

A black and white photograph of a young man and an elderly woman walking towards the camera in a brightly lit hallway. The man is on the left, wearing a plaid shirt and a lanyard, and the woman is on the right, wearing a cable-knit sweater. Both are smiling. The hallway has white walls, a carpeted floor, and recessed ceiling lights.

Headline social worker information

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

February 2025

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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 2024.

Key findings:

- There were around 19,200 social worker filled posts in local authorities in 2024. Since 2023, the number of social worker filled posts has increased by 700 (3.8%).
- There was an increase of 3,000 social worker filled posts since 2017 (18.5%). The overall number of filled posts in adult social services departments increased by 10,700 (9.8%) over the same period.
- The social worker turnover rate was 12.8% in 2024, equivalent to around 2,200 leaving their roles in the previous 12 months.
- There were around 1,600 vacant social worker posts in 2024, which is a rate of 8.8%.
- Social workers had an average of 10.8 sickness days in over the previous 12 months. This was the highest average number of sickness days amongst regulated professions employed by local authorities. Occupational therapists had the second highest average at 8.8 sickness days.
- Social workers had an average of 5.2 years in their current role.
- Social workers were more ethnically diverse than the overall adult social services departments' workforce. Around 69% of social workers had a white ethnicity compared to 79% across all job roles.
- The average (mean) full-time equivalent pay for a social worker was £43,000 in 2024. Compared to 2023, this was around £1,500 (3.7%) higher in nominal terms, and around £800 (2.0%) higher in real terms.
- 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 decreased in 2022. In 2024, the social worker real term average FTE pay was 5.3% less than in 2016.

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 2024. Data on the children's social work 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

Meeting the criteria for a full ASC-WDS return means that for each workplace the following fields must be completed: type of organisation, service provided, service user groups for whom care is provided, capacity, number of service users, number of staff, vacant posts, and number of leavers in the past year.

Also, for every worker a staff record must be completed with the main job role and the employment status. And at least 90% of staff records must have the following 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 Statistics](#), we use several methods to quality assure the data. The 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 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](#).

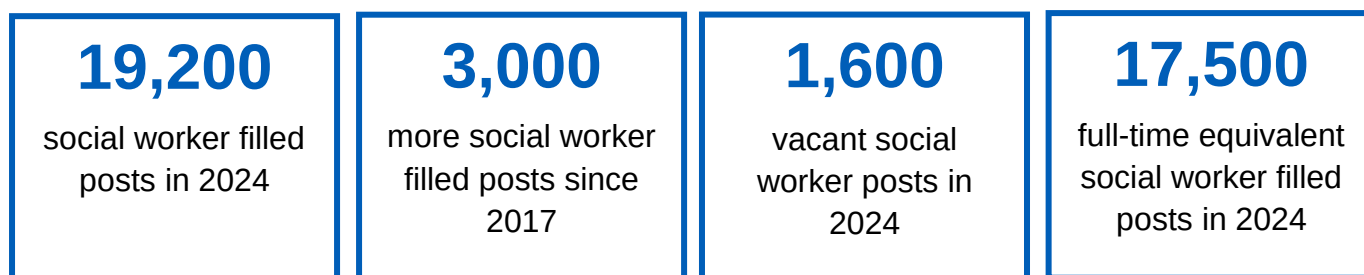
Scope of this report

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 presents the number of filled posts and full-time equivalent (FTE) filled posts held by social workers in adult social services departments within local authorities in England as well as trends since 2017.



Key findings

- There were around 20,900 social worker posts in total in adult social services departments across England in 2024. Of which 19,200 were filled posts and 1,600 were vacant posts.
- There were around 19,200 social worker filled posts in adult social services departments across England in 2024, which was 700 more than 2023, and 3,000 more than in 2017.
- Social workers accounted for 16% of all filled posts in adult social service departments.
- There were around 1,600 vacant social worker posts in 2024.
- Around 12% of social worker posts were indirectly employed (bank/pool/agency) in 2024.
- There were around 17,500 full-time equivalent social worker filled posts.

In 2024 there were around 20,900 social worker posts in total in adult social service departments. These were comprised of 19,200 filled posts and 1,600 vacant posts. There were around 119,900 filled posts across all job roles in adult social services departments, therefore social workers accounted for 16% of filled posts.

Table 1 below shows the number of social worker and overall filled posts within adult social service departments between 2012 and 2024.

Between 2012 and 2017, the overall number of filled posts in adult social service departments decreased by around 41,400. During this period the number social worker filled posts remained about the same amount, therefore the percentage of the overall workforce accounted for by social workers increased from 11% to 15%.

Since 2017, the overall adult social services workforce and the number of social worker filled posts has increased almost every year. The overall workforce has increased by around 10,700 filled posts and the number of social worker filled posts has increased by around 3,000. During this period, the percentage of the overall workforce accounted for by social workers has changed minimally.

