

Headline social worker information

Social workers employed by local authorities in the adult social care sector

February 2024

Key findings

This report provides the key findings from the Adult Social Care Workforce Dataset (ASC-WDS) relating to social workers in local authority adult social service departments as at September 2023.



The number of social worker filled posts, in local authorities in England as at September 2023, was 18,500.

There was an increase of 2,500 social worker filled posts since 2016 (15.2%), whereas the total number all filled posts within local authorities increase by a smaller proportion, 4,600 filled posts (4.1%) over the same period.

1. Introduction

This report provides the estimated number of social workers employed by local authorities in England, and information about recruitment and retention, demographics and pay rates. Information is correct as at September 2023. Data on

information: gender, date of birth, ethnic group, contracted/average hours, sickness, pay and qualifications.

To ensure that the data we provide in our publications is trustworthy, the best quality and adds value to the sector, and as part of our commitment to the Code of Practice for Statistics², we use several methods to quality assure the data. Applicable data is validated at the point of entry into the ASC-WDS and data from local authority employers is checked and approved by Skills for Care's workforce intelligence team.

Due to the mandatory criteria for local authorities, we have complete data for the vast majority of data fields from this part of the sector. We do have some small gaps in completion, and we use our workforce estimates methodology to fill these gaps in order to create a full picture of the adult social care local authority sector and workforce. We have confidence in the quality of these estimates; the methodologies used have been peer reviewed by universities and an independent statistician. For a detailed methodology of how these estimates were produced, please visit the Workforce Intelligence website.

1.2 Scope of this report

There were 18,500 social workers filled posts employed by local authority adult social service departments across England as at September 2023, and an additional 2,200 in the independent sector and around 4,000 in the NHS. This report focuses on the 18,500 social worker filled posts employed by local authority adult social services departments only.

1.3 Shortage Occupation List

Under the new post-Brexit immigration rules in January 2021, social workers are listed as an occupation on the 'skilled worker route' and are on the Shortage Occupation List. Therefore, workers are still able to immigrate to the UK under the new rules. providing they have a job offer, which meets the salary threshold, and can speak English to the required standard.

2. Social worker filled posts

In 2023 there were 18,500 social worker filled posts and around 117,400 filled posts in local authority adult social service departments. Table 1 shows the number of social worker filled posts and the number of all roles within adult social service departments between 2016 and 2023.

In 2016 and 2017 the overall number of filled posts decreased by 6.1% and then 3.2%. From 2018 this increased slightly each year to 2021, followed by a slight reduction of -1% in 2022. Overall, since 2016, the overall number of filled posts increased by 4,600 (4.1%).

The number of social worker filled posts in adult social service departments has increased by around 2,500 (15.2%) between 2016 and 2023. As a result of this increase the proportion of these filled posts that were social workers has increased from 14% in 2016 to 16% in 2023.

Table 1. Social worker filled posts and all job roles in adult social service departments

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023

	Social workers	% change	% of all filled posts	All filled posts	% change
2016	16,100	-0.2%	14%	112,800	-6.1%
2017	16,200	0.9%	15%	109,200	-3.2%
2018	17,000	4.7%	15%	112,100	2.7%
2019	17,400	2.5%	15%	113,300	1.0%
2020	17,500	0.1%	15%	114,100	0.7%
2021	17,300	-1.0%	15%	115,100	0.8%
2022	17,300	0.0%	15%	113,900	

week has been classed as 'full-time'. The number of social workers working on permanent or temporary contracts (referred to as employees) was estimated at 16,200 in 2023.

