

The Adult Social Care Workforce in Scotland

This paper summarises the available evidence on the adult social care workforce in Scotland. It is part of an initial collection of contextual evidence papers, setting out key sources of information about social care and related areas in Scotland, linking to the National Care Service Consultation proposals published in August 2021.

Key findings

- In 2020, there were 134,640 people employed in adult social care in Scotland, which is 5.7% higher than in 2011. This increase has been driven mainly by increases to the housing support/care at home sub-sector.
- Eight out of ten (80%) adult social care staff in Scotland in 2020 were female, and 44% of workers were aged 45 and over. On average adult social care staff worked for 31 hours per week and the majority (86%) were employed on permanent contracts.
- Brexit and Covid-19 are some of the recent factors that have impacted the adult social care workforce.
- The social care sector had a very high vacancy rate of 43%, in comparison with 11% across all sectors in 2020. In particular, care at home, housing support, and care homes for older people reported that vacancies were hard to fill. The sector also has a qualifications gap, with only 52% of staff reported to hold qualifications suited to their role in 2020.
- The private sector was the largest employer in adult social care in 2020, employing 44% of the workforce. The largest sub-sectors in adult social care were housing support/care at home and care homes for adults, employing 56% and 39% of the workforce respectively.
- Projections suggest that Scotland is likely to have more older people and fewer younger people in mid-2045 than in mid-2020, which has implications for the supply of, and demand for, adult social care in the future.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Current structure of the adult social care workforce.....	4
2.1 Headcount and composition.....	5
2.2 Employer type	6
2.3 Demographic profile of the adult social care workforce in Scotland	7
2.3.1 Age.....	7
2.3.2 Sex.....	8
2.3.3 Ethnicity	9
2.3.4 Disability.....	10
2.4. Overview of post characteristics: job function, hours of work and contract type	11
2.4.1 Job function.....	11
2.4.2 Hours of work/Contract type.....	12
3. Impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit.....	12
3.1 Impacts of Covid-19	12
3.2 Impacts of Brexit	13
4. Ongoing issues for the adult social care workforce.....	13
4.1 Vacancies	13
4.2 Skills and qualifications	14
4.3 Pay.....	15
5. Projections of the adult social care workforce.....	15
5.1 Ageing population in Scotland.....	16
6. Conclusion.....	17

1. Introduction

This paper summarises the available evidence on the adult social care workforce and providers in Scotland¹ and analyses several factors that affect them. The data and analysis reported here have mainly been drawn from Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and Office of National Statistics (ONS) reports, as well as recent reports on the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit on the workforce. It does not provide exhaustive or fully comprehensive coverage of all social care services, but provides an insight into recent trends in social care use. The focus is on adult social care but data that covers all age groups is indicated throughout.

This paper forms one of an initial collection of contextual evidence papers, setting out key sources of information about social care and related areas in Scotland, linking to the National Care Service Consultation proposals published in August 2021.

The collection consists of the following 6 papers on social care:

1. [Scotland's Health and Demographic Profile](#)
2. [People who Access Social Care and Unpaid Carers in Scotland](#)
3. [Social Care Support and Service Provision in Scotland](#)
4. [Experiences of Social Care and Caring in Scotland](#)
5. [The Adult Social Care Workforce in Scotland](#)
6. [Adult Social Care in Scotland - Equality Evidence Overview](#)

And papers on:

7. [Children's Social Services](#)
8. [Justice Social Work in Scotland](#)
9. [Learning and evidence from national social care systems in Nordic and Scandinavian countries](#)
10. [Integrated Care Studies: The SCFNuka \(Alaska\) and Canterbury \(New Zealand\) Models](#)

While the focus of this set of evidence papers is social care, there is an intrinsic link between social care and social work. Social work is a statutory role which involves assessing need, managing risk, and promoting and protecting the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Social care support is an umbrella term for adult, children's and justice services which directly support people to meet their personal outcomes. A social work evidence paper is being prepared for publication in summer 2022.

¹ In the [SSSC report](#), the term 'social care services' is used instead of 'social care workforce'.

