

QUALIFYING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING

# Review of Trends 2010/11

# Introduction

Each year the Care Council produces a summary report of the themes and trends in social work education and training based upon its quality assurance work over the year.



2010/11 has been a significant year in relation to social work education and training in Wales. In November 2010 the Independent Commission on Social Services in Wales published their report, *From Vision to Action*. In their report the Commission acknowledged the pivotal role of the workforce in delivering high-quality social work and social care.

The report stated that “social work and social care will only ever be as good as the people who work in them. The workforce is the service.”

The importance of a confident and competent professional workforce was re-stated in February 2011 in the Welsh Government’s policy document, *Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action*, which says: “citizen-focused, sustainable services will not be possible without placing the professional contribution of social workers and social care workers even more at the heart of services.”

It recommends a continued drive towards improvement through the

commitment to, and investment in, continuing professional development. Over the year the Care Council has been developing its proposals for a new framework of continuing professional education and learning (CPEL) as a key part of delivering the ‘new professionalism’ set out in the policy paper.

The success of the CPEL framework however also depends on the social work degree providing the right social workers for the workforce and over the year we have worked

with others to review the degree and make proposals for its further improvement. That review was informed by the Care Council’s Quality Assurance work. The full Quality Assurance Report for Approved Social Work Education and Training Programmes 2010/11 upon which this summary is based referred to in this summary can be found on the Care Council website at [www.ccwales.org.uk](http://www.ccwales.org.uk).

# Key Messages from 2010/11

The Social Work degree in Wales continues to be providing social workers for the Wales social services workforce. 252 newly qualified social workers registered with the Care Council for Wales in the year, 91% of whom trained in Wales.

The degree is based on partnerships between a Higher Education Institution (HEI), employers and service users and carers. Strong partnerships continue and are critical to quality integrated social work education. All local authority employers are in partnership with at least one degree and efforts will need to be made to encourage the closer involvement of third sector employers as well to ensure social work training meets the needs of all social work employers.

Employers are committed to playing a central role in social work training

and education and quality workforce planning.

Overall there is a high completion rate from the social work degree. There is benefit to be gained from improving information on what best enables students to complete courses in order to make the most efficient use of the opportunities and resources for learning.

The high demand for places on social work courses can contribute to widening participation in higher education and the promotion of a varied workforce as many social work students enter through non

traditional routes. However there are still relatively few men or disabled students entering social work education and training.

Professional social workers are committed through their registration to continue to develop their knowledge and skills. The social work degree should therefore be an integral part of the continuum of education and training, based on explicit standards (at key points of a social worker's professional development/experience) linked to career pathways.

The curriculum of programmes needs to continue to adapt to ensure social workers are equipped to deal with the challenges of contemporary social work in Wales. In particular there needs to be a strengthening of the learning and assessment requirements in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. The Care Council is proposing through its review of the Rules for course approval that students are required to demonstrate experience of these different aspects of safeguarding.

Key Messages from 2010/2011 continued

The social work degree involves equal amounts of academic and practice learning and therefore reflects contemporary practice. Consideration needs to be given to how closer integration of the two can be achieved. Practice Assessors need to ensure an approach to assessment of overall professional standards and avoid mechanistic approaches to evidencing National Occupational Standards (NOS).

Consistency of standards across social work degree programmes, for instance in relation to assessment requirements is important and the Care Council could assist in this through the production of clearer guidance.

The Care Council's 'quality assurance' model for the social work degree should be reviewed to take account

of standards for regulatory excellence and should seek to involve employers and service users.

Effective social work requires close working with other professional groups. This needs to be reflected in students' learning and inter-professional learning opportunities should be promoted to embed understanding of different professions from an early stage.

The expectations for Welsh language provision need to be clear and the Care Council should regularly review social work degree programme's action plans for development through its quality assurance processes.



# Entering Qualifying Social Work Education and Training

According to UCAS data there were 4.3 times as many applicants as places available for the social work degree in Wales.<sup>1</sup>

Programmes reported 977 applicants in 2009-10 and 1378 in 2010-11 for 316 places (excluding the OU), an increase of 39%. This increase exceeded the wider increase in applications to higher education with UCAS reporting an overall increase of 8.6% in applications for the year.

