

Domiciliary care services in the adult social care sector

2025/26

Contact us: analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk

Introduction

Key findings

580,000

filled posts

15,695

CQC-regulated
locations

34%

employed on a
**zero-hours
contract**

9.0%

vacancy rate

This summary report accompanies '[The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, 2026](#)' report and focuses on the workforce employed in **domiciliary care services** that are regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Charts shown here display rounded whole numbers and percentages, therefore the charts may not always total to 100%.

Domiciliary care services are defined as those services that provide care to individuals in their own home. These services must be CQC-regulated by law and are defined in this report as **CQC non-residential services**. This includes CQC-regulated domiciliary care services, CQC-regulated supported living services and CQC-regulated extra care housing services.

The information in this summary is derived from the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS); independent sector information shown in this report was collected between April 2025 and March 2026, and local authority information was collected as at September 2025. As at March 2026, over half of CQC-regulated locations were recorded in the ASC-WDS (54.1%) and in CQC non-residential services this figure was 48.7%.

Within the ASC-WDS, coverage of the CQC-regulated workforce varied by sector, service, job role and geographical area. To produce our analysis we create workforce estimates, enabling us to accurately describe the size and characteristics of the whole adult social care workforce. You can read about our [methodology](#) for creating these and find [data download Excel files](#) with further breakdowns of these on our website.

Skills for Care is an official statistics producer. This means that all official statistics produced by Skills for Care's Workforce Intelligence team will include oversight from the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#) (OSR), ensuring that we follow the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Our Workforce Intelligence analysts are committed to the Code as well as the three principles of trustworthiness, quality and value for all of our data outputs. See our website for our full [statement](#).

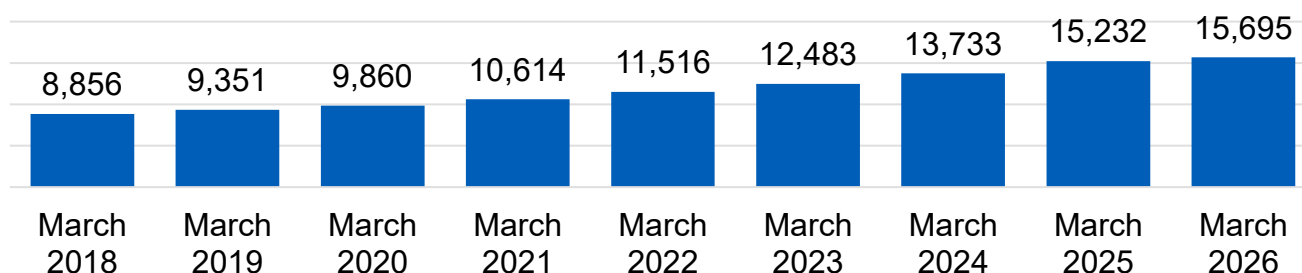
Further information about the workforce employed in CQC non-residential services can be found in the [data visualisation](#) that also accompanies the full report. The visualisation can be filtered by service and job role and shows analysis of all variables collected in the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS).

1. Size and structure

As at March 2026, there were 15,695 locations regulated by the CQC to provide non-residential services. This is an increase of 6,839 (77%) since 2018. During this same period, the number of CQC care homes with nursing decreased by 3% and the number of CQC care homes without nursing decreased by 8%, showing a trend of people receiving care in their own homes.

Chart 1. Number of CQC-regulated domiciliary care service locations, 2018 to 2026

