

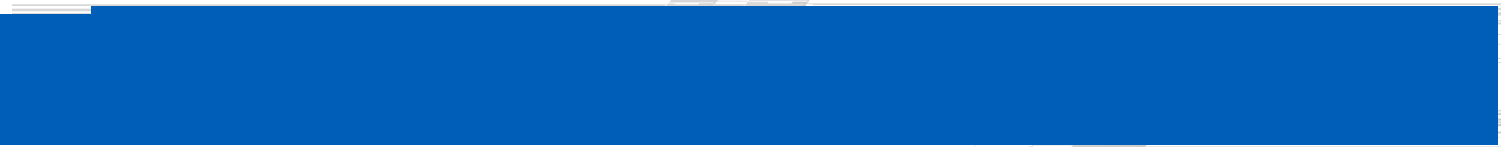
Headline social worker information

Social workers employed by local authorities in the adult social care sector
February 2025

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Key findings

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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. The adult social care workforce is published by the Department for Education ([Statistics: children's social work workforce](#)).

Skills for Care is the strategic workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England. We work with employers, Government, and partners to ensure social care has the right people, skills, and support required to deliver the highest quality care and support, now and in the future. Our role is to respond and adapt to the emerging trends and needs within social care, using data and evidence to drive forward widescale change.

The Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS) is an online data collection service which gathers information about the adult social care workforce in England. This service was formerly known as the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC), which was launched in 2007.

The ASC-WDS is the means of collection for the adult workforce data return for local authorities (Adult social services departments). Between 2012 and 2021 all local authorities in England met the criteria of a full ASC-WDS return for people working in adult social services departments. However, in 2022 all local authorities apart from Salford submitted a return. In 2023 Cumbria divided into two new local authority areas (Cumberland and Westmoreland and Furness) but neither of the new areas provided a complete data return. In 2024, all local authorities in England met the criteria for a full ASC-WDS return for people working in adult social services departments.

Methodology used to estimate characteristics of the adult social care workforce in local authorities

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 coverage, 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 to see our [methodology](#).

Scope of this report

There were around 19,200 social workers filled posts employed by local authority adult social service departments across England as at September 2024, and an estimated 2,400 filled posts in the independent sector in March 2024 and around 4,300 filled posts in the NHS were estimated as at March 2024. This report focuses on the 19,200 social worker filled posts employed by local authority adult social services departments only.

1. Filled posts

This chapter

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

2. Employment overview



This chapter looks at the employment status, full-time / part-time hours and zero-hours contracts of social workers in adult social services departments within local authorities in England.

Key findings

The majority of social workers were employed on permanent contracts (84%), but a relatively high proportion were indirectly employed as bank/pool or agency staff (12%). Around 80% of social workers worked full-time hours and 20% worked part-time hours. Few social workers were employed on a zero-hours contract (4%).

The number of social worker employees (those working on permanent or temporary contracts) was estimated at 17,000 in 2024. Chart 1 shows the majority of social worker filled posts were employed on permanent contracts (84%). Adult social services departments reported that 10% of social workers were employed from agencies, which

may have used several agency staff throughout the year, but none may be in post on the date that they completed their ASC-WDS data.

Chart 2 shows the majority of social workers (80%) worked full-time hours (32 or more week). This proportion has shown little change from 78% in 2017.

Chart 2. Social worker full-time or part-time status in adult social service departments, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

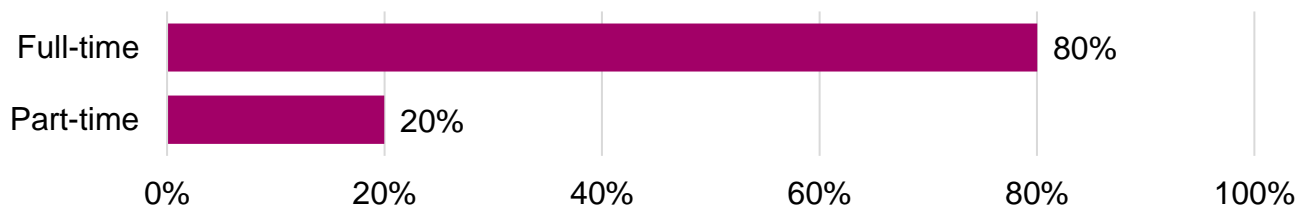
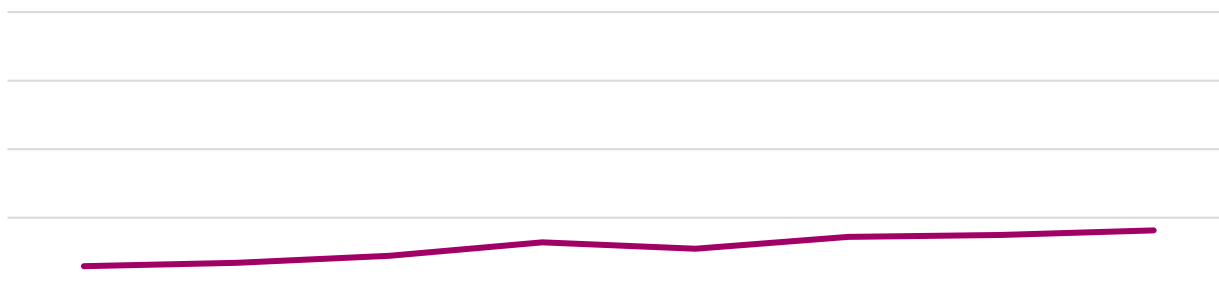


Chart 3 shows that few social workers were employed on a zero-hours contract (4%), which was around 800 posts, however this proportion has gradually increased from 1% in 2017.

