

Section two: The Social Care Register

The Social Care Register contains basic details of all the social workers who are registered to practise and all social work students registered in England. It is a legal requirement for this information to be published in order that the public and people who use services can check whether an individual is registered. The Social Care Register (SCR) is available on the GSCC's website. At the time of writing this report the SCR contained details of approximately 87,000 social workers and 18,500 social work students. Only those who are on this register as qualified social workers can call themselves a social worker and it is a criminal offence to use the title 'social worker' without being registered and with intent to deceive.

This section sets out details about who registered with the GSCC in terms of their age, gender, ethnic background, their country of qualification and their employment status. It also sets out how many people have been refused registration by the GSCC; how we approached the regulation of internationally qualified social workers; the introduction of post-registration training and learning; how we assessed the physical and mental health of social workers; and how we dealt with the volume of applications over the nine years the Social Care Register has been open.

The characteristics of those who registered with the GSCC

Age

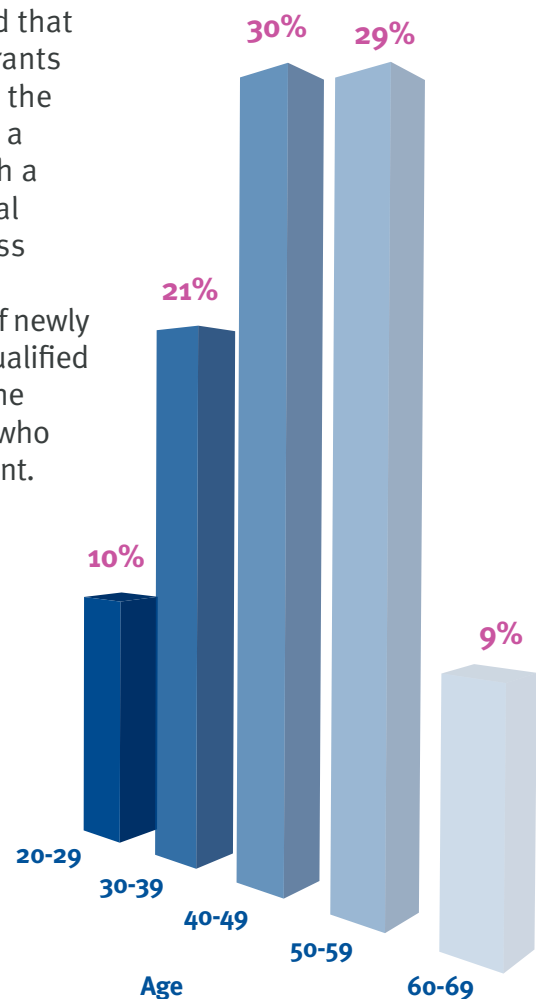
The average age of the qualified social workers registered with the GSCC in September 2011 was 45.9. For those qualified social workers who were qualified in the UK the average age was 47, but this was considerably lower for those who were qualified outside the UK with the average age being 37.6.

The distribution of the ages of those on the register shows that over 60 per cent of those registered with the GSCC are between the ages of 40 and 59. For men on the register, 65 per cent fall into this category and just under 60 per cent

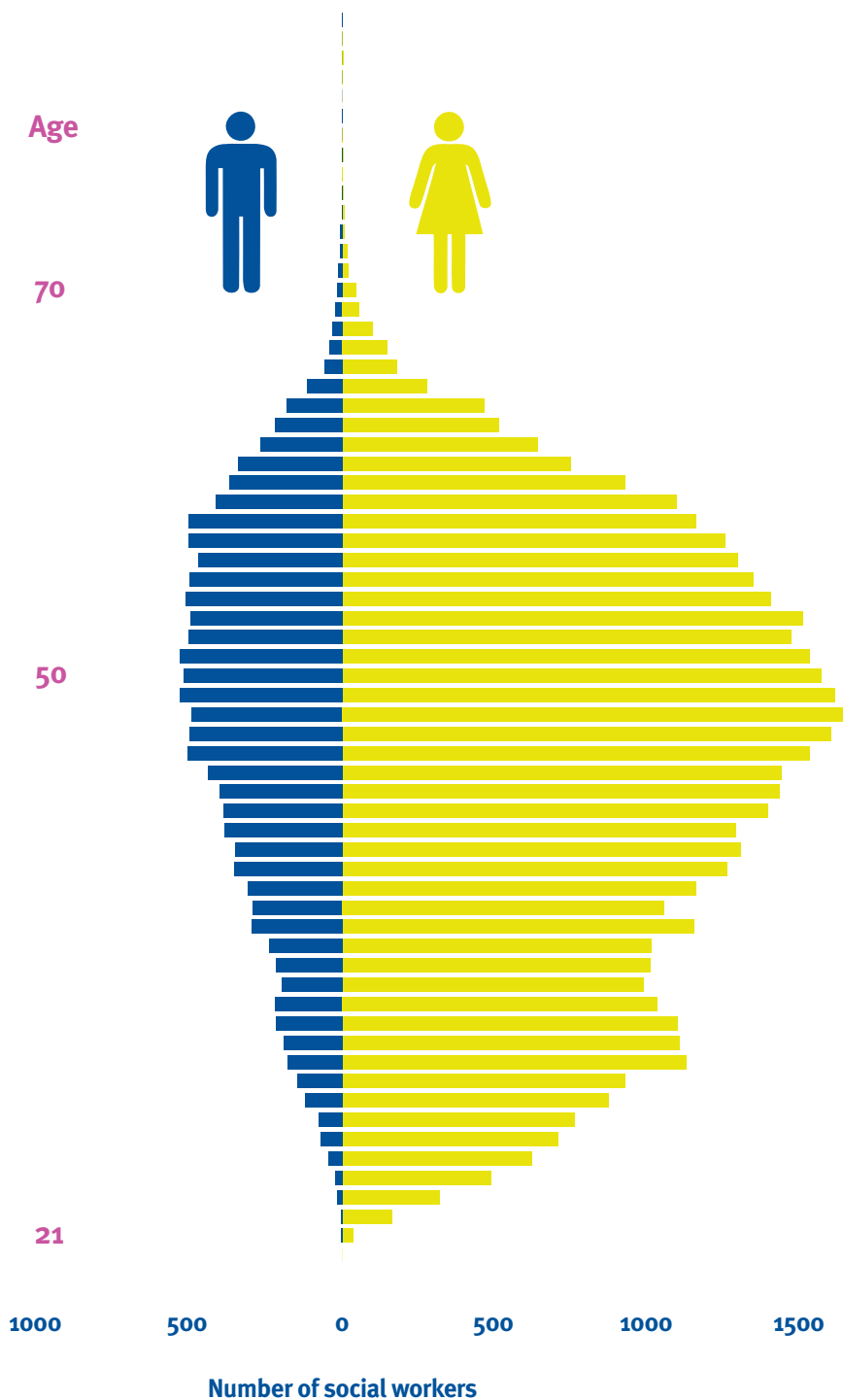
of women. However, out of those who are UK qualified, the percentage of men in the 40-59 age category rises to 68 per cent.

