



Annual Monitoring of Youth and Community Work Programmes 2017/2018

Professionally validated by the National Youth Agency



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1.0 Introduction:

The scope of this report is limited to findings given in response to the survey from those programmes and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) running JNC validated courses. Responses show that some wider structural factors are altering the context that JNC courses sit within, and impacting them directly. Namely:

- The last decade has seen a major reduction in funded local authority youth services resulting in less staff, and a shift within those that are funded towards targeted services.
- Where this loss of a career pathway was initially offset by an increase in youth work in the voluntary sector, youth work graduates are now finding employment in associated services such as health services, housing associations, schools and drug services.

Whilst it is encouraging to see that youth work methodology is being transferred into other disciplines and sectors, the dispersal of qualified youth workers into other disciplines is symptomatic of the fact that youth work as a profession has suffered as a result of cut backs, not only in the number of youth work posts, but importantly in prestige. Youth work has often had a lower public profile than other professions working with children and young people, and cuts to services have further reduced its visibility at local level. For some people, there is a perception that youth work is no longer seen as a valid career option, impacting on the value they attribute to professional youth work qualifications.

Despite this challenging environment, youth work qualification programmes are ensuring that students continue to have access to JNC qualified lecturers and supervisors. In the face of the challenges of finding suitable placements and supervisors, programmes remain steadfast in their resolve that JNC qualifications are important. The findings of external examiners and reviews show that quality remains high within these courses, even though the challenges surrounding them are evident, including:

- Student numbers dropping by 50% from a peak in 2010
- Many youth work courses being insecure in their institutions because of university-wide pressure on student numbers and resources
- Significant reductions in suitable fieldwork placements due to the loss of local authority youth services

We also find that students themselves are struggling; common reasons for non-completion included:

- Large amounts of personal commitments as carers, parents, employees
- Tight financial circumstances
- Returning to formal learning after significant gaps and/or without academic A-Level qualifications
- Issues with health, especially mental health

Other high-level findings that are evident in the returns show that:

- Overall there has been a decline in student numbers, programmes and HEIs offering courses over a ten-year period.
- Student intakes are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of ages, ethnicity, experience and qualifications at entry (fewer students are coming into youth work education via A-levels). There are, however, significant imbalances in gender, with women accounting for 3 in every 4 new students.
- JNC qualification programmes are: offering extra support to a diverse student population, are ensuring that youth work remains at the heart of delivery, and are becoming increasingly multi-disciplinary in their content to reflect these changing contexts and to give students the best opportunities for future employment.

Although there has been much success in the innovations that programmes are making, the continuing decline in student numbers on youth work qualifications remains a concern especially given the promising indicators that youth work is receiving greater national recognition through Government.

This is seen in the incoming investment of £90million to the Youth Futures Foundation for distribution to groups tackling youth unemployment and £200m Youth Endowment Fund for interventions and community partnerships preventing children at risk of being drawn into crime and violence, and recent announcements for subsidised training

and workforce development. This suggests the tide is turning with new investment in young people which recognises the need for trained and qualified youth workers.

The Civil Society Strategy also recognised a need for trained and qualified youth and community development workers, with the strategy referring to youth work as ‘transformational’. Within this strategy was also a commitment to review the Guidance on the statutory duty of Local Authorities for leisure-time services and activities to improve young people’s well-being. This review has been formally launched, making good on the commitment. The Government has also committed to developing a Youth Charter which will set out a vision for young people over the next generation and beyond.

Additionally, the Government has also pledged to renew specific youth work qualifications that were due to expire in 2020, subject to a business case, and review of the youth work training curriculum, demonstrating an awareness and recognition of the need to have the right foundations in place for a future workforce.

There is thus much positivity to be built upon.

2.0 Recommendations:

1. **The Trailblazer Level 6 Youth Work Apprenticeship, which is expected to be fully approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education in 2019 is designed to sit alongside degree level youth work qualifications. Universities currently delivering professional youth work qualifications are encouraged to engage with the Apprenticeship route as deliverers of training.**

The Apprenticeship Standard has been developed through a Steering Group of youth work employers supported by the NYA and representatives of HEIs. The enhanced status of apprenticeships and the funding attached to them through the Apprenticeship Levy is likely to make this an attractive route for both employers and those who wish to train as youth workers. Larger employers including local authorities are likely to create trainee/apprenticeship posts in youth work as a result of the implementation of the Apprenticeship Standard. The co-funding scheme also makes apprenticeships an attractive proposition for smaller organisations that aren't subject to the Levy.

2. **There is an urgent need for an overall Workforce Development Strategy for Youth Work in England, underpinned by labour market research and identification of trends in the wider children and young people's workforce. NYA and the Education & Training Standards Committee (ETS) are well-placed to lead this strategy with their partners across the sector, and should seek funding to enable accurate forecasting of likely supply and demand for youth work qualifications at all levels over a 5-10 year period**
3. **The value of a professional framework for youth work qualifications, recognised by the JNC for Youth & Community Workers should be highlighted and promoted by all those with an interest in ensuring a qualified and professional workforce to support young people.**

Partners across the youth work sector and key employers' organisations, notably the Local Government Association should be asked to embrace the recommendations on workforce from the recent All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs *Youth Work Inquiry* (2019). The professional status of youth work must be valued and enhanced, and employers should regard it as their responsibility to ensure that those they employ in youth work are appropriately qualified and experienced.

4. **NYA should work with regional partners and universities to find ways of facilitating the supply of suitable placements for youth work students at regional and sub-regional level.**

For some HEIs there are problems securing such placements, and bringing the practice sector closer to education in this way is therefore deemed beneficial. There should also be exploration into whether funders could pledge to support a certain number of spaces for placements on youth work qualification programmes

5. **Develop a strategy for attracting more men into the profession.**

Whilst youth work students are increasingly diverse when it comes to experience, ethnicity and age, there are concerns over the female to male ratio of new recruits, which currently stands at 3:1. More young males need to be attracted to the sector, which, in turn, may help arrest the decline in student numbers overall.

6. **Develop a national campaign to promote youth work as a career option.**

Given the recent increased interest in the role that youth workers can play in supporting young people in challenging circumstances, there should be a campaign to highlight the diversity of work opportunities that a JNC youth work degree can lead into. Fire services, housing associations, drug services, schools and many others are hiring JNC graduates, and there should be some media activity to boost a positive image of the youth work sector, but also to alert prospective new students to the breadth of opportunities that studying for a JNC recognised degree can lead to.