309 students were accepted onto programmes starting within the year and at 31 March 2011 there were 847 students on the social work degree.

Intake onto degree programmes is controlled by four main factors. The quality of applicants, the entry criteria of programmes, the capacity

of employers to provide Practice Learning Opportunities (PLO) and the number of places a programme is approved by the Care Council to provide. The overall uptake of places saw 88% of Care Council approved places taken up, with only two courses 10% or more below their approved intake. As employers' workforce planning has developed so there has been some change in the PLOs offered and consequently two programmes have reduced their planned intake for 2011.

Students can undertake the social work degree at undergraduate or postgraduate levels and through a

traditional or distance learning route. Since 2009 the only programme offering a part-time route is the Open University. One of the eight approved programmes is a Masters level course and accounts for 16% of the student intake in the year. 88% of students enrolled for full-time study, the remaining 12% being on the distance learning route.

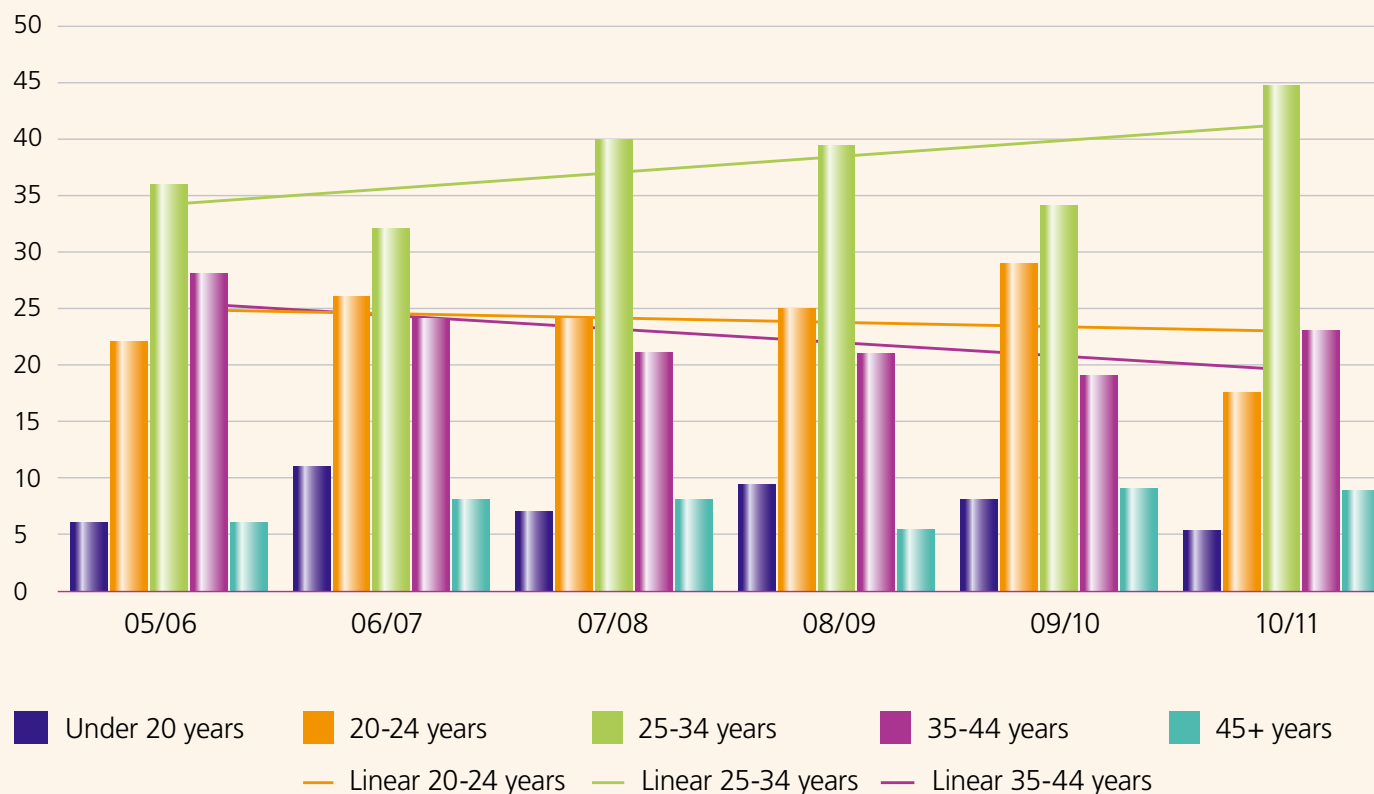
The demographic profile of students remains similar to previous years with minor fluctuations.

