Headline social worker statistics

Adult Social Care Workforce Dataset (ASC-WDS)

March 2021
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 2020. Data on the children’s social work workforce is published by the Department for Education¹.

There were around 17,500 social workers employed by local authority adult social service departments across England as at September 2020, 1,900 in the independent sector and around 2,800 in the NHS. This report focuses on the 17,500 social workers employed by local authority adult social services departments.

**Brexit**

The information in this report was collected prior to the introduction of the new post-Brexit immigration rules in January 2021. Social Worker is a listed occupation on the ‘skilled worker route’ and is on the Shortage Occupation List. Therefore, social workers are still able to immigrate to the UK under the new rules providing they have a job offer and can speak English to the required standard.

**COVID-19**

The majority of the information in this report was collected in September/October 2020 and therefore refers to the situation at that point in time, during the pandemic. Staff turnover rates and sickness rates are completed ‘over the 12 months prior to completion’ so contain information from around 6 months before the pandemic and 6 months during it.

Skills for Care will continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and Brexit on a monthly basis here:


**Summary of key findings**

- The number of social workers employed by local authorities in England has increased by an average of 2.1% each year since 2016.
- However, the total number of jobs in adult social services departments has decreased by 28.4% since 2011 despite increasing since 2017. Social worker jobs have generally been retained by local authorities during a period where many other jobs have been outsourced to the independent sector.
- The turnover rate for social workers in local authorities was 13.6% in 2020. This figure has decreased each year from 16.0% in 2016.
- The vacancy rate for social workers in local authorities was 7.5% in 2020, equivalent to around 1,300 vacant social worker posts. This figure has decreased from 13.0% in 2015.
- The average full-time equivalent salary for a local authority social worker was around £37,100 in 2020. This was similar to occupational therapists (£36,700) and allied health professionals (£38,800).

1. Social worker jobs

In 2020 there were around 114,100 jobs in local authority adult social service departments, which is an increase of less than 0.7% from 113,300 in 2019. However, between 2011 and 2017 the overall number of jobs decreased consistently each year, by an average of 6.1%. Since 2011, the overall number of jobs fell by 45,300 (28.4%).

Most social worker roles have been retained within local authorities. As shown in Table 1, the number of social worker jobs in adult social service departments has increased by around 1,300 (7.7%) between 2011 and 2020.

As a result of the wider fall in jobs in adult social services departments, the proportion of these jobs that were social workers has increased from 10% in 2011 to 15% in 2020. Between 2012/13 and 2019/20 the independent sector adult social care workforce grew by an estimated 11%. Adult social service department jobs that have been outsourced to the independent sector have contributed to this increase.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social workers</th>
<th>% change</th>
<th>% of all job roles</th>
<th>All job roles</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>159,400</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>16,600</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>150,700</td>
<td>-5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>-0.3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>140,700</td>
<td>-6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>15,700</td>
<td>-5.1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>130,100</td>
<td>-7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>16,100</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>120,200</td>
<td>-7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>16,100</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>112,800</td>
<td>-6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>109,300</td>
<td>-3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>112,200</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>17,400</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>113,300</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>17,500</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>114,100</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 2011</td>
<td>+1,300</td>
<td>+7.7%</td>
<td>-45,300</td>
<td>-28.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England - www.skillsforcare.org.uk/stateof
2. Recruitment and retention

Turnover and vacancy rates
The social worker turnover rate in adult social services departments was 13.6% in 2020, equivalent to around 2,200 leavers in the previous 12 months. Between 2012 and 2016 this rate increased each year, by an average of 1.7 percentage points, but since 2016 this rate has consistently fallen each year, until 2020 where it remained the same as 2019. The rate is still relatively high compared to the pre-2016 turnover rates.

There were around 1,300 vacant social worker jobs in local authorities as at September 2020, which is a rate of 7.5%. The vacancy rate peaked in 2015 at 13.0%, at which time there were around 2,200 vacant social worker posts. After this point the rate has consistently fallen each year down to its lowest point over the reported period.

Many factors influence the vacancy rate for social workers. It is likely however that the decreasing turnover rate has contributed to the decrease in the vacancy rate with fewer jobs becoming vacant due to people leaving their jobs.

Chart 1. Social worker turnover and vacancy rate trends in adult social service departments
Source. Workforce estimates 2020

Sickness
Social workers had an average of 10.3 sickness days in 2020, which equates to around 164,000 working days lost. Chart 2 below shows that the average sickness days has varied little since 2012. Please note that sickness rates refer to the previous 12 months are therefore straddle the start of the pandemic. Many social workers have also been working remotely during the pandemic which may contribute to the rate not increasing like it has for some other jobs roles.