3.0 Background

The National Youth Agency (NYA) 'Professional Validation: Guidance and Requirements' document sets out the requirements and the Process for the Professional Validation of Higher Education Programmes which are currently recognised by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) as conferring professionally qualified status for Youth Workers in England.

This report outlines the findings of the annual review of professionally validated programmes for the academic year 2017/18, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

The overall procedure for validations comes within the purview of the NYA's Education Training Standards Committee (ETS).

Whilst the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have the main responsibility for the monitoring and quality assurance of the programmes, the NYA monitors individual programmes in order to retain a view on whether programmes continue to operate in accordance with the requirements of professional JNC validation.

Annual Monitoring is an annual requirement for Higher Education Institutes to maintain JNC status for youth work programmes, and the data contains valuable evidence, which collectively informs this Annual Monitoring Report.

The objectives of the Annual Monitoring are:

- To ensure that programmes are operating in accordance with the criteria for professional validation and JNC requirements.
- To alert the Education Training Standards Committee (ETS) to overall patterns and trends in education and training. (Participation in the annual monitoring process is a requirement for the continuing professional validated status of a programme).

4.0 Methodology

In order to comply with the context above, institutions are required to complete the online 'NYA Annual Monitoring pro forma' for each programme that is validated by the NYA.

The following quantitative and qualitative information is currently collected;

- Data on admission, progression and completion and the demographic profile of student numbers;
- Data on staffing levels, placements and supervisors;
- Confirmation of quality assurance within the programme with main strengths and development areas highlighted.

The collection of quantitative data has some minor inconsistencies due to the way that individual HEIs record their data, and others not providing full qualitative sources. For example; some courses receive both January and September intakes with course lengths also differing between distance learning and traditional 'in-house' courses, causing inconsistencies in student numbers.

Where there are such examples of methodological variance these are indicated in the relevant places throughout the remainder of this report.

In order to try and improve upon the analytical aspect of the collected data we have, this year, been more selective in what is reported as in many cases, more is less. Showing highlights and trends over a number of years helps to identify shifts in the landscape.

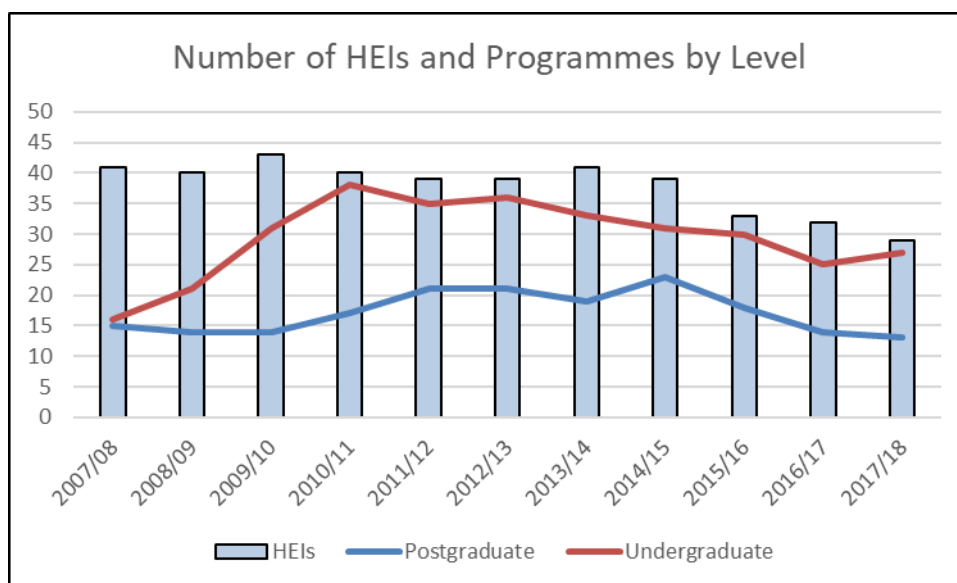
However, whilst for high-level data this is possible over a ten-year period, there have been multiple differences in the way data is collected that does not allow such a time scale and often a three-year period is used instead. Furthermore, most data is now placed into a visual representation through a graph or chart in order to make identifying those trends easier.

Lastly, the quantitative data is interspersed with qualitative data in order to substantiate any assertions or conjectures made, or to help explain the trends shown.

Pro-formas were disseminated to **29** HEIs offering **41** programmes, with a 100% response rate.

5.0 Analysis of Data:

5.0.1 HEIs and Programmes - High level overview of programmes:



Both the number of HEIs offering programmes, and the number of programmes offered are at record lows (41 programmes were recorded also last year, but from a lower response rate). Future reports should look to assess whether youth studies courses that are non-JNC validated, or other courses which have elements of youth work within them, are suffering from comparable declines. For example, youth ministry programmes.

Looking at the data over a ten-year period it is clear that following a peak in 2010/11 there has been a general decline in the number of JNC validated undergraduate courses offered. The professional qualification changed to degree level in this period which saw a number of new programmes emerging from previous Dip/FDA programmes. The period since then has seen the introduction of fees for study, especially important for mature student entry, and austerity measures impacting heavily on the youth sector. Both are likely explanations for the reduction of provision and student numbers.

5.0.2 Regional Analysis of Courses

The regional analysis of courses enables a picture to be presented of the location of youth work programmes.

2017/18	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
East Midlands	4	3	7
Greater London	4	3	7
North East	1	0	1
North West	4	2	6
South East	4	1	5
South West	3	1	4
West Midlands	1	2	3
Yorkshire & Humberside	6	2	8
East of England	0	0	0
TOTAL	27	14	41

