

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

Workforce supply and demands trends
2023/24

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Workforce supply and demand

Key Findings

- The total number of adult social care posts was 1.84m in 2023/24 (an increase of 2.6% from 2022/23).
- Between 2022/23 and 2023/24 the number of posts that were filled increased by 4.2% to 1.705m (an increase of 70,000 filled posts).
- The number of vacant posts decreased by 22,000 vacant posts (-14.6%) to 131,000 over the same period.
- International recruitment was the main driver behind the increase in filled posts and the decrease in vacant posts. An estimated 105,000 people arrived in the UK in 2023/24 and started direct care providing roles in the independent sector. This was an increase of 25,000 from 2022/23, when the estimated number was 80,000.
- The number of posts filled by people with a British nationality decreased by 30,000 in 2023/24 (a decrease of 3%), after decreasing by 40,000 in 2022/23.

This report provides information about the size and composition of the adult social care workforce, including information relating to workforce supply and demand such as recruitment and retention statistics, international recruitment and statistics on the wider economy.

Workforce supply and demand is a key issue for the adult social care sector. In recent years workforce supply has experienced significant fluctuations due to policy changes and external factors. The information in this short report provides the latest figures and context surrounding this topic. We have also included qualitative information and evidence gathered from care providers to add context to the statistics.

This report looks at changes in the workforce since 2019/20, and before where relevant, using Skills for Care's workforce estimates going back to 2012/13.

Introduction

The majority of the data in this report comes from the workforce intelligence that we collect in the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS). There are currently around 20,600 care providers using the ASC-WDS service, completing details from over 675,000 staff in the sector.

The ASC-WDS is an online service that collects data about the adult social care workforce in England. Prior to 2019 it was known as the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC) service, which had been collecting information about social care providers and their staff since 2006. For more information, please visit the [ASC-WDS](#) pages of our website.

The data collected in the ASC-WDS is vital to the Government, the Department of Health and Social Care, local authorities and the Care Quality Commission as it has allowed them to plan, fund and monitor the sector for the past 18 years.

The ASC-WDS collects information about adult social care sector employers, including the types of care services provided, as well as a detailed picture of the workforce. This includes retention, demographics, pay rates and qualifications, both by job role and employment status.

We use the data collected by the ASC-WDS to create workforce models that, in turn, allow for weighted estimates of the whole adult social care workforce to be produced. We annually estimate the size, structure and characteristics of the adult social care workforce in England and at a local level. Details of these estimates can be found on our [workforce intelligence website](#).

The Skills for Care Workforce Intelligence team are committed to the three pillars of trustworthiness, quality and value, and principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Please see our website for our full [statement](#).

Throughout this report, charts and tables will display rounded whole numbers and percentages. Therefore, it should be noted that charts and tables may not always total to 100%.

1 Total posts, filled posts and vacant posts

