Quality assurance of social work education and training annual report

Academic year: 2019 to 2020

Contents

1. What we do

A part of Social Care Wales's 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*[1].

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 demonstrate continuous improvement and a commitment to improving quality. We will also regularly review the processes by which regulation is carried out 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.

---

1. Available at: 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 be provided to the required standards, so they result in confident and competent practitioners.

We currently approve:

- **8** social work degree programmes provided at **7** universities. These include:

    - **5** undergraduate programmes (one of which is a distance-learning route)

    - **3** master's level programmes

- **12** post-qualifying social work programmes.

In 2019-20, we:

- approved **1** post-qualifying programme

- quality-assured **19** programmes

    - setting **4** conditions and making **10** recommendations to programmes at qualifying level

    - making **19** recommendations to programmes at post-qualifying level

- carried out **3** periodic reviews involving

    - **2** qualifying programmes

    - **1** post-qualifying programme

- received **7** applications to make minor modifications to programmes so they could meet the revised requirements for the social work degree

- did not receive any complaints or cause for focused investigation

- coordinated a task and finish group to develop specific Covid-19 practice learning guidance.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK-wide restrictions imposed in March 2020, we introduced a level of flexibility in the requirements for awarding a degree in social work in Wales. We did this to make sure students weren't unduly disadvantaged as a result of the exceptional times we are in. We based our decision-making on the principles of fairness and proportionality, while making sure competency standards were not compromised.

We completed our quality assurance activity for 2019-20 using online meeting platforms as visits to programmes were suspended.

2. Data analysis

As part of our annual monitoring, approved programmes must provide us with 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 2019-20, **312** places were offered by approved social work qualifying programmes, with **86 per cent** of those places taken up. There were **269** new students, a slight increase on last year's **260** new students.

Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the take up of places by programme with comparative data for the last three academic years.

Figure 1

Programme	Route	2017-18			2018-19			2019-20		
		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	19	90%	22	22	100%	21	15	71%
Cardiff University MA	2-year FT	50	40	80%	50	48	96%	50	38	76%
Swansea University MSc	2-year FT	20	20	100%	20	19	95%	20	20	100%
Cardiff Metropolitan University UG	2-year FT	39	29	74%	39	25	64%	39	30	77%
Cardiff Metropolitan University (Bridgend) UG	3-year FT	16	15	94%	16	16	100%	16	15	94%
Glyndwr University UG	3-year FT	36	33	92%	36	35	97%	36	33	92%
Open University Wales UG (distance learning)	3-6 year	40	40	100%	48	46	96%	65	60	92%
Swansea University UG	3-year FT	30	29	97%	30	30	100%	30	30	100%
University of South Wales UG	3-year FT	35	26	74%	35	19	54%	35	28	80%
Total		**287**	**251**	**87%**	**296**	**260**	**88%**	**312**	**269**	**86%**

Table title: **Social work qualifying programmes intake**

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

- number and quality of applicants

- selection criteria

- the capacity of programme partners to provide practice learning opportunities

- the approval numbers we set.

The increase in the number of student training places available over the last two academic years is largely due to an increase in the secondment of students by employers, as part of 'grow your own' workforce development schemes, via a distance learning route.

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 three most recent cohorts of students.

Figure 2

Category	2017-18 cohort	2018-19 cohort	2019-20 cohort
Average age	32 years	31 years	32 years
Gender			
Female	88.4%	86%	84.8%
Male	11.6%	14%	15.2%
Ethnicity			
Ethnic minorities	6.4%	6.5%	5.5%
White	93.6%	93.6%	94.5%
Disability	3.8%	3.4%	4.5%
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual/Straight	95.9%	93.4%	95.6%
Gay or lesbian	2.8%	4.3%	2.6%
Bisexual	1.2%	2.3%	1.8%
Welsh language ability			
Some/fluent	52.1%	52.1%	55.1%
None	47.9%	47.9%	44.9%

The demographic profile of student social workers has remained fairly consistent in recent years, but it is encouraging that the number of men undertaking social work training has risen by **3.6 per cent** over the last three student cohorts. Additionally, the the percentage of students who are fluent or able to use some Welsh rose by **3 per cent** compared to last year.