This distribution suggests that there is a likelihood that large numbers of registrants will leave the register in the coming decade or so as a result of retirement, with a likely drop off in the total number registered unless there is a corresponding increase in the number of newly qualified or previously qualified social workers entering the register to replace those who will leave due to retirement.

Demographic profile of all 85,424 social workers on the Social Care Register at 19 September 2011



Age and gender breakdown of GSCC registered social workers



However, it is unclear how the current age distribution of qualified social workers on the register will affect the overall number of social workers practising in the future therefore, no conclusions can be drawn from this in terms of the adequate supply of social workers to deliver services.

In terms of the average age of those on the student register, this is currently 32.5, with 45 per cent in the 20-29 category and 25 per cent in the 40-59 age categories.

The average age of the eight per cent of social workers who qualified outside the UK is 38 which is considerably lower than those who qualified in the UK, which is 47. This suggests that any future decline or increase in immigration of those who qualified outside the UK would also affect the age profile of the register.

Table 1: Age and gender breakdown of GSCC registered social workers

All social workers

Age band	Female		Male		Total	
80-89	7	0.0%	1	0.0%	8	0.0%
70-79	187	0.3%	85	0.4%	272	0.3%
60-69	5,702	8.6%	2,374	12.5%	8,076	9.5%
50-59	18,441	27.8%	6,702	35.3%	25,143	29.4%
40-49	19,687	29.6%	5,765	30.4%	25,452	29.8%
30-39	14,719	22.1%	3,205	16.9%	17,924	21.0%
20-29	7,686	11.6%	832	4.4%	8,518	10.0%
unknown	24	0.0%	7	0.0%	31	0.0%
Total	66,453		18,971		85,424	

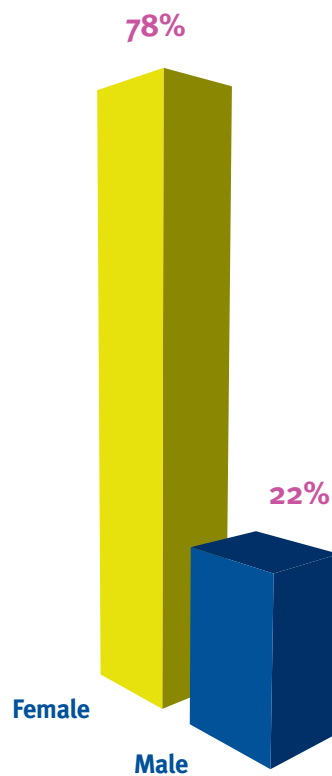
UK qualified social workers

Age band	Female		Male		Total	
80-89	7	0.0%	1	0.0%	8	0.0%
70-79	178	0.3%	83	0.5%	261	0.3%
60-69	5,557	9.0%	2,330	13.4%	7,887	10.0%
50-59	17,995	29.3%	6,552	37.8%	24,547	31.2%
40-49	18,794	30.6%	5,367	31.0%	24,161	30.7%
30-39	12,331	20.1%	2,399	13.8%	14,730	18.7%
20-29	6,526	10.6%	599	3.5%	7,125	9.0%
unknown	24	0.0%	7	0.0%	31	0.0%
Total	61,412		17,338		78,750	

Internationally qualified social workers

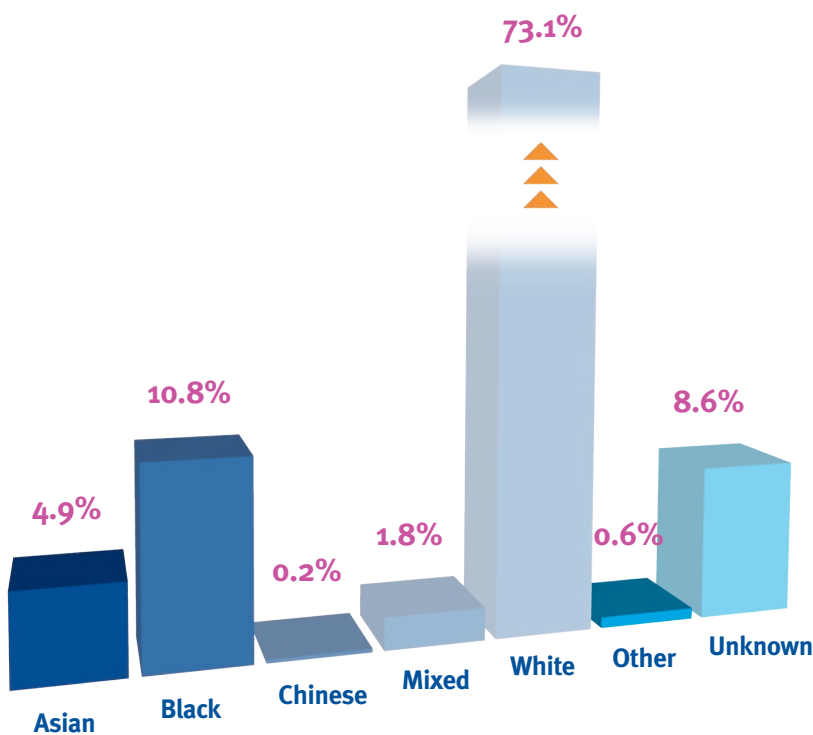
Age band	Female		Male		Total	
80-89	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
70-79	9	0.2%	2	0.1%	11	0.2%
60-69	145	2.9%	44	2.7%	189	2.8%
50-59	446	8.8%	150	9.2%	596	8.9%
40-49	893	17.7%	398	24.4%	1,291	19.3%
30-39	2,388	47.4%	806	49.4%	3,194	47.9%
20-29	1,160	23.0%	233	14.3%	1,393	20.9%
unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	5,041		1,633		6,674	