Chart 3. Social worker zero-hours contract status in adult social service departments, 2017 to 2024

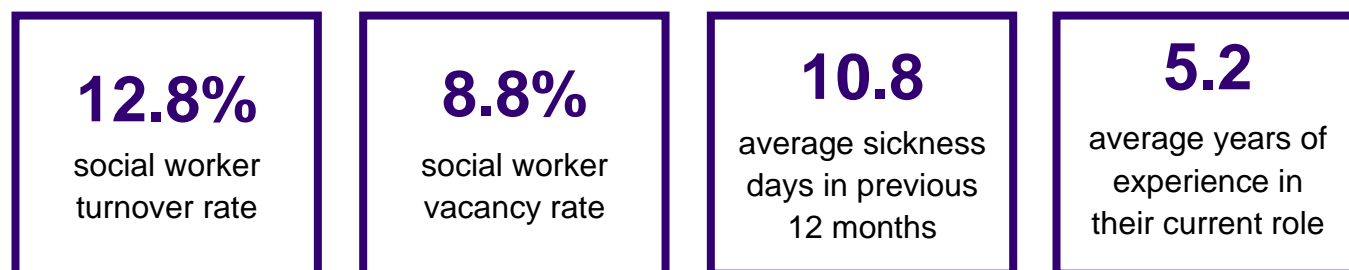
Source: Skills for Care estimates



3. Recruitment and retention



This chapter looks at the turnover and vacancy rates of social workers in adult social services departments within local authorities in England as well as the average years of experience in role and the average number of sickness days over the previous 12 months.



Key findings

The social worker turnover rate was 12.8% in 2024, equivalent to around 2,200 leavers over the previous 12 months.

There were around 1,600 vacant social worker posts in 2024, a vacancy rate of 8.8%.

Both the turnover and vacancy rate peaked in 2022, at 17.1% and 11.6% respectively, and have decreased in the following years.

Social workers had an average of 10.8 sickness days in 2024, which was the highest of all regulated profession roles employed by adult social service departments.

Social workers had an average of 5.2 years of experience in their current role.

3.1 Turnover and vacancy rates

The social worker turnover rate in adult social services departments was 12.8% in 2024, equivalent to around 2,200 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 12.5% in 2024 compared to 25.8% in the independent sector March 2024.

Chart 4 shows that social worker turnover rates decreased between 2017 and 2018, and then plateaued between 2018 and 2020. The turnover rate peaked at 17.1% in 2022 but then decreased in each year since.

There were around 1,600 vacant social worker posts in local authorities in 2024, a rate of 8.8%. Vacancy rates stood at 10.2% in 2017 and had fallen year on year to a low of 7.5% in 2020. The vacancy rate peaked at 11.6% in 2022 but then decreased in each year since.

4. Demographics

This chapter looks at the demographics of social workers in adult social services departments

Chart 8 shows that around 83% of social workers were female and 17% were male, which was similar to all job roles in adult social service departments. The proportion of social workers that were male (17%) was greater than that of occupational therapists (10%) and registered nurses (13%).

Chart 8. Gender in adult social service departments by selected job role, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

4.2 Age

Social workers had an average age of 45.0 years in 2024, and this has shown little change since 2017. This was lower than the average age across all job roles (47.6 years). Chart 9 shows that around a fifth of social workers (20%) were aged between 25 and 34 years compared to 15% of all people in adult social service department posts. A relatively lower proportion of social workers were aged 55 and above (24%) compared to all job roles in adult social service departments (34%).

Chart 9. Age bands of social workers and all job roles in adult social 2dart000008871 0 595.32 8

4.3 Ethnicity

Social workers were more ethnically diverse than the overall adult workforce. Chart 10 shows that 69% of social workers had a white ethnicity compared to 79%

5. Pay



Chart 11. Average (mean) FTE pay in adult social services departments by selected job role, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

Chart 12 shows the average (mean) FTE pay trend of social workers in both nominal and real terms. The real pay has been calculated using the Consumers Price Index (CPI), the official measure of inflation of consumer prices in the UK, as at September 2024. Therefore, this considers changes in the cost of living over time.

The chart shows that average (mean) nominal FTE pay of social workers has increased between 2023 and 2024 in both nominal (up £1,500 or 3.7%) and real terms (up £800 or 2.0%). This means the nominal increase was greater than the change in inflation over this period.

The chart also shows that the average (mean) nominal FTE pay of social workers has increased every year since 2016, from £34,200 to £43,000 (25.6% increase). But, in real terms their pay stayed relatively the same between 2016 and 2021 then

Further resources

Key topic areas

We also produce information on popular topic areas. Each topic includes a summary of the workforce information available, and signposts to other relevant resources.

Monthly tracking of key metrics

Learning disability and/or autism
workforce

Apprenticeships

Pay rates

Personal assistants

Nurses in social care

Recruitment and retention

Registered managers

Social work

Workforce nationality.