Comparitive data for the wider student population in Wales shows that in 2018-19 **56 per cent** of students were female and **44 per cent** male. Of these, **88 per cent** of students were of white ethnicity, with **12 per cent** from other ethnic groups. Fifteen per cent of students were known to have a disability[2].

It is important we increase the diversity of the social work workforce so that it appropriately reflects the population and citizens it works with. In 2019, we launched a national attraction and recruitment campaign for social care and early years. From November 2020 the campaign will focus on roles within social care, including social work.

We continue to work with a range of partners to make sure we have a joined-up approach to promoting social work as a career of choice and encouraging greater diversity in the people applying to social work qualifying training. You can find examples of the work to date on the WeCare Wales website.

---

2. Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2018/19 - Student numbers and characteristics | HESA

Financial assistance for qualifying training

We support the education and training of qualifying social workers by providing 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 that's 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 the education of social workers

- bursaries and a travelling allowance to help some students study in Wales.

Of the **269** newly-enrolled students, we gave bursaries to **194** 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 2018-19		Bursary allocation 2019-20	
	Total bursaries	New bursaries	Total bursaries	New bursaries
	492	199	478	194
Undergraduate	339	118	331	128
Percentage	68.9%	59.3%	69.2%	66.0%
Masters degree	153	81	147	66
Percentage	31.1%	40.7%	30.8%	34.0%

The percentage of bursaries paid to master's students declined by **6.7 per cent** in 2019-20 because of the reduction in student intake numbers across two of the master's programmes. In feedback, financial reasons was cited as one of the main issues for students not being able to undertake post graduate training in social work. We are currently in talks with the Welsh Government about the financial assistance available to postgraduate social work students.

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.

In 2019-20, 597 practice learning opportunities were provided. **Figure 4** 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 due to:

- some programmes combining Level 1 and 2 practice learning requirements into one practice learning opportunity

- for distance learning students, an option to undertake a portfolio route to demonstrate Level 1 competencies.

Figure 4
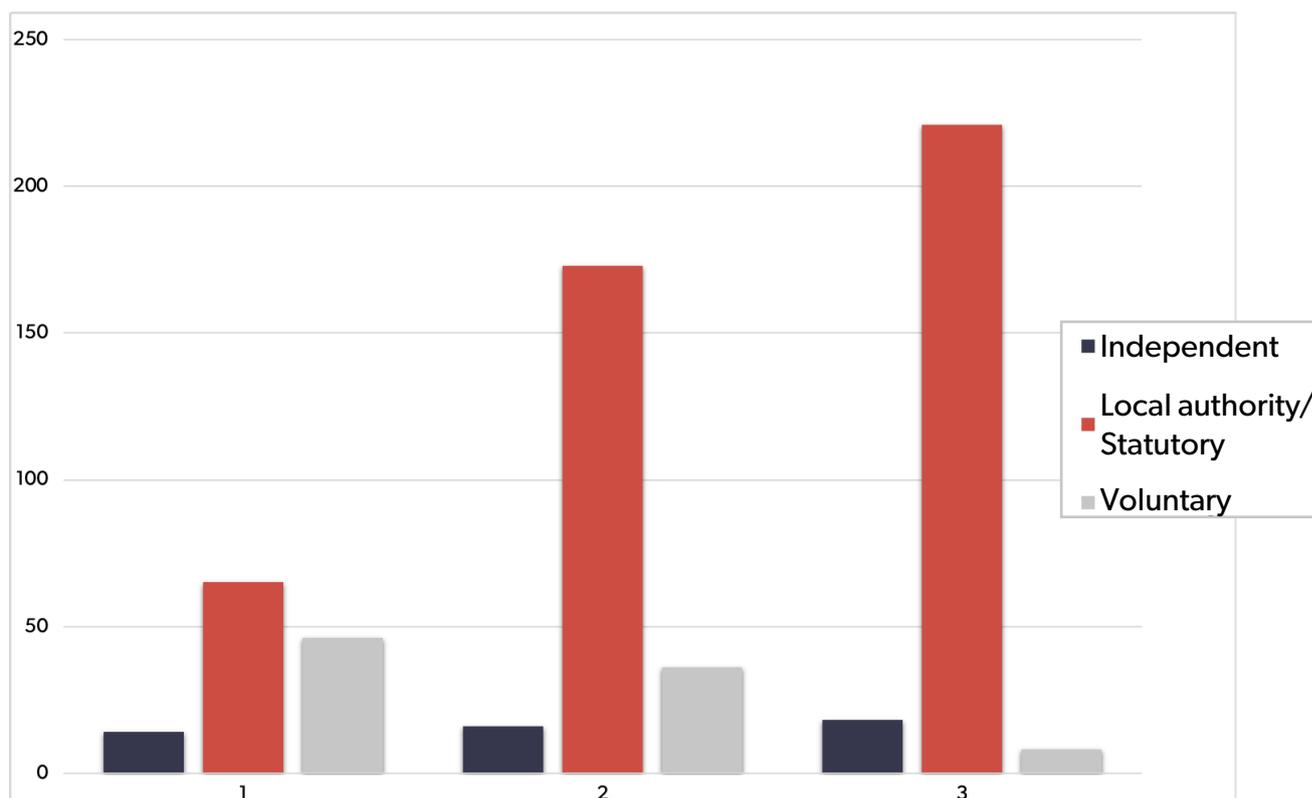
Our rules require that all students carry out at least one of their longer (Level 2 and Level 3) practice learning opportunities in local authority social services. The information displayed in **Figure 4** shows that this requirement continues to be fulfilled by programme partnerships.