Demographic profile of all 85,424 social workers on the register as at 19 September 2011



Gender

Seventy-eight per cent of those on the register are women compared to 22 per cent men. This gender split is similar for both UK qualified and internationally qualified registrants. Over time social work is likely to become an even more female dominated profession with 84 per cent of registered students being women and 16 per cent men. Indeed as noted above, men are currently over-represented in the 40-69 category, which further suggests that the proportion of men on the register is likely to decline over time.



Ethnicity

Data on ethnicity is collected on the equal opportunities form which applicants are asked to complete voluntarily. There is a 91 per cent return rate of this data. The data that we do hold is published on the opposite page in **Table 2**.

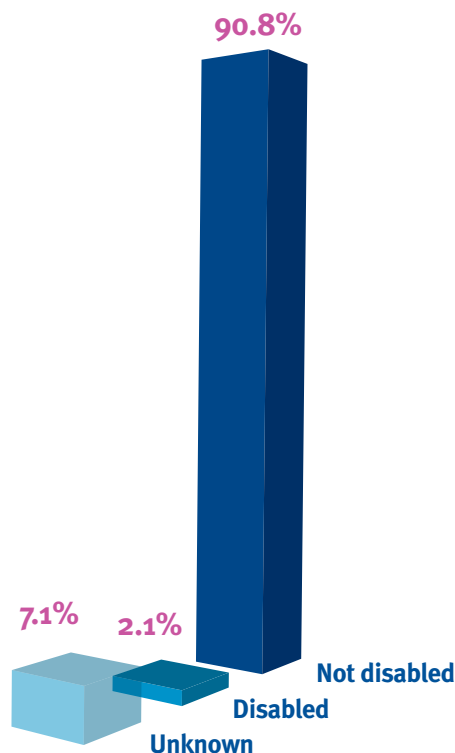
Table 2 Ethnicity of GSCC registered social workers as at 19 September 2011*

	UK qualified social workers	Internationally qualified social workers	Total	% of Total	Benchmark 1 2001 Census England population all age groups	Benchmark 2 2009 ONS estimate of England 'working age' population
Asian or Asian British	3,073	1,067	4,140	4.8%	4.6%	6.9%
Bangladeshi	299	7	306	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%
Indian	1,624	910	2,534	3.0%	2.1%	3.2%
Pakistani	874	23	897	1.1%	1.4%	2.0%
Other Asian	276	127	403	0.5%	0.5%	0.9%
Black or Black British	8,188	1,011	9,199	10.8%	2.3%	3.3%
African	3,648	795	4,443	5.2%	1.0%	1.8%
Caribbean	4,149	112	4,261	5.0%	1.1%	1.3%
Other Black	391	104	495	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Chinese or Chinese British	130	40	170	0.2%	0.5%	1.1%
Mixed ethnic background	1,404	147	1,551	1.8%	1.3%	1.6%
Mixed White and Asian	304	19	323	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%
Mixed White and Black African	244	42	286	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	569	4	573	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%
Other Mixed	287	82	369	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
White	59,091	3,340	62,431	73.1%	89.5%	82.7%
White British	55,357	295	55,652	65.1%	87.0%	80.7%
White Irish	1,822	146	1,968	2.3%	1.3%	1.0%
Other White	1,912	2,899	4,811	5.6%	1.3%	1.0%
Other ethnic group	381	165	546	0.6%	0.4%	1.0%
Unknown	6,483	904	7,387	8.6%	-	-
Grand total	78,750	6,674	85,424			

*Notes: Benchmark 1 is the broad ethnic breakdown of all ages in England recorded in the 2001 Census. (Source: Table KS06, Census 2001 Key Statistics for Local Authorities in England & Wales, Office for National Statistics, 2003). Benchmark 2 is the Mid 2009 estimate of the broad ethnic breakdown of the estimated working age population in England (men aged 16-64 and women aged 16-59). (Source: Table EE2, Population Estimates by Ethnic Group Rel.8.o, Office for National Statistics, 2011) Due to rounding bold highlighted figures in each percent column may not total 100.

Even taking into account the lack of data for nine per cent of social workers, we can state reasonably confidently that the population of the social worker register is more ethnically diverse than the general population of England. For example the proportion of White British people on the Social Care Register (65 per cent) is about a fifth smaller than the proportion of White British people in the general population of England (80-87 per cent). In contrast the proportion of Black African (5 per cent) and Black Caribbean

(5 per cent) people on the Social Care Register are about four times larger than within the general population of England. The proportion of social workers on the Social Care Register from Asian groups is similar to those in the general population. It should be stressed that this data is only able to tell us about the national profile in England. There are likely to be variations between UK regions in terms of both the diversity of population and of the social workers practising in them.