Table 1. Social worker and all job roles filled posts in adult social service departments and percentage change, 2012 to 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

	Social worker filled posts	% change	% of all filled posts	All job roles filled posts	% change
2012	16,600		11%	150,600	
2013	16,500	-0.4%	12%	140,700	-6.6%
2014	15,700	-5.1%	12%	130,100	-7.5%
2015	16,100	2.9%	13%	120,100	-7.7%
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%	113,200	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	-1.0%
2023	18,500	7.3%	16%	117,400	3.0%
2024	19,200	3.8%	16%	119,900	2.1%
Change 2012 to 2017	-325	-2.0%		-41,400	-27.5%
Change 2017 to 2024	3,000	18.5%		10,700	9.8%

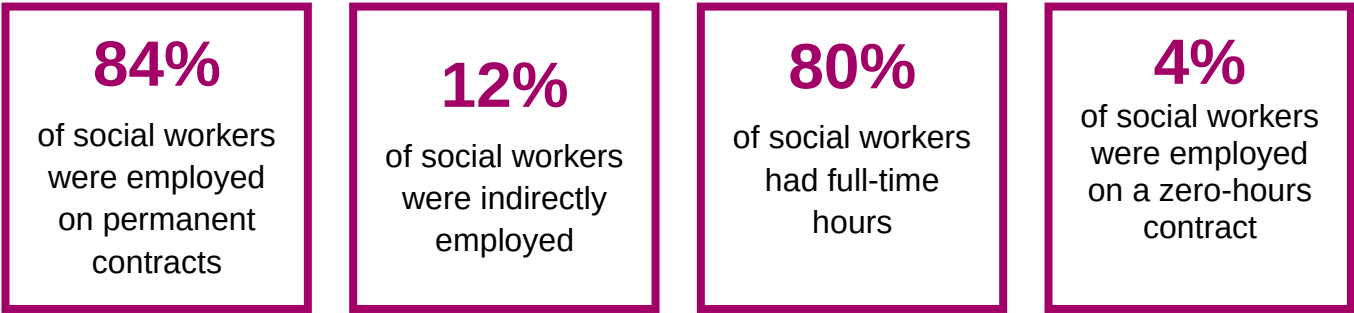
The majority of social workers were employed on permanent contracts in 2024 at 84%. This proportion has decreased from 92% in 2012, and the proportion that are indirectly employed, as bank/pool or agency staff, has increased from 4% in 2012 to 12% in 2024.

The number of social worker full-time equivalent (FTE) filled posts was estimated at 17,500 in 2024, which was an FTE ratio of 0.91. These estimates were created by applying contracted hours and 'usual hours' data to estimates of the number of filled posts where 37 hours per week has been classed as one 'full-time equivalent' post (on average full-time hours in adult social care are 37-37.5 hours per week).

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.

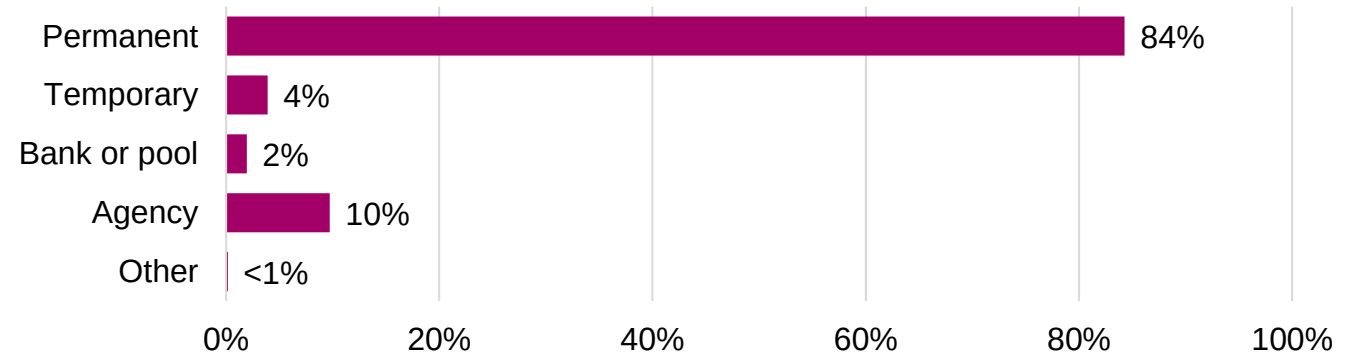


Key findings

- 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 was approximately 1,900 posts. This proportion has increased from 2% in 2012. Social workers had the highest proportion of agency workers across all the job roles reported in [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England report](#) in 2024.

Chart 1. Social worker employment status in adult social service departments, 2024
Source: Skills for Care estimates



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 weren't directly employed will be higher. For example, a local authority

