

# The Standards for Employers of Social Workers

NATIONAL REPORT SUMMARY

# 2021

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# Introduction

The purpose of the survey was to better understand a number of critical questions about the experiences of Social Workers in England:

- How well do employers deliver the refreshed Employer Standards?
- How do employees perceive their working environment?
- What factors influence them to remain engaged with their work and minded to stay with their organisations?

Please note that this summary report relies primarily on data collected from social workers employed by local authorities and related agencies. While the data are considered to represent a reasonable, representative national sample, no claims are made for generalisation of the results to other areas of the UK.

# What Are The Employer Standards?

The employer standards for social workers in England were last refreshed in 2020. They set out whole system approaches to help develop a working environment where social work practice and social workers can flourish. They are explained in headline detail below:

**1**

## **Strong and clear social work framework**

Promoting a clear statement about the principles that constitute good social work practice.

**2**

## **Effective workforce planning systems**

Using effective workforce planning systems to make sure that the right resources are available to meet current and future service demands.

**3**

## **Safe workloads and case allocation**

Ensuring employees do not experience excessive workloads, resulting in unallocated cases and long waiting times for individuals.

**4**

## **Wellbeing**

Promoting a positive culture for employee wellbeing and supporting social workers to practice effectively and safely.

**5**

## **Supervision**

Making sure students and qualified practitioners can reflect critically on their practice through integrated high quality, regular supervision.

**6**

## **Continuing professional development (CPD)**

Providing the time and opportunity for Social Workers to learn, keep up to date and critically reflect on the impact this has on their practice.

**7**

## **Professional registration**

This standard is about supporting social workers to maintain their professional registration with the regulator.

**8**

## **Strategic partnerships**

Creating strong partnerships and good collaboration between employers, higher education institutions and other training providers.