This paper does not go into detail about workforce equality characteristics as this is covered in the [Social Care in Scotland - Equality Evidence Overview](#). There is limited evidence available on workforce projections as these are highly dependent on demand for social care, expenditure on social care and factors such as population and demographic changes. However, this paper considers the main factors that impact future workforce numbers and future demand for social care.

2. Current structure of the adult social care workforce

This section provides an overview of the adult social care workforce in Scotland. It examines total headcount and composition, employer types, demographic characteristics of the social care workforce and the stability index of the sector (the stability index measures the proportion of staff who have been retained from the previous year).

The main data source is the SSSC report [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data](#)² which is the latest published information available. Thus, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is not fully captured by this report.

Adult social services include care homes for adults, housing support/care at home, adult day care and adult placement services.

Some key characteristics of the adult social workforce in Scotland in 2020 are:

- 134,640 people were employed in adult social care, which is 5.7% higher than in 2011. This increase has been driven mainly by increases to the housing support/care at home sub-sector (16.5%).
- The stability index of the adult social care workforce was 81.7%. This means just over four fifths of the workforce remained in the same post since the previous year.
- The private sector was the largest employer in adult social care.
- The two largest sub-sectors in adult social care were housing support/care at home and care homes for adults.
- The median age of the adult social care workforce was highest in the public sector (51) and lowest in the private sector (42).
- 80% of adult social care staff were female and 17% were male, with no data reported for the remaining 3%.
- The adult social care workforce was mainly employed on permanent contracts (86%).

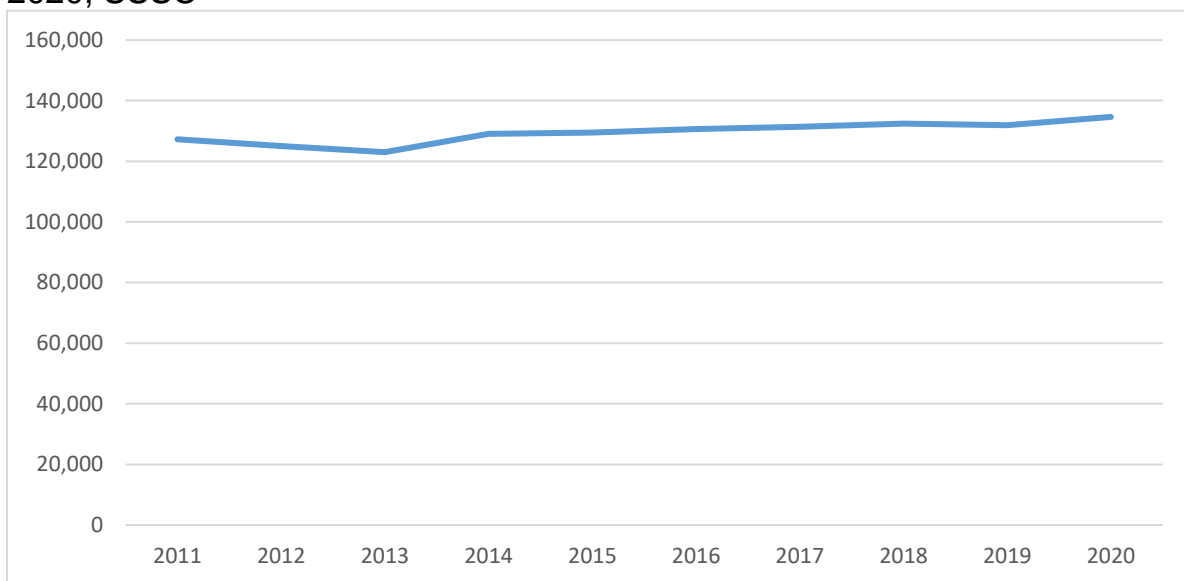
² Scottish Social Services Council (2021) [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data](#)

- On average adult social care staff in Scotland worked for 31 hours per week in 2020.