It is also important that students develop an understanding of the work of the voluntary and independent sectors, and the different approaches to working with individuals, groups and communities. The table shows that 48 per cent of practice learning opportunities provided at Level 1 were in independent / voluntary sector organisations, with 23 per cent offered at Level 2 and 10.5 per cent at Level 3.

Figure 5 provides a breakdown of where practice learning opportunities were provided by service setting.
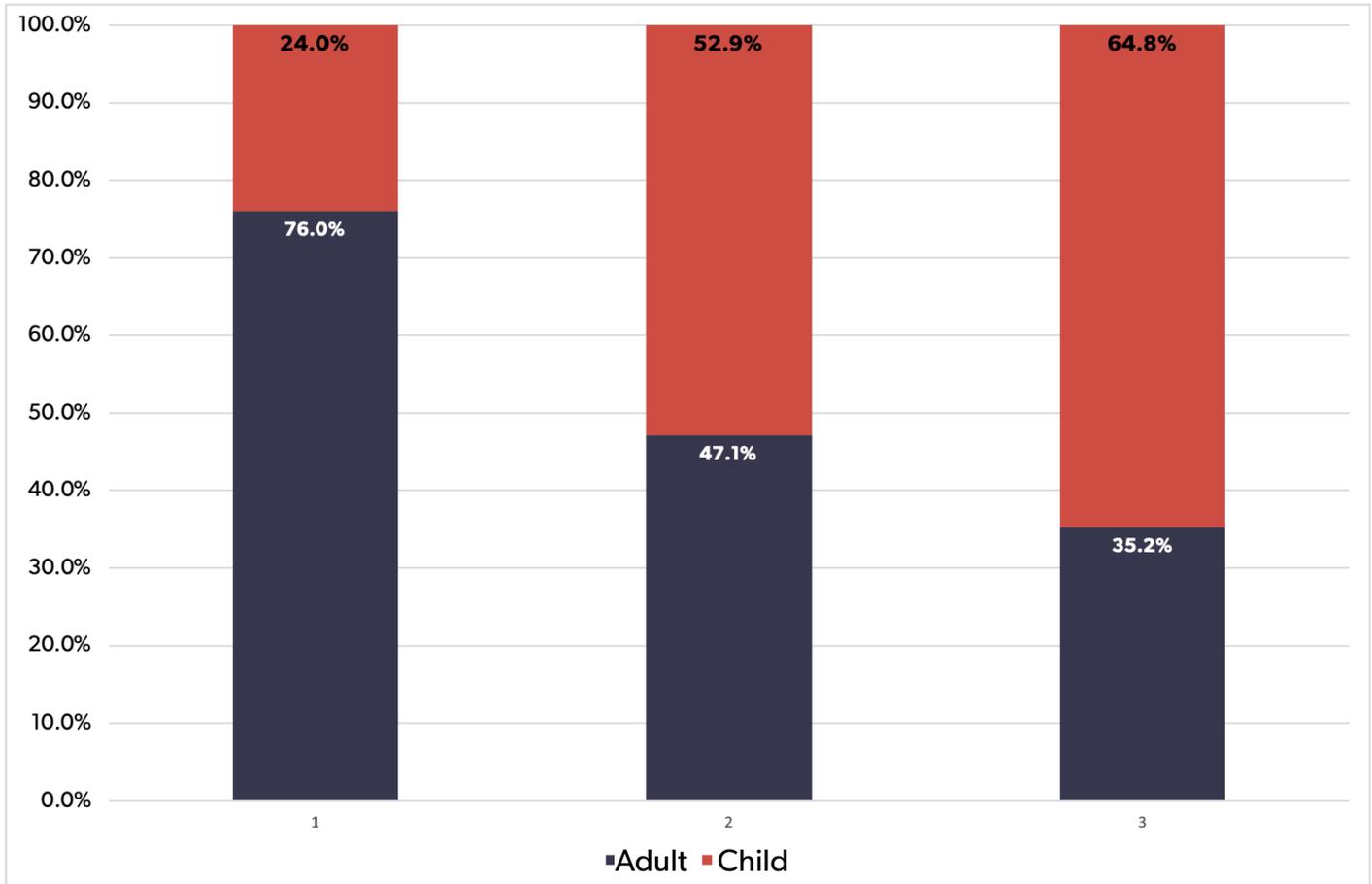
Figure 5
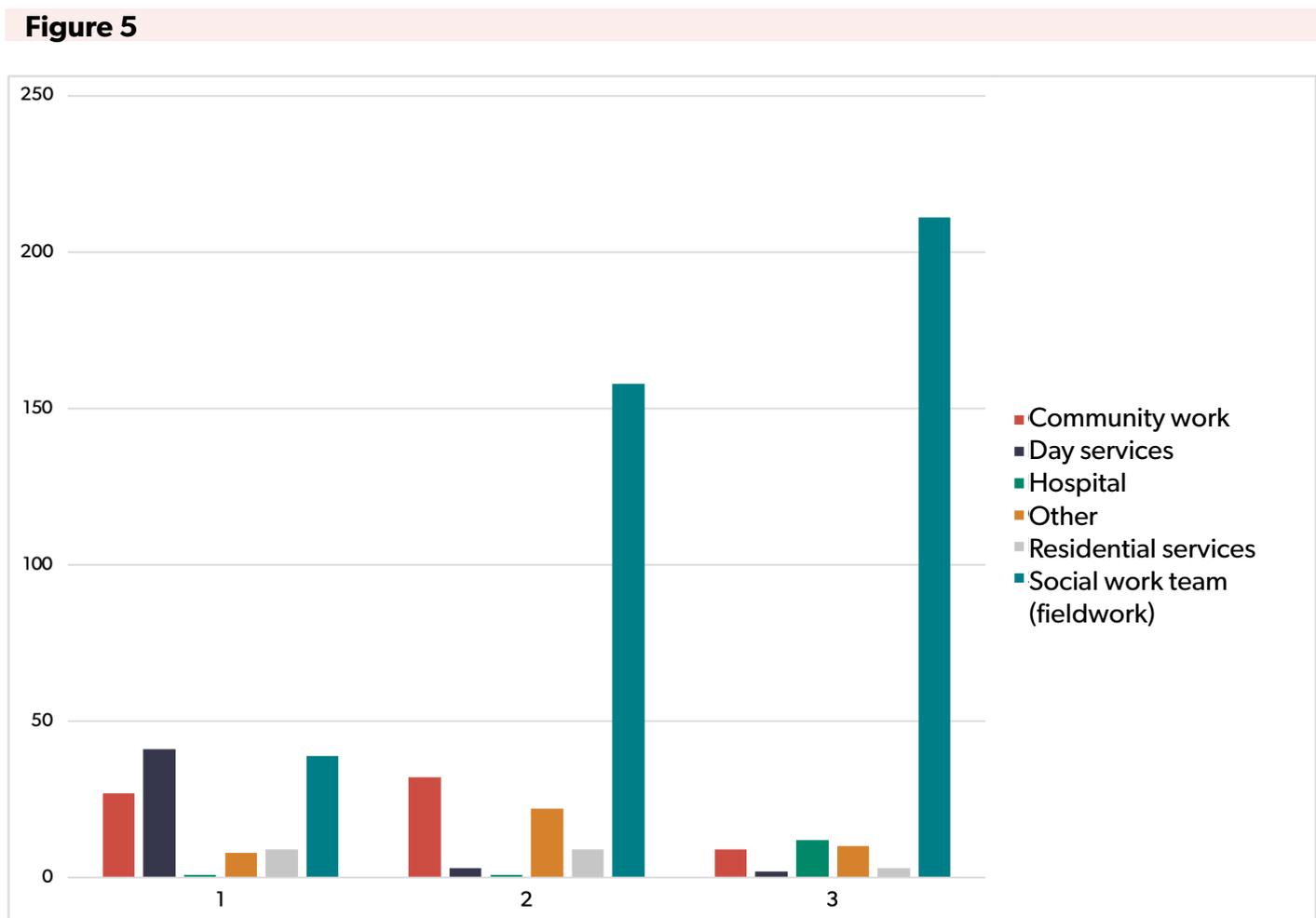
In terms of service setting, most of the longer practice learning opportunities take place in social work teams. This pattern is similar to last year and reflects the continued success of social work teams in providing placements for Level 2 and Level 3 students.