Source: CQC Care Directory

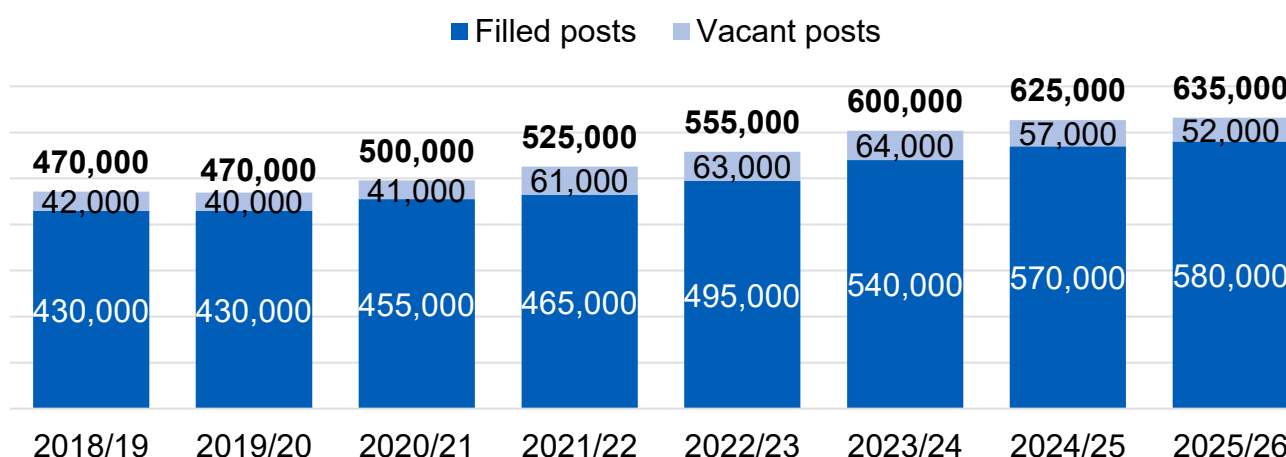


Please see our [filled posts in the adult social care workforce in England: monthly statistics](#) for monthly estimates of filled posts in independent sector CQC-regulated locations, including percentage changes over time.

In 2025/26, CQC non-residential services had an estimated workforce of 580,000 filled posts across England and 52,000 vacant posts, making a total of 635,000 posts in the local authority and independent sectors. Between 2024/25 and 2025/26, the number of filled posts in CQC non-residential services increased by 11,500 (2%), while the number of vacant posts decreased by 4,800 (-8%).

Chart 2. Estimated number of adult social care posts in CQC non-residential services (local authority and independent sector only), in England, 2018/19 to 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates



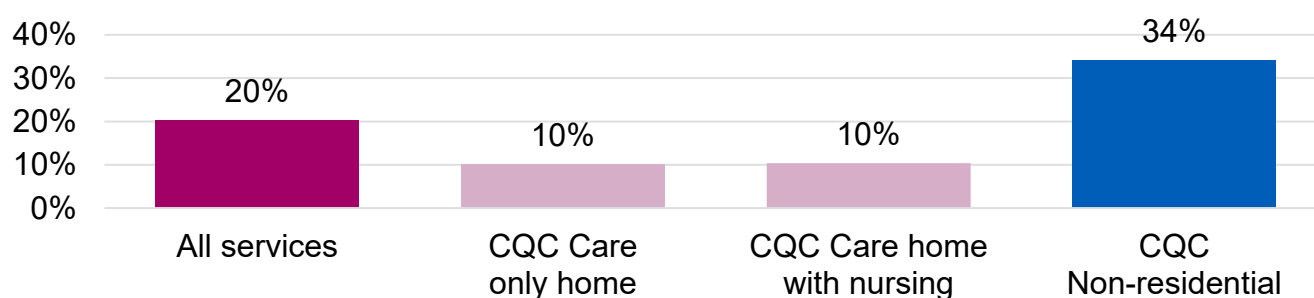
2. Employment overview

There were an estimated 505,000 direct care providing filled posts in CQC non-residential services, 49,000 managers, 2,600 regulated profession filled posts and 24,500 other filled posts including ancillary non-care-providing roles.

Around 34% of the CQC non-residential workforce were employed on a zero-hours contract, this was higher for care workers, at 44%. Across all filled posts the CQC non-residential workforce had a higher reliance on zero-hours contracts than CQC care homes with nursing and CQC care homes without nursing (both 10%). The proportion of CQC non-residential workers employed on a zero-hours contract has decreased by one percentage points since 2024/25.

Chart 3. Estimated proportion of workers employed on a zero-hours contract by main care service (local authority and independent sectors only), 2025/26