The majority of social worker filled posts (84%) were permanently employed. Local authorities reported that 10% of the social worker workforce were agency workers, this was approximately 1,900 posts. Social workers were the most likely to be agency workers across all the job roles reported in the 'State of the adult social care sector and workforce' report in 2023.⁴

Chart 1. Estimated employment status of social workers in the local authority sector

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023

It should be noted that when the ASC-WDS is completed, it reflects a snapshot in time. Therefore, these estimates should be interpreted as an indication of the average number of the above types of worker being utilised at any one time. The total number of workers used throughout the year that aren't directly employed will be higher. For example, an establishment may have used several agency staff throughout the year, but none may be in post on the date that the organisation

3. Recruitment and retention

3.1. Turnover and vacancy rates

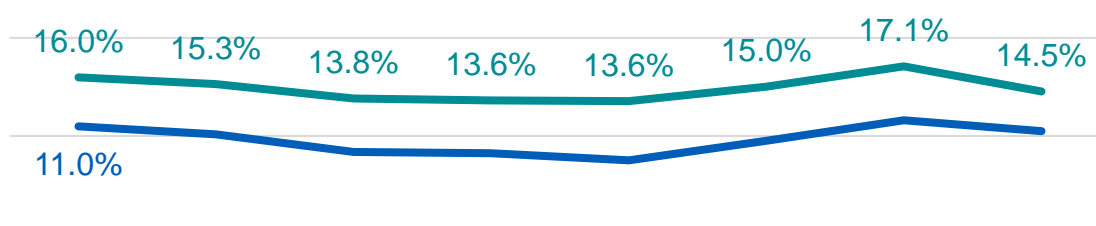
The social worker turnover rate in adult social services departments was 14.5% in 2023, equivalent to around 2,400 leaving their roles in the previous 12 months. It should be noted that the turnover rate for all roles within adult social services departments was much lower than the independent sector, with a local authority turnover rate of 13.0% in September 2023 compared to 30.4% in the independent sector March 2023.

Turnover rates decreased year on year from 2016 to 2018, and then plateaued between 2018 and 2020. Between 2021 and 2022 turnover rates increased from 15.0% to 17.1% and have decreased again in the last year.

There were around 1,900 vacant social worker posts in local authorities as at September 2023, a rate of 10.5%. Vacancy rates stood at 11.0% in 2016 and had fallen year on year to a low of 7.5% in 2020. In 2021 and 2022 they increased to 9.5% and 11.6% before decreasing again in the last year.

Chart 3. Social worker turnover and vacancy rate trends in adult social service departments

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023



Skills for Care monitor the change in vacancy rates every month. For the most up-to-date information about selected job roles, not including social workers, please see our vacancy information monthly tracker.⁵

As explained in section 1.3, under the post-Brexit immigration rules in January 2021 social workers are listed occupations on the 'skilled worker route' and are on the Shortage Occupation List. Therefore, workers are still able to immigrate to the UK

⁵ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/Monthly-tracking/Monthly-tracking.aspx>

under the new rules providing they have a job offer, which meets the salary threshold, and can speak English to the required standard.

3.2. Sickness

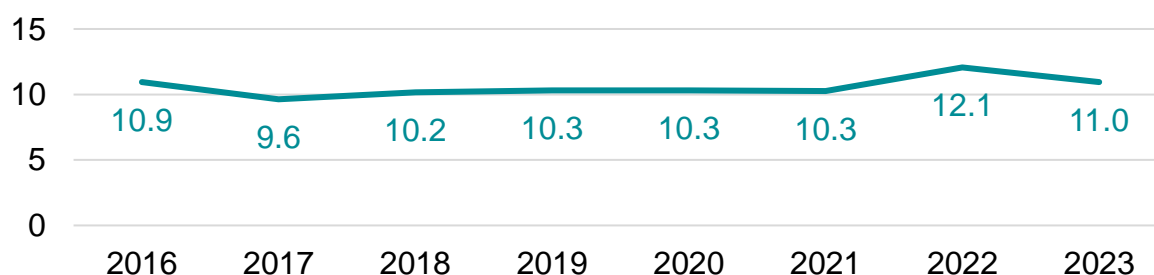
Supporting the health and wellbeing of staff can have a positive impact on their performance, most especially when this is aligned with the culture of the organisation. Workplace culture is defined as the character and personality of an organisation. Having a positive workplace culture has been found to be vital in the delivery of higher quality care and support. We've launched the 'Culture for care' toolkit to guide employers towards developing a positive workplace culture⁶ and a workforce wellbeing resource finder all social care workers and employers.⁷

We understand that the daily stress of care work can contribute to absence through sickness; it's crucial that employers support their staff to become resilient, help them to cope better under pressure, and to protect them from mental and physical ill-health. The 'Greater resilience, better care'⁸ resource has been developed to help managers to approach the wellbeing of their staff positively, and to offer practical ideas on how they're able to improve the working environment for their staff.