The 2018-19 *Social Worker Workforce Planning* report[3] highlighted that of the **161** newly qualified social workers who joined local authority social services, **65 per cent** went into children's services and 35 per cent joined adults' services.

---

3. *Social Worker Workforce Planning 2017-18* | Local Government Data Unit – Wales.
Available at: socialcare.wales/research-and-data/workforce-reports

Figure 6 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 6

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 7 highlights the number of students who studied five or more academic credits through the medium of Welsh during 2018-19, and the universities where they studied.

Figure 7

University	5+ credits studied through the medium of Welsh	40+ credits studied through the medium of Welsh
Bangor	Year 1: 15 Year 2: 21	Year 1: 15 Year 2: 21
Swansea	149*	94
The Open University	95	0
Source: HESA	*Students completed Social Work – Language Awareness E-Learning module (MOOC) as part of a larger module of learning*	

In addition to Bangor University, which offers students the opportunity to carry out their social work qualifying training through the medium of Welsh, students studying through the Open University are now able to complete stage 1 of their training through the medium of Welsh.

Attrition from programmes

Attrition from programmes is low. Across all levels of training, **5 per cent** of students (42 students in total) left the course and the Register between September 2019 and August 2020. In comparison, the most recent data available shows that 6.8 per cent of students across all Welsh universities do not continue with their studies[4].

Figure 8 shows the numbers and reasons why students left their courses during 2019-20.

Figure 8

Reason for removal	Number
Academic	5
Conduct/Suitability	2
Health	9
Personal	26
Total	**42**

4. Non-continuation: UK Performance Indicators 2017/18 | HESA

Fitness to practise

Programmes must tell us when fitness to practise issues arise that need to be investigated. In 2019-20, **5** students were referred to us under our fitness to practise rules. This is a significant decrease from the previous year's 19. Of the **5** referrals made, **3** were closed following an initial investigation, with 1 student receiving a fitness to practise officer warning, while **2** cases are still under investigation.

The reasons for the referrals were:

- attitude / behaviour (2)

- breach of trust (1)

- breach of confidentiality (1)

- conviction / caution (1)

- professional boundaries (1)

- professional judgement (2)

- misuse of company resources (1).

Some referrals involved more than one allegation about the student

Members of our fitness to practise team visit all the degree programmes as part of the students' induction to qualifying training and run more workshops as requested. Feedback from the universities highlights how useful these sessions are in developing students' awareness and understanding about the *Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*, as well as professional conduct and behaviour.

b. Post-qualifying training

Every social worker must complete 90 hours of post-registration training and learning in each 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"[5].

Carrying out regulated post-qualifying training is one way of meeting these requirements.

We have **12** approved post-qualifying programmes in Wales, which include:

- **5** practice assessor qualifying training programmes

- **1** Approved Mental Health Professional programme

- **1** team manager development programme

- **5** Continuing Professional Educational and Learning (CPEL) programmes made up of:

  - **2** Consolidation Programmes

  - an Experienced Practice in Social Work programme

  - a Senior Practice in Social Work programme

  - a Consultant Social Work programme.

According to the data we received as part of our annual monitoring of approved programmes, approximately **552** social workers enrolled on programmes for the 2018-19 academic year. This included those undertaking single learning modules, as well as those enrolled on full programmes.