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

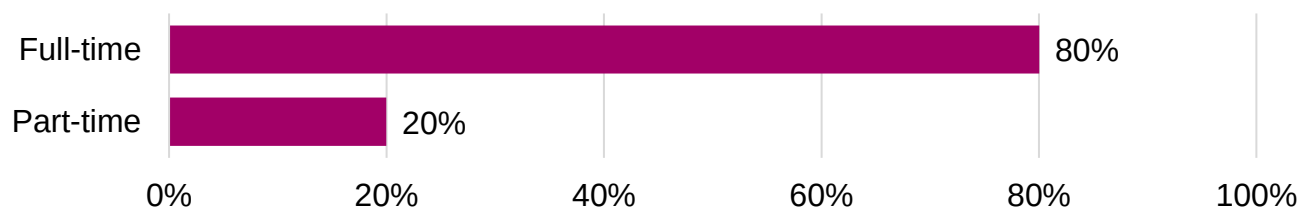
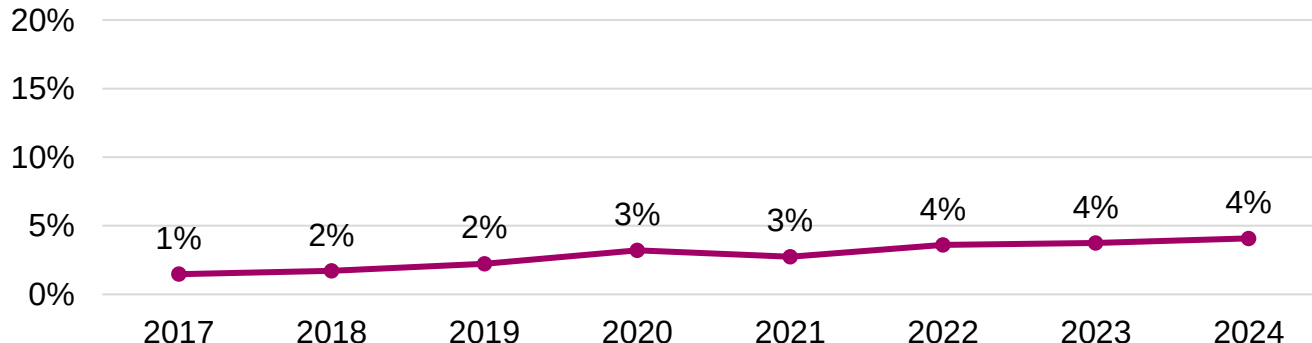


Chart 3 shows that few social workers were employed on a zero-hours contract (4%), which was around 800 posts, however this proportion has gradually increased from 1% in 2017.

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.

12.8%

social worker
turnover rate

8.8%

social worker
vacancy rate

10.8

average sickness
days in previous
12 months

5.2

average years of
experience in
their current role

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

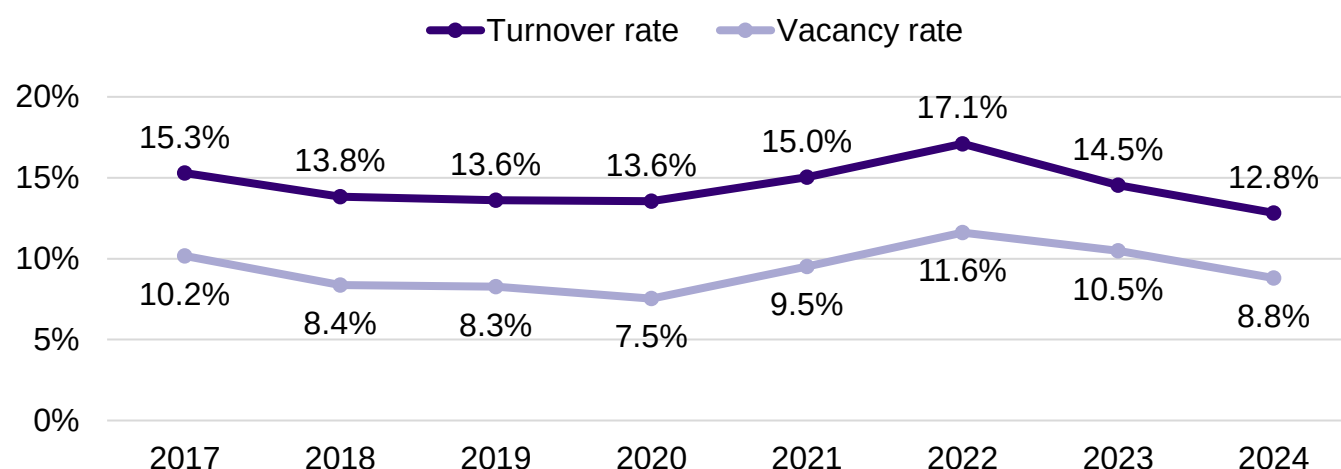
The social worker turnover rate in adult social services departments was 12.8% in 2024, equivalent to around 2,200 leaving their roles in the previous 12 months. It should be noted that the turnover rate for all roles within adult social services departments was much lower than the independent sector, 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.

Chart 4. Social worker turnover and vacancy rate trends in adult social service departments, 2017 to 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates



3.2 Sickness

Wellbeing at work relates to every aspect of working life, from the working environment to how the workforce feels about themselves. Stress and burnout are prominent issues for adult social care staff and workforce wellbeing is paramount. Supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce is essential to make sure people with care and support needs and their families receive good quality care so they can live as independently as possible. Our website has many resources to support managers to promote [staff wellbeing](#). We've launched a [positive culture toolkit](#) to support managers and staff to understand positive workplace culture and how to achieve it.