Disability

Similarly the GSCC collects data on the disability of applicants to the register. Again because it is not compulsory to record disability status when applying to the GSCC we do not know the status of around seven per cent of those on the register.³ However, we do know that only two per cent of those on the register informed us that that they had a disability whilst 91 per cent said they did not.⁴

3. The equality monitoring form states that disability discrimination law considers a person to be disabled if they have a long standing physical or mental condition or disability that has lasted or is likely to last at least 12 months and this condition or disability has a substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

4. Given that around 18 per cent per cent of the UK population aged between 16-64 are disabled and about a quarter of this group work in upper middle class or high skilled jobs, it is likely that more than two per cent per cent of registered social workers are disabled and that many of our registrants did not disclose a disability for a possible range of reasons. See: "People with disabilities in the labour market" Office for National Statistics December 2011 www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/people-with-disabilities-in-the-labour-market/2011/rpt-people-with-disabilities-in-the-labour-market.html

The employment status of registrants

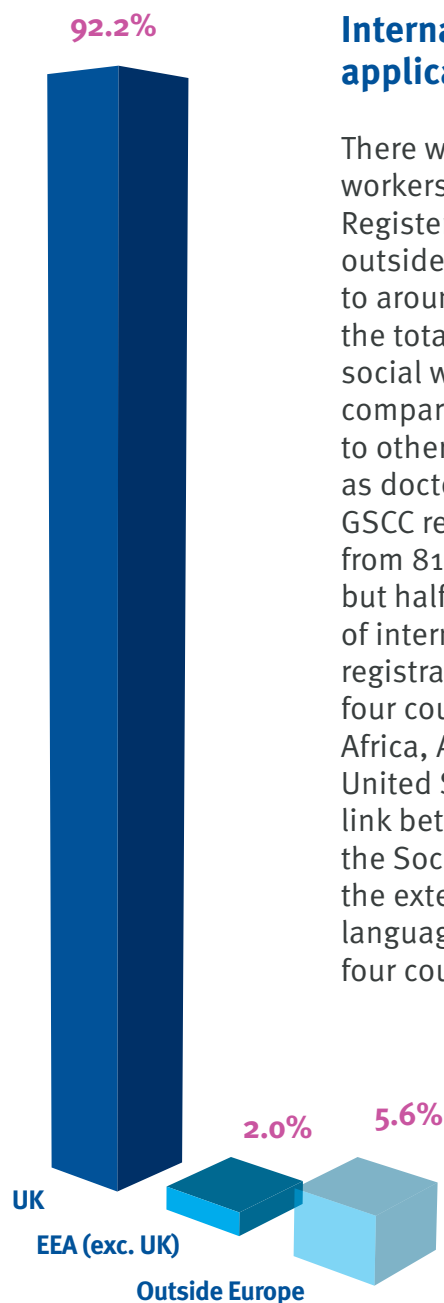
When applying for registration social workers are required to tell us about their employment status. According to the data we held on 19 September 2011, a significant number of our social worker registrants were not working, or not working within social care. In total about 28 per cent of those registered were not working or were not working within social care [See **Table 3** below]. This may include for example those working in academia and unemployed or retired social workers. This raises interesting questions about why social workers decided to register with the GSCC when not practising social work.

One factor here is likely to be the subsidised fee of £30 per year which is one of the lowest for any comparable professional regulator, as well as the possible importance attached by non-practising social workers to the value of being registered. However, as the annual fee increases (to £76) once the public subsidy is removed and the GSCC's functions transfer to the Health Professions Council it will be interesting to see whether non-practising social workers maintain their registration. Again, as with the age profile of the register, the employment status of those on the register is another factor which may reduce the size of the register in the future.

Table 3: The work status of qualified social workers

Work status	Qualified social workers	
Working in social care	61,796	72%
Working outside social care	4,125	5%
Not working	8,108	9%
Other or unknown work status	11,395	13%
Total	85,494	100

5. Once registered registrants should promptly notify us if their employer or employment status changes so we can update the register. Experience has taught us that we are not always promptly notified of such changes, therefore it is likely some of the employment status data on our register is out of date. Nevertheless the data is capable of providing an indication of the employment status profile of registrants.



Internationally qualified applicants

There were 6,674 social workers on the Social Care Register who were qualified outside the UK. This amounts to around eight per cent of the total number of registered social workers, which is comparatively low compared to other professions, such as doctors (37 per cent). The GSCC registered social workers from 81 different countries but half of the total number of internationally qualified registrants came from just four countries – India, South Africa, Australia and the United States. This suggests a link between applications to the Social Care Register and the extent to which English language is used in these four countries. There are

also similarities between the model of social work practice and training in these countries and that applied in the UK. This distribution may also reflect the approach taken by employers when recruiting social workers from outside the UK. However, again, it is likely that the make-up of the Social Care Register will change overtime as a result of recent changes to UK immigration policy which means that very few visas will be granted to social workers from outside the EEA. Currently, just 25 per cent of the GSCC’s registrants who qualified from outside the UK trained in the EEA. This proportion is likely to increase overtime if immigration of social workers from outside the EEA declines.

What we learnt:



There are more women than men on the Social Care Register. The average age of a qualified social worker is 45.9. Due to the age profile of the register it is likely that large numbers of registrants will leave the register in the coming decades as a result of retirement unless there is a corresponding increase in the numbers entering the register.

Twenty-eight per cent of those qualified social workers registered with the GSCC were either not working in social care, were not working or their work status was unknown.

The characteristics of those on the Social Care Register are more ethnically diverse than the population in England as a whole.

Eight per cent of registrants trained outside the UK and 75 per cent of these trained outside the EEA.