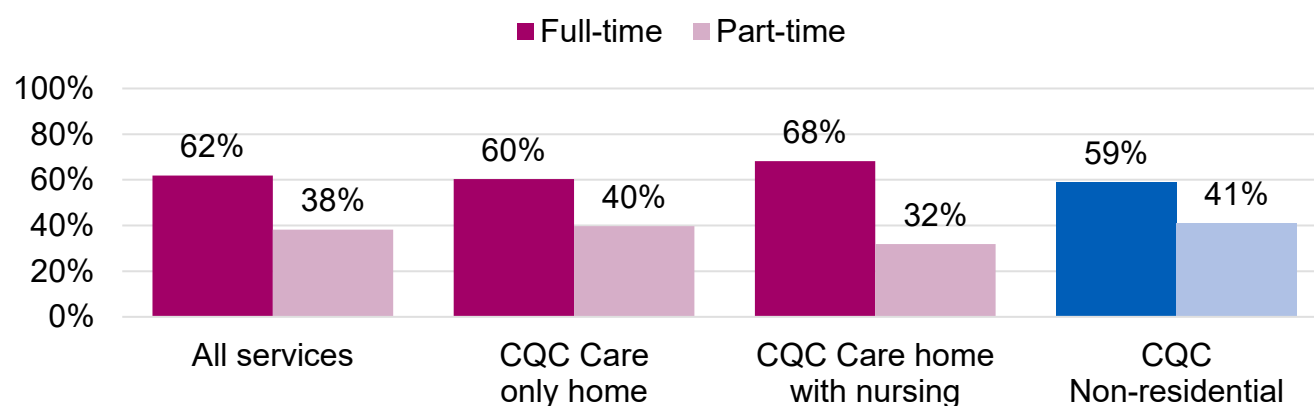
Source: Skills for Care estimates



Over half of staff in CQC non-residential services were employed on a full-time basis (59%) and 41% employed part-time. In terms of employment status, 87% were employed on permanent contracts while 3% were employed on temporary contracts. 9% were indirectly employed, that is staff employed on bank, pool, agency and/or other contract types.

Chart 4. Estimated full-time/part-time status of the adult social care workforce by main care service (local authority and independent sectors only), 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates



3. Recruitment and retention

The turnover rate among staff in CQC non-residential services was 23.5%, which was lower than that of care homes with nursing (27.8%) but higher than care homes without nursing (21.4%). This equates to an estimated 124,000 workers leaving their role in the previous 12 months. Care workers in CQC non-residential services had a higher turnover rate, at 28.6% (93,000 leavers).

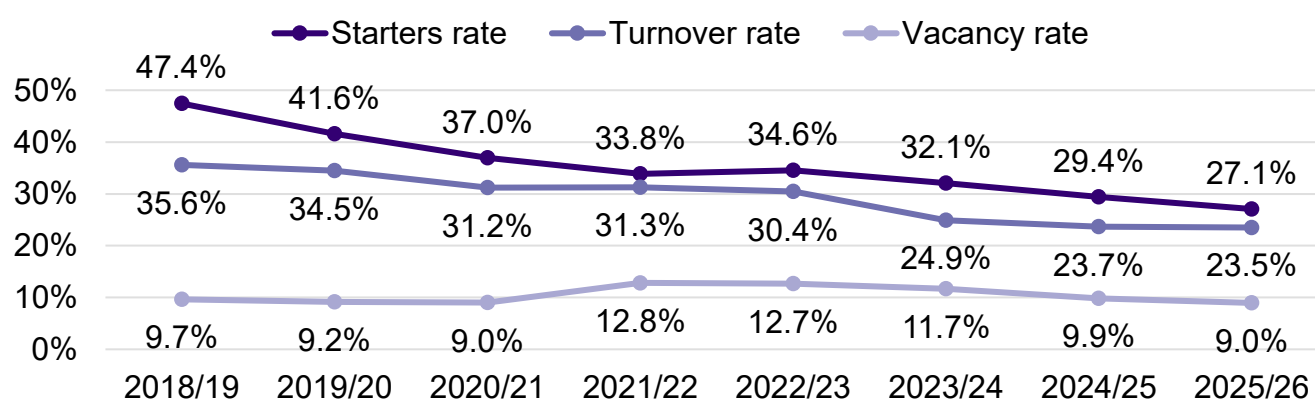
The starters rate in CQC non-residential services has consistently been higher than the turnover rate over time, which highlights a growing workforce. Almost half of the workforce were recruited from within adult social care (48%). This means that although the high turnover rate results in employers going through the recruitment process, with its associated costs, the skills and experience of many workers are retained by the sector.

A post may become vacant due to a worker leaving their job, but a vacancy may also be created to grow the existing workforce. The vacancy rate in CQC non-residential services increased sharply during the COVID-19 period, to a peak of 12.8% in 2021/22, but has since decreased each year down to 9.0% in 2025/26.

To see monthly changes in the starter, turnover and vacancy rate in the independent sector, see our [recruitment and retention tracker](#).

Chart 5. Estimated starter, turnover and vacancy rate trends in CQC non-residential services (local authority and independent sectors only), 2018/19 to 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates



The workforce had an average of 8.0 years of experience working in social care and 4.1 in their current role. The CQC non-residential workforce typically had less experience working in the adult social care sector compared to workers in care homes with nursing (9.5 years) as well workers from care homes without nursing (9.1 years).