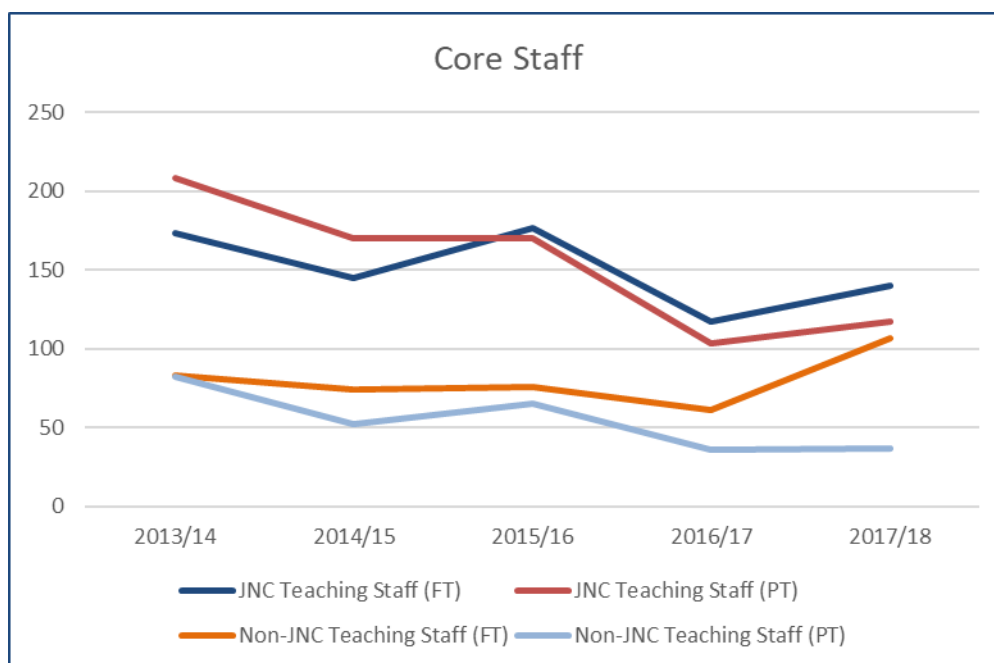
The returns showed 2 new courses; 1 new undergraduate course in the East Midlands, and 1 post graduate course in London.

There are now no courses located in the East of England with the West Midlands and the North East only offering 1 undergraduate course in each region.

There are increasing numbers of HEIs who told us that they are offering their courses via distance-learning platforms which may mitigate this to an extent. Future monitoring could look to explore this to know how many students have taken this option up, where those students are based and how whether this is an attraction for students and may help recruitment.

We also do not know if shortfalls in academic training are being offset via more vocational based learning, or if more students are enrolling on non-JNC courses (including multi-disciplinary courses).

5.0.3 Staffing Levels



In 2017/18 there were 257 full-time teaching staff across all courses, of which 57% were JNC qualified, this is the lowest figure on record by almost 10%. 2 courses had no Full-Time JNC qualified tutor and indicated a number of part-time lecturers. These will be contacted to explore whether requirements are being met.

Of the part-time teaching staff, 76% were JNC qualified, which is not significantly different to previous years.

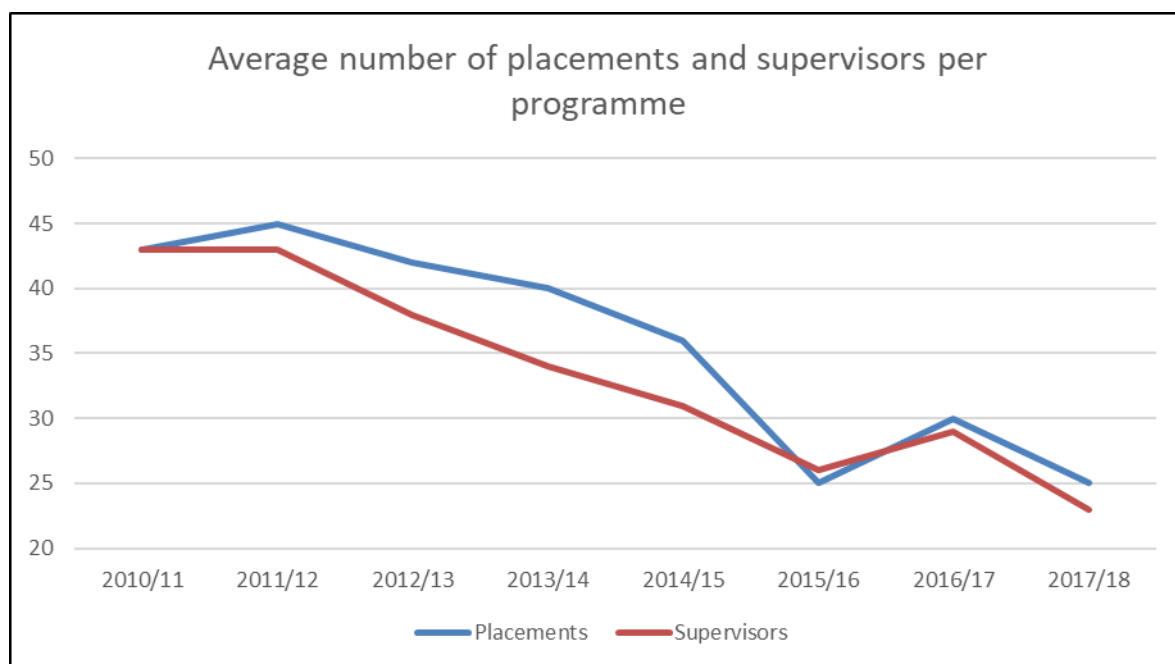
Using 2013/14 as an index point, the data shows a decline in all numbers of core staff since 2013/14 except for the use of non-JNC teaching staff.

Of the other staff recorded; only 1 institution declared having PhD students and researchers on their staff.

Whilst we previously reported on the use of visiting and shared internal lecturers, there has been some double counting in the methodology by recording the number of total lecturers who were JNC qualified as separate lecturers. However, below, this is corrected for 2017/18, with the figures not significantly different from those for 2016/17 when corrected. This will now be tracked over coming years.

2017/18	Number Used	Number JNC Qualified	% JNC Qualified
Visiting External Lecturers	170	113	66%
Shared Internal Lecturers	65	13	20%

5.0.4 Fieldwork Placements



Along with the drop in the total number of programmes on offer, is a concurrent decline in the opportunities for placements, and the number of supervisors used in those placements.

Many institutions have voiced this area as one that causes concern, attributing it mainly to a reduction in the number of statutory funded youth services affecting both the number of available placements and geographical proximity. There is also a recognition that youth work is increasingly being delivered in non-traditional or more blended settings; e.g. in health care services, within housing associations, or in youth offending environments.

For some this has meant that:

“supervisors are drawn from a range of aligned practices - including counselling, housing & welfare advice, asylum and refugee work, teaching and social work, and that consequently, working with non-JNC supervisors is inevitable.”

However, despite the decrease in number of placements that are solely youth work focussed, respondents were also quick to state that *placement providers remain strong*, with some purposefully choosing to either:

- Work with a select few trusted providers (*stronger relationships and better quality placements with fewer placement providers has been a general direction we have taken*); or,
- Ensure that supervisors were given some relevant training to counter the fact they were from different sectors, non-JNC qualified, or new to youth work supervision (*we run two briefing sessions annually for all supervisors & [we] brief ... the programme placement coordinator where the organisation is new to hosting placements*).