# Demographics

RESPONSES

10090

TOTAL  
RESPONSES

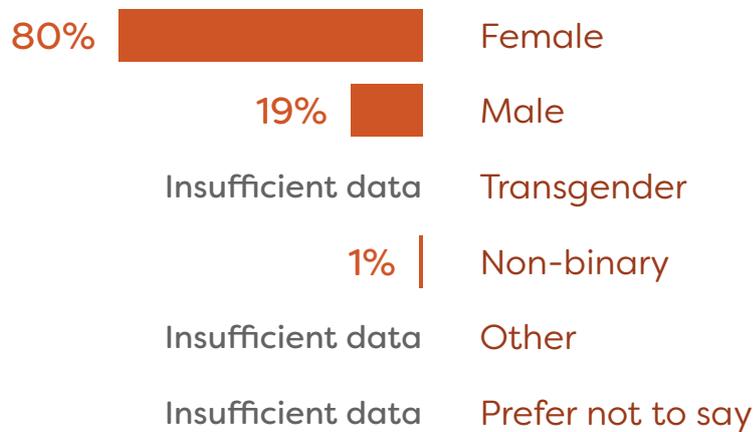
147

ORGANISATIONS  
PARTICIPATED

JOB ROLE



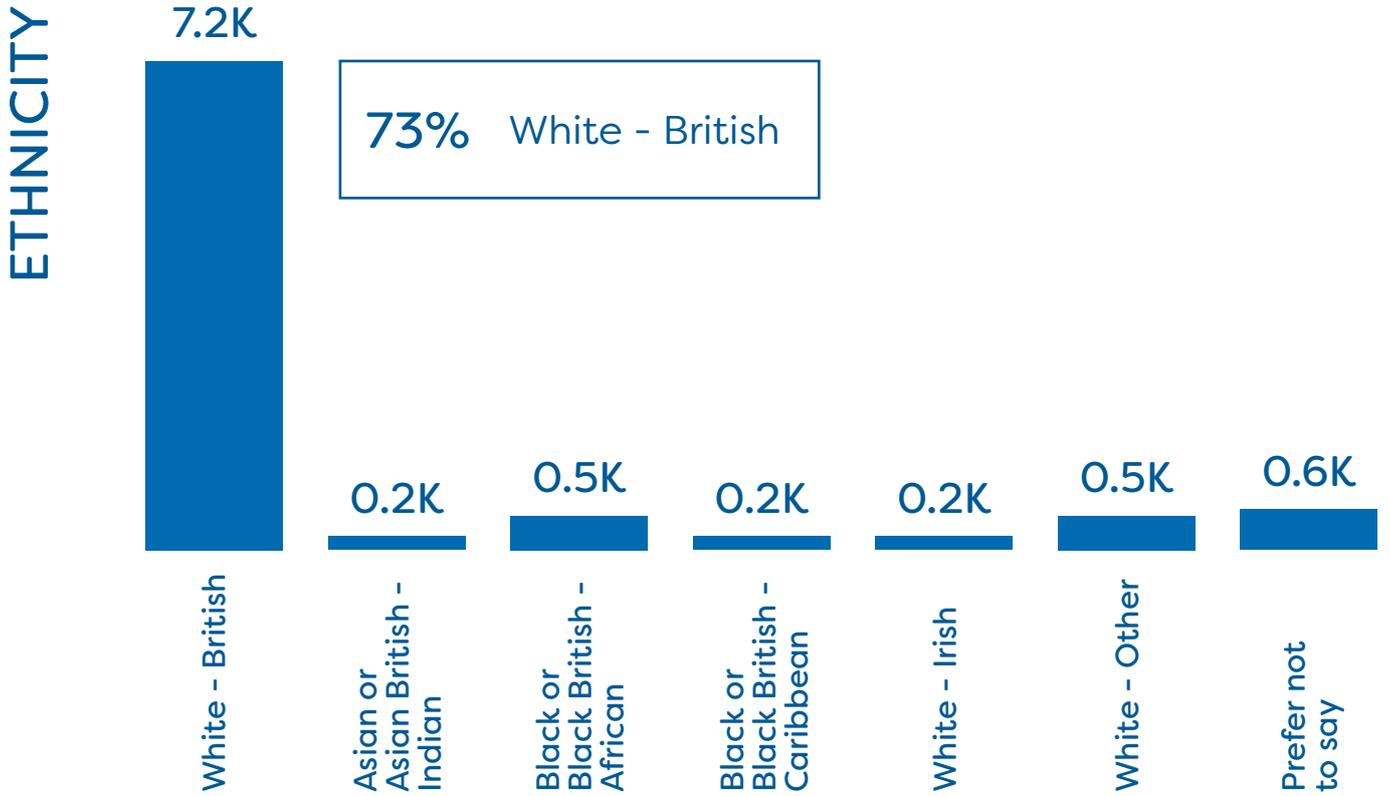
GENDER



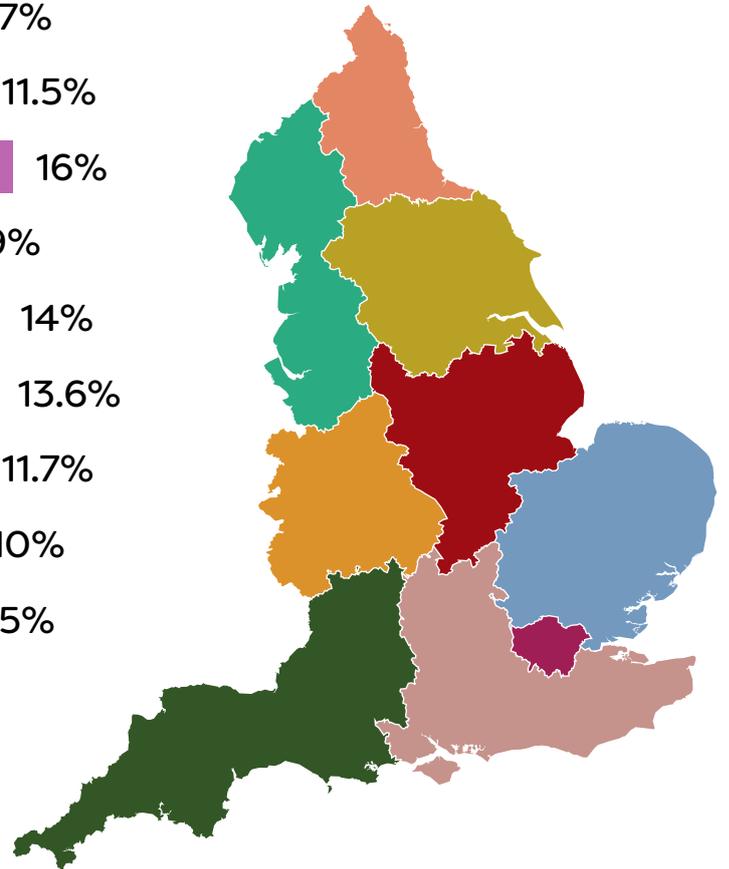
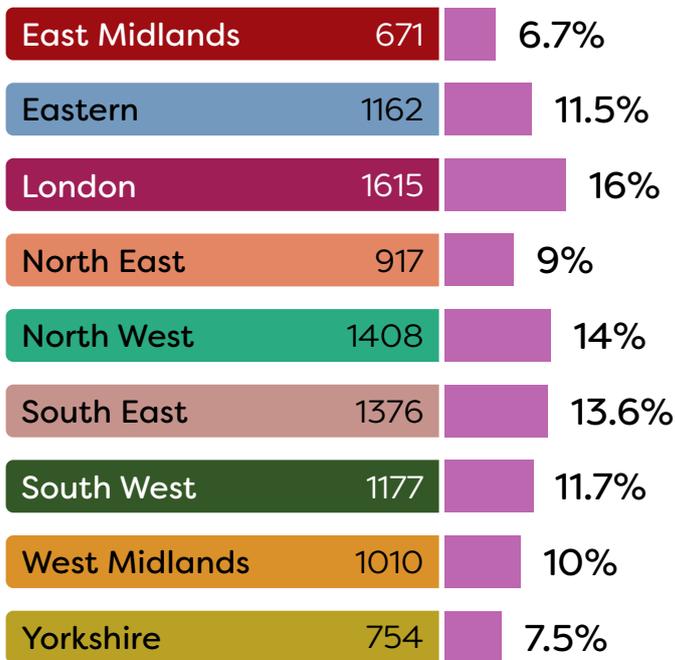
80%