Chart 5 shows that social workers had an average of 10.8 sickness days over the previous 12 months, which equates to around 183,000 working days lost. It shows that the average sickness days varied little between 2017 and 2021, then increased sharply in 2022, but decreased again over the following years.

Chart 5. Average number of sickness days in the previous 12 months for social workers in adult social service departments, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

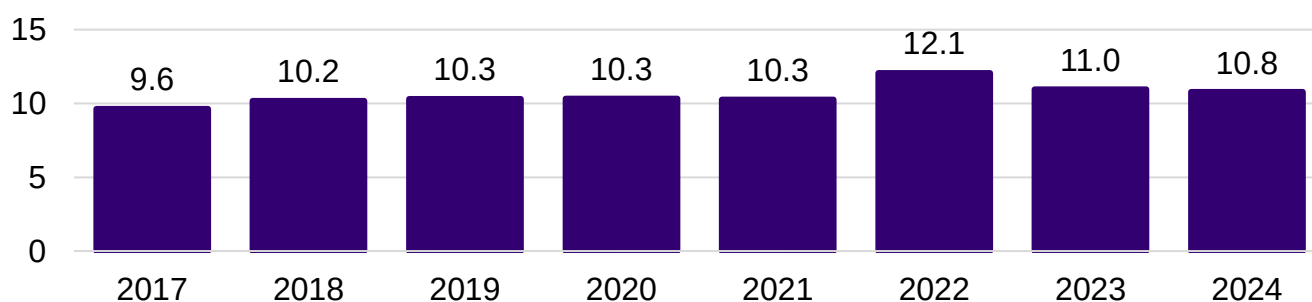
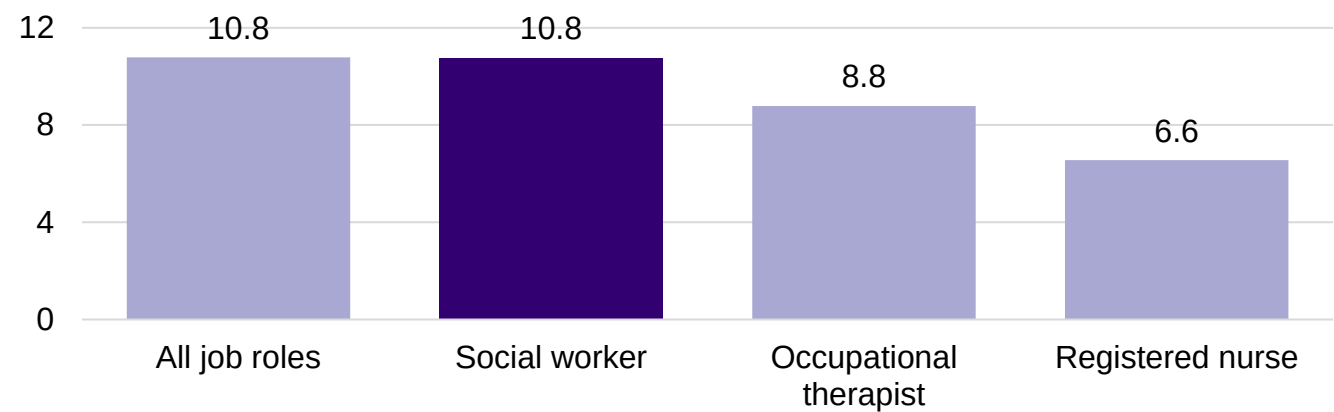


Chart 6 shows that social workers had an average of 10.8 sickness days over 12 months, which more than any other regulated profession employed by local authorities.

Chart 6. Average number of sickness days in adult social service departments by selected job role, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