Checks ensure the individual is of good character and conduct, is physically and mentally fit to perform all or parts of the work of a social worker, is competent, and has the right qualification

Checks on those applying to join the Social Care Register

The GSCC is required under its legislation to undertake certain checks on applicants to the Social Care Register. These checks ensure the individual is of good character and conduct, is physically and mentally fit to perform all or parts of the work of a social worker, is competent, and has the right qualification. Where the GSCC did not consider that an applicant satisfied these tests it could refer the application to a registration committee for it to decide whether the applicant should be entered on the Social Care Register. The

GSCC registration committee can register an individual with conditions or refuse to register them. In addition, from 2005 onwards officers of the GSCC (rather than the registration committee) were given the powers to refuse registration on the grounds that the qualification held by the applicant did not meet the required standard. **Table 4** shows the breakdown of the reasons why applications were referred to the registration committee.

Table 4: Breakdown of reasons why applications for social worker registration were referred to the Registration Committee

Case manager recommendation to the Registration Committee	Registration criteria referral related to	Financial year application referred to the Registration Committee								Grand Total	% of total
		04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	Apr-Sept 2011		
Refuse registration	Good character	1	9	1	10	2	24	11	1	59	14%
	Good conduct		2	7	1		7	6	2	25	6%
	Physical and mental fitness	3	6	7	9		6	5	1	37	9%
	Competence			1			6	2	1	10	2%
	Qualification	37	42	2	1					82	20%
	Multiple	2	13	31	31	4	9	1		91	22%
Total refusal recommendations		43	72	49	52	6	52	25	5	304	75%
Register with conditions	Good character	4	3	1	4		2	4	3	21	5%
	Good conduct	1	10	8	2		2		2	25	6%
	Physical and mental fitness	14	6	5	3	1	1	4	1	35	9%
	Competence								2	2	0%
	Multiple	1	3	7	5	1	3	1		21	5%
Total conditions recommendations		20	22	21	14	2	8	9	8	104	25%
Grand total		63	94	70	66	8	60	34	13	408	

Two-hundred and fifty-five social worker applicants were refused registration and 92 were registered on the basis that they complied with certain conditions. Additionally, in 922 cases the qualification held by the applicant did not meet the required standard

The GSCC received approximately 220,000 applications between 2003 and 30 September 2011. In the vast majority of cases (99.4 per cent) the GSCC registered those who applied to join the Social Care Register as qualified social workers or renewed their registration. As **Table 4** shows, in total between 2003/4 and September 2011, 408 applicants were referred to the Registration Committee with a recommendation either to refuse registration or register the individual with conditions. The committee agreed with the recommendation that officers had made in 87 per cent of cases. Two-hundred and fifty-five social worker applicants were refused registration by the Committee and 92 were registered on the basis that they complied with certain conditions. Additionally, in 922 cases, officers decided that the qualification held by the applicant did not meet the required standard; the majority of these were applications from those outside the UK.

Overall this is a very small proportion of those who applied to the GSCC (0.6 per cent), but for each of those refused registration or had conditions attached to their registration, it has meant that the public and people who use services have been better protected. The assessments and decisions undertaken by the Registration Committee and by GSCC officers in determining access to the Social Care Register have therefore been very important in upholding standards and confidence in the social work profession.

Those applicants to the Social Care Register who were refused registration or had conditions attached to their registration had the right to appeal against the decision taken. These appeals were held outside of the GSCC at the independent Care Standards Tribunal (CST). Between 2003/4 and 30 September 2011, a total of 89 appeals were lodged with 18 of these allowed by the CST and three conceded

by the GSCC. In two cases, the refused applications were reconsidered by the Registration Committee following a recommendation to do so by the tribunal. Both reconsiderations resulted in a decision to grant the applicant registration with conditions.

In terms of social work students, 99.8 per cent were granted unconditional registration, with 45 students being referred to the Registration Committee with a recommendation to either refuse registration or grant registration with conditions. In total, of those referred to the registration committee, 19 were refused registration, 16 were granted unconditional registration and 10 were granted registration subject to conditions.

What we learnt:



The assessment of applicants to the Social Care Register is an important way of protecting the public and upholding confidence in the profession.

The vast majority of social workers who applied were registered but the GSCC refused registration to 1,177 applicants between 2003 and 30 September 2011. Nineteen social work students were refused registration and 10 were granted registration subject to conditions.

Experience and research taught us that this approach to assessing physical and mental suitability which looked solely at the individual's condition was unnecessary, inefficient and carried a risk of breaching disability discrimination law when applied to disabled applicants

Lessons from assessing the health of social workers

Like all other professional regulators the GSCC was required under the Care Standards Act to assess the 'physical and mental health' of applicants to the Social Care Register. However, applying this standard has been one of the more difficult and controversial aspects of our work.⁶

Our approach to assessing registration applicants' physical and mental fitness has evolved over the years as our understanding of what does and does not pose a risk to the public has developed. Initially we assessed whether an applicant met this standard by asking applicants to declare whether they had particular types of health conditions. Details were then requested from the applicant and, when necessary, further information was sought from

the applicant's doctor and employer. A decision was then taken as to whether the applicant was suitable for registration and if so whether their registration should be subject to any conditions relating to their physical and mental health.

Experience and research taught us that this approach to assessing physical and mental suitability which looked solely at the individual's condition was unnecessary, inefficient and carried a risk of breaching disability discrimination law when applied to disabled applicants. This was because there was no evidence that having a particular condition made a social worker any more likely to pose a risk to the public; the key issue was whether and how they managed the impact of that condition on their work. A

6. Care Standards Act 2000, ss58(1)

Disability Rights Commission investigation into access to the social work, nursing and teaching professions and subsequent research by the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence informed this thinking.⁷

Moreover there are a multitude of ways in which social workers can and do manage themselves and their work to ensure temporary or long term ill health or disability does not compromise the safety of their practice. In social work the vast majority of social workers are working in an employment setting where they are subject to supervision on a regular basis. This means that the responsibility for ensuring that an individual is fit on a day-to-day basis lies with both the individual social worker and their employer. And health and safety and disability discrimination laws require employers to support their

staff in such circumstances. Consequently it is rarely necessary for the GSCC, as the national regulator, to intervene in such matters as employers are better placed to deal with any health-related issues.