FEMALE

# Demographics



**TOTAL RESPONDENTS BY REGION**



# How well do employers deliver the refreshed Employer Standards?

Figure 1 provides a visualisation of the mean scores across all Employer Standards. The data shows that overall Standard 1 (Strong and Clear Social Work Framework) was most favourably received and Standard 6 (CPD - Continuous Professional Development) was least well received. This mirrors the situation reported in 2021. More granular analysis of the mean scores for a sample of demographic groups can be found on pages 6, 7 and 8.

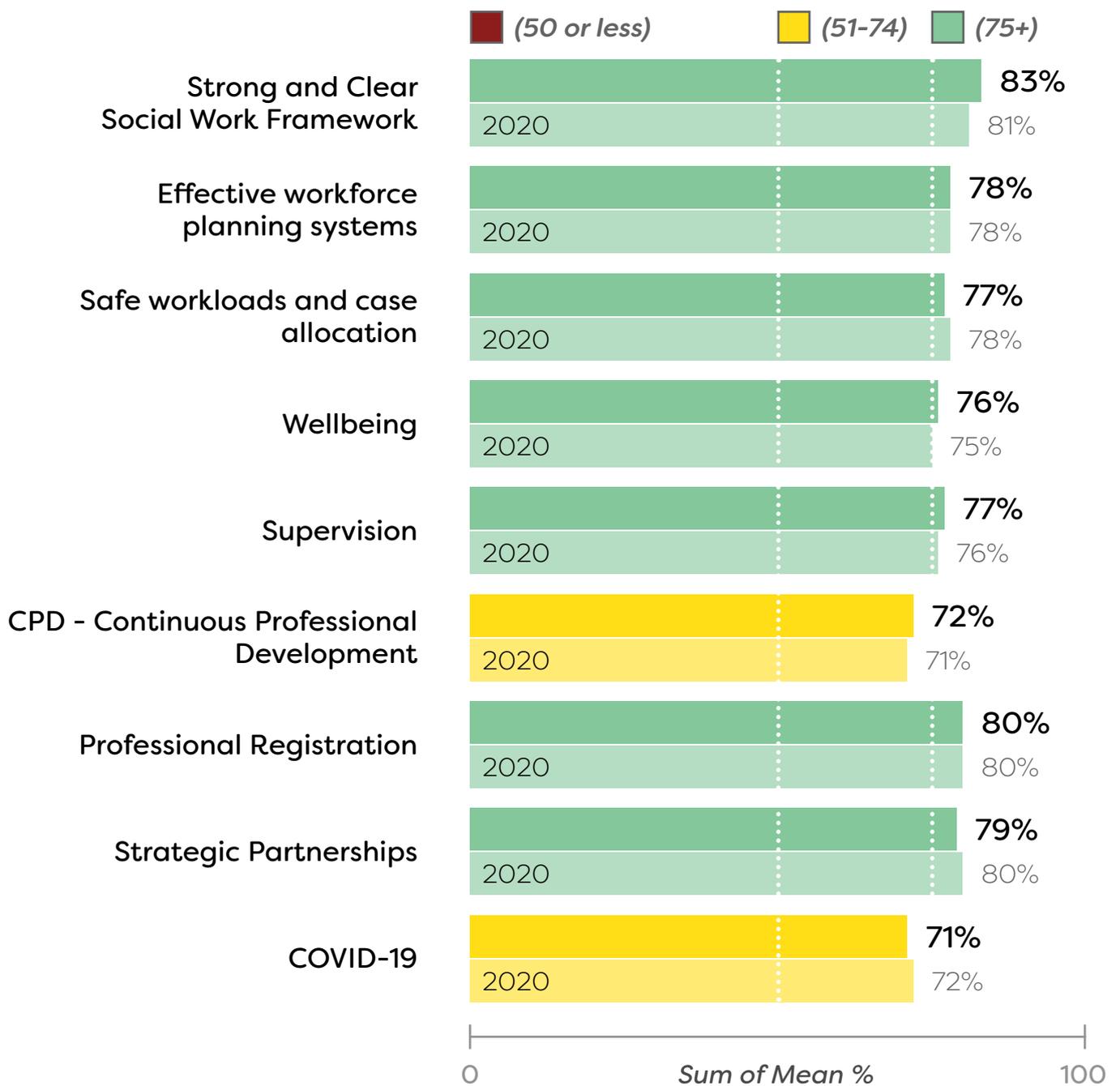


Figure 1: Mean scores across all Employer Standards

# Demographics

Figure 2 provides a visualisation of the mean scores across all Employer Standards for social workers' reported job role categories. The data shows that there were no significant differences across role types, which mirrors the situation reported in 2021.