18% of new students are men, which whilst being the largest proportion since the start of the degree, is still

below the 23% of registered social workers who are male. This may suggest the profession is becoming increasingly female and consideration could be given by the Council and programmes to developing careers information that promotes social work as a career for both men and women.



### Age Profile of SW degree enrolments 2005-11 including trend lines



At the point of the degree's introduction there was debate around whether the age profile of students would reduce. The chart provides evidence of an upward trend in those aged 25-34 at enrolment but a decrease in those aged 20-24 and 35-44 years. This suggests social work graduates are not getting younger; however the age profile for the 2010-11 entry is different to other years and it may be that future years will help provide more reliable evidence on this.

The Care Council requires programmes to provide opportunities for students to learn and be assessed through the medium of Welsh and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol has been established to expand higher education teaching in this regard. Bangor University has the lead role in developing social work learning opportunities in Welsh



from which all other programmes should benefit. In the year 24% of new social work students are Welsh speakers. All programmes support these (and non Welsh speaking) students in a range of ways including opportunities to learn and improve Welsh as well as the provision of academic and practice learning opportunities through Welsh.

In 2010-11, 10.7% of students declared a disability, the most common being dyslexia or other specific learning disability. This compares with the Disability Rights Commission survey from July 2008 which estimates 9% of the working population to have a disability.

Again, given the commitments to widening participation in higher education and involving service users and carers in social work education and learning, this may be another

area for considering suitable careers information promoting social work as a career.

Whilst social work programmes recruited a greater ratio of people from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds than is found in the national population, it does appear that they find it difficult to increase the proportion further. Over the 6 years for which records exist 4.5% of students enrolling have declared themselves to be from Black or Ethnic Minority backgrounds. In 2010-11 the figure was slightly below average at 4.2% (or 18 people). For those that are recruited it is hoped the Care Council publication *Best Practice Guidance in Supporting Black and Ethnic Minority Students of Social Work Degree Programmes in Wales*<sup>2</sup> will prove a positive development that encourages others to pursue social work education.



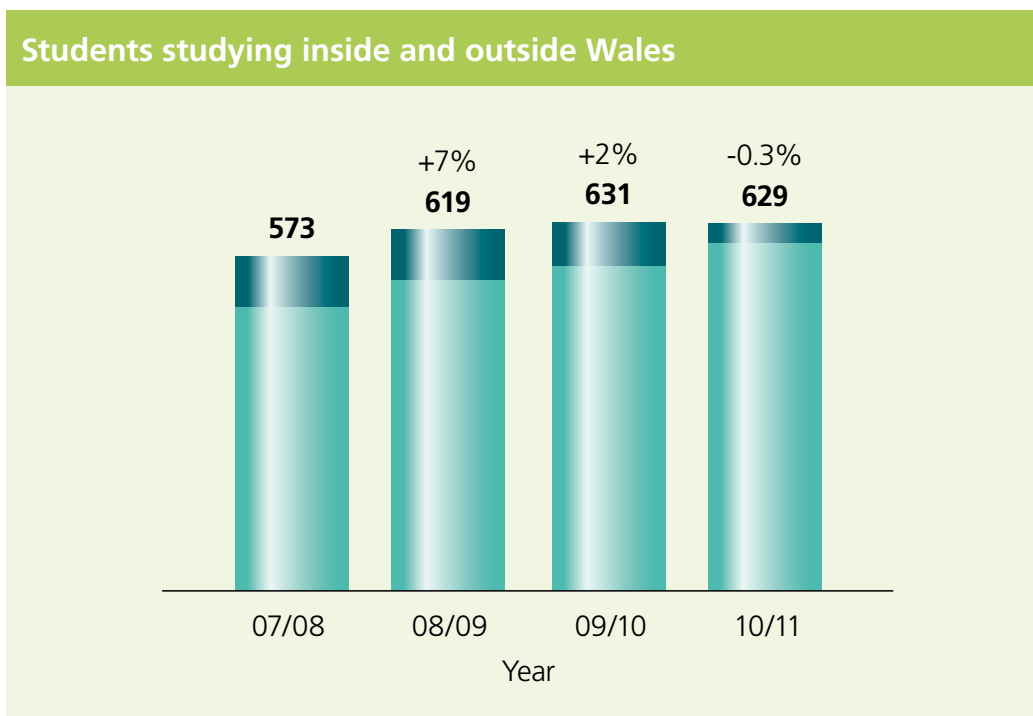
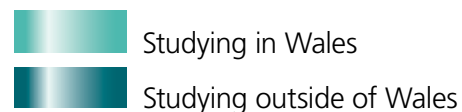
# Funding of Social Work Students