In light of the above learning our approach to assessing physical and mental suitability now focuses on asking applicants if they have a health condition or impairment that may at times or in certain circumstances prevent them from safely performing all or part of the work of a social worker. Those that have such a condition are then required to declare that when such circumstances arise that they will manage the risk by adapting, limiting or stopping their practice (whichever is necessary to ensure no one is harmed or put at risk of harm by poor practice).

Responsibility for ensuring that an individual is fit on a day-to-day basis lies with both the individual social worker and their employer

7. [Maintaining Standards: Promoting Equality Professional regulation within the nursing, teaching and social work and disabled people's access to these professions](#) (Disability Rights Commission 2007); [Health Conditions: Report to the four UK Health Departments](#) (CHRE 2009)

It is our view that the health standard in our primary legislation was unnecessary (from a public protection perspective) and unhelpful in that it encouraged people to think that social work is not a suitable profession for disabled people. We therefore welcome the recent proposal from the Law Commission that a specific health test is not included into the future legislation for the social work profession.⁸

What we learnt:



No particular health condition makes a social worker more likely to pose a risk of harm to the public or people who use services.

The key to public protection is ensuring that individual social workers manage the effects of any health condition and work with their employers to deal with any risks which may emerge as a result of that condition.

Regulators must be proportionate in how they use their powers to establish that an individual is suitable to be registered.

8. Law Commission 'Regulation of health care professionals; regulation of social care professionals in England' Joint Consultation Paper LCCP 202/SLCDP 153/ NILC 12 (2012) March 2012

Lessons from registering internationally qualified social workers

Around eight per cent of all social workers registered with the GSCC had trained outside the UK. In total, over the past six years the GSCC had to make an assessment in 11,000 cases about whether a social worker from outside the UK was trained to the same level as a UK trained social worker. It was important to get this assessment right as once registered with the GSCC an individual has the right to practise as a social worker anywhere in the UK.

This was a particularly challenging aspect of the GSCC's work, mainly because the definition of social work varies considerably from one country to another.

For example in the current and former commonwealth countries the model of social work is very close to the model in the UK. But in some parts of Europe the model is closer to 'social pedagogy'. As would be expected across all countries the training standards, length of training and the content of training differs and so any comparison against the UK standards is inevitably difficult to make. **Table 9** shows the number of applications that we received from each country.

Over the past six years the GSCC had to make an assessment in 11,000 cases about whether a social worker from outside the UK was trained to the same level as a UK trained social worker

Table 5: GSCC registered social workers trained outside the UK split by country of training

Country of Training	Number of registrants	Percentage
India	920	14%
South Africa	847	13%
Australia	793	12%
United States	773	12%
Germany	369	6%
Romania	364	5%
Canada	291	4%
New Zealand	249	4%
Zimbabwe	243	4%
Not input on register database	181	3%
Poland	169	3%
Ghana	118	2%
Ireland	110	2%
Spain	110	2%
In descending order of frequency - Nigeria, Portugal, Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary, Philippines	Between 50 - 99 per country	7%
In descending order of frequency - Uganda, Bulgaria, Lithuania, West Indies, Slovakia, Greece, Denmark, France, Finland, Israel, Belgium, Czech Republic, Jamaica, Italy, Hong Kong, Kenya, Brazil, Norway, Pakistan, Turkey, Zambia, Mauritius, Switzerland, Austria, Malta, Slovenia, Estonia, Namibia	Between 10 - 49 per country	9%
In descending order of frequency - Colombia, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Singapore, Albania, Guyana, Egypt, Latvia, Croatia, Taiwan, Ukraine, Barbados, Chile, Iceland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Argentina, Bangladesh, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Lebanon, Thailand, Armenia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mexico, Moldova, Puerto Rico, Russia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Sudan	Between 1 - 9 per country	2%
Total	6,674	

***Notes:** Percent column may not total 100 due to rounding. The figures reflect the social workers on the internationally qualified part of the register on 19 September 2011

In order to make these decisions the GSCC learnt that it was important to have in place a panel of social work experts to review qualifications received from outside the UK. The GSCC also put in place a dedicated team to assess applications which developed considerable expertise in the training and regulation of international social work and the European legal framework. Gaining knowledge about social work in different countries was at the heart of being able to make adequate assessments and the GSCC commissioned research on these areas to become better informed. The GSCC also relied heavily on UK NARIC, the national agency for providing advice on international qualifications, to assess whether an international social work qualification was at the same level as the social work degree.

The team also experienced instances of fraudulent international qualifications being sent through to the

GSCC and validating the authenticity of documentation sent from abroad proved to be a major challenge.

Because of the European Treaty which guarantees the free movement of workers across the European Economic Area the GSCC was required to adhere to a European Union Directive which set out how the GSCC should treat applications for registration from EEA nationals.⁹ The directive meant that the GSCC was able to refuse registration to a social worker from the EEA but only in very limited circumstances where there was clearly no comparability between the qualification and the social work degree.

In most cases the GSCC had to assess an application and set out the difference between the individual's training in Europe and the training standards in the UK. Where there was a gap the GSCC had to identify this and set out to the applicant how they could make up any shortfall by sitting an aptitude

The GSCC put in place a dedicated team to assess applications which developed considerable expertise in the training and regulation of international social work and the European legal framework

9. European Union Directive 2005/36/EC

We learnt that there was an insufficient supply of training and supervised practice placements to allow many social workers who were qualified in Europe to gain registration with the GSCC

test, attending an additional training course or through supervised assessed practice. One of the major lessons that we learnt here was that there was an insufficient supply of training and supervised practice placements to allow many social workers who were qualified in Europe to gain registration with the GSCC. At the time of compiling this report there were 82 social workers from outside the UK who were seeking to gain the additional training needed to bring them up to the UK standard. Although the supply of training was outside of the GSCC's control we consider it is important that such opportunities are made available to EEA qualified social workers to enable them to gain registration in the UK. Addressing this issue will require coordinated effort between employers, regulatory bodies and training providers.