## OVERALL MEAN BY ROLE

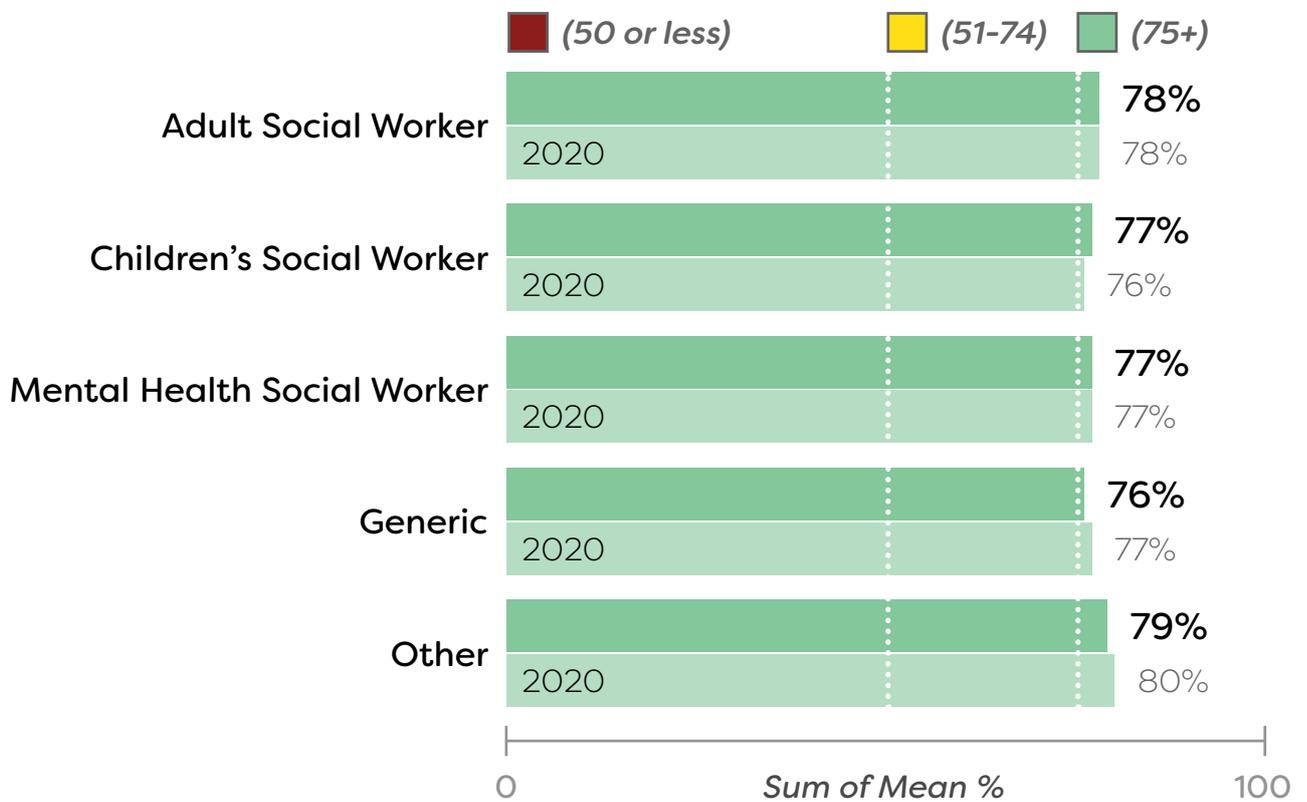


Figure 2: Overall Mean by Role

# Demographics

Figure 3 provides a visualisation of the mean scores across all Employer Standards for social workers' reported gender categories. The data shows that there were no significant differences between male and female social workers but a significant variance between them and 'non-binary' or 'prefer not to say' categories.