In 2010-11 the Care Council provided social work bursaries to 629 students undertaking undergraduate and Masters degrees in Social Work amounting to £3,241,042.

The Care Council supported the funding of social work qualifying students through the Student Funding schemes throughout 2010-11, and supported social work degree programmes through the Practice Learning Opportunity Fund (PLOF) payable to local authority hosts of students and the Service User and Carer Participation Grant payable to the university.

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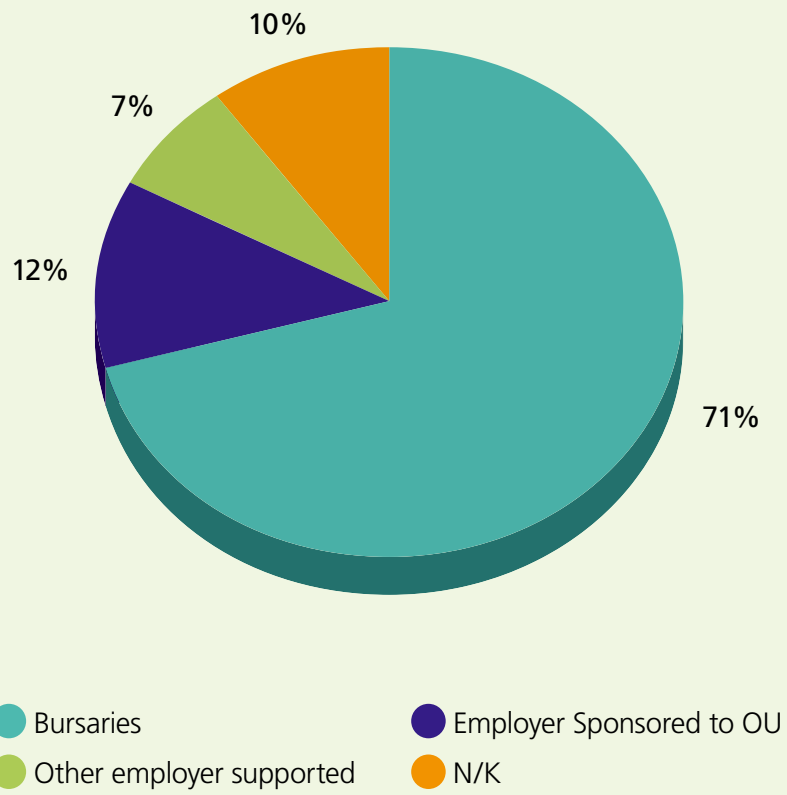
to £3,241,042 which represented a small decrease of 1.7% over the previous year. The Council no longer supports new applications for bursaries to study outside of Wales hence the reducing number of bursaries being paid to those studying elsewhere.





Funding of Social Worker Students continued

Funding of students enrolling 2010-11



The Welsh Government, through its Social Care Workforce Development Programme requires local authorities to support social work qualifying training and this remains an important contribution to the overall funding picture through the use of secondments and trainee schemes.

Like all other public bodies the Care Council is facing significant financial pressures but remains committed to supporting qualifying and post qualifying social work education and learning as best it can. Discussions are continuing with partners on how best to use the resources available.