This aside, 70% of supervisors used on placements held JNC qualifications, which is comparable to previous years.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
% of JNC Qualified Supervisors	67%	74%	76%	61%	69%	70%	70%

This is likely stable because many institutions are taking proactive steps to ensure they meet validation requirements and that students have access to JNC qualified supervisors where possible:

“Where supervisors have limited experience we draw on our pool of JNC qualified practitioners elsewhere.”

“Where a student does not have a JNC qualified supervisor in their workplace, a group supervision process is set up with a JNC-qualified member of the university team.”

5.0.5 Recruitment and Student Numbers

The total number of students recruited has decreased slightly again with a difference of 24 less students this year compared to last, continuing a pattern of reduction in cohort numbers.

Again, the target number of recruitments was not met (2009 being the last year that actual recruitment was above target) yet was 3% higher than last year.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Actual	951	825	701	793	673	456	432
Target	1013	1037	811	847	694	566	517
% Achieved	94%	80%	86%	94%	97%	81%	84%

The dominant narrative within responses indicates that youth work is seen as an increasingly uncertain employment pathway due to a lack of secure jobs with consistent and continuous chances for progression:

“The drop in recruitment numbers is heavily linked to cuts in youth services nationally with employers having limited or no staff development budgets”

“school and colleges based careers staff that I have spoken to see this as a non-viable career option because of their perception of the impact of service cuts and consequent closure”

Whilst this could be said to effect the ‘demand’ of youth workers, it has also had an impact on the supply as it causes an *absence of generic youth projects providing feeder routes*, meaning students are;

“less likely to come from local authority youth work settings, they are in the main involved in voluntary and community based youth work or in the more formal 'care'/youth justice sectors”

in part because;

“cuts in youth services nationally [result in] employers having limited or no staff development budgets.”

Another factor that may impact on the reduction in student recruitment are that when asked whether the programmes attend recruitment fairs or similar, nearly two thirds (64%) of institutions either did not respond to the question or explicitly stated that they did not.

Changing the perception that youth work is not a viable career option is therefore one that needs to be attended to, both by HEIs themselves, and within public and professional discourse.

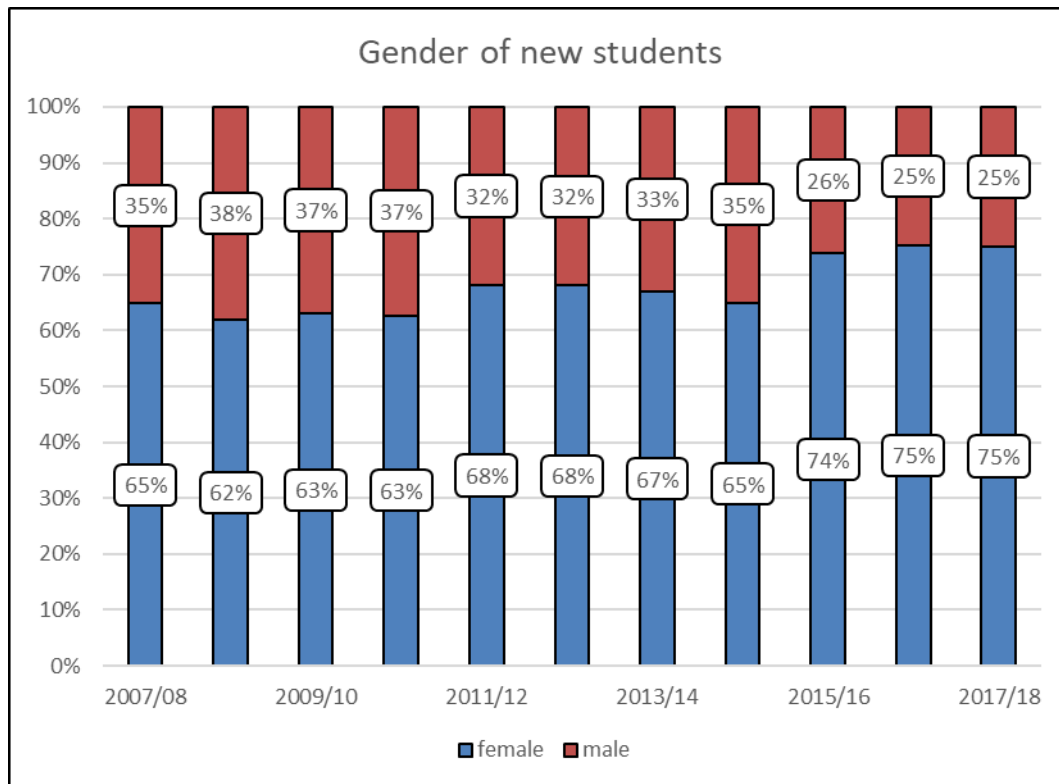
5.0.6 New Student Demographics - Gender

There is continuing trend of a large gender imbalance in student recruitment. Whilst this has always been evident it has become increasingly divergent since 2015/16, with 3 in 4 students now female. In some institutions this ratio is even more imbalanced:

“in two of the past three years we have recruited female-only cohorts”

“the new cohort of students lacks gender diversity ... we have only one male student.”

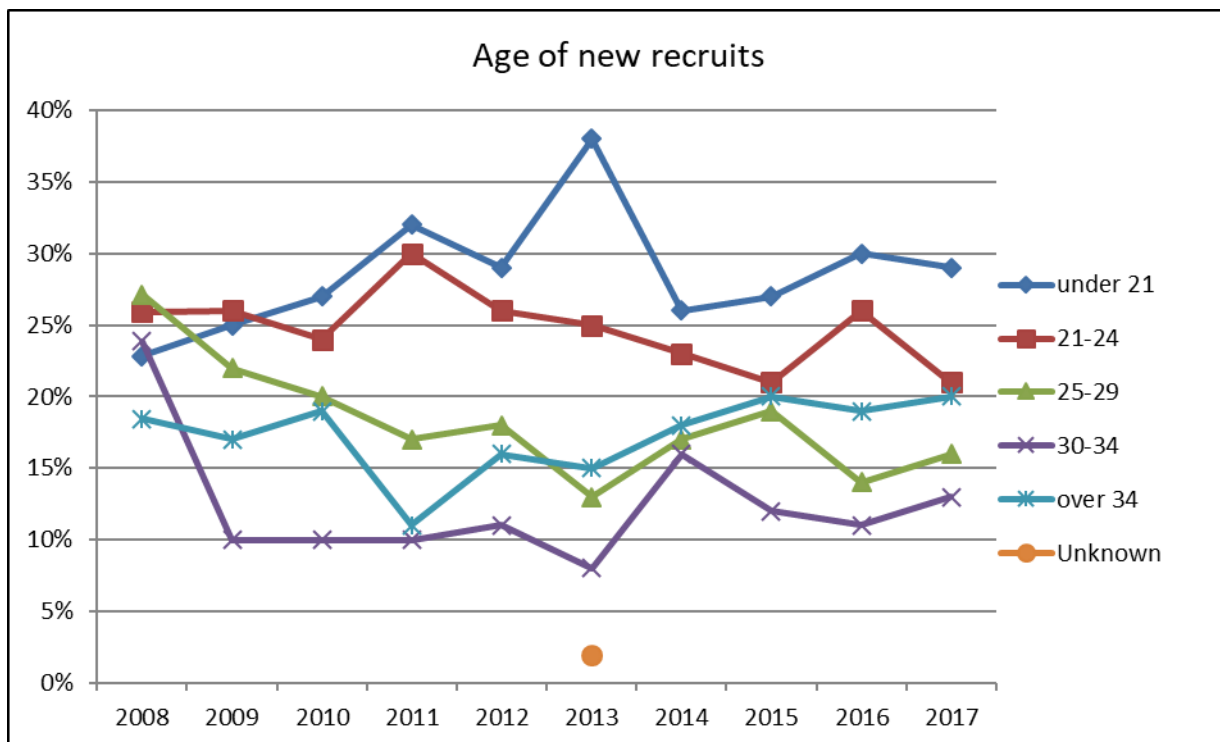
No potential reasons for this were given in the responses.