Social workers had an average of 11.0 sickness days in 2023, which equates to around 178,000 working days lost. Chart 4 shows that the average sickness days varied little between 2016 and 2021, then had increased sharply in 2022 but has decreased again in the last year.

Chart 4: Average number of sickness days in the previous 12 months for social workers

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023



⁶ www.skillsforcare.org.uk/culture

⁷ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Managing-people/Wellbeing/Workforce-wellbeing-finder/Wellbeing-resource-finder.aspx>

⁸ www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resilience

Chart 5 shows that social workers had the highest average number of sickness days (11.0) compared to other regulated professions employed by local authorities.

Chart 5: Average number of sickness days in adult social service departments

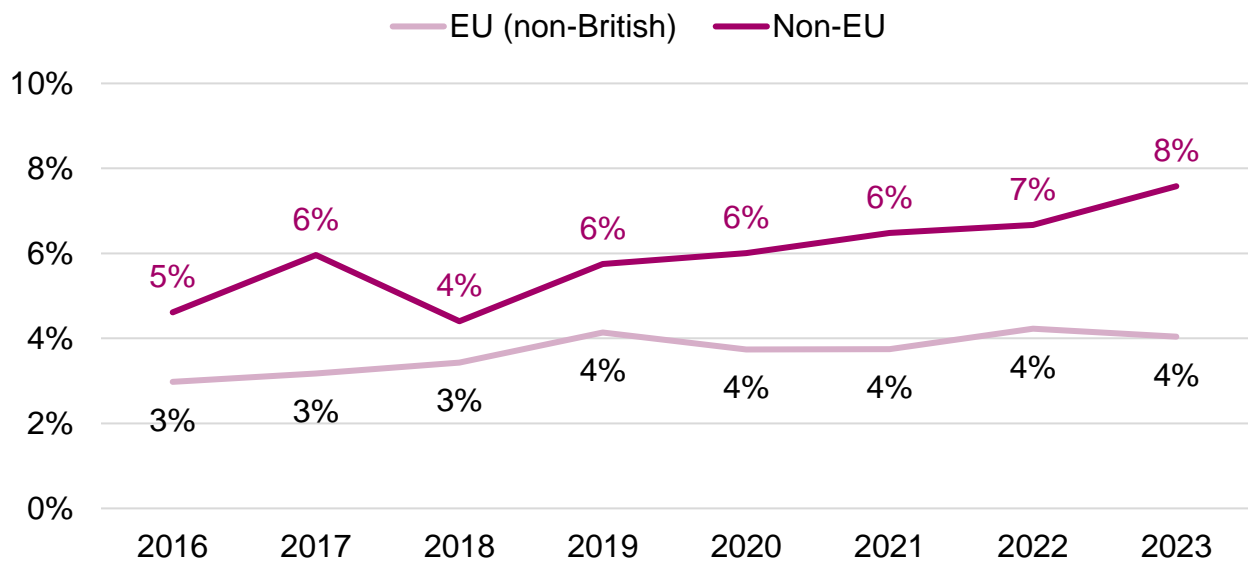
4. Demographics

workers posts held by people with an EU nationality has increased by around 275 (36%) since 2016. The proportion with a non-EU nationality has also increased, by around 700 (64%) over the same period.

Please see section 1.3 for more information about social workers on the Shortage occupation list and rules post-Brexit.

Chart 10: Nationality trend of social workers in adult social services departments

Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023



5. Pay

The mean full-time equivalent salary for a social worker in local authorities was £41,500 as at September 2023. This was similar to occupational therapists (£41,100) and higher than registered nurses at (£37,500).