Additionally £75,000 was provided by the Care Council to the Social Work programmes across Wales to support the involvement of service users and carers in the Social Work degrees. This annual grant has contributed to an increase in the level and range of service users and carers participating in social work education and learning which students widely reported as being of significant benefit.

# Developing Practice Skills

The Care Council supported Local Authorities to manage 855 practice learning opportunities, an increase of 15 PLOs over the previous year

The social work degree requires students to complete 200 days of practice learning as part of their course.

In total the Care Council supported Local Authorities to manage 855 practice learning opportunities, an increase of 15 PLOs over the previous year. A regional perspective indicates all areas sustained their level of PLOs except for south east Wales which saw a rise of 8.5%.

At least one period of a student's practice learning must be within a local authority social services authority. Many students report

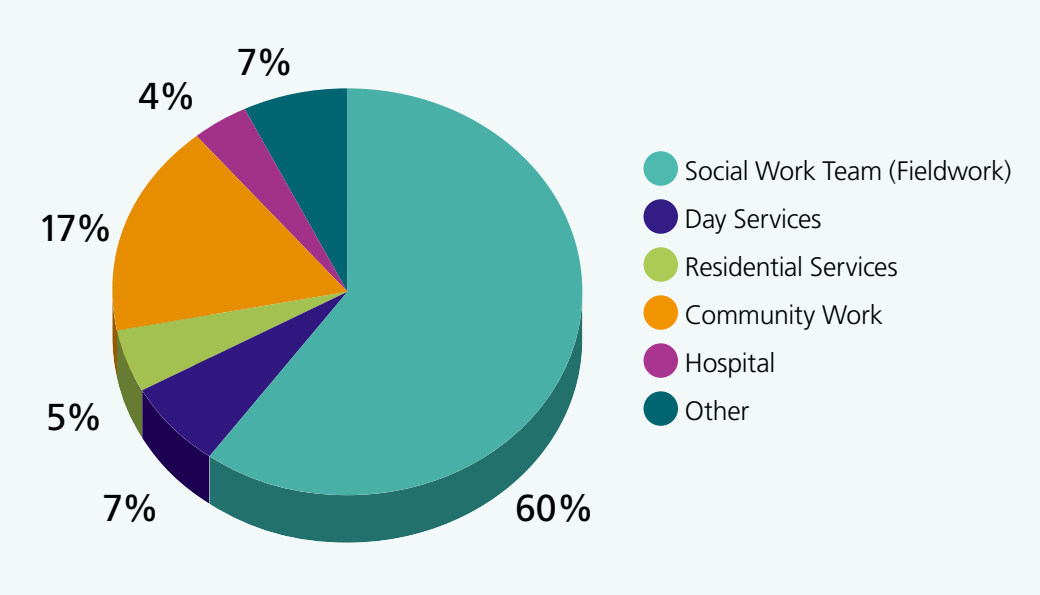
they have more than one PLO in this sector. Analysis of the PLOF data indicates there has been a slight reduction in the proportion of PLOs being provided in the statutory sector over the past 5 years which reflects the efforts made by local authority employers to develop PLOs in the private and voluntary sectors. These are understood to be particularly prevalent in the first 20 day PLO.

In terms of settings there remains a wide range of PLOs available. The majority of qualified social workers however find work in local authority social work teams and so it is

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
<b>Local Authority Social Services</b>	77%	72%	70%	70%	69%
<b>Voluntary and Independent</b>	23%	28%	30%	30%	31%

encouraging that social work fieldwork teams have sustained the same proportion as previously.

