



**Cyngor Gofal Cymru**  
Care Council for Wales

*Hyder mewn Gofal - Confidence in Care*

# The Profile of Social Workers in Wales

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Report from the Care Council for Wales Register of  
Social Care Workers June 2014

**Introduction**

This profile provides an analysis of data from a range of sources about social workers and their employment. Much of the data was provided during the application process to register onto the Care Council for Wales (Care Council) Register of Social Care Workers (the Register) and to maintain registration with the Care Council. The data is from the Register on 1 June 2014 and changes in registrants' employment between 1 June 2013 and 31 May 2014.

- The social work workforce in Wales overall is largely stable with a regular supply of newly qualified practitioners. Social workers leaving the profession were predominantly over 50 and the most common reason given for leaving the Register was retirement. 6.5 per cent of social workers withdrew from the Register in the period covered by this report. There is also movement within the sector and some movement between jobs for the same employer may not be reported. The fact that the workforce, overall, is largely stable does not necessarily mean it always feels stable to the workforce on the ground. Other matters such as re-organisation and local variations can create a different experience to the national picture.
- Although the number of applicants for qualifying training appears to have fallen slightly in recent years, social work remains a popular profession for people to study. Social Work programmes are able to fill their approved places and there is no shortage of supply of newly qualified social workers applying for social work posts meaning employers have choice in making appointments. There is some anecdotal evidence from employers that it is more difficult to appoint experienced practitioners and this may be an area in which further research is required.
- The qualifying programme for social workers requires equal amounts of academic and practice learning meaning a positive relationship between training provider and employer is essential in education and training. Formal partnership arrangements are required for all qualifying training. All employers are in partnership arrangements with at least one Higher Education Institution and representatives of employers are engaged in all aspects of development, delivery and management of programmes.
- A requirement for and a commitment to continuing professional development is a defining characteristic of a profession and there is strong evidence of social workers meeting their "post-registration training and learning" requirements. Further, there is evidence of social workers engagement in the Care Council's Continuing Professional Education and Learning framework.

## Key questions addressed by this profile

### Are we training the right people in the right way?

That social work training relies on both academic and practical training is fully accepted. Partnership arrangements remain strong and practice learning opportunities appear to prepare students for local authority statutory social work which many new social workers move into. The increase in Master's level programmes suggests an increase in support for this level of study for qualifying social workers.

Information from the Fitness to Practise process suggests there are no greater problems in current graduates complying with the Code of Practice for Social Care Workers and if anything, suggests it is those who qualified before the publication of the Code and who have more years of experience who are statistically more likely to be referred under Fitness to Practise procedures.

### Are service providers getting who they need?

Qualifying social work training is supported through payments to eligible students, to employers providing Practice Learning Opportunities and to programmes to support service user engagement. Through the development of the register the Care Council is increasingly able to consider the impact of this funding. Data currently suggests a high proportion of those receiving bursaries go on to register as social workers in Wales. The extent to which they are employed as social workers with caseloads

also depends on other factors such as the number and type of vacancies held by employers. Employers use Practice Learning funding in a range of creative ways to support the provision of placement opportunities for students.

## Is there resilience for the future?

In the longer term this investment in training needs to secure social workers committed to their profession. The engagement in the new framework of Continuing Professional Education and Learning and the relatively low levels of social workers leaving the Register, along with other information, suggests that despite the pressures social workers remain in the workforce for a substantial period and develop their careers. This suggests high levels of experience exist within the overall workforce. Additional analysis of other data, for instance on sickness levels would provide a more rounded impression of the workforce's resilience.

## Data and Analysis

### How are social work students prepared for the workforce and what are the facts and figures?

The demand for university places in Wales to study social work remained high, although there are early signs of reduced demand for social work and other university courses.

### Students

#### Applications

Over 1,000 people applied for the 304 available places on social work qualifying courses in Wales in the year. Students may study at Master's level (30 per cent of total places) or at undergraduate level. In 2013–14, 96 per cent of places were filled (293 students)

#### Practice Learning

Local authorities host all social work students and organise all their Practice Learning Opportunities. Last year local authorities organised 815 practice placements for students on qualifying courses in statutory, voluntary and independent settings.

Practice Learning Opportunities in Wales are characterised by high levels of provision within local authority social service settings. This is appropriate given that most newly qualified social workers enter local authority social work. 88 per cent of level 3 placements occurred in local authority social work fieldwork teams.

#### Funding

Funding of learning is drawn from a range of sources including Student Finance Wales, Care Council bursaries and employer support. Care Council bursaries were provided to all eligible students who applied with 233 students (79.5 per cent of all students) benefitting from this support. Approximately 38 students (12.9 per cent) were sponsored by their employer; others may have self-funded or received bursaries from England.

#### Profile

The demographic profile of social work students remains stable, with 27 per cent describing themselves as having some Welsh language skills, 82 per cent being female, 90 per cent white and 61 per cent aged between 25 and 44 at enrolment.

