	93.6%	93.6%	94.5%	91.3%
Disability	3.8%	3.4%	4.5%	5.9%
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual/Straight	94%	93.4%	95.6%	94.0%
Gay or lesbian	2.8%	4.3%	2.6%	3.0%
Bisexual	1.2%	2.3%	1.8%	3.0%
Welsh language ability				
Some/fluent	52.1%	52.1%	55.1%	61.3%
None	47.9%	47.9%	44.9%	38.7%

All the programmes acknowledge the need to increase the diversity of the future social work workforce. The graph shows there has been a steady increase in the number of students with disabilities and students from ethnic minority backgrounds accessing the training.

The higher education data and analysis (HESA) statistics support these findings. They report: "The percentage of UK domiciled students that are White has decreased over the last five years. However, the percentage that are Asian, Black and from other ethnic backgrounds has increased"<sup>2</sup>.

Our WeCare Wales [website](#) continues to promote diversity and inclusion by capturing stories and images of people that reflect the workforce and our population. To widen participation, we intend to target the Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities in the future. We will continue to promote social work as a career of choice. We will use this platform to engage with and encourage greater diversity among the people applying for social work training.

## Financial assistance for qualifying training

We support the education and training of qualifying social workers by giving financial assistance in the following ways:

- a social care workforce development grant that's paid to regional partnerships. Two of the grant's seven national priorities are funding the qualifying and post-qualifying training of social workers
- practice learning opportunity funding paid to local authorities that host students
- a grant to promote and enable people who receive care and support and carers to take part in social workers' education
- bursaries and a travelling allowance to help some students study in Wales.

We gave bursaries to 176 of the 244 newly enrolled students. The remaining students were not eligible for a bursary because:

- they were being financially supported by their employer
- they were from outside Wales
- they were repeating first year studies.

Figure 3 provides information about the allocation of bursaries for the last two academic years.

**Figure 3**

	Bursary allocation 2019-20		Bursary allocation 2020-21	
	Total bursaries	New bursaries	Total bursaries	New bursaries
<b>Undergraduate</b>	331	128	320	108
Percentage	69.2%	66.0%	67.5%	61.4%
<b>Master's degree</b>	147	66	154	68
Percentage	30.8%	34.0%	32.5%	38.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>176</b>

The percentage of bursaries paid to master's students increased by 4.6 per cent for 2020 to 2021. This was a slight increase by two in the number of master's students accessing the programme for 2020 to 2021.

However, only 62 per cent of the available postgraduate training places have been recruited to. Feedback continues to suggest postgraduate students' inability to access student loans is a factor. We remain engaged with Welsh Government about the financial assistance available to postgraduate social work students. The commissioned piece of research reviewing social work education will also look at future options available for financially supporting the programmes and students accessing them.

## Attrition for programmes

The next table indicates several students have deferred their studies for 2020 to 2021. While the reasons for deferral are not recorded, it's believed the impact of the pandemic and concerns about the student learning experience is a contributing factor. Last year's report recorded no students deferred their studies.

**Figure 4**

Student enrolment status	
Student enrolment status	244
Did not start	19
Deferred	11
Withdrawn	9
Referred	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>

Attrition for programmes remains low. Last year it was reported that 42 students left the programmes. This academic year, 40 students across all levels of training chose to leave or did not start their studies.

HESA publishes data about the non-continuation or attrition of students every two years. The most recent data available (2018 to 2019) also looked at the 2018 to 2019 entrants in 2019 to 2020. This was reported in last year's quality assurance report. The data available indicated 6.8 per cent of students across Welsh universities do not continue with their studies<sup>3</sup>. This information is due to be published next year.

## Practice learning

Qualifying social work training is provided through a partnership between the higher education institute, local authorities, community representatives – including people who receive care and support, and carers – and other partners. The social work degree has a blended learning approach where 50 per cent of a student's learning takes place in an academic setting and 50 per cent in practice.