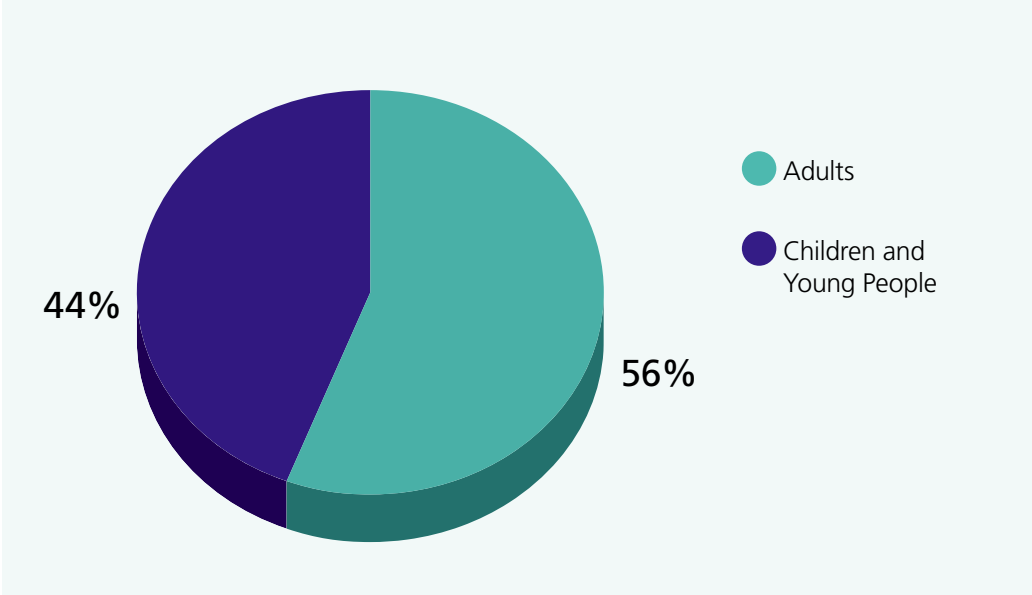
PLO Settings



Whilst most employment opportunities remain with child and family teams, the majority of PLOs are within adult services. More work is required to analyse this data further in relation to the two longer PLOs to better understand

the experience of students and how effectively this prepares them for the employment opportunities they face upon graduating.

PLO's per Service User Group



Similarly the apparent majority of Practice Learning Opportunities in adult services may mask a different picture at each of the three levels of the degree. The second and third levels provide the better opportunities to develop

practice skills as they are longer. Understanding the balance of PLO's by service user group at each level would provide a clearer picture of the extent to which PLO's are preparing students for the available job opportunities.

# Social Work Degree Graduates

834 students have completed a social work degree in Wales since 2007. 262 graduated in 2010-11

The first graduates gained their awards in 2007<sup>3</sup>. Since then the total number to have completed a social work degree in Wales is 834 of which 262 were achieved in 2010-11

33 students withdrew from the degree in 2010-11, representing 3.9% of the total number of registered students. The largest number left for "academic" reasons, representing one third of all withdrawals.

Of the 262 graduating in 2010-11, 97 received some support from their employer, with 56 having been seconded and 14 on an employer trainee scheme, the remainder

receiving other non-specific forms of support including Care Council bursaries and NHS bursaries where students were from England. Secondment and Trainee schemes therefore accounted for 26% of graduates in the year.

Of the 262 graduates, 49 were at Masters level and of the 213 completing an undergraduate degree, 105 achieved first or upper second class honours degrees.

The Care Council has published information on newly qualifying social workers in Qualified Social Worker Profile June 2011<sup>4</sup>. This



3. The first cohort graduating in 2007/08 was made up of only 4 programmes which started a year before the others. 2008/09 is therefore the correct benchmark to refer to when measuring change.
4. Qualified Social Worker Profile June 2011, Care Council for Wales. [www.ccwales.org.uk](http://www.ccwales.org.uk)

Social Work Degree Graduates continued

indicates that between June 2010 and May 2011, 252 newly qualified social workers were registered with the Care Council for Wales, 91% of whom were trained in Wales.

This supports the case that Wales is largely self sufficient in preparing the future social work workforce. However it also illustrates the difficulties in accurate workforce planning as employers had anticipated appointing 137 newly qualified social workers in the year as part of the Social Worker Workforce Planning Project.<sup>5</sup>