2.1 Headcount and composition

The headcount of the adult social care workforce in Scotland for 2020 was 134,640. The whole time equivalent, that is to say the number of hours considered as full-time, of the 2020 adult social care workforce was 100,060. The fluctuation over time has been relatively small in comparison to the overall size as is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Total headcount of the adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2011-2020, SSSC



Source: [Area at a glance \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

Table 1 presents an overview of the adult social care sector workforce by sub-sector for 2011, 2019 and 2020, as well as the percentage change over the 10 years since 2011.

Table 1: Headcount of the adult social care workforce in Scotland 2011, 2019 and 2020.

Sub-sector	2011	2019	2020	Change since 2011
Adult day care	8,730	7,260	6,650	-23.8%
Adult placement services	160	290	200	22.8%
Care home for adults	54,150	53,080	52,920	-2.3%
Housing support/care at home	64,290	71,260	74,870	16.5%
Total	127,330	131,890	134,640	5.7%

Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

In 2020, there were 134,640 people employed in adult social care in Scotland, which is 5.7% higher than in 2011. The largest two sub-sectors are housing support/care at home and care homes for adults. Together they accounted for approximately 95% of the total headcount in adult social care in 2020.

Between 2019 and 2020, the estimated workforce increased by 2,750 (2%). This was driven by an 3,610 (5%) increase in the housing support/care at home sector. Three out of four sub-sectors in adult social care recorded a decrease in the estimated headcount, with the biggest absolute decrease in adult day care, with 610 fewer people (approximately -9%).

2.2 Employer type

Table 2 displays the employer type for the adult social care sub-sectors.

Table 2: Headcount of the adult social care workforce in Scotland, by sub-sector and employer type, 2020.

Sub-sector	Public	Private	Voluntary	Total
Adult day care	3,600	430	2,620	6,650
Adult placement services	160	0	40	200
Care home for adults	6,820	37,880	8,220	52,920
Housing support/care at home	19,680	20,280	34,910	74,870
Total	30,260	58,590	45,790	134,640

Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

In 2020, approximately 22% of the adult social care workforce was employed in the public sector, 44% in the private sector and 34% in the voluntary sector. The public and voluntary sectors for adult social care are at their highest absolute numbers since 2011 while private sector increased only slightly.

In 2020 the private sector was the main employer in the care home for adults sub-sector (approximately 72%), whereas the voluntary sector was the main provider of workforce in the housing support/care at home subsector (approximately 47%).

2.3 Demographic profile of the adult social care workforce in Scotland

2.3.1 Age

Table 3 provides information about the average (median) age of the adult social care workforce in Scotland.

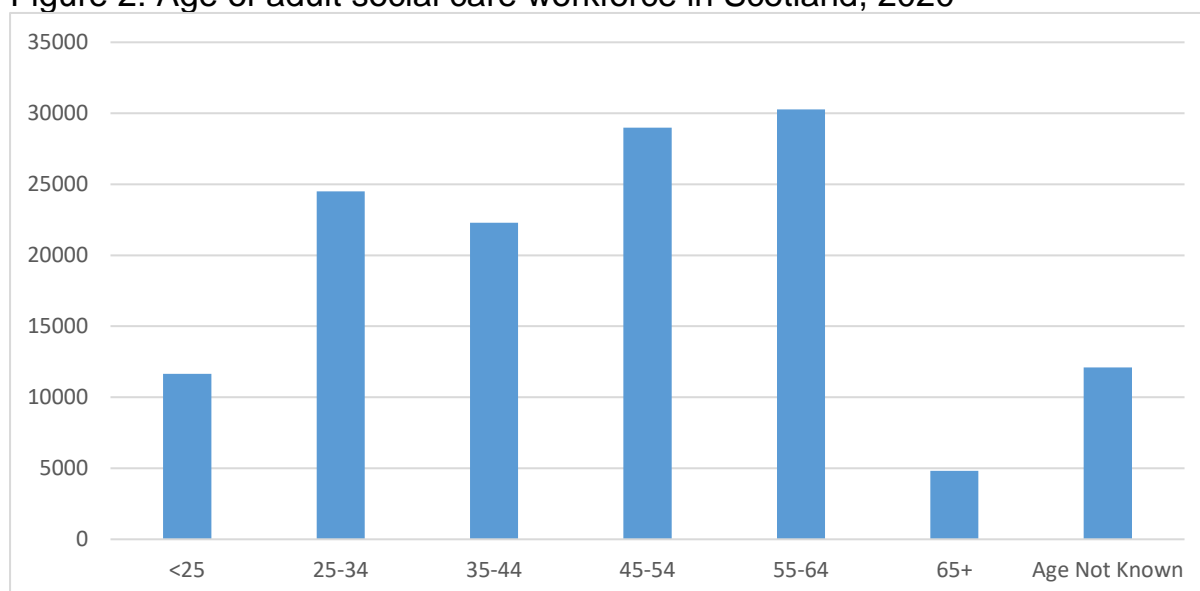
Table 3: Median age of adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020