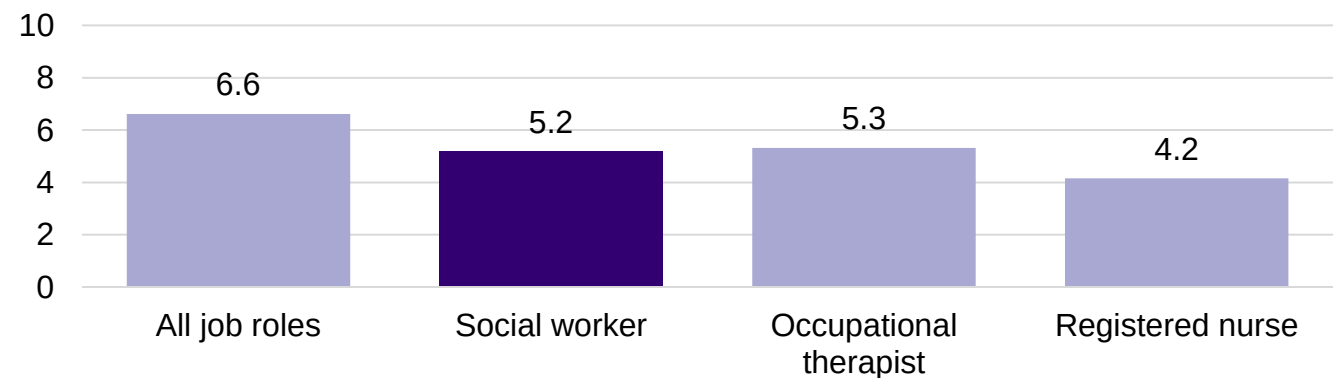


3.3 Experience in role

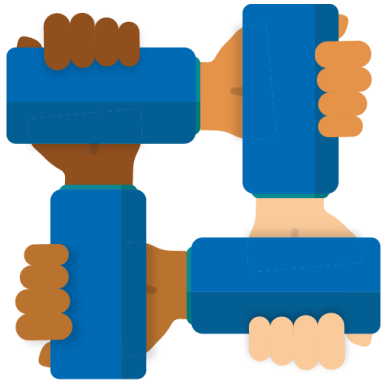
Social workers had an average of 5.2 years of experience working in their current role. Chart 7 shows this was higher than registered nurses (4.2 years) but similar to occupational therapists (5.3 years).

Chart 7. Average number of years' experience in role in adult social service departments by selected job role, 2024

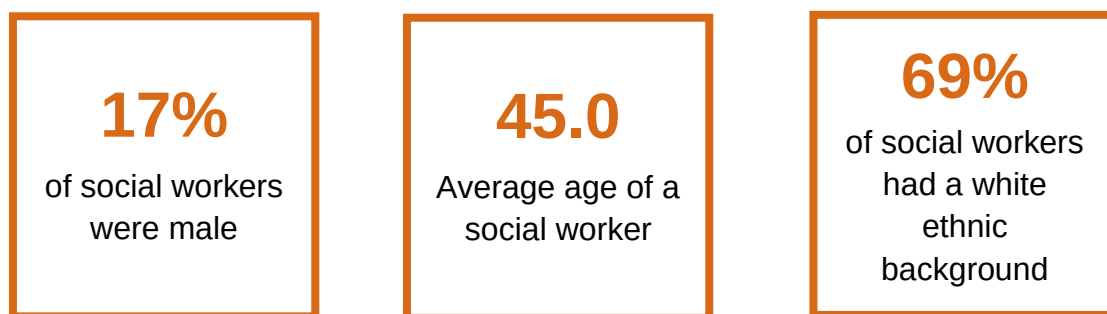
Source: Skills for Care estimates



4. Demographics



This chapter looks at the demographics of social workers in adult social services departments within local authorities in England in terms of their gender, age and ethnicity.



Key Findings

- The majority of social workers were female (83%) and 17% were male. This was similar to that of all job roles in adult social service departments (81% female and 19% male), but the proportion of male social workers was higher than registered nurses (13% male) occupational therapists (10% male).
- The average age of a social worker was 45.0 years, which was slightly lower than the average across all job roles (47.6 years). A fifth of social workers (20%) were between 25 and 34 years of age, this was greater than that of all job roles in adult social service departments (15%).
- Social workers were more ethnically diverse than all job roles in adult social service departments, with 69% having a white ethnic background compared to 79% for all job roles.

4.1 Gender

In 2021/22 the gender question was changed in ASC-WDS from 'gender' to 'gender identity' and the option of 'other' was added alongside 'male', 'female' and 'I don't know'. In 2024, 0.02% of local authority social workers were recorded as having 'other' gender identity by their employer in ASC-WDS. 'Not known' responses are removed prior to weighting, as with our other variables.

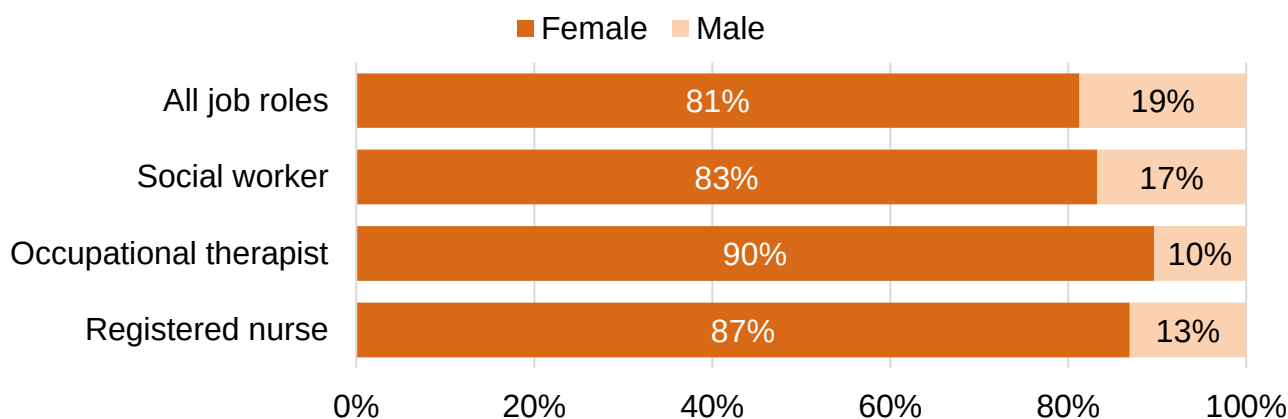
The following detailed analysis includes 'male' and 'female' gender identities. The 'other' gender identity responses are not included in the detailed analysis because the national base is very low, and we are still understanding its representativeness.