*NB –The data collection does not yet allow for any other gender denominations

5.0.7 New Student Demographics – Age

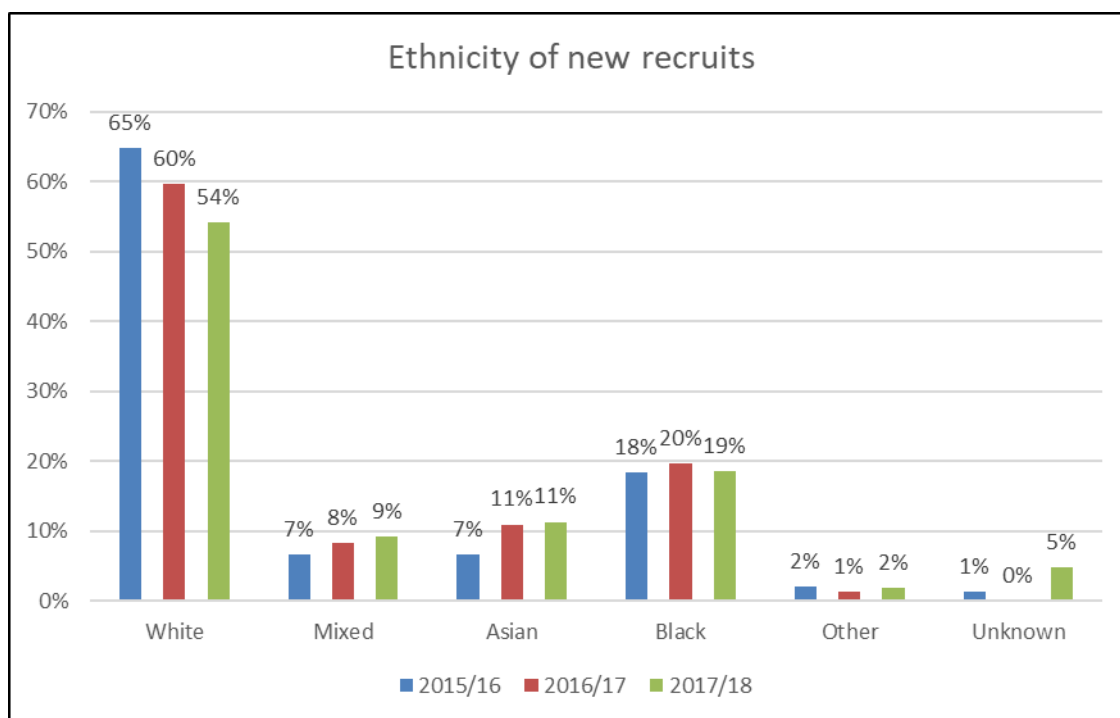
The majority of new students continues to come from those under 25, or those over 34, a trend evident for the past five years. However, following a clear divergence in the years 2011/12 to 2013/14 there is a more balanced spread of the age of new recruits, as shown below.



5.0.8 New Student Demographics – Ethnicity

Data on ethnicity is collected in accordance with the categories recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality, based on the Census. Information is requested under sixteen categories of ethnic origin which can be summarised into seven main groupings as per below.

Data was received on 411 students and shows that the intake of new recruits continues to diversify in terms of ethnicity. This year also recorded 3 white Gypsy or Irish travellers, the first such instance of this ethnicity being represented.



5.0.9 New Student Demographics – Disability

Over the past three years the percentage of new recruits with a disability has hovered around the 17% to 20% mark, suggesting that the programmes are accessible to all.

However, we have no understanding of what type of disabilities are recorded, and given that ‘health issues’ are consistently recorded as the main reason for undergraduate withdrawal or deferral from courses there should be more consideration given to whether these facts are linked, and whether greater support is needed for disabled students to complete the course, for example by considering the suitability of placements.

More than one HEI responded to this effect:

“high level of support needs of students contributed to withdrawals, particularly mental health.”
“retention is increasingly proving problematic. This reflects the complexity of the lives of many of our students, large numbers of who have family and other caring responsibilities, and a high proportion of whom experience mental health problems.”

5.1.0 New Student Demographics – Qualifications at Entry

Postgraduate courses are naturally well populated with students who have at least a degree level qualification, with 90% of all students holding a degree. The other students have accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Of concern is a continued trend downwards in the amount of new undergraduate recruits who have at least an A-Level as their highest qualification upon entry (24%). This suggests that youth work is not a favoured route for those finishing A-levels and considering further or more specialised study.

However, this is somewhat offset by the number of those coming with equivalent level 3 or level 4 qualifications from elsewhere (49%); possibly suggesting that new recruits are more likely to come from a vocational pathway rather than an academic one.

5.1.1 Current students – Attendance

The attendance levels of part-time students remain very high, at 95% and above.

However, as with previous years, the major concerns are over the attendance levels of full-time level 4 students in particular, which are consistently the lowest, this year dropping 5 points to 76%.