Chart 11: Mean full-time equivalent pay of regulated professional roles in adult social services departments

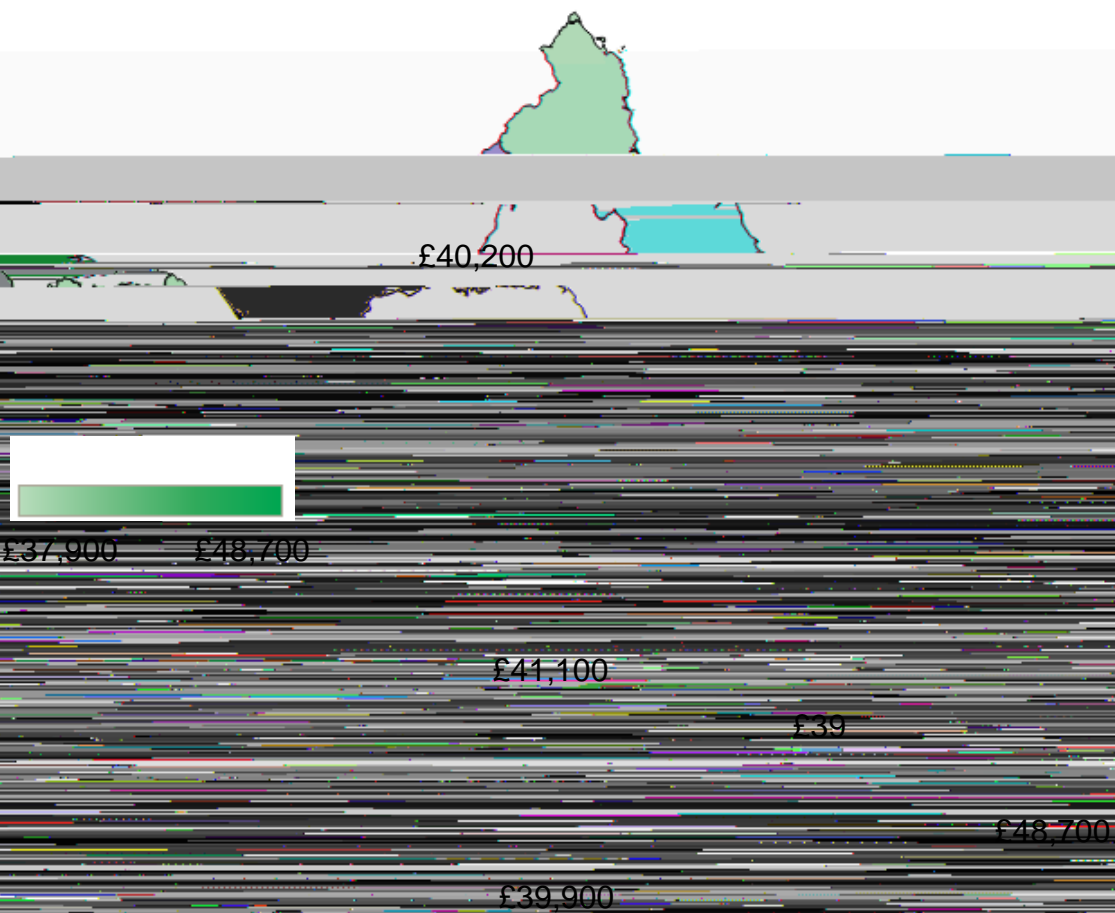
Source: Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023

The chart below shows the mean salary trend of social workers in both nominal and real terms. 'Real term' means that the pay rate has been adjusted to take inflation into account and has been calculated using the Consumers Price Index (CPI), the

The map below shows that social workers in London had the highest mean salary at £48,700, which was 17.5% higher than the mean across England. Outside of London, social worker salaries ranged from £42,900 in the South East, to £37,900 in the East Midlands region.