It is important to note that our data is reported by employers, not the workers themselves and this may result in an underestimation of people with a gender identity other than male and female recorded. Skills for Care is continuing to monitor the results of the gender identity question and will review the question wording with employers.

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

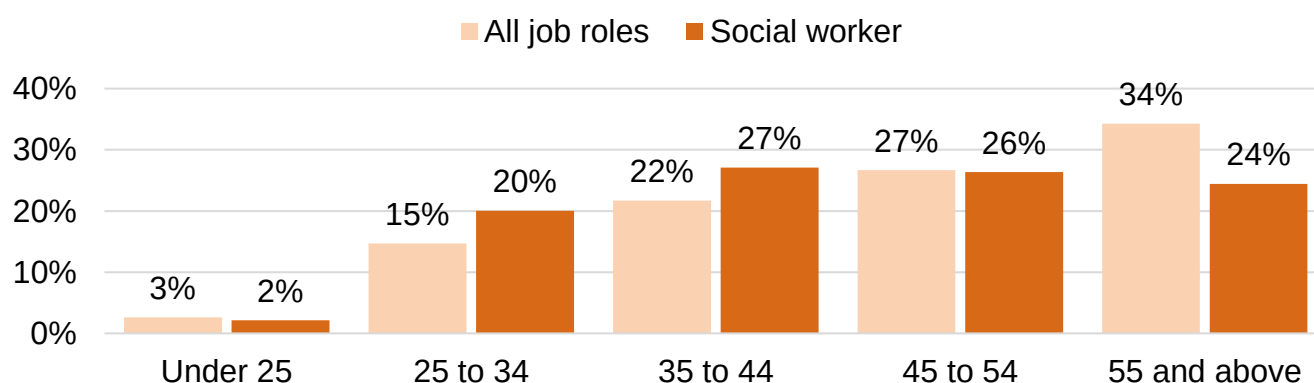


4.2 Age

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 service departments, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates

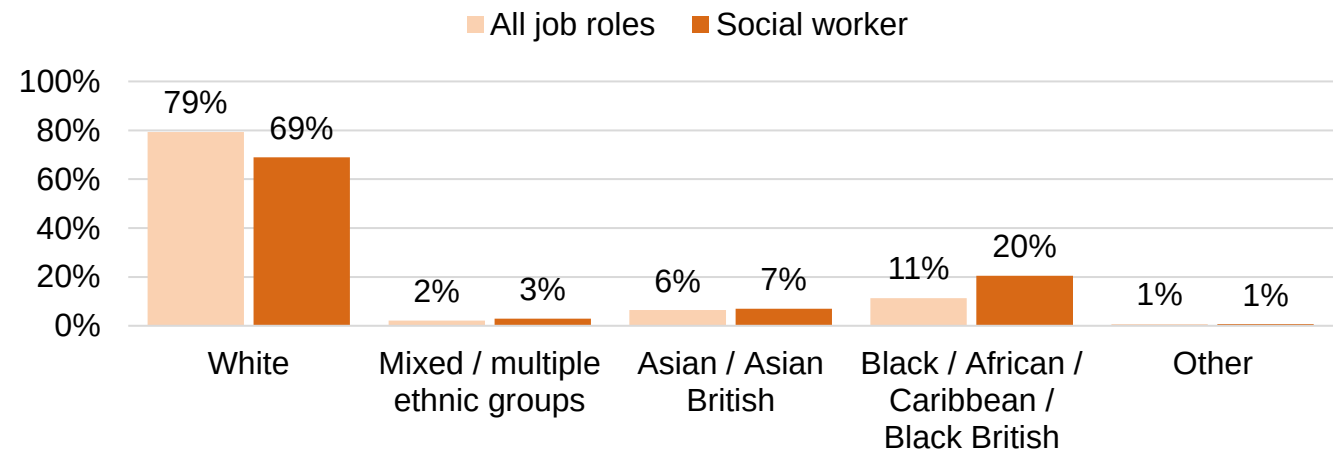


4.3 Ethnicity

Social workers were more ethnically diverse than the overall adult social services departments' workforce. Chart 10 shows that 69% of social workers had a white ethnicity compared to 79% across all job roles. This comparison also highlights that 20% of social workers had a Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British ethnicity compared to 11% of the overall local authority workforce. Other ethnicity groups had similar representation across social workers and all other local authority job roles.

Chart 10. Ethnicity of social workers and all job roles in adult social services departments, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates



5. Pay



This section looks at the average full-time equivalent (FTE) pay of social workers in adult social service departments and compares them to other regulated professions.

£43,000

social worker average
(mean) FTE pay

25.6%

nominal increase in
social worker FTE pay
since 2016

5.3%

real term decrease in
social worker FTE pay
since 2016

Key findings

- Social workers had an average (mean) FTE pay of £43,000 in 2024. This was around £1,500 (3.7%) higher in nominal terms, and around £800 (2.0%) higher in real terms, compared to 2023.
- The social worker average (mean) pay has increased in nominal terms by 25.6% since 2016 but has decreased by 5.3% in real terms over the same period. Therefore, social workers are paid relatively less in real terms in 2024 than in 2016.
- London had the highest average social workers FTE pay at £50,400, closely followed by the South East (£44,200). Social workers in the East Midlands had the lowest average FTE pay at £39,100.