4. Demographics

High levels of international recruitment since 2022/23 has contributed to the change in workforce demographic trends in this section. For example, care workers and support workers recruited internationally both on the Health and Care Worker visa and via other routes, were more likely to identify as male and were more likely to be younger.

77% of workers in CQC non-residential services identified as female. The proportion of workers identifying as male increased for the fourth consecutive year and reached 23% in 2025/26, up from 18% in 2022/23.

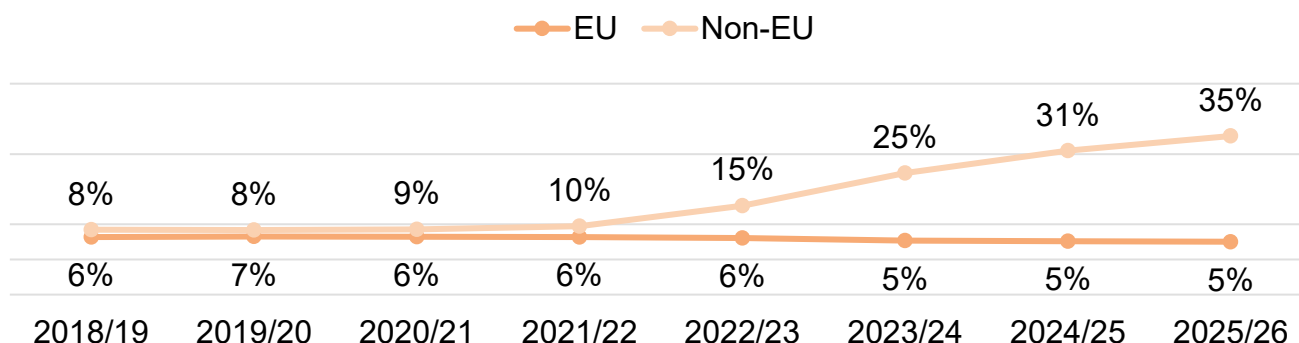
The average age of workers in CQC non-residential services was 42.8, this was similar for care homes without nursing (43.3) and care home with nursing services (43.5). Around 23% of the workforce were aged 55 and over in 2025/26, this highlights both the experience within the current workforce and the importance of understanding and planning for future changes.

The majority of the workforce in CQC non-residential services were of a British nationality (60%), while 35% were of a non-EU nationality and 5% an EU nationality. The proportion of British workers was similar for care home with nursing services, where 58% of the workforce were British but lower than CQC care only homes, where 70% were British.

The chart below shows that over time the proportion of non-EU workers has increased substantially, which is linked to the increase of international recruitment. For information about the estimated number of people arriving in the UK and starting direct care providing roles in the adult social care independent sector, see our [International recruitment quarterly tracker](#).

Chart 6. Estimated proportion of workers of a non-EU and EU nationality in CQC non-residential services (local authority and independent sectors only), 2018/19 to 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates



Half of workers in CQC-regulated care homes without nursing services were people of White ethnicity (51%). A further 32% were people of Black, African, Caribbean or Black British ethnicity, 14% were people of Asian or Asian British ethnicity, and 2% were people of mixed or multiple ethnicities. The remaining 1% were people of ethnicities not listed above.

5. Pay

Across the adult social care workforce, pay varies by job role as well as by sector, main care service and geographical area. Care workers make up 60% of all filled posts within CQC non-residential services in the independent sector. This summary focusses on hourly pay of those care worker only. To see pay information for other job roles, services or sectors please see the green pay pages of 'The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England' [data visualisation](#).

Our pay analysis shows pay in both nominal and real term amounts.