Given the mixed academic and practice-based approach to qualifying training, effective partnerships are essential. All the universities are in partnership with at least three local authorities and all the local authorities are in partnership with at least one university.

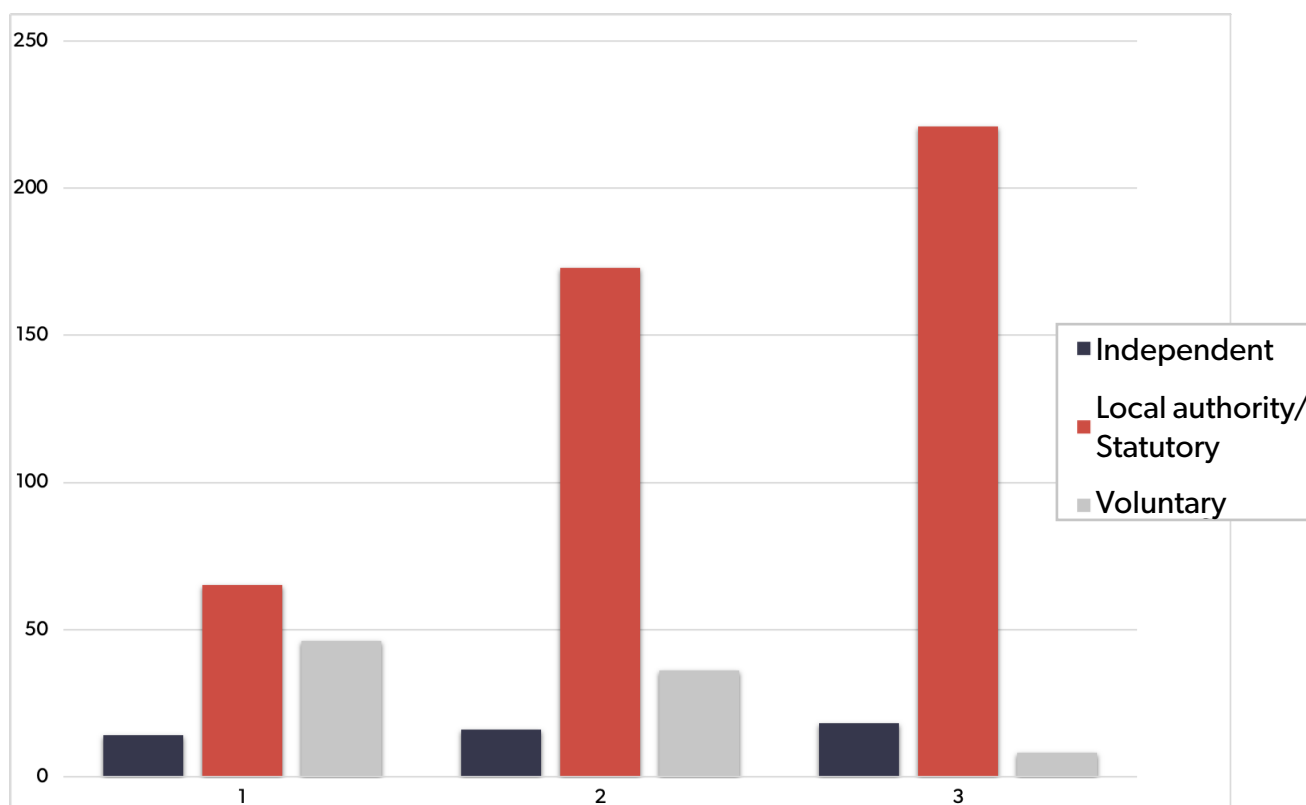
Practice learning enables students to develop, practise and be assessed for their competence in carrying out social work tasks. Social work in Wales is a varied profession provided by a range of settings, so it is important that practice learning opportunities are relevant and broadly representative of where social work takes place.