Employer type	Median age of workforce
Public sector	51
Private sector	42
Voluntary sector	45
Total	46

Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com/Scottish-Social-Service-Sector-Report-on-2020-Workforce-Data)

The public sector has the oldest workforce, with an average age of 51 years, while the private sector had the youngest workforce with an average age of 42 years. The voluntary sector has a workforce median age of 45, very close to the overall adult social care workforce average which is 46 years.

Figure 2: Age of adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020



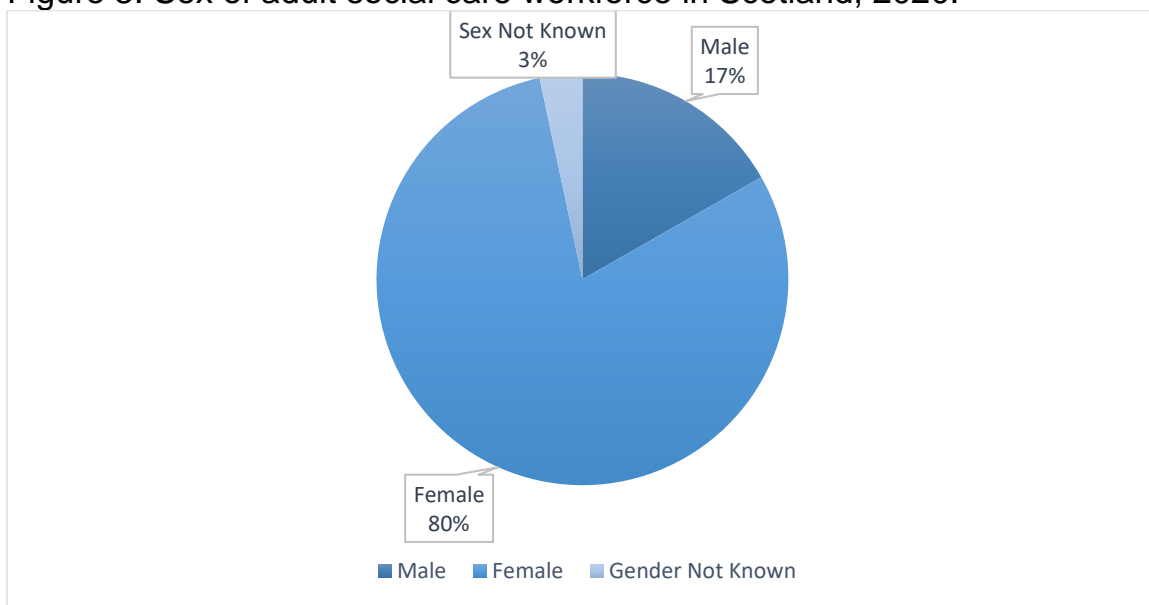
Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com/Scottish-Social-Service-Sector-Report-on-2020-Workforce-Data)

Most adult social care staff were in the 55-64 and 45-54 age brackets (see Figure 2), which accounted for approximately 22.5% and 21.5% of the total adult social care workforce respectively.

2.3.2 Sex

Figure 3 provides information on the proportion of staff working in adult social care by sex. In 2020, at least 80% of staff were reported to be female and only 17% were reported to be male, with no data reported for the remaining 3%. That means that approximately four out of five staff were female. For 3% of the workforce there was no information about their sex. In 2011 the ratio of males to females in the adult social care workforce was similar to that in 2020.

Figure 3: Sex of adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020.



Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

2.3.3 Ethnicity

There was a high proportion of unknown responses in the workforce ethnicity data (including those where ethnicity was not disclosed), so the data should be treated with caution. Table 5 shows the percentage of staff by ethnic classification for the adult social care sector.

Table 4 Percentage of staff by ethnic classification in the adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020.³

Sub-sector	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other	Unknown
Adult day care	84	0	1	0	0	14
Adult placement services	84	0	1	0	0	16
Care homes for adults	73	0	3	2	1	22
Housing support/care at home	65	0	1	1	0	32
Total	69	0	2	1	0	27

Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

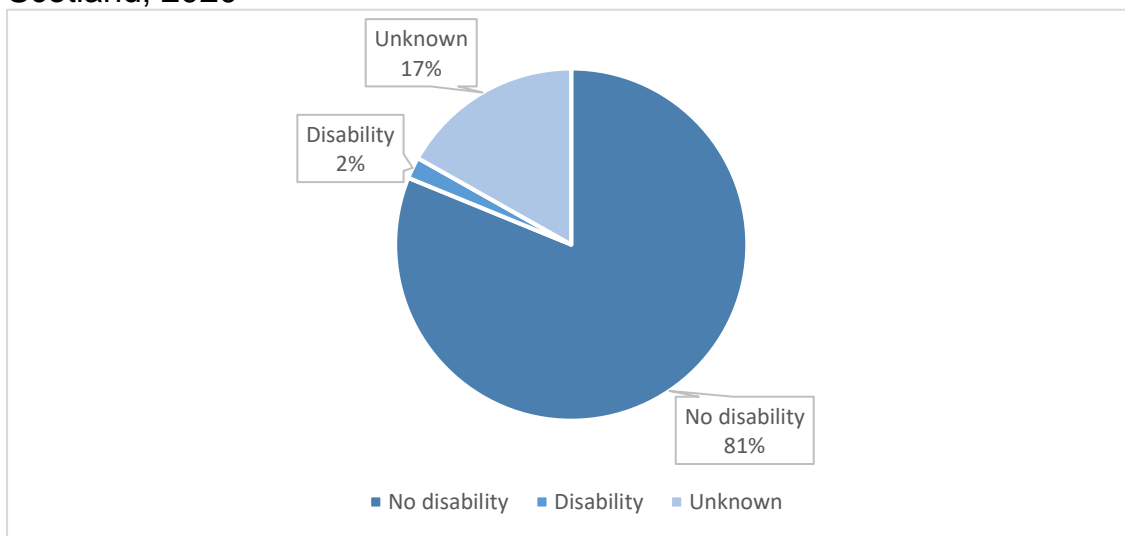
The adult social care sector is mainly white (at least 69% of staff). There appears to be a higher proportion of ethnic minority staff in the private sector than the other sectors. Overall, 3% of the workforce reported as belonging to an ethnic minority, ranging from 2% in the public sector to 5% in the private sector.

³ Some of the percentages do not add to 100. This is because of rounding.

2.3.4 Disability

As with ethnicity, the data on whether workers regarded themselves as having a disability is difficult to interpret due to the large number of unknown responses (including not disclosed). As Figure 4 indicates, 81% of adult social care staff stated that they do not have any disability. Only 2% reported having a disability, however, this is likely to be an undercount because disability information was unknown or not disclosed for a further 17% of the workforce.

Figure 4: Percentage of staff by disability in the adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020⁴



Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

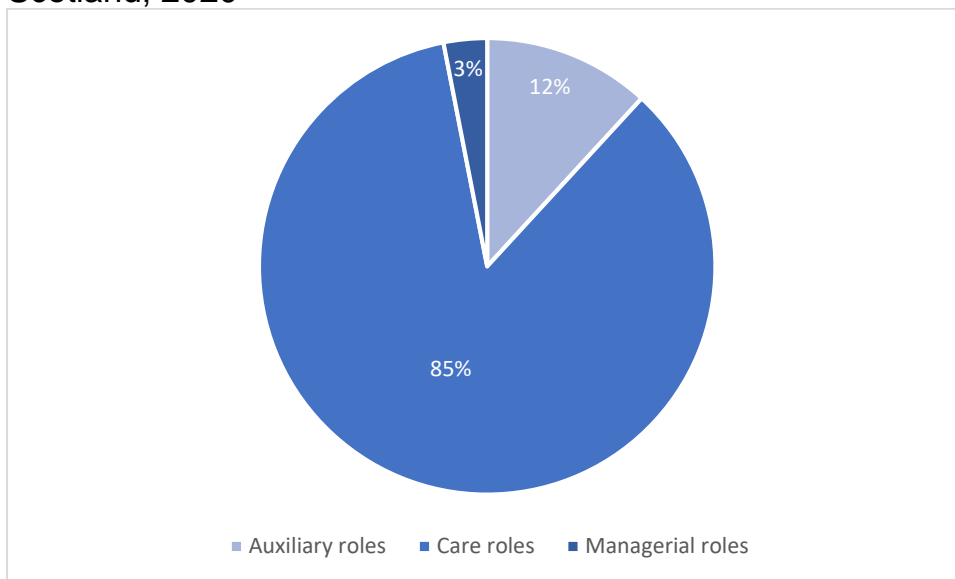
⁴ [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

2.4. Overview of post characteristics: job function, hours of work and contract type

2.4.1 Job function

Figure 5 shows the proportion of adult social care staff working in different job functions. The majority of staff (85%) were employed in frontline care roles with auxiliary roles⁵ at 12% of the overall workforce. The remaining 3% were in managerial posts.

Figure 5: Percentage of role by function in adult social care workforce in Scotland, 2020



Source: [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2020 Workforce Data | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

There was a small variation across the sub-sectors. Some sub-sectors require staff with specific qualifications, so they had higher proportion of managerial staff. For example, adult placement services had 24% of staff working in managerial roles.

Since 2011, frontline care roles have increased, as a percentage of the adult social care workforce, by three percentage points, while auxiliary and managerial staff saw a decrease of two percentage points and one percentage point respectively.

⁵ In the [SSSC report](#) auxiliary roles consists of administrative/support staff and ancillary staff.

2.4.2 Hours of work/Contract type

On average adult social care staff in Scotland worked for 31 hours per week in 2020. Just over half (53%) of the total workforce was employed on a full time basis, while 47% was part time.

In terms of contract type, around five-sixths (83%) of the adult social care workforce in 2020 was employed on a permanent basis, a proportion which was consistent across the sub-sectors. Around 5.5% of employee contracts had no guaranteed hours (zero hour contracts), which rose to 9% in the housing support/care at home sector.

3. Impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit

This section examines the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response to it (e.g. measures implemented to curtail the spread of the virus) and of Brexit on the adult social care workforce in Scotland.

3.1 Impacts of Covid-19

As noted in [The Independent Review of Social Care in Scotland](#), Covid-19 highlighted and intensified existing challenges facing the adult social care sector, including workforce issues⁶.

Covid-19 had a large impact on the working hours and patterns of social care staff. In the first six months of the pandemic, the number of hours of homecare support reduced in Scotland. According to a Scottish Parliament survey on [How has Covid-19 impacted on care and support at home in Scotland?](#), the total reduction of care for those responding ranged from 30 minutes to 61 hours per week per person supported, with an average reduction of 20.5 hours per week. The same source indicates that the main reason for reduction in care provided from a staff perspective was 'safety', as there was a need to spend minimal time in people's homes to ensure everybody was safe. Some people chose to suspend care and support in order to protect themselves from the virus by preventing carers from entering their household. Others chose to access care from friends and family, which resulted in reduced and cancelled care packages with the providers not being able to claim sustainability payments at that time. Moreover, during the first six months of the pandemic, as a result of emergency legislation, home care operated on critical and substantial needs. As critical care occurred mostly in the morning and evening, staff ended up having to work split or shorter shifts and this required flexibility.