When exercising its regulatory responsibilities, the GSCC had to balance the rights of qualified EEA social workers to practice anywhere in Europe with protecting the public from those social workers who were not properly trained. But it was difficult to establish much of the detail about the suitability of applicants from outside the UK due to the restrictions placed on the GSCC by the EU directive but also because the GSCC learned that in only a small number of EEA countries is there any form of regulation of the social work profession which is equivalent to regulation in the UK.¹⁰ Exchanging information was therefore key to making robust decisions about whether to register an internationally qualified social worker and this was made significantly easier when, in 2010, the European Commission made it possible for the

10. Shereen Hussein; 'Social Work Qualifications and Regulation in European Economic Area (EEA)' King's College London November 2011 www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/sshm/scwru/pubs/2011/hussein2011eea.pdf. This research found that of the 22 EEA member states who responded to the survey. In only 12 of the 22 member states is the social work profession subject to regulation and of these only six national authorities hold information on the good character and conduct of social workers. A licence/certificate to practise was only required in five member states. In six EEA member states once qualified the social worker is registered for life with no further contact being made with the social worker once they are registered. Only one member state said that there was a requirement for a professional to renew their registration.

GSCC to use the Internal Market Information system to exchange information between authorities in EEA members states about both the nature of qualifications in their countries and about individuals.

The EU Directive also permits social workers from the EEA to register in the UK on a 'temporary basis' without allowing the GSCC to carry out the full checks on their background and their qualification, although no social worker has sought GSCC registration in this way. This has been noted as a major risk to public protection both by the GSCC and other health professional regulators and is one which still remains despite changes to the EU Directive.

The GSCC's work in relation to international assessments went much further than Europe as 75 per cent of our applications came from individuals trained outside the EEA. The GSCC made a decision to apply the same approach to those applicants from outside the EEA and developed links with other regulators for example in Canada and the USA. And because the UK was one of the few countries in the world where social work was a registered profession, visitors from across the world, including South Korea, Sweden, China and Malaysia came to the GSCC to learn about our experience and to share their knowledge about social work practice.

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The European Commission has recently proposed revisions to the professional qualifications directive. The GSCC, along with health professional regulators in Europe, has made strong representations to the European Commission that the Directive should be amended to allow health and social care regulators in the UK to better protect the public through greater sharing of information between EEA member states.¹¹ The GSCC is also concerned to ensure that any revisions to the Directive continue to allow the professional regulators to carry out background checks on qualifications and training as well as to strengthen the safeguards for those who are seeking to register in the UK on a temporary basis.

What we learnt:



The GSCC became a regulator in an international labour market with social workers applying to become registered in the UK from 81 different countries. This meant assessing 11,000 applications from outside the UK.

The diversity in the training, regulation and concept of social work outside of the UK made it difficult to assess applications from outside the UK and considerable resource was devoted to understanding social work practise around the world.

The EU Directive sought to balance the rights of EEA social workers to practise in Europe with the protection of the public, and the GSCC has sought changes to the Directive to provide professional regulators with more powers to protect the public.

The social work sector needs to work together to provide opportunities for social workers trained outside the UK to gain the skills and training needed to bring them up to the required UK standard.

11. For more details see: 'AURE position paper - proposal amending Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, 30 January 2012' Alliance of UK Healthcare regulators on Europe www.aure.org.uk

Lessons from introducing post-registration training and learning (PRTL) requirements for social workers

The GSCC introduced the first requirements on social workers to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. Registered social workers were required to undertake training and learning throughout their three year period of registration. This was set out in the Registration Rules which require registrants to complete 90 hours or 15 days of study, training, courses, seminars, reading, teaching or other activities which could reasonably be expected to advance the social worker's professional development, or contribute to the development of the profession as a whole.

All registrants were required to keep a record of their PRTL. The objective of this was to put in place a clear and non-

burdensome system that allowed social workers to meet requirements that enhanced their ability to support service users and carers effectively.

PRTL was not intended to be difficult or expensive. A wide range of activities can count as PRTL. When setting the requirement the GSCC deliberately focused it on learning outcomes rather than prescribing particular subjects or methods of learning.

The GSCC recognised that by introducing demanding requirements on registrants that this could place them in a difficult position in terms of their registration if they were not supported by their employers, who may not have the resources to meet such

The GSCC recognised that by introducing demanding requirements on registrants that this could place them in a difficult position in terms of their registration if they were not supported

We found that the majority of social workers demonstrated satisfactory evidence of training and learning, with many of these exceeding what was required of them

demands. However, the GSCC also received feedback from some social workers that the PRTL requirements were used as a way of seeking time and resources from their employers to assist with their training and learning. This perceived conflict between the availability of resources for training and the expectation that professionals keep their training up-to-date, in order to practice safely, is an issue which all professional regulators face when setting registration renewal requirements.

In January 2011 the GSCC introduced a system of more rigorously checking a proportion of PRTL records, placing particular emphasis on the learning outcomes and how they would affect the quality of the support for service users. The new process required all social workers and their endorsers to confirm that

PRTL had been completed. The GSCC then randomly sampled 2.5 per cent of renewal applicants and asked them to provide a copy of their PRTL record for scrutiny. The GSCC assessed each of the PRTL records sampled to be sure that the training and learning activity was of the required duration, that the PRTL was relevant to the professional role and that it was supported by a credible statement about how the training had improved the practice of the registrant, or had supported the development of the profession as a whole.

During the calendar year 2011, the GSCC sampled 1,186 records of PRTL. Initially 336 social workers did not provide a PRTL record and 100 were asked to provide more information. In the end, through the sampling process, including follow-up correspondence, we

found that the majority of social workers demonstrated satisfactory evidence of training and learning, with many of these exceeding what was required of them. Only four social workers were removed for failure to complete the required PRTL and six had conditions applied to their registration to make up the PRTL shortfall in their next period of registration. Seventy of the social workers sampled had completed post-qualifying courses as part of their PRTL.