3. Information available at [Upcoming data releases | HESA](#)

In 2020 to 2021, 567 practice learning opportunities were provided. Figure 5 outlines the provision of practice learning opportunities by sector across the three levels of qualifying training. The comparative lower number of Level 1 practice learning opportunities is because:

- some programmes combine Level 1 and 2 practice learning requirements into one practice learning opportunity
- distance learning students have the option to undertake a portfolio route to demonstrate Level 1 competencies
- four programmes were unable to provide the Level 1 placements because of the pandemic, and we approved modifications as a proportionate response to managing the impact of Covid-19 on programmes.

**Figure 5**



The qualifying programmes and associated partners report the continued challenges of identifying placements throughout the pandemic. Providing placements virtually has been a learning process for all involved.

Placements must be underpinned by appropriate risk assessments to make sure students' safety and well-being is prioritised. Infection control measures, such as social distancing, were supported and personal protective equipment (PPE) was provided when face-to-face visits were carried out.

During the onset of the pandemic we ran group support sessions for the programmes and associated partners. We completed guidance to support practice educators in their role because of the changes in practise that now required social workers to engage virtually.

We continue to work with the programmes and partners to support and advise them in meeting our regulatory requirements and government guidelines.

Our rules require that all students carry out at least one of their longer (Level 2 and Level 3) practice learning opportunities in local authority social services.

The information in Figure 5 shows programme partnerships continue to fulfil this requirement.

We recognise it's important for students to develop an understanding of the voluntary and independent sectors, to gain an insight into the relevance of their work and how it can complement statutory services. Feedback from programmes and their partners throughout the pandemic suggested the impact the pandemic had on the way in which voluntary services could be provided meant there were significantly fewer placements available. This had a significant impact on placements.

Figure 6 provides a breakdown of where practice learning opportunities were provided by service setting.