% of students with 80% + attendance levels	Full Time	Part Time
Level 4	76%	95%
Level 5	83%	100%
Level 6	88%	97%
Post Graduate*	97%	97%

*The data for one Post Graduate course was incomplete

Whilst attendance levels at level 4 are therefore seemingly a cause for concern, various institutions did point out variations on the theme that there are numerous students with:

- Demands on a caring role
- Childcare issues (particularly child illness)
- Other family / household barriers

Given this, one institution suggested that:

“Engagement is a better indicator of commitment - for example, students access lecture capture when unable to attend.”

Retention and attendance rates were, however, improved where extra support was provided;

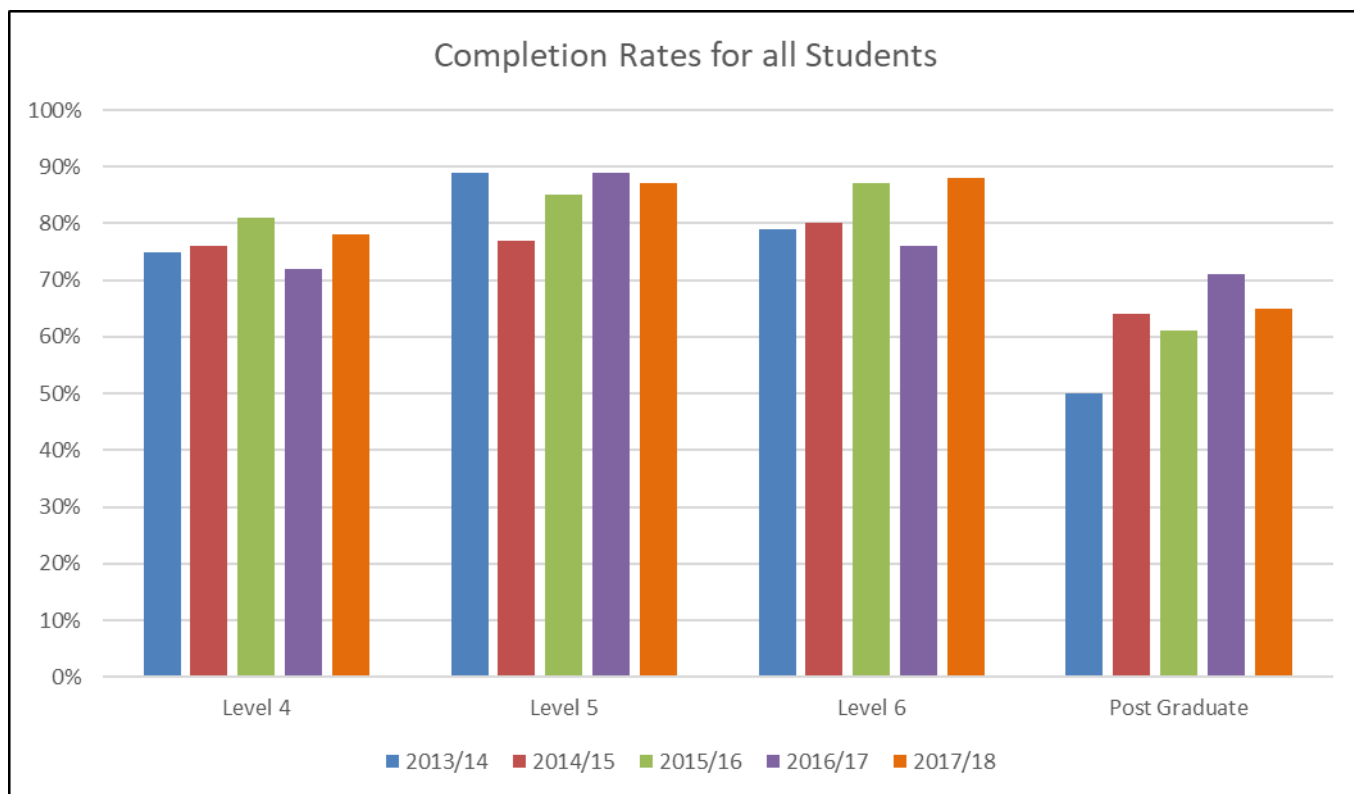
“Significant additional support was provided in the form of additional tutor group sessions and a ‘Welcome to Semester B’ event.”

There should also be consideration as to whether mental health factors play into this, with it being the most cited reason for withdrawal from courses.

5.1.2 Current students – Retention and completion

The rates of student completion of courses show a fairly distinct pattern, in that completion rates are lowest for undergraduates at Level 4, and highest at Level 5.

Postgraduate completion rates remain around the 60% to 70% mark.

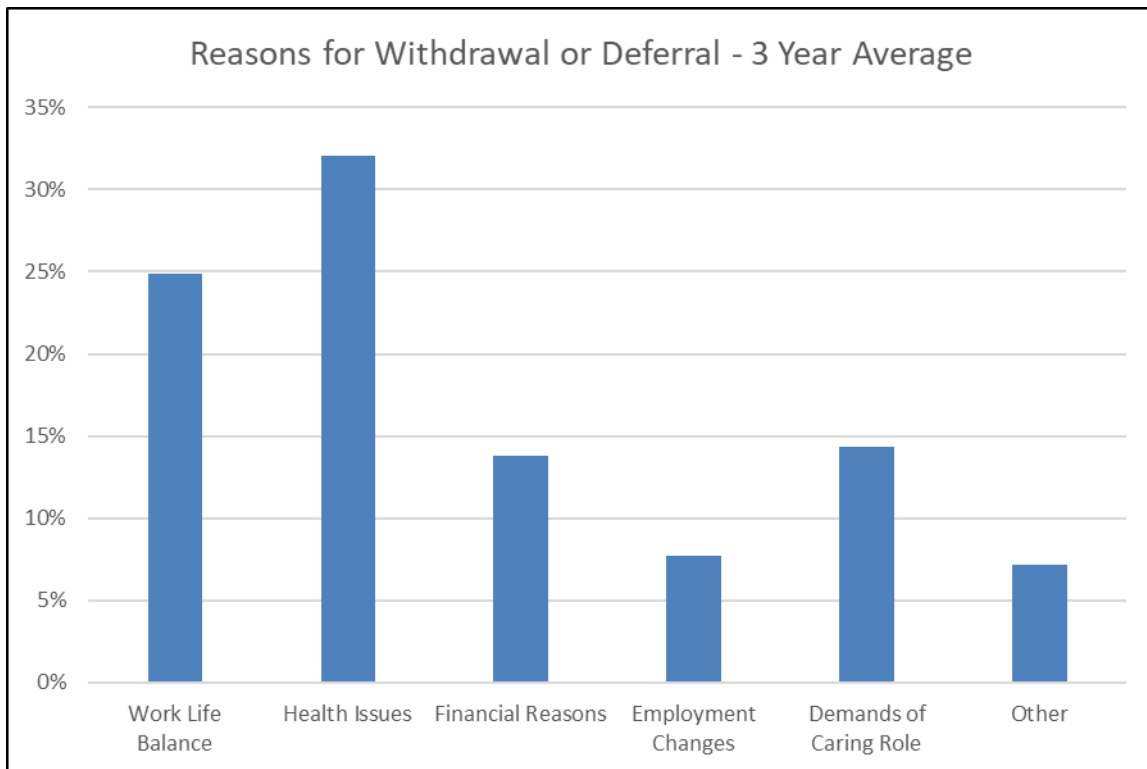


Non-completion happens for a variety of reasons (and on some occasions have been duplicated – for instance where a student has ‘failed’ in one year, and therefore ‘deferred’ to the next). In data collections for coming years we will look to isolate the primary reason for a clearer understanding.