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

CPEL 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*[6] framework. The programme also benefits those who are returning to practice after a break, as well as social workers who are working in the UK for the first time.

In 2018-19, **272** candidates enrolled on the Consolidation Programmes, with **195** successfully completing their programme of study in this period and **5** students failing the programme. In line with academic regulations, these students had further retrieval opportunities.

In the period April 2019 to March 2020, **49** registration case conferences were held for social workers who had not completed the Consolidation Programme in time to renew their registration. The most common reasons for not completing the programme were maternity leave, not securing social work employment straight-away after qualifying and changes in employment. In all cases, renewal was granted with a recommendation that the programme should be successfully completed within a set timescale.

The other three programmes that form part of the CPEL framework were commissioned for a five-year period and this commission has now come to an end. The programmes are now in a 'teach-out' period with very few students left to complete them.

We arranged an independent longitudinal evaluation of the CPEL framework, which came to an end in 2019. Here's a summary of its findings:

- the CPEL framework provided a uniquely, clearly-structured pathway of activities, tailor-made for the profession it serves

- participants felt that the CPEL programmes provided high quality, well-tailored programme content that was relevant to day-to-day professional practice, and which offered the potential to specialise as they progressed through their learning

- taking part in the programmes made a positive and sustained contribution to improvements in social worker understanding, skill and confidence

- the time commitment needed by social workers to take part in a CPEL programme was deemed highly-ambitious, with partners citing this as one of the barriers to take-up of places and high attrition rates

- partners reported that high professional caseloads for social workers, as well as the inflexibility and urgency of much of this work, restricted their ability to take part in a CPEL programme: in terms of taking part in the first place and continuing to take part on an ongoing basis

- social workers highlighted that other training necessary for their job also reduced the time they had for CPEL

- throughout the course of the evaluation, Social Care Wales and its partners demonstrated their capacity to respond to the feedback of those engaging with the CPEL framework to continue to improve the quality of the programmes.

6. *The First Three Years in Practice* | Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales
Available at: socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/social-work-qualifications#section-936-anchor

A review of the post-qualifying awards available to social workers is currently underway and we expect this will be completed in 2020-21. This will take account of the preparatory work needed to put the Liberty Protection Safeguards into practice from April 2022, and the introduction of a new Approved Mental Capacity Professional role.

The review of post-qualifying learning forms part of a wider scheme of work relating to the workforce needs of social workers in Wales.

3. 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[7]

- 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 2019-20, we set **4** conditions and made **10** recommendations to approved qualifying degree programmes. We also made **19** recommendations to approved post-qualifying programmes.

The conditions we set referred to programme revalidation activity and meeting of approval rules when making specific modifications to programmes. We also recognised the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the implementation of changes to meet some of the revised requirements of the degree, and so new timescales were set.

Our recommendations included:

- informing us of any changes to Covid-19 contingency plans

- updating student guidance and information in programme handbooks

- telling us about the outcome of quality enhancement reviews and projects.

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.

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

4. Covid-19 summary

Student learning in this academic year has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of student social workers were on placement when the UK-wide restrictions were imposed, with others due to start their placement in the months that followed.

We worked with programmes to make sure students were not unduly disadvantaged because of the crisis and introduced a number of flexibilities to our rules and requirements governing the social work degree in Wales. This allowed the students to continue and complete their studies, as far as possible, on time, where they had met the competency standards.

Some post-qualifying programmes were also affected where there was a practice learning element and similar provision was made for those candidates.

All the programmes have had to adapt to providing teaching and learning support via online learning platforms and a blended learning approach has continued into the 2020-21 academic year. Placements that continued during this period or resumed have had to take account of new virtual working arrangements. They've also had to respond to issues such as student well-being and support, appropriate learning activities and approaches to assessment. These practice learning opportunities have enabled the students to develop as digitally-competent practitioners – an important skill-set for future social work practice.

The need to introduce a level of flexibility to our rules so that we could respond appropriately to this public health emergency highlighted that this is an area that isn't currently addressed in our standards. So we will be carrying out a 'light-touch' review of our rules in 2020-21 to address this.

We will continue to work with approved programmes to make sure they are well-placed to respond to any further developments in the Covid-19 outbreak. We want students to have the best opportunity to learn and develop as professional social workers during this crisis, while prioritising their health, well-being and safety.