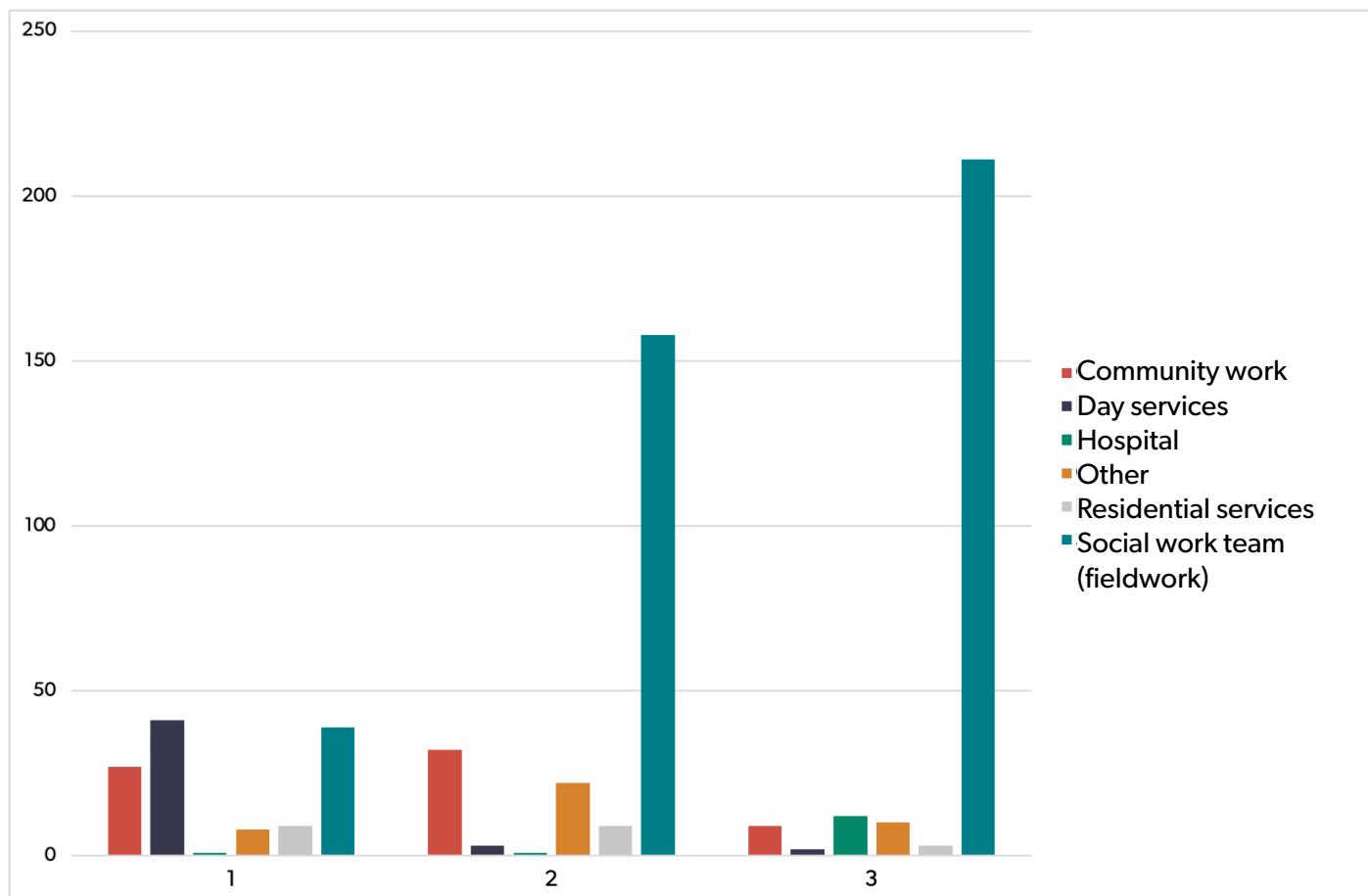
Level 1 placements were most affected, and four programmes reported they were unable to identify and proceed with placements. These have been rolled over to this academic year. One programme has involved people who receive care and support and carers in this element of work, with additional days again rolling over to this academic year. This decision was made in consultation with us to make sure the standards and requirements remained rigorous and were maintained.

The graph indicates that overall, 8.11 per cent of all placements were provided by the voluntary and independent sector, broken down in the percentages below:

- level 1 students accessed 29 per cent
- level 2 students accessed 18.85 per cent
- level 3 students accessed 6.28 per cent.

These numbers are significantly lower than last year. This was to be expected and supports the feedback we received about the challenges faced in identifying and supporting placement learning opportunities.