## OVERALL MEAN BY GENDER

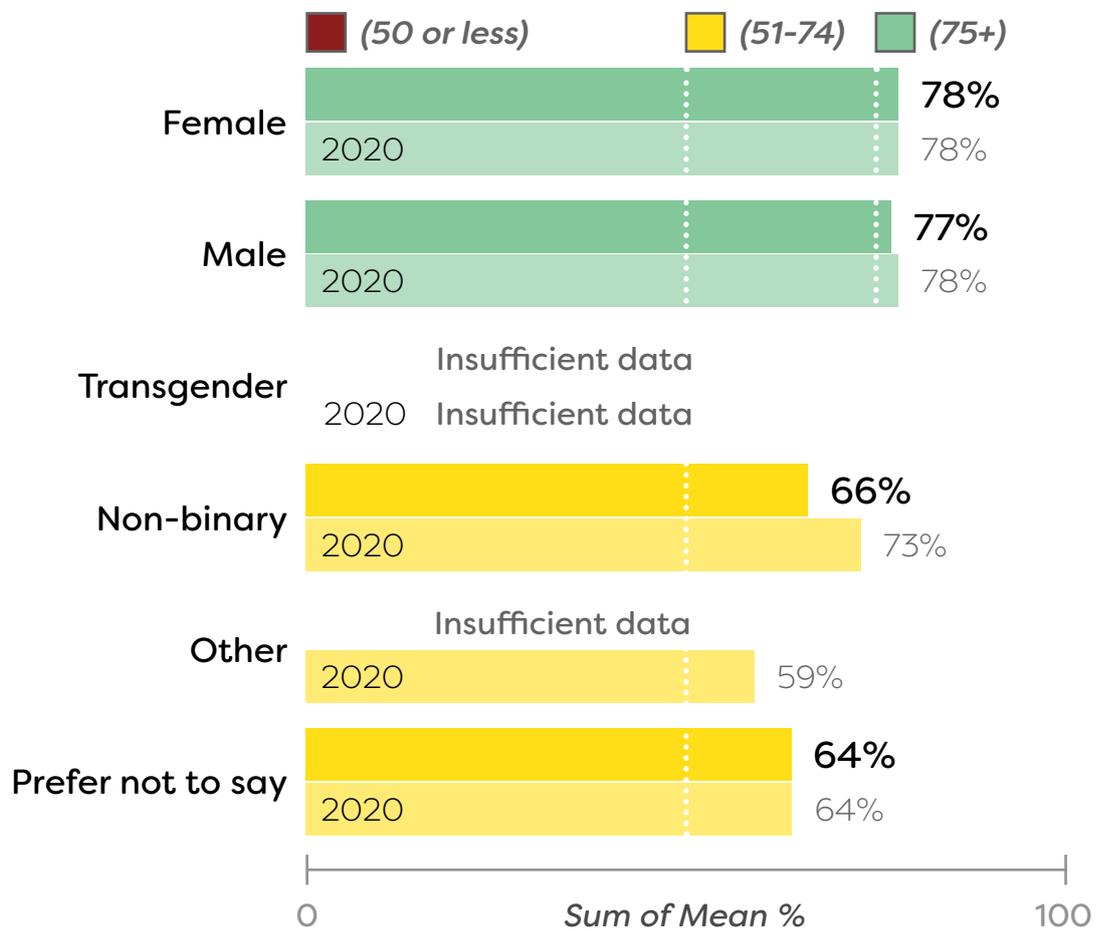


Figure 3: Overall Mean by Gender

# Demographics

Figure 4 provides a visualisation of the mean scores across all Employer Standards for social workers' reported ethnicity categories. The data mirrors the situation reported in 2021. All categories display significant variation with the 'prefer not to say' category.