The ASC-WDS collects pay data as both annual and hourly rates. It also collects information about workers' contracted hours and usual hours worked for both agency and zero-hours staff. The information in this section shows full-time equivalent (FTE) average salaries. Pay data was converted into FTE annual salaries using an average working week of 37 hours. Hourly pay data was also converted into annual salaries, based on the full-time equivalent. Converting pay in this way allows for the pay of full-time and part-time workers to be compared.

Comparisons to pay information in previous years always refers to the data as at September of that year (when the annual data collection takes place). **Trends go back to 2016**, as this marks the change from the National Minimum Wage to the National Living Wage (NLW). Please note that at the time of data collection, September 2024, the NLW was £11.44.

Chart 11 below shows the average (mean) FTE pay for a social worker in local authorities was £43,000 in 2024. This was similar to occupational therapists (£42,900) and registered nurses (£44,500).

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

Source: Skills for Care estimates



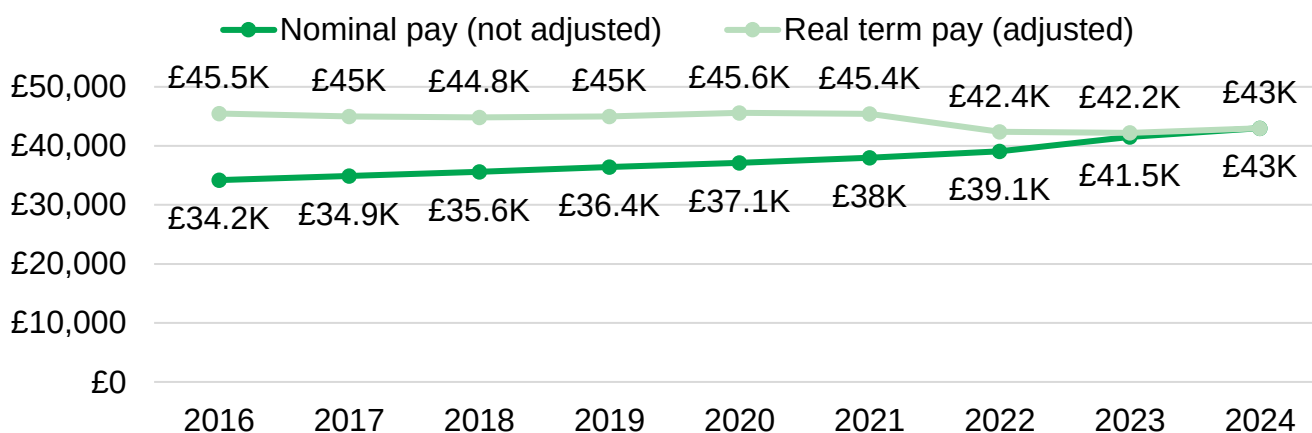
Chart 12 shows the average (mean) FTE pay trend of social workers in both nominal and real terms. 'Real term' means that the pay rate has been adjusted to take inflation into account and has been calculated using the Consumers Price Index (CPI), the official measure of inflation of consumer prices in 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 decreased in 2022. In 2024, the social worker real term average FTE pay was 5.3% less than in 2016.

Chart 12. Social worker average (mean) FTE pay of social workers in adult social service departments, 2016 to 2024