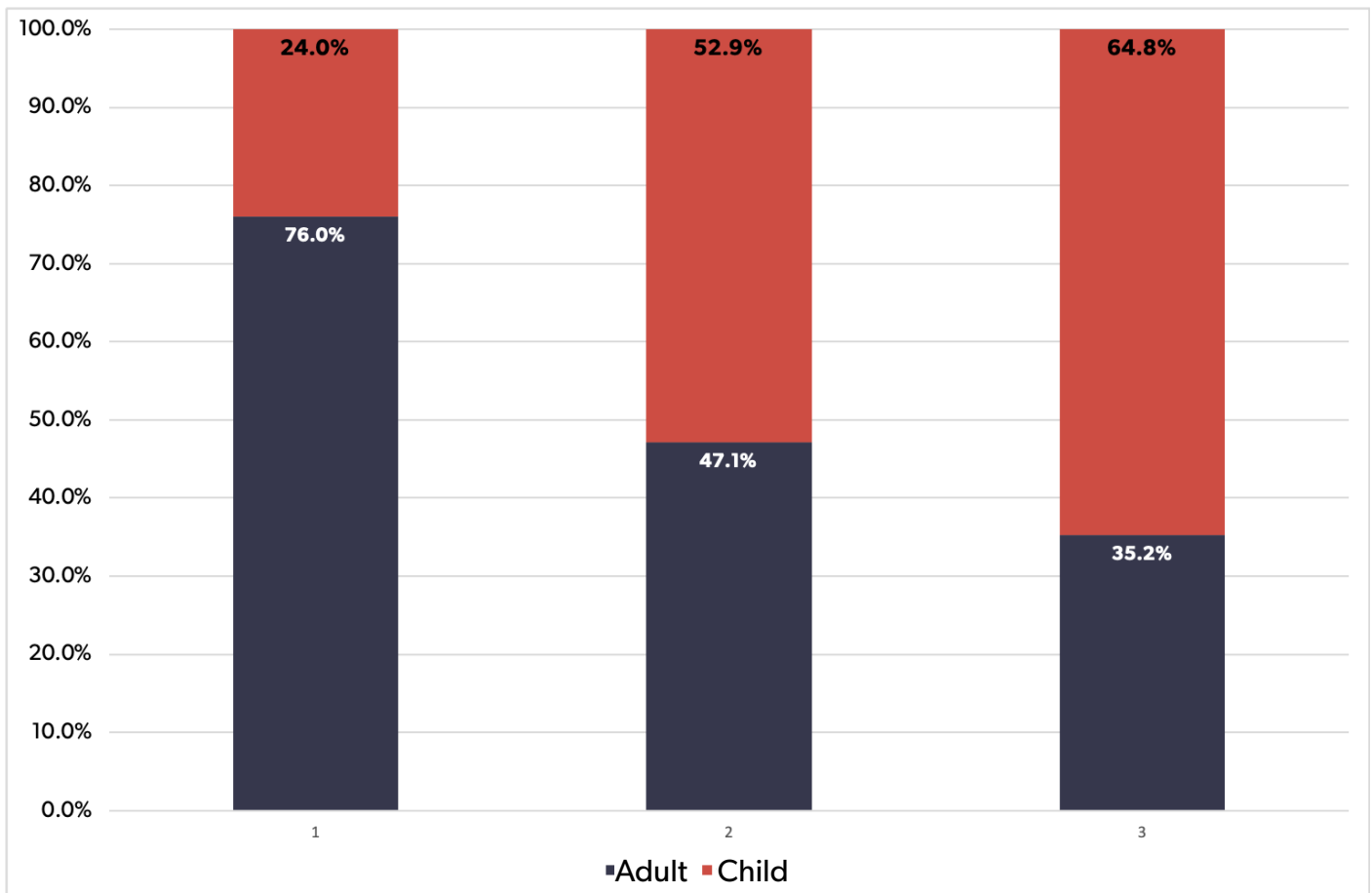
**Figure 6**



In terms of service settings, most of the longer practice learning opportunities continue to take place in social work teams. This pattern is similar to last year's and reflects the continued success of social work teams in providing placements for Level 2 and Level 3 students. Feedback also suggests the lack of alternative placements in the voluntary and third sector placed a greater demand on these teams.

Figure 7 shows the provision of practice learning opportunities by service area and that opportunities for placements in children's services are well-represented at Levels 2 and 3. There is also proportionate placement provision across adults' and children's services for these two student cohorts.

**Figure 7**



Of the 217 newly qualified social workers that registered with us during April 2020 to March 2021, 183 were employed by the local authority. Of these, the 'primary client groups' they work with are:

**Figure 8**

Primary client group	Number	Percentage
Children	89	48.6%
Adults	61	33.3%
Adults and children	20	10.9%
Children and families	5	2.7%
Adult social care	3	1.6%
Not specified	3	1.6%
Children with disabilities	1	0.5%
Mental health	1	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The largest percentage of newly qualified social workers again entered children's services, and this reflects last year's data. This also indicates where the vacancies are within the profession. Adult services recruited 33 per cent of all newly qualified social workers. The remaining 34 per cent have gone into the voluntary or third sector.