## OVERALL MEAN BY ETHNICITY

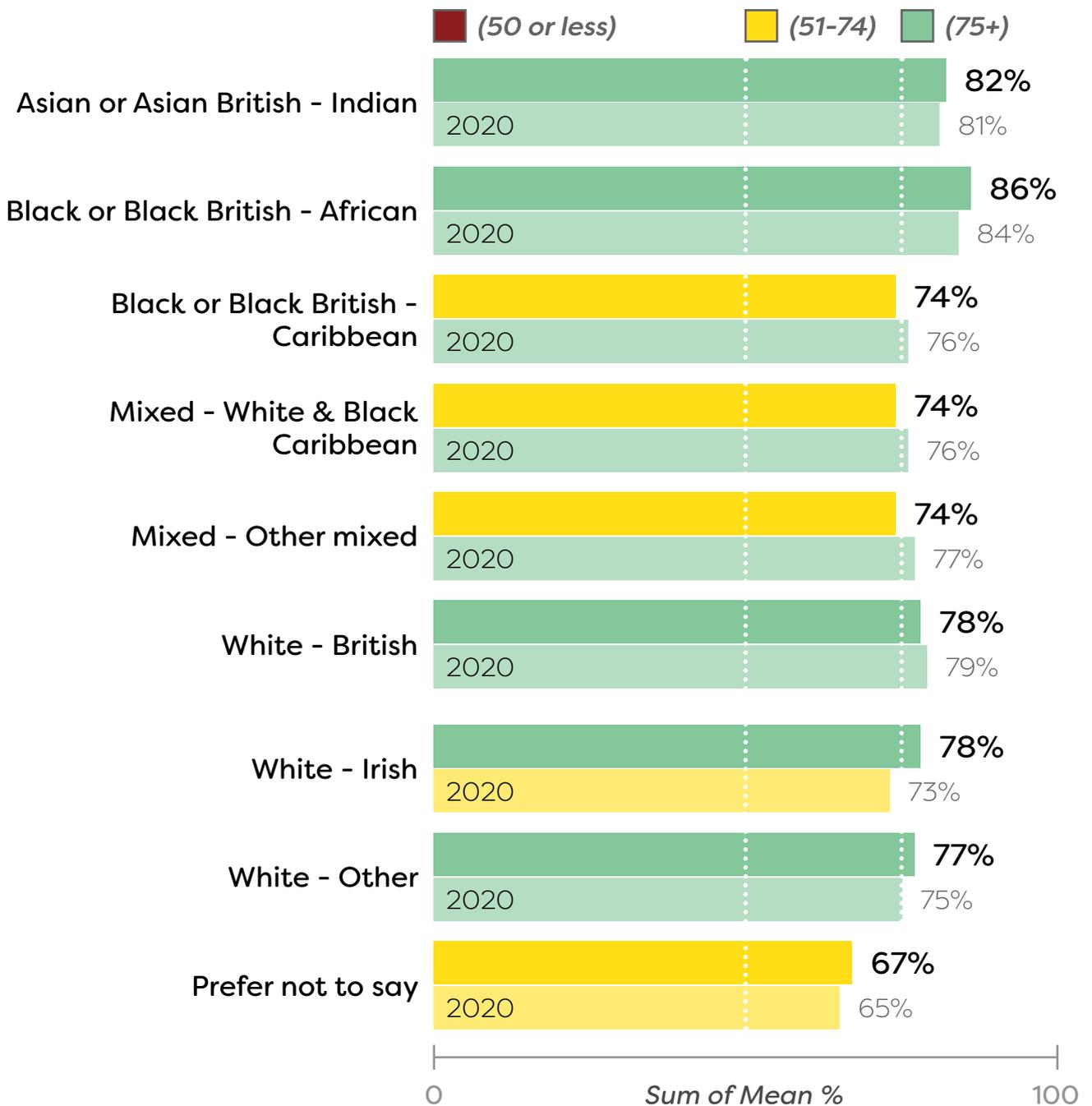


Figure 4: Overall Mean by Ethnicity

# Average Authority Scores by Region

The overall mean values of the Employer Standards for each region are shown in figure 5. The variance in the score between the regions is 7%. Eight regions have an overall score in the Good Range, whereas East Midlands falls into the Moderate Range.