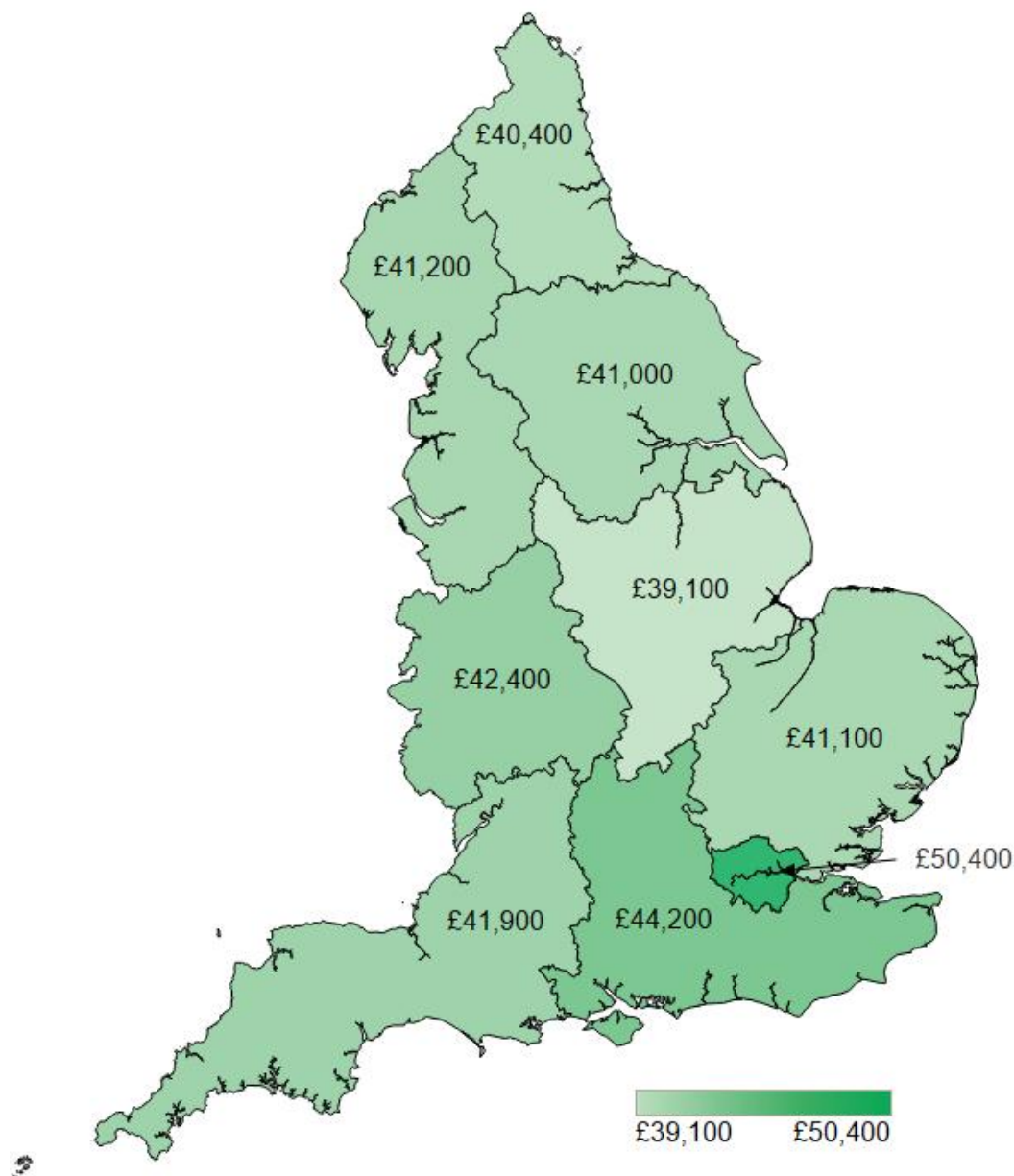
Source: Skills for Care estimates



The map below shows that social workers in London had the highest mean pay at £50,400, which was 17% higher than the mean across England. Outside of London, social worker salaries ranged from £39,100 in the East Midlands to £44,200 in the South East region.

Map 1. Social worker average (mean) FTE pay in adult social service departments by region, 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates



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 chapter 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](#).

Our workforce intelligence publications

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

This report provides in-depth analysis of the workforce in the adult social care sector in England. This includes further detail on the size and structure of the workforce, as well as information on workforce characteristics, trends and future projections.

To access this information, visit <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof>

Latest version, October 2024. Updated information is due in October 2025.

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

This report 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 information, visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure

Latest version, July 2024. Updated information is due in June 2025.

Regional information

We have data visualisations and written reports which provide an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region. We have two data visualisations that show regional information: one looks at one region at a time, the other looks at key variables and compares the nine regions. Alongside these data visualisations are written summaries.

To access this information, visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports

Latest version, October 2024. Updated information is due October 2025.

Local area information

There are six pages of local area information on our website. These are split by either local authority area or NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) geography area.

- Individual areas: we have one report looking at the workforce in each local authority area or ICB area, one at a time.
- Our comparison reports compare key variables across local areas or ICB areas.
- Each local area has a written summary report, summarising the workforce statistics.
- Our 'My ICB area (MH and LD&A)' report shows the latest information from the ASC-WDS for the mental health and learning disability and/or autism workforces, split into ICB areas.

To access this information, visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/local-information

Latest versions, October 2024. Updated information is due in October 2025.

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.

To access these topic pages, visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/topics

Our values

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 [our website](#).

All analysts leading on the production of this report are certified statisticians, meaning we work to the standard of the 'five safes'. We always make sure that our research and outputs are appropriate and trustworthy, and that there's no risk of misuse or confidentially breach. When creating outputs, we always adhere to statistical disclosure controls.

As a Workforce Intelligence team, we:

- help people to understand what's already available without commissioning our services and what options are available
- aren't selling the data, we're selling our analysis and sector expertise
- carry out bespoke work in particular areas that we can't cover in general outputs
- have a 'good for the sector' aim on all projects we work on
- channel any money we earn straight back into the sector.

In 2023 Skills for Care became an official statistics provider, having been added to the [Official Statistics Order 2023](#). We, Skills for Care's Workforce Intelligence team, are committed to the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality and value, as well as the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Please see our website for our full [statement](#).

User engagement is important to us and we welcome any feedback on the collection of this data and the findings of this report, as well as the accompanying reference tables and data visualisation on our website. To contact us, please use one of the options below.



For more information about the services listed above, to be kept up to date with Workforce Intelligence news or please get in touch via the following routes:

Email: analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk

X (Twitter): [@SfC_Data](https://twitter.com/SfC_Data) or [@skillsforcare](https://twitter.com/skillsforcare)

Website: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/contactWI



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