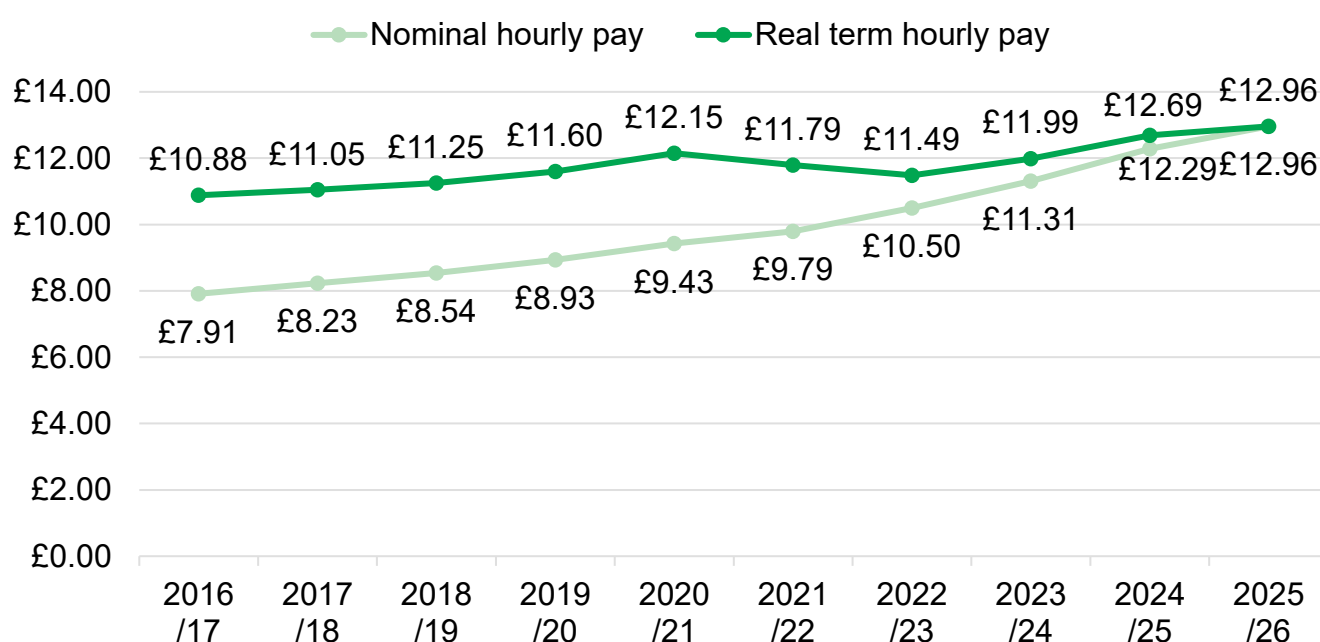
- **'Nominal'** pay shows the actual pay rates as they were at the time.
- **'Real term'** means that historical pay rates have been adjusted to take inflation into account and have been calculated using the [Consumers Price Index](#) (the official measure of inflation of consumer prices in the UK) and expressed in prices as at March 2026.

The [National Living Wage](#) (NLW) was first introduced on 1 April 2016 at £7.20 per hour for workers aged 25 and over. Over time the age threshold has been reduced and at the time of data collection of this report, the NLW was £12.21 per hour for workers aged 21 and over.

The chart below shows the nominal and real term pay trends for average mean hourly pay for independent sector care workers in CQC non-residential services. Between 2016/17 and 2025/26, nominal pay has increased by £5.05 (64%) while in real terms, pay has increased faster than inflation, increasing by £2.08 (19%).

Chart 7. Estimated average mean nominal and real term hourly pay of care workers in CQC non-residential services (independent sector only), 2016/17 to 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates

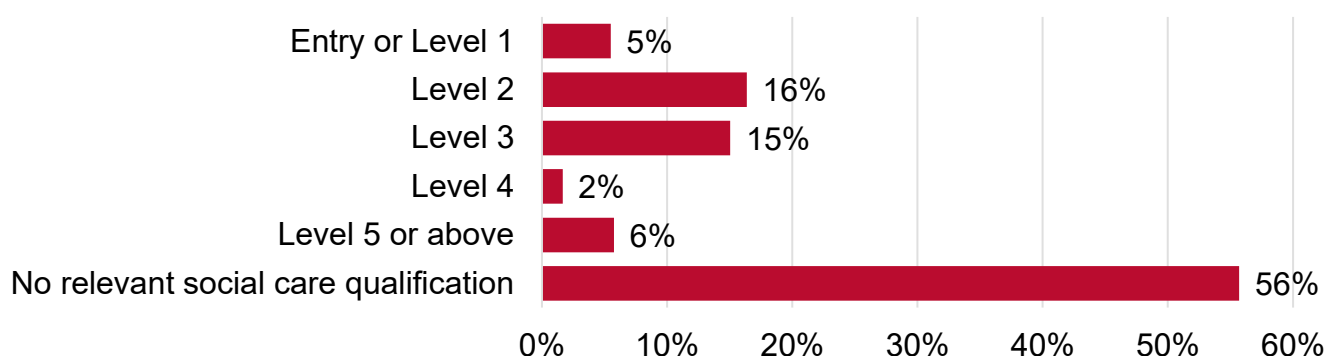


6. Qualifications

Around 44% of the workforce in CQC non-residential services held a qualification relevant to social care. This excludes staff in regulated professions who must be qualified to perform their roles (e.g. social workers, registered nurses or occupational therapists).