⁶ Scottish Government (2021) [Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland](#)

While the number of care hours reduced, workload increased due to staff absence (e.g. for health reasons) which led to additional pressure on existing staff. Furthermore, additional workload came from training (such as infection control and use of personal protective equipment), increased staff meetings and by completing risk assessments or reports to senior management.⁷

In [Working in a care home during the COVID-19 pandemic: How has the pandemic changed working practices?](#) it is noted that care home staff roles have changed significantly and unexpectedly during the pandemic. This is associated with stress, burnout, fear and uncertainty, and has been exacerbated by staff shortages⁸.

3.2 Impacts of Brexit

According to the 2018 report, [EU workers in Scotland's social care workforce: contribution assessment](#), an estimated 5.6% of the adult social care and childcare workforce in Scotland were non-UK nationals, which is approximately 9,830 workers. In nursing agencies the percentage was even higher at 16.5%. This study found that more than half (51.7%) of managers who had tried to recruit nursing and midwifery council (NMC) registered nurses, and over two in five (44.2%) who had tried to recruit care staff or practitioners over the previous 12 months had found the procedure more difficult in comparison to the year before. As Brexit impacts on EU nationals' ability to come to the UK or to stay, this could have a knock on effect on recruitment in the adult social care sector in Scotland⁹.

4. Ongoing issues for the adult social care workforce

This section summarises some other issues facing the adult social care workforce, including vacancies, skills and qualifications, and relative levels of pay.

4.1 Vacancies

The annual [Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2020](#) report shows that the social care sector had an overall vacancy rate¹⁰ of 43%. In particular, housing support, care at home and care homes for older people reported that vacancies were hard to fill, with vacancy rates of 60%, 59% and 48% respectively. The vacancy rate in adult social care services decreased since

⁷ The Scottish Parliament (2020) [How has Covid-19 impacted on care and support at home in Scotland?](#)

⁸ Hanna, K., Giebel, C., Cannon, J. et al. (2022) [Working in a care home during the COVID-19 pandemic: How has the pandemic changed working practices? A qualitative study](#). BMC Geriatr 22, 129

⁹ Scottish Government (2018) [EU workers in Scotland's social care workforce: contribution assessment](#)

¹⁰ Vacancy rate is the proportion of services which report having a vacancy

2019¹¹. According to the [Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2020](#) 11% of employers (across all sectors) reported having a vacancy¹², which shows that the vacancy rate in adult social care is much higher in comparison to other sectors.

The [Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2020](#) has data from the end of 2020. Since December 2020 the unemployment rate in Scotland fell from 4.3% to 3.5% in January 2022¹³ which can create further pressures for social care staffing. With lower unemployment, fewer people are looking for a job. which can affect the number of applicants and can increase competition from other providers or others type of work.

4.2 Skills and qualifications

According to the [SSSC Workforce Skills Report 2021](#) report, at the end of 2020, 52% of adult social care workers held the required qualifications for their role. The least qualified group of registered workers are workers in care at home/housing support services, which is the social care sub-sector with the highest vacancy rate.

The total number of qualification conditions¹⁴ ending between 2021 and 2025 stands at 68,768. Most of these qualifications are met by the SVQ Social Services and Healthcare (SSH) at SCQF level 6. Almost 20,000 qualifications conditions require to be met in 2024, which means that enrolment should be in 2023 to give sufficient time to complete the qualification. In the previous five years, the supply for the SVQ SSH at SCQF level 6 award was just under 5,000 starts per year. Thus, the qualification demand is projected to be more than two times bigger than the training provision. Specifically, almost 55,000 social care workers will require the level 6 qualification, with only 25,000 available training slots.

Approximately nine out of ten managers said that qualifications did meet the needs of their service, while over eight out of ten agreed that the qualifications required for registration support the professionalisation of the workforce. The main areas where managers reported skills gaps and which were not addressed by current qualifications were infection prevention and control, digital skills, trauma informed practice and quality improvement¹⁵.

¹¹ Scottish Social Services Council (2021) [Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2020](#)

¹² Scottish Government (2021) [Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2020](#)

¹³ ONS (2022) [LFS: ILO unemployment rate: Scotland](#)

¹⁴ Staff in some social care positions need to complete mandatory training and earn specific qualifications within a specific period of time.