Chart 2. Average number of sickness days in the previous 12 months for social workers
Source. Workforce estimates 2020
Chart 3 shows that social workers had the highest average number of sickness days (10.3) compared to other regulated professions employed by local authorities. Sickness is not universally high. Around 46% of social workers didn’t have any sickness days in the year leading up to September 2020.

**Chart 3. Average number of sickness days in adult social service departments**
*Source. Workforce estimates 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional roles</th>
<th>Social worker</th>
<th>Occupational therapist</th>
<th>Registered nurse</th>
<th>Allied health professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Experience**

Social workers had an average of 10.3 years of experience working in adult social care, which was higher than other regulated professions, such as registered nurses (8.6 years), but similar to occupational therapists (10.4 years) and lower than allied health professionals (11.9 years).

The average length of time a social worker has been in their current role was 5.7 years, a shorter duration than in the sector, which demonstrates that social workers are moving between jobs within the adult social care.

**Chart 4. Experience in sector and role in adult social services departments by job role**
*Source. Workforce estimates 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All job roles</th>
<th>Social worker</th>
<th>Occupational therapist</th>
<th>Registered nurse</th>
<th>Allied health professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Demographics

The demographics of social workers differed from the overall adult social services departments’ workforce. Chart 5 shows that social workers were younger on average with around a fifth (21%) of social workers aged between 25 and 34 years compared to 14% of all people in adult social service department jobs. Social workers had an average age of 45 years in 2020, and this has shown very little change since 2012.

Chart 5. Age bands of social workers in adult social service departments
Source. Workforce estimates 2020

Social workers were more ethnically diverse than the overall adult social services departments’ workforce. Chart 6 shows that 27% of social workers were identified as of a black, Asian and minority ethnic background (BAME), compared to 17% across all job roles. Around a fifth of social workers were male (18%), which was the same proportion shown across the whole workforce in local authorities.

Chart 6. Ethnicity of social workers in adult social services departments
Source. Workforce estimates 2020

Around 90% of social workers in local authorities had a British nationality, 4% had an EU nationality (equivalent to around 700 jobs) and 6% had a non-EU nationality (equivalent to around 1,000 jobs).
The proportion of social worker jobs held by people with an EU nationality showed little change between 2012 and 2020. In nominal terms, the number of social workers jobs held by people with an EU nationality has increased by around 100 (16%) since 2012. In contrast, the proportion with a non-EU nationality has decreased by around 200 (15%) over the same period.

The information in this report was collected prior to the introduction of the new post-Brexit immigration rules in January 2021. Social Worker is a listed occupation on the ‘skilled worker route’ and is on the Shortage Occupation List. Therefore, social workers are still able to immigrate to the UK under the new rules providing they have a job offer and can speak English to the required standard. Skills for Care will monitor if there is any impact in the future.
4. Pay

The mean full-time equivalent salary for a social worker in local authorities was £37,100 as at September 2020. This was similar to other regulated professions, such as occupational therapists (£36,700), allied health professionals (£38,800) but higher than registered nurses (£35,000).

Chart 9. Mean full-time equivalent pay of regulated professional roles in adult social services departments
Source. Workforce estimates 2020

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 official measure of inflation of consumer prices in the UK) as at September 2020, and therefore considers changes in the cost of living over time. Between 2012 and 2020, the nominal full-time equivalent salary of social workers has increased by 14% from £32,600 to £37,100. However, in real terms the salary has increased by 1%.

Chart 10. Average FTE salary of social workers between 2012 and 2020
Source. Workforce estimates 2020
The map below shows that social workers in London had the highest mean salary at £44,500, which was 20% higher than the mean across England. Outside of London, social worker salaries ranged from £37,500 in the South East to £34,000 in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Map 1. Mean FTE salary of social workers by region
Source. Workforce estimates 2020
6. Workforce intelligence publications

Skills for Care 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.

The ASC Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS) (formerly the National Minimum Dataset for Social Care (NMDS-SC)) is recognised as the leading source of workforce intelligence for adult social care. Skills for Care manages the service on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care and has been collecting information online since 2007. This chapter provides an overview of some of the reports and resources published by our Workforce Intelligence team.

Skills for Care workforce intelligence publications can be found at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/workforceintelligence.

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

This report provides comprehensive workforce characteristics about the 1.65 million jobs 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, August 2020

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

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 job estimates, trend data, and future projections. To access this report, please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/sizeandstructure. Latest version, August 2020

Regional reports

These nine regional reports provide an annual overview of adult social care services and the workforce in each region. Each of these nine reports examines regional findings in light of the findings for England as a whole, which are presented in this report. To access these, please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/regionalreports. Latest version, October 2020

Local authority area reports

This collection of summary reports gives an overview of the adult social care sector and workforce in each of the 151 local authority areas in England. They are accompanied by two interactive visualisations which look at individual areas in greater detail. To access these reports, please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/lasummaries. Latest version, October 2020.