Chart 8. Estimated highest social care qualification level of the adult social care workforce in CQC non-residential services (local authority and independent sectors only, excluding regulated professions), 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates

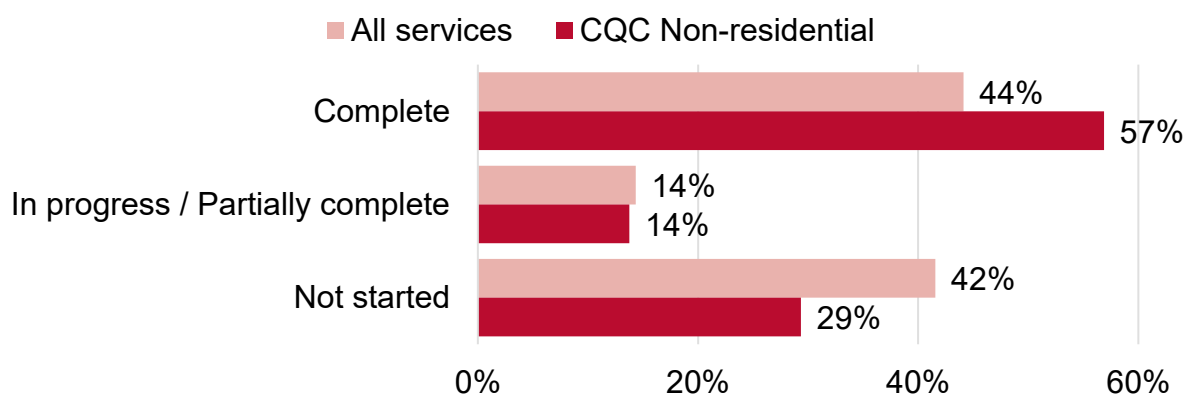


Different job roles would be expected to be qualified at different levels. In CQC non-residential services 35% of direct care workers were qualified at Level 2 or above and 37% of managers were qualified at Level 5 or above.

The [Care Certificate standards](#) are an agreed set of 16 standards that define the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of specific job roles in the health and social care sectors. They are an employer-led certificate of competence designed to support a robust induction programme for workers that are 'new' to the sector. The standards are typically undertaken by direct care providing workers but are open to all job roles in adult social care.

Chart 9. Estimated Care Certificate standards status of all adult social care roles in CQC non-residential services (local authority and independent sectors only), 2025/26

Source: Skills for Care estimates



Further resources

As a producer of official statistics, we provide outstanding workforce intelligence that 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. To access these reports and visualisations, please refer to the relevant pages on our [Workforce Intelligence website](#).

[National](#) information

This summary report accompanies our flagship publication: [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#). The detailed publication analyses the size and structure of the workforce, as well as key workforce characteristics and additional analysis on international recruitment and factors affecting turnover and CQC ratings. There is also a data visualisation, which can be filtered by service and shows further information alongside this summary report.

[Regional](#) and [local](#) information

We have several data visualisations and written reports which provide an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region and local authority area. We have visualisations showing one area at a time, and visualisations that show variable comparisons amongst regional and local areas. Our area summary reports detail the workforce characteristics within that area, with additional insights.

Monthly statistics – workforce trackers

We publish [tracking information](#) about the adult social care workforce including;

- [Filled posts in the adult social care workforce in England: monthly statistics](#)
- [Recruitment and retention monthly tracker](#) and
- [International recruitment quarterly tracker](#).

Commission our services

Our Workforce Intelligence team are the experts in adult social care workforce insight. The data we collect in the ASC-WDS gives an unrivalled overview of the adult social care workforce in England. Beyond the wealth of information already available publicly on our website, you can [commission the services](#) of the Workforce Intelligence team to produce bespoke reports and analysis for your organisation or area.

Skills for Care is guided by core values. Throughout everything we do, we're inclusive, motivated, passionate, ambitious, collaborative and trustworthy. For more information about the Skills for Care strategy, our vision, mission, values and plan to achieve our mission, visit [the Skills for Care website](#).

For bespoke analysis of workforce information or to answer any specific questions you have about the adult social care workforce, please contact us at analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk.

Skills for Care

West Village
Wellington Street
Leeds
LS1 4LT

E: info@skillsforcare.org.uk

skillsforcare.org.uk



facebook.com/skillsforcare

linkedin.com/company/skills-for-care

© Skills for Care 2026