Map 1. Mean FTE salary of social workers by region

Source, *Skills for Care workforce estimates 2023*



Further resources

We provide outstanding workforce intelligence which the Government, strategic bodies, employers, and individuals rely upon to help them make decisions that will improve outcomes for the people who use care services. This section provides an overview of some of the reports and resources published by our Workforce Intelligence team. The ASC-WDS is recognised as the leading source of workforce intelligence for adult social care. We're grateful to all the employers who have completed ASC-WDS data. Without their contributions, our workforce intelligence wouldn't be possible.

Interactive visualisations

We've created interactive visualisations to enable you to see and understand our publications and workforce intelligence in a more visual and interactive way. By clicking on and moving around the visualisations, you can discover and compare the characteristics of the adult social care workforce in applicable topic areas. To access the visualisations, please refer to the relevant pages within www.skillsforcare.org.uk/WIpublications.

Key workforce intelligence publications

The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

This data visualisation provides estimates of the number of organisations and establishments involved in providing or organising adult social care, as well as the size and structure of the workforce, including people and filled posts estimates, trend data, and future projections.

To access this webpage, please visit

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure

Latest version, July 2023. Updated information is due in July 2024

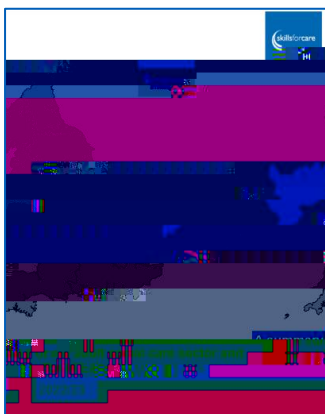
The state of the adult social care sector and workforce report in England

This report and data visualisation provides comprehensive workforce characteristics about the 1.635 million filled posts working in adult social care in England. It includes information on employment, recruitment and retention, workforce demographics, pay, and qualifications and skills, as well as workforce forecasts. Data science is also used to look at factors affecting turnover rates and CQC ratings. To access this report please visit

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof

Latest version, October 2022. Updated information is due in mid-October 202

Regional information



We have published a data visualisation showing regional level information, one region at a time. This report provides an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region. Also available is a regional comparison data visualisation, comparing key variables. Alongside these data visualisation are nine regional written summaries.

To access these, please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports

Latest version, October 2023. Updated information is due October 2024

Local area information

There are six pages of local area information:

'My local area' is a detailed interactive visualisation showing local areas in England one at a time.

'Local area comparison', is where you'll find the local authority comparison interactive visualisation which allows you to compare multiple local areas in England.

'Local area summary reports' contains written summary reports for each area.

'My ICB area', showing the latest information from ASC-WDS split into Integrated Care Board (ICB) areas.

'ICB comparison area' page is where you can compare multiple ICB areas in England.

'My ICB area (MH and LD&A)', showing the latest information from ASC-WDS for the mental health and learning disability and/or autism workforces split into Integrated Care Board (ICB) areas.

To access these data visualisations and reports, please visit

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/local-information

Latest versions, October 2023. Updated information is due in October 2024.

Adult social care workforce estimates Excel file

To support workforce intelligence publications, we've published an 'Adult social care workforce estimates' spreadsheet. This file includes the size and structure of the workforce, recruitment and retention information, employment information, demographics, pay rates, qualification levels, and training information for England listed by region, sector, service, and job role.

To access the spreadsheet, visit: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/workforceestimates

How we can help you

We can partner with you or form part of your project team on tenders and bids. By using our expertise and sector knowledge we can add value to your research or project.

We can use advanced analytics techniques to help you understand how key outcomes such as CQC scores, turnover and vacancy rates can be improved. We can produce bespoke reports and analysis to help you solve problems and provide data solutions to help you improve your services.

We can provide a detailed analysis into the adult social care workforce in your local area or look at performance in comparison to other areas.

Request a feed of data to enhance or improve a product or service.

For more information about our services, please email analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk.

Keeping informed



To be kept up to date with Workforce Intelligence news, please join our mailing list by registering with us and selecting 'Workforce Intelligence publications'.

You can also follow us on Twitter: [@SfC_Data](https://twitter.com/SfC_Data) or [@skillsforcare](https://twitter.com/skillsforcare)

Or visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/contactWI



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