The demographic profile is consistent with previous reports, indicating

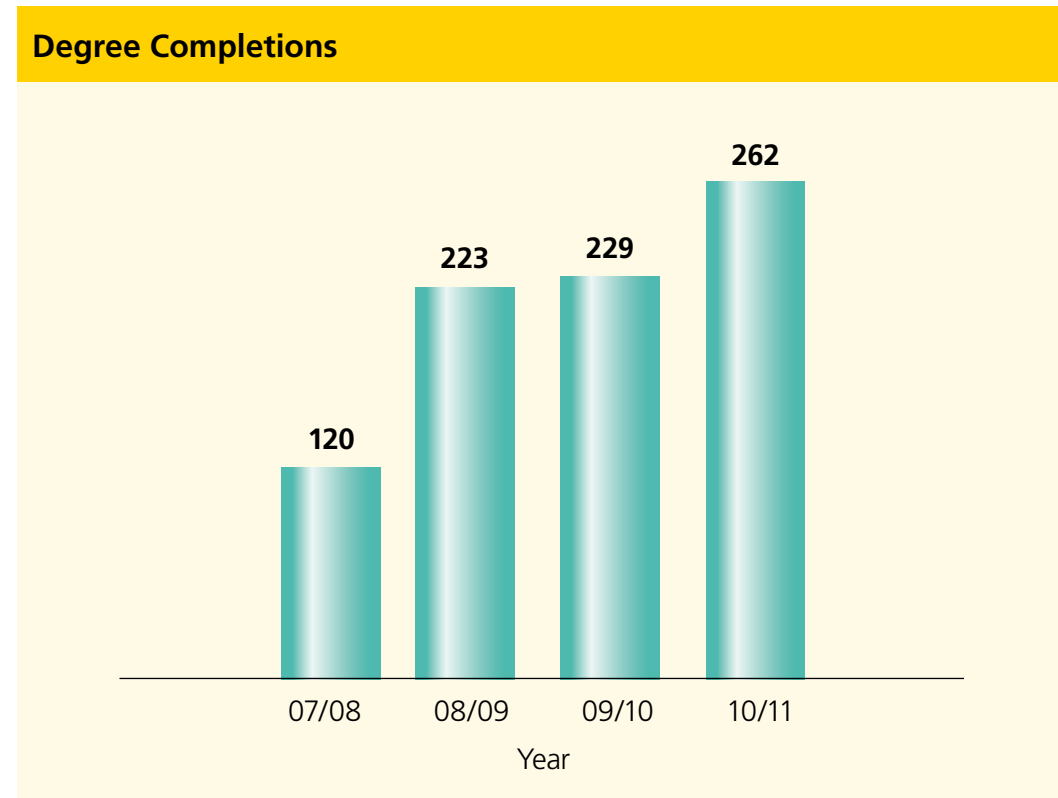
- 85% graduates were female
- 72% were aged over 25 years
- 87% described themselves as white

- 24% are Welsh speaking
- 15% describe themselves as having a disability
- 13 graduates completed via a part time route of whom 69% achieved a first or upper second class degree (compared with 49% overall)

As part of its quality assurance work the Care Council regularly meets with social work students and recent graduates. Comments received in these meetings have focused upon the quality of support offered by academic and practice teachers, and their willingness to allow students to explore issues in a safe environment. Comments have also included some concern about some academic staff having little recent experience of social work practice, and different practices between programmes in assessment requirements and the wish to see greater standardisation.

These comments have been considered in the recent review of the degree rules and it is proposed that all programmes include

registered social workers on teaching staff and that the Care Council provide more guidance in relation to assessment.



5. <http://www.dataunitwales.gov.uk/Publication.asp?id=SX9A80-A77FFBB7>

# The Conclusions

The social work degree is a popular course in Wales producing academically successful and competent social workers who largely gain employment in social services in Wales

This annual summary of trends has been drawn from the annual monitoring of social work degree programmes and the more comprehensive Periodic Reviews conducted over the two years of 2009-10 and 2010-11. A review of the social work degree Rules and Requirements has also informed the findings.

It aims to provide the sector with key information on those starting and completing the social work qualification. Further detail can be found on the Regulation of Training Pages of the Care Council website at [www.ccwales.org.uk](http://www.ccwales.org.uk).

The social work degree is a popular course in Wales producing academically successful and competent social workers who largely gain employment in social services in Wales.

The commitment of employers and HEIs to sustaining partnerships and the development of the framework for Continuing Education and Learning will further contribute to the profession's ability to deliver the ambitions of the Welsh Government for social services in Wales.