What we learnt:



Social workers welcomed the requirement to keep their skills up-to-date and the vast majority of social workers met this requirement, with many exceeding it. The requirement gave social workers an added reason to request resources from their employers to assist with their training and learning as it was necessary to retain their registration.

It is important to strike a balance between the requirements on registrants to keep skills up-to-date and the time and resources available to them to do this.

The 'three peaks challenge' - dealing with the volume of applications to the Social Care Register

A key part of GSCC's function and a large part of the work of staff has been to assess and make decisions on applications to the Social Care Register and to process these as promptly as possible. This is important because only those social workers who are registered with the GSCC are able to practice. Any delays in registering social workers could impact on the delivery of social care services and would undermine the system of professional regulation.

The sheer volume of applications received by the GSCC has made this one of our most significant challenges as well as one of our biggest achievements. Between 2003/4 and 30 September 2011, GSCC officers processed approximately 220,000 applications.¹²

However, as this page graphic shows, the distribution of these applications has been

very uneven, with certain 'peaks' of high volume activity happening at three points over the course of the GSCC's lifetime. This is because; whilst the Social Care Register opened for social workers in April 2003 it only became compulsory to register with the GSCC on 1 April 2005. Despite a significant publicity campaign between 2003 and 2005 only a very small proportion of social workers chose to register during this voluntary phase. Consequently there was a huge influx of applications in early 2005 and the GSCC had to process these applications in a timeframe which was extremely challenging. In order to allow existing social workers to carry on practising, the GSCC issued a 'letter of acknowledgement' that they had applied for registration and could continue practising before a registration certificate had been issued.

Because the GSCC's rules stated that the date for registration renewal had to be the third anniversary of when an individual first registered this meant that the pattern

30,000

25,000

20,000

15,000

10,000

5,000

2003-04

2004-05

2005-06

2006-07

2007-08

12. This figure includes initial applications to join the register, renew their registration or rejoin after a break from the register.

of peak volumes would be repeated every three years. Whilst this allowed the GSCC to plan its resources to meet these peaks it placed significant pressure on the GSCC's overall capacity. Again, the GSCC was successful in managing this demand and following the last renewal peak 85 per cent of renewal applications were decided within just three weeks.

Whenever a new compulsory register is established an initial surge in demand is likely. Our challenge therefore was to manage and minimise the application peaks as best as possible.

We learnt that effective publicity and communications can have some effect but it should be anticipated that few applicants will submit applications until shortly before registration becomes compulsory. Planning for peaks in demand, communicating with registrants through all available means and utilising online technology and automation where possible are amongst the most important lessons that we have learnt in meeting this challenge.

What we learnt:



The processing of such large volumes of registration applications, particularly during peak periods of activity, was a major achievement. Planning and communication with registrants enabled the GSCC to maintain a high level of customer service.

We learnt the importance of utilising online technology and automation to meet this expected demand.

95 per cent of those students who are enrolled on the social work degree were also registered with the GSCC

Lessons learned from the registration of social work students

Unlike the students of most other professions, social work students are subject to regulation across the UK. The only other students of a caring profession who are registered in the UK are student opticians.

The Care Standards Act 2000 permitted the GSCC to open part of the Social Care Register to social work students and this part of the register formally opened in September 2005. However, unlike for registered and qualified social workers, there were no ‘protection of title’ regulations to make it a criminal offence for a student to use the title of social work student without being registered. It was also not a requirement for students to be registered with the GSCC as a condition of enrolling on a social work

degree course, as is the case in the rest of the UK. Instead the GSCC sought to compel students to register through its administration of funding for practice placements; in order to receive funding for practice placements from the GSCC a university needs to provide evidence that the social work student is registered. And over time this proved very successful, so that in 2012 95 per cent of those students who are enrolled on the social work degree were also registered with the GSCC.

There were three main reasons behind registering students. In the first place, the circumstances in which social work students train compared to other professionals are unique. On their course social work students are required

to undertake a total of 200 hours of practice placements and although each student is allocated a practice educator to oversee and supervise their placements, many placements involve unaccompanied students visiting people in their own homes. Students work with a range of people who use services including children, older people, those with mental health issues and those with drug and alcohol dependency issues. They are also required to have experience of statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions and so the nature of their work with service users is far from trivial.

Since 2005, the GSCC has found misconduct in relation to 13 students (five have been removed and eight have been admonished) in a conduct hearing. In addition a further 76 students have been removed from the register following a complaint which was made against them. In these 76 cases they were removed from the social care register either because they were removed from their course by the university or because they left their course voluntarily.

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Registration has the added benefit of requiring students to adhere to a code of practice very early in their careers

Secondly registration has the added benefit of requiring students to adhere to a code of practice very early in their careers. Not only does this introduce students to the standards expected of them as professionals it provides certainty to people who use services about what they can expect from the students working with them.

Finally, because of the nature of the practice placements that students undertake, the GSCC did not consider that there was any difference in regulating students and regulating qualified social workers. Whilst social work students obviously have less autonomy and responsibility than qualified social workers, there is still potential for an unsuitable student to cause harm to people who use services.

One key lesson from this aspect of our work was the importance of working effectively with HEIs to make clear the respective roles of the course providers and the national regulator.

Overall the GSCC has learnt the importance of regulating social work students in order to protect the public. The continued registration of social work students in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales means that it is important that the mechanisms for protecting people who use services is consistent across the United Kingdom and that efforts are made to coordinate the system of regulation across the four countries.

What we learnt:



Registering social work students has been important to protect the public and people who use services. This is because students often have unsupervised access to vulnerable people when on practice placements and it is important for a national

regulator to be able to take action against those who are unsuitable.

Any arrangements for the oversight of social work student practice in the future will need to take into account the specific nature of the training that social workers undertake.