## Welsh medium study

Every programme must have a Welsh language action plan to promote and embed opportunities for students to learn and be assessed through the medium of Welsh.

Figure 9 highlights the number of students who studied five or more academic credits through the medium of Welsh during 2019 to 2020, and the universities where they studied.

**Figure 9 – 2019 to 2020**

University	5+ credits studied through the medium of Welsh	40+ credits studied through the medium of Welsh
Glyndwr University	5	1
Bangor University	37	37
Swansea University	162*	105
Cardiff Metropolitan University	0	0
University of South Wales	0.7	0
Cardiff University	0	0
Open University	71	3
Source: HESA	* Students completed Social Work – Language Awareness E-Learning module (MOOC) as part of a larger module of learning	

Bangor University continues to support students to carry out their social work qualifying training through the medium of Welsh. In addition, the Open University is developing a new 15-credit digital module covering the Active Offer and the Welsh context in collaboration with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Bangor and Swansea universities. Figure 2 shows the number of Welsh speakers accessing the programmes has increased 10.2 per cent since the 2017 to 2018 cohort.

## Fitness to practise

Our fitness to practise team received 10 referrals during 2020 to 2021. This was double the number reported last year but is still fewer than in 2019 to 2020.

Of the students referred to our fitness to practise team:

- two students were referred by their HEIs as part of their suitability processes
- one was referred because of inappropriate behaviour in work
- three were referred because of inappropriate behaviour outside work
- three were referred because of practice failings
- one student was given a fixed penalty.

All the cases were closed after an initial investigation and three students received fitness to practise warnings.

Members of our fitness to practise team provided virtual presentations to the degree programmes as part of the students' induction to qualifying training. Feedback from the universities continues to be positive and these sessions are valued for developing students' awareness and understanding about the *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care Workers*, as well as professional conduct and behaviour.

## Student feedback

All the programmes collect feedback from their students in many different forms. The information is used to improve the quality of the education they provide and is given to us to inform our annual monitoring process.

A common theme in the feedback has been the impact of online learning on students. While some statements are positive and students have said they have preferred this style of learning, many have found this challenging. Programmes have responded by putting on bitesize learning sessions, recording sessions for greater flexibility and making study groups smaller, where possible, to encourage students to have more input.

The programme leads have identified a need for additional pastoral care throughout the pandemic and students reported they have been grateful for the one-to-one support they have received from their personal tutors. During 2020 to 2021 we commissioned research to get more detailed feedback from newly qualified social workers about their experiences of qualifying and starting work during the pandemic. The findings will inform our future approach to quality assurance and potentially to workforce development.

## b. Post-qualifying training

Every social worker must complete 90 hours of post-registration training and learning in each three-year registration period to keep their professional registration. The *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care* states that social care workers must “be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and developing knowledge and skills”<sup>4</sup>.

We have received reports from the sector that the provision of training and ongoing learning to meet the requirements of continuing professional development has been severely disrupted because of the pandemic.

In response, we negotiated with Welsh Government an extension period of 12 months for re-registration. We recognise that social care workers have learned much during the pandemic and it has been difficult to find time to carry out formal training.

Practitioners who have worked during the pandemic will therefore be credited 45 hours of CPD. We approve nine post-qualifying programmes in Wales, which include:

- five assessing and supervising social worker students/practice assessor programmes
- one Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) programme
- one Team Manager Development Programme (TMDP)
- two Consolidation Programmes.

According to the data we received as part of our annual monitoring of approved programmes, around 442 social workers enrolled on programmes between the 2019 to 2020 academic year. Last year’s quality assurance report for the academic year of 2018 to 2019 recorded 552 social workers enrolled on programmes, which means there’s been a reduction of 100 social workers. Reported contributing factors are the pandemic and the Experienced/Senior and Consultant Social Work practitioner programmes or CPEL no longer being an option for post-qualifying training.