## Qualifying Students

261 students progressed to their final year of study, of whom 255 achieved the qualification, a reduction of four from 2012-13 and 28 fewer than in 2011-12 ( a consequence of smaller student intake between 2008 and 2010)

88 per cent of those who qualified in 2013 -14 had registered in Wales as social workers by June 2014

86 per cent of the students who qualified and registered as social workers in Wales in the year 2013-14 had received a bursary.

## What do we know about the recruitment of newly qualified social workers?

There are high sector related employment rates for social work graduates.

There was a small increase in the number of newly qualified social workers gaining employment, however fewer obtained a post with a local authority as a social worker with a case load than in the previous year. By contrast, the number working for a local authority in other posts grew significantly.

Employers tell us they are keen to recruit experienced social workers. Coupled with a continued reduction in overall vacancies (5 per cent according to the Social Worker Workforce Planning Project, at 31 March 2014), it is not surprising newly qualified social workers are finding it harder to gain employment as social workers with a caseload.

Data from the Register tells us:

- By 1 June 2014, 81.3 per cent of newly qualified social workers had a social care job, this was 1.8 per cent more than in 2013 (79.5 per cent)
- Newly qualified social workers obtaining a social work job with a caseload fell by 9 per cent to 52 per cent.
- Number employed by a local authority with no caseload rose by 14 per cent to 18 per cent.
- 29 of the 34 newly qualified outside Wales (85 per cent) had employment in Wales by 1 June 2014
- 15.6 per cent of social workers qualifying and registering between 1 June 2013 and 31 May 2014 did not yet have employment at 1 June 2014

## What are the employment facts and figures for social workers?

The majority of social workers work for a local authority, and three quarters of social workers employed in a local authority carry a caseload. About 25 per cent of social workers work in other sectors.

The evidence from the Register suggests a broadly stable workforce, with low turnover. Over half the social workers had been in their current post at least three years.

- 57 per cent had been in their current post at least 3 years, 11 per cent over 10 years.
- Over 75 per cent qualified at least five years ago and over half over 10 years ago

Vacancies are slightly higher in Child and Family service than other areas and according to the SWWP 78 per cent of newly qualified social workers appointed to a frontline local authority social work post joined this area of practice. However, only 5.6 per cent of those working in Child and Family teams are newly qualified.

There appears to be some evidence to suggest social workers were likely to start their career working with children and families and subsequently move to other areas of practice.

## What is the age and sex profile of social workers?

The demographic profile of social workers remains largely unchanged but there are patterns emerging especially in relation to their sex.

### Sex

There are more women social workers than men and the difference has been growing in Wales each year; the ratio is four to one. This is due to a greater proportion of men reaching retirement age, a very small increase in the number of men qualifying and newly qualifying social workers being mostly women.

- 79 per cent of social workers in Wales were women
- 84 per cent of newly qualified social workers were women

### Age

The number of social workers qualifying is sufficient to replace those retiring. Therefore, although the age profile is of an aging workforce (mean age of 46 and mode of 51 for women and 55 for men) there are sufficient graduates coming through to replace retirees.

## What is the turnover of social workers and the number joining the Register?

### Turnover

It is further evidence of stability in the profession that while those who joined the Register were predominantly newly qualified and under 36 years old, those who left were predominantly over 50 and retirement was the most common reason given.

- Turnover 6.5 per cent of those registered at June 2013 had left the Register by June 2014
- 7.6 per cent of those due to renew in 2013-14 left the Register
- 236 requested voluntary removal which was 61.5 per cent of those who left the Register, the primary reason given (40 per cent) was retirement.

### Number joining the Register

The social work profession has grown each year since mandatory registration was introduced in April 2005. Of those joining the register just over half were qualified in the past 12 months. Numbers returning to registration after a period out of practice remained small.

The number of registered social workers in Wales grew by 48, with 5,539 social workers on the Register in Wales at 1 June 2014. This included 432 who joined or re-joined the Register, while 384 had left the Register in the year.

New registrants included 59 per cent who had qualified in the last 12 months, 223 who qualified in Wales and 34 qualified outside Wales.

The numbers returning to the Register after a gap remained small (22).

## What is the diversity and Welsh language profile of social workers?

### Welsh Language

Confidence to speak some Welsh is an important factor in delivering a social work service appropriate to community need, for example through the 'active offer' policy of the Welsh Government.<sup>[1]</sup> A third of social workers describe themselves as having some Welsh language; amongst newly qualifying social workers more describe themselves as having some Welsh but fewer describe themselves as fluent.

### Diversity

The percentage of non-White social workers is similar to that of the Census data for Wales as a whole.

- 5 per cent of social workers registered in Wales described themselves as non-white
- 2.1 per cent declared a disability

<sup>[1]</sup> Mwy na Geiriau – Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care. Welsh Government, 2012