The National Minimum Dataset for Social Care (NMDS-SC) is the leading source of workforce intelligence for England’s adult social care workforce. The annual local authority return provides an evidence base from all 152 councils. Key findings from the NMDS-SC relating to social workers in local authority adult social service departments in 2016 are provided in this report.

Summary of key findings (adult social services departments)

- The size of the social worker workforce in local authorities has remained stable between 2011 and 2016 (at around 16,000) whereas the wider local authority employed social care workforce has decreased by around 29% over the same period.
- The turnover rate for social workers was 16% in 2016. This was an increase on 2014 (12%) and 2015 (13%).
- The vacancy rate for social workers in local authorities was 11% in 2016. This rate is similar to the rate in 2015 (12%) and higher than it was in 2014 (8%).
- The average full-time equivalent salary for a social worker was £32,800 in September 2016. This was the same as for occupational therapists, higher than registered nurses (£27,100) and lower than allied health professionals (£36,000).

The workforce

In 2016 there were 112,800 jobs in adult social services departments¹. Overall the number of these jobs has been declining and the 2016 figure represents a 29% decrease from 159,400 jobs in 2011. However, within this overall picture, the number of social workers has remained stable. There has been a decrease of 100 social worker jobs between 2011 and 2016 (equating to 1%), but unlike the overall number of jobs this has not been a consistent downwards trend (see table 1).

As a result of the wider fall in jobs, the proportion of adult social services jobs that were social workers has increased year-on-year since 2011, from 10% in 2011 to 14% in 2016. During the same period (2009 to 2015), the independent sector social care workforce grew by an estimated 23%, (The Size & Structure of the Adult Social Care Sector and Workforce, 2016²), suggesting jobs which were lost from the statutory sector could be moving to the independent sector. Social worker jobs have not followed this overall trend.

¹ A report on adult social services departments published by NHS digital using NMDS-SC data can be found here: [http://www.content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB23291](http://www.content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB23291)
² Skills for Care’s annual report on the size and structure of the whole adult social care workforce can be found here: [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure)
The overall number of social worker jobs in the adult social care sector is estimated by Skills for Care at 18,700 (this includes 16,100 in local authorities, 1,600 in the NHS and 1,000 in the independent sector).

**Table 1. Social worker jobs and all job roles in adult social services departments**
*Source. NMDS-SC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job role</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>16,600</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>15,700</td>
<td>16,100</td>
<td>16,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as % of all jobs</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All job roles</td>
<td>159,400</td>
<td>150,700</td>
<td>140,700</td>
<td>130,100</td>
<td>120,200</td>
<td>112,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. 2012-2016 total jobs based on 152 councils, 2011 based on 138 councils (14 were estimated).

**Recruitment and retention**

The starters rate for social workers in 2016 was 19%. The starters rate has been increasing for social workers, rising from 13% in 2014 and 15% in 2015 (see Chart 1).

Turnover in the local authority sector for social workers was 16% in 2016. This rate has also been increasing year-on-year since 2014 when the rate for social workers was 12%.

The vacancy rate for social workers in local authorities was 11% in 2016. This rate is similar to the rate in 2015 (12%) and higher than it was in 2014 (8%).

**Chart 1. Starters, turnover and vacancies trends, for social workers in adult social services departments**
*Source. NMDS-SC September 2016*

1. 2014-2016 based on 152 councils with total starters and total leavers data recorded.
2. 2016 vacancies data is based on 145 councils, 133 completed in 2015 and 121 in 2014
3. Starters rate = started in the previous 12 months / employees (permanent + temporary) on completion date in September 2016.
4. Turnover rate = leavers in the previous 12 months / employees (permanent + temporary) on completion date in September 2016.
5. Vacancy rate = Vacancies on completion date / (Vacancies on completion date + employees (permanent + temporary) on completion date).
Demographics

The demographics of social workers differed in several ways from the overall adult local authority workforce. Social workers had a younger age profile than the average across all roles in adult social services departments. Chart 2 below shows around a fifth of social workers (21%) were aged 25 to 34 compared to 14% on average across all job roles.

![Chart 2. Age bands of social workers in adult social services departments](Source: NMDS-SC September 2016)

Social workers were more diverse than the overall local authority workforce. 21% of social workers were from BAME backgrounds, compared to 14% in all job roles (Chart 3). There were also a larger proportion of male (20%) social workers when compared to the average for all job roles (18%).

![Chart 3. Ethnicity of social workers in adult social services departments](Source: NMDS-SC September 2016)

Pay

The average full time equivalent salary for a social worker in local authorities was £32,800 in September 2016. This was the same as for occupational therapists, higher than registered nurses (£27,100) and lower than allied health professionals (£36,000).

![Chart 4. Average full time equivalent pay of regulated professional roles in adult social services departments](Source: NMDS-SC September 2016)