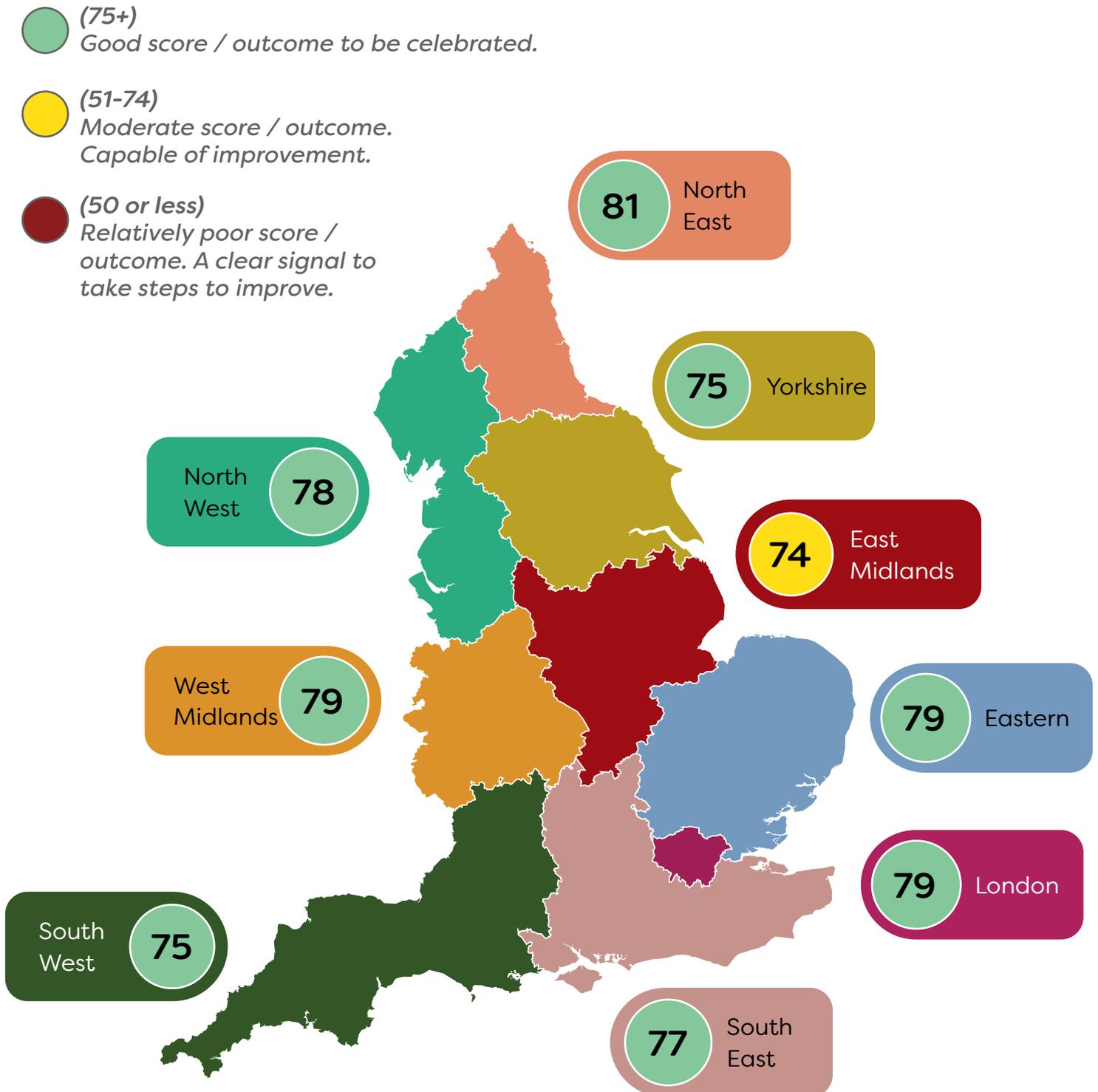


Figure 5: Average Authority Scores by Region

# Main drivers of employees giving their best at work

Using multiple regression techniques on the data, the three ‘drivers’ - survey items having the greatest impact or potency on employees’ overall contribution in the workplace - are shown below.

## Top 3 Key Drivers related to social workers’ contribution

	KEY DRIVER	AVERAGE SCORE	
STANDARD 1	<i>I am able to use my professional judgement, creativity and autonomous decision making where appropriate.</i>	87	This question is concerned with role autonomy and the way in which social workers feel that they can exercise their capabilities at work.
STANDARD 4	<i>I feel cared for by my managers and/or supervisor.</i>	79	This is surfacing evidence of a positive culture for employee wellbeing and supporting social workers to practice effectively and safely.
COVID	<i>I have felt positive and able to cope with work most of the time.</i>	67	This provides a sense of how social workers feel in themselves and able to tackle the various challenges at work during the COVID pandemic.



Figure 6: Top 3 Key Drivers related to social workers’ contribution

# Main drivers encouraging employees to stay in their organisations

Using multiple regression techniques on the data, the three ‘drivers’ - survey items having the greatest impact or potency on employees’ overall desire to stay with their organisations - are shown below.