¹⁵ [Workforce Skills Report 2021 | Scottish Social Services Workforce Data \(sssc.uk.com\)](#)

4.3 Pay

In 2021, [The Independent Review of Social Care in Scotland](#) reported that the social care workforce is undervalued, badly paid for vital, skilled work and held in low esteem in comparison particularly to the health workforce¹⁶. In their 2019 report on [Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector](#), the Fair Work Convention highlighted poor terms and conditions and a lack of security for social care staff, although they acknowledged that progress was being made to address issues of low pay with the implementation of the Living Wage¹⁷.

Since 2016, the Scottish Government has provided funding to ensure that adult social care workers, delivering direct care in commissioned services, are paid at least the Real Living Wage (RLW). During 2018/19, this commitment was extended to include workers providing overnight adult social care support. From 1 December 2021, the pay rate increased from the RLW rate of £9.50 per hour to £10.02 per hour; and then from 1 April 2022, the minimum hourly rate increased to £10.50 per hour. The uplift applies to workers delivering direct care to adults in care homes and a range of services including care at home, day care, housing support, adult placement services, respite services and all Self Directed Support options.

Due to the way adult social care services are currently commissioned, these uplifts in pay are currently delivered through Local Government contracts. This relies on providers accepting the additional funding – as part of contract variations – and this funding must be used to increase pay to the minimum levels. For the 2022/23 financial year, the Scottish Government has transferred £200 million to Local Government to support investment in social care; this includes funding to deliver the £10.50 minimum wage for these adult social care workers.

This represents an increase of 4.8% from the £10.02 pay rate that was introduced in December 2021, and an increase of 12.9% for these workers in the course of a year - with pay rising from at least £9.30 per hour in March 2021 to at least £10.50 per hour in April 2022.

5. Projections of the adult social care workforce

This section examines the factors that may affect the social care workforce in the future.

¹⁶ Scottish Government (2021) [Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland](#)

¹⁷ Fair Work Convention (2019) [Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector](#)

5.1 Ageing population in Scotland

Overall, it is projected that the population of Scotland will age in the upcoming years. As shown in Table 6, all age groups above 65 years old are projected to rise significantly between 2020-2030. Specifically, the average increase will be 15.59% in the 65-74 age group while 75 and over age group will see a 24.25% increase. The 0-15 and 45-64 age groups will see a significant decrease in population while the 16-24 and 25-44 age groups will see a slight increase¹⁸.

Table 5: Projection of the population of Scotland, (2020)

Age group	2020 Population	2030 Population	Change since 2020
0 to 15	916,783	792,732	-13.53%
16 to 24	566,882	587,202	3.58%
25 to 44	1,431,305	1,444,244	0.90%
45 to 64	1,494,950	1,395,904	-6.63%
65 to 74	586,263	677,675	15.59%
75 and over	469,817	583,770	24.25%

Source: [Population projections of Scotland - National Records of Scotland \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io/population-projections-of-scotland/)

The ageing population could lead to increased demand for social care, however it is difficult to make an accurate projection. At the same time as the potential increase in demand for social care, there will be a decrease in the working age population which may impact on the ability to provide social care services. More information about population projections can be found in [Scotland's Health and Demographic Profile](#).

¹⁸ National Records of Scotland (2022) [Population projections of Scotland - National Records of Scotland \(shinyapps.io\)](https://shinyapps.io/population-projections-of-scotland/)

6. Conclusion

The previous sections provide a summary of the available evidence on the adult social care workforce and providers in Scotland. It does not go into detail about workforce equalities characteristics as this is covered in [Adult Social Care in Scotland - Equality Evidence Overview](#).

The social care sector is a major employer in Scotland and the number of people employed in adult social care has increased over the past decade. Population projections suggest that Scotland is likely to have more older people and fewer younger people in the coming years, which has implications for the future supply of, and demand for, adult social care. As well as the ageing population, there are other significant challenges facing the sector, including Brexit and Covid-19, and employers are finding it challenging to fill vacancies. There is limited evidence available on workforce projections as these are highly dependent on both social care demand and expenditure and other factors such as population and demographic changes. However, this paper provides insight into some of the main factors that are likely to impact future workforce numbers and the future demand for social care.



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