Nevertheless; looking back through the data can help to illuminate some of the major trends:

- **‘Failure’** - Failure to complete is due to either failing academic or workplace criteria
 - Workplace failure accounts for a small proportion of non-completion, suggesting that the demands of practice-hours and placement conditions are met by a large majority of students.
 - Academic failure accounts for a large proportion of non-completion across all undergraduate levels, (but markedly less for postgraduate). It often therefore leads to withdrawal or deferral.
- **‘Withdrawal’** – Complete withdrawal is most common at Level 4 and at postgraduate Levels of study.
 - For Level 4 students it may suggest that many struggle with the demands placed upon them both in terms of academic output and the necessary dedication of time. The data could be interpreted to suggest this is due to both a lack of academic experience or ability amongst some students, and also the fact that many have conflicting demands (such as caring roles, parenting roles and unstable work contracts).
 - However, many HEIs are providing more flexible and extra support systems for those who need it in order to try and convert some of the ‘withdrawals’ into deferral or completion.

It could be presented as a possible correlation between a large decline in the proportion of students who had an entry level qualification of A-Levels or higher, and the rates of academic failure as a reason for non-completion. However, this will need more exploration before any conclusions can be drawn.



Given that ‘health issues’ have consistently been the primary reason for undergraduate withdrawal and deferral for numerous years, there may be the need to ensure better identification of these at the earliest possible stage to ensure tailored support is in place.

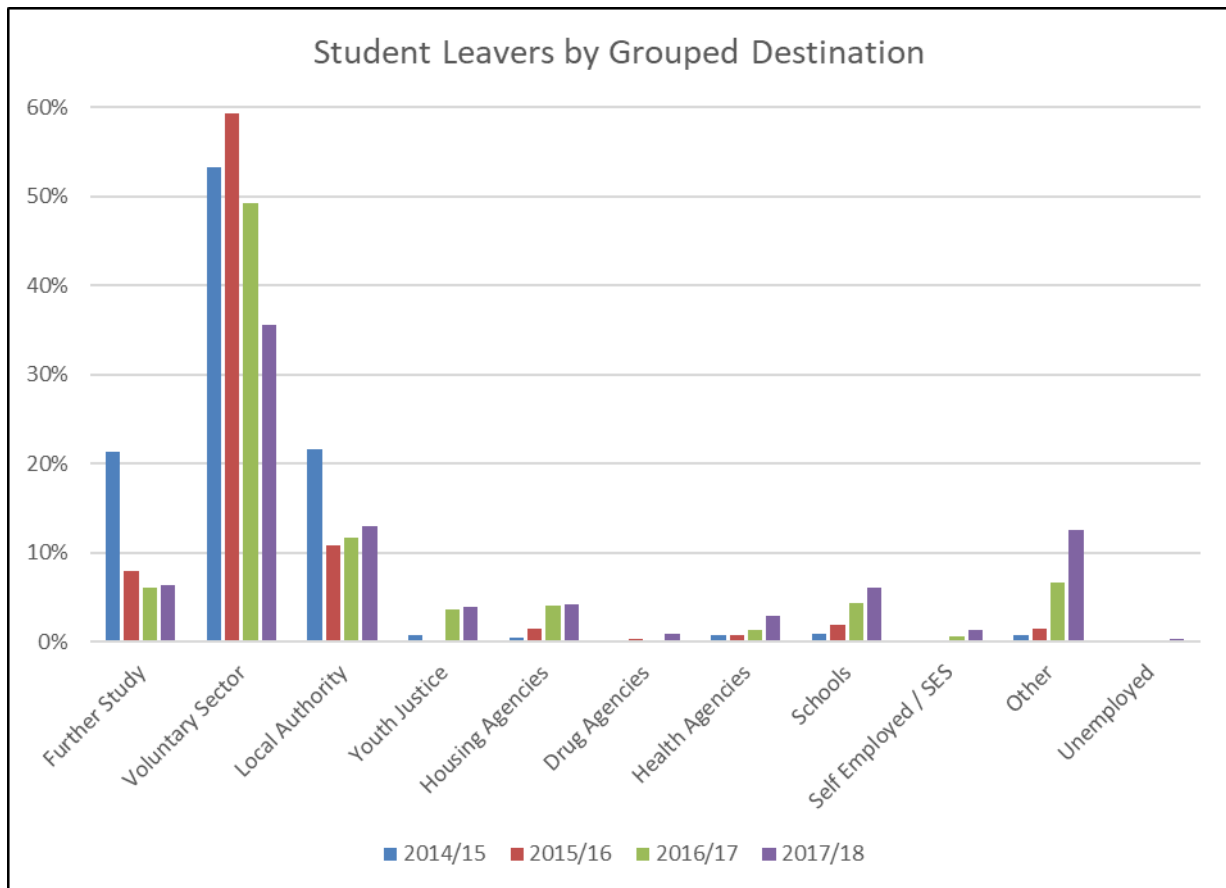
N.B. There is nothing within the data to identify whether the increasing amounts of ‘academic failure’ is having an effect on work-life balance or health issues – this should be explored.

5.1.3 – Destination of Graduates

As with previous years the returns for destination of graduates is incomplete with many HEIs not recording it, or unable to provide this for the current year due to their own collection of this data not having taken place by the time of ours.

Furthermore, many students discontinue contact and some HEIs do not collect this data at all.

However, there is enough data to draw some conclusions, and taking the cumulative data for the past 4 years (prior to this the survey questions were not easily transposable) shows a clear diversification in the destination of graduates for whom this data is known.