One of the assessing and supervising social work students’ programmes was suspended because of the disruption and impact of Covid. As student placements were suspended, trainee practice educators couldn’t continue with their studies as they wouldn’t meet the learning outcomes required by the programme.

One programme didn’t run the previous year due to a lack of uptake (not Covid related) and the number of practice educators who gained their award in 2020 was 58. The graph below also identifies the number of candidates who deferred, and the feedback received suggests the pandemic has been the main reason for this.

Our rules require degree programmes to make sure:

(b) there are enough practice educators (as described in paragraph 6(1)(j)) to assess students in each period of practice learning<sup>5</sup>

4. *The Code of Professional Practice for Social Care* | Section 6

5. [The framework for the social work degree in Wales.](#)

This year has seen another reduction in the number of practice educators completing their award. The pandemic has severely disrupted these programmes and feedback from the programmes and partners advise that the pool of independent practice educators is also reducing.

**Figure 10 – 2019 to 20**

Students enrolling on assessing and supervising student social workers programmes	101
Carried across from the previous year	11
Deferred	15
Referred	19
Failed	6
Completed and passed	58

## Continuing professional development programmes

As part of their continuing professional development, social workers who qualified after 1 April 2016 must successfully complete a Consolidation Programme in their first period of registration when practising as a social worker. Undertaking the Consolidation Programme is an essential element of The First Three Years in Practice<sup>6</sup> framework. The programme also benefits those who are returning to practice after a break and social workers who are working in the UK for the first time. In 2019 to 2020, 253 candidates enrolled on the Consolidation Programmes, 183 successfully completed the programme and 17 students failed.

In line with academic regulations, these students had further opportunities to resubmit their work. The remaining 53 students will roll their studies over into the next academic year. The enrolment figure is down by 19 candidates from the previous year and the number of successful candidates is down by 12.

The review of the post-qualifying framework available to social workers has also been disrupted by the pandemic. This is progressing and it is likely that it will now be completed in 2021 to 2022.

This will take account of the preparatory work needed to put the Liberty Protection Safeguards in place from April 2022, and the introduction of a new Approved Mental Capacity Professional role.

## Student feedback from post-qualifying programmes

This year's feedback indicates candidates are finding it increasingly difficult to study and practise. Staffing levels and service priorities have affected their ability to access protected study time. Other feedback indicates that candidates have appreciated the support tutors have offered during the pandemic and have found it positive engaging with academics and re-engaging with their personal studies.

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## Annual monitoring themes

Our annual monitoring measures how social work education provision is performing against a set of indicators, to assess the strengths and potential risks in specific programmes. These indicators are:

- the programme meets published standards<sup>7</sup>
- the programme continues to develop and focus on improvement
- having and making use of systems for evaluation and scrutiny
- the confidence of students and partners.

Our feedback to programmes can include:

- setting **conditions** to make sure programmes continue to meet our requirements for approval
- making **recommendations**, which contribute to the improved quality of programmes.

As part of our annual monitoring activity for 2020 to 2021, we set one condition and made 15 recommendations to approved qualifying degree programmes. We also made 17 recommendations to approved post-qualifying programmes.

The condition referred to a programme's revalidation activity and meeting the approval rules.

The recommendations we made included:

- informing us about any changes to coronavirus contingency plans
- updating student guidance and information in programme handbooks
- providing us with qualitative feedback from students to feed into next year's improvement and enhancement plans
- informing us about revalidation plans for programmes for the next academic year.

We asked programmes to provide a written response to the annual monitoring by a set date, or to make specific evidence available in the next cycle of annual monitoring.

We acknowledge the impact the coronavirus pandemic continues to have on programmes and the need for them to continually adapt and put changes in place.

This year, programmes report they are continuing to provide a blended method of teaching, that is, some face-to-face teaching (when it's safe to do so) and some teaching online.

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7. These are grouped under partnership working, resource provision, learning and assessment, policies and procedures, and quality assurance.