## Top 3 Key Drivers related to social workers’ desire to stay

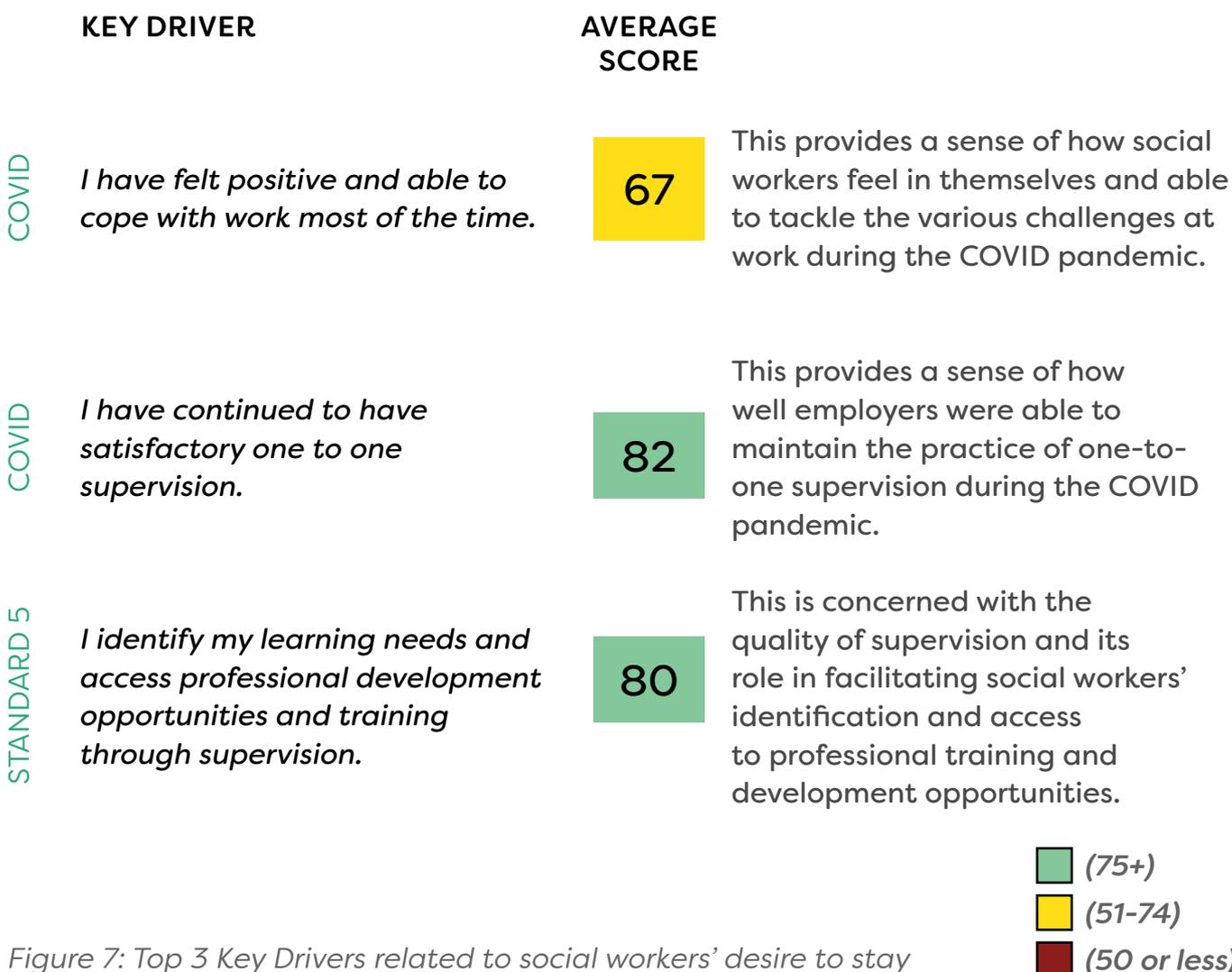


Figure 7: Top 3 Key Drivers related to social workers’ desire to stay

# Employee Voices - Thematic Analysis

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide free text comments throughout the survey. The chart below identifies the top five themes, in terms of frequency and topic, to emerge from the analysis, adding context to the statistical evidence.

## Professional Development

Reveals insights into the time and opportunity for Social Workers to learn, keep up to date and critically reflect on the impact this has on their practice.

## Pressure

Accommodates a range of challenges in the workplace that, can impede the ability of social workers to provide their best work, particularly if the challenges are allowed to persist unchecked. Work/Caseload was a prominent feature and has been assigned its own category.

## Support

Represents a broad range of support in the workplace from team members, managers and other support functions. Manager supervision was a prominent feature and has been assigned its own category.

## Supervision

Reflects the extent to which students and qualified practitioners can reflect critically on their practice through integrated high quality, regular supervision.

## Work / Caseload

An expression of how the volume of work (caseloads) affects the ability of social workers to deliver their best work.

Examples of free text comments follow, organised by relevant theme.

# Key Themes Narrative Examples

Development

Pressure

Support

Supervision

Work / Caseload

*I feel due to current pressures that there is limited opportunity to fully explore and invest time in development and individualised learning outside of supervision.*

*Needing more training, and being thrown out in the community without appropriate training, having to figure things out by myself.*

*I have a very supportive manager, however due to the pressures of his role there is not always time for a lot of reflection during those sessions.*

*Case management is not reflective supervision. Reflexivity and reflection are not used in supervision.*

*Workloads are undoubtable increasing and feel more complex due to the issues on the ground we are currently facing.*

Figure 8: Key Themes Narrative Examples

# Key Themes Narrative Examples (continued)

Development

Pressure

Support

Supervision

Work / Caseload

*Due to lack of funds, lack of staff, and lack of services it feels like all support for staff now non-existent as we are pressured to complete more and more work.*

*The learning opportunities within my organisation are good.*

*I feel the manager try to support staff as best they can, but they are busy and sometimes not available.*

*Excellent well-being support in place. Good quality reflective supervision relevant to my needs.*

*Workload is often dependent on the amount of workflow and staffing means it's not always possible to have a manageable workload.*

Figure 9: Key Themes Narrative Examples



# Future Publications

The evidence set out in this report provides an opportunity for organisations and related agencies involved in the delivery of social work to undertake conversations for change about how to improve the engagement and retention of staff through the adoption and delivery of the refreshed Employer Standards.

A more detailed report, revealing more textures and layers in the data, will be published as a companion document in the coming weeks.