Taking a long-term view, local authority services have declined from taking over 30% of graduates in 2009 to now hovering above 10%, with ‘targeted’ and ‘other’ local authority services currently responsible for half of all local authority destinations. This of course reflects the changing landscape through the period of austerity. However, the graph does show that within that picture there is a slight rise over the last three years in local authority recruitment. There is also a rise across all other categories, showing the breadth of employers for youth work students and indicates a recognition of the value of youth work skills within a range of roles. Within the ‘Other’ category destinations include:

“Fire and Rescue Service Youth Work Team, Armed Forces Youth Work, Community Development and residential care for young people.”

From 2009 to circa 2015, the voluntary sector made up for the shortfall in local authority positions, but over the past few years this sector is seemingly becoming saturated -

“Students are managing to find work but it is p/t work based mainly in the voluntary sector”

Whilst we cannot see the detail of roles and the terms and conditions associated, it gives a clear indication on the changing nature of youth work within services. A workforce audit would be a helpful step on from this to better understand the nature of roles and value of youth work to help build a new career pathway vision for potential students considering undertaking a JNC recognised programme. What is pleasing is the low level recorded as unemployed.

5.1.4 Qualitative Feedback

The importance of JNC

In almost all cases, the body of staff on JNC recognised courses have a number who are JNC qualified, as set out in the professional validation requirements. This is recognised as an assurance and is seen as vital by the respondents who often pointed out that they consider JNC qualified members as ‘core’:

“We 'lost' one JNC qualified colleague during the course of the year to retirement; another was promoted, and has much less involvement than previously. This has effectively halved the capacity of core staff, putting immense pressure on those who remain”

Where such staff were not JNC qualified, the importance was shown in the fact that steps were being taken to remedy this:

“The core full time member of staff who is not JNC qualified is currently working towards their PG JNC qualification”

As identified above, similar actions are being taken to ensure that students have contact with JNC qualified supervisors when on their placement also;

“Where supervisors have limited experience we draw on our pool of JNC qualified practitioners elsewhere.”

“Where a student does not have a JNC qualified supervisor in their workplace, a group supervision process is set up with a JNC-qualified member of the university team.”

Internally then, there is a clear and concerted effort to ensure that courses match to the standards set out in the NYAs Professional Validation Requirements and this is seen as an assurance of quality.

Youth Work and JNC in the labour market

There is recognition that since youth work has moved away from local authorities and the link to the JNC terms and conditions, questions arise as to the value of the JNC badge, with some reflection that JNC may not hold the same esteem. This may be linked to the ‘new’ range of employers who are less familiar with the profession of youth work and the structures that underpin its high quality. Due to this there is an -

“external perception that youth and Community Work is not a professional career choice”

In contrast to related areas such as teaching or social work, much youth work offers less job security due to short term and/or part-time contracts and relatively low pay. However, the destination evidence (5.1.2) suggests that youth workers are gaining employment in related areas, and emerging funding and narrative within Government for youth work gives encouragement that with increased understanding a new case can be made for the profession.

We were thus warned of a lack of status for JNC allied to a dearth of secure youth work jobs which require it, with one HEI identifying a major challenge as being;

“The number of youth work opportunities not requiring JNC qualification”

This leads to a precarious situation for recruitment as for some HEIs;

“The focus is very much on the market place and potential student numbers in the Uni. Unless there is a substantial shift in the need for youth workers, I can't see us being able to justify a JNC course in the near future.”

The effect on internal administration

However, as identified in the report above; the pressures of a stagnant labour market, and poor perception of youth work means that many courses are not meeting their recruitment targets. Recruitment is voiced as the major concern that needs attending to.

The responses show that where youth work courses are struggling, HEIs tend to either:

A.) Take proactive steps to support and restructure courses and management;

Most HEIs are minded that to restructure, they need to offer courses which are often multi-disciplinary in nature to still ensure that youth work methodology is taught alongside other courses as part of an Undergraduate Framework (as confirmed by a small-scale research project run by one HEI).

“The College has reconfigured its departments with the programme moving in to new School and Division. This creates the opportunity for much closer exploration of disciplines and promotion of youth and community work”

Such restructuring towards a multi-disciplinary approach;

“allows students to benefit from the input of staff with a range of professional and academic backgrounds, and to develop relationships with students from other disciplines.”

Other approaches being taken include attempts to appeal to a different student market by;

“[changing] the delivery patten to weekend blocks to make it more attractive / accessible to those in work and to applicants beyond the region.”

Conversely, some HEIS choose an alternative route in that they;

B.) Provide less support and counter dwindling student numbers with cost savings on staff with some institutions noting that;

“The 0.4 Fieldwork Coordinator resigned and was not replaced and the Senior Leadership Team cancelled our L4 recruitment and are now attempting to make one F/T post redundant”

“The administrative support provided to Externals since our f/t dedicated admin officer left in June 2017 has been incredibly poor and created more work for Externals”

This may be as a result of something identified in last year’s report, in which 1 HEI suggested that;

“fewer line managers ... have an understanding of a pure youth work approach.”

Recruitment

The major concern voiced in the responses was that in the light of youth work not being seen as a favourable career, and with JNC not being afforded the status it once was, there is a decreasing incentive for students to undertake degree level study specifically for a career in youth work. As one HEI stated, there is a;

“very weak national profile for youth work and community development and this is translating into low levels of application for programmes.”

The majority of HEIs were therefore not able to hit their recruitment targets.

Of concern, there is an implicit suggestion that in order to get as close to those targets as possible (in order to stave off closure or loss of staff) many students are being recruited who are not well equipped to deal with the academic requirements; whether due to academic ability, lack of time to dedicate due to numerous personal situations – such as caring and parenting – or due to poor health.

Programmes are therefore having to provide extra support and increasingly tailored support where possible.

Of course, there is another side to consider in that the loss of vocational training routes has led to more of those who wish to pursue a career in youth work having to go through this academic route, despite the potential unsuitability of it to their circumstances.

Appendix

A: External Examiner Reports and Programme Reviews

The questionnaire asked programmes to confirm whether the main quality assurance processes have been carried out for this annual monitoring period.

The returns indicated that where relevant (i.e. where courses had not been discontinued or deferred), programmes have managed to provide at least one of an overview of either the academic or field external examiner reports, or were due to complete these after the submission of evidence for this report.

The vast majority of responses indicated that there were strong levels of both theory and practice across programmes, and that this was aided by close ties between the programmes and the youth work sector who provide placements.

Programmes were considered, therefore, to not only offer consistent quality, but to do this in a way that is relevant to the shifting context of youth work in both political circles and the labour market.

Where there are improvements recommended, these generally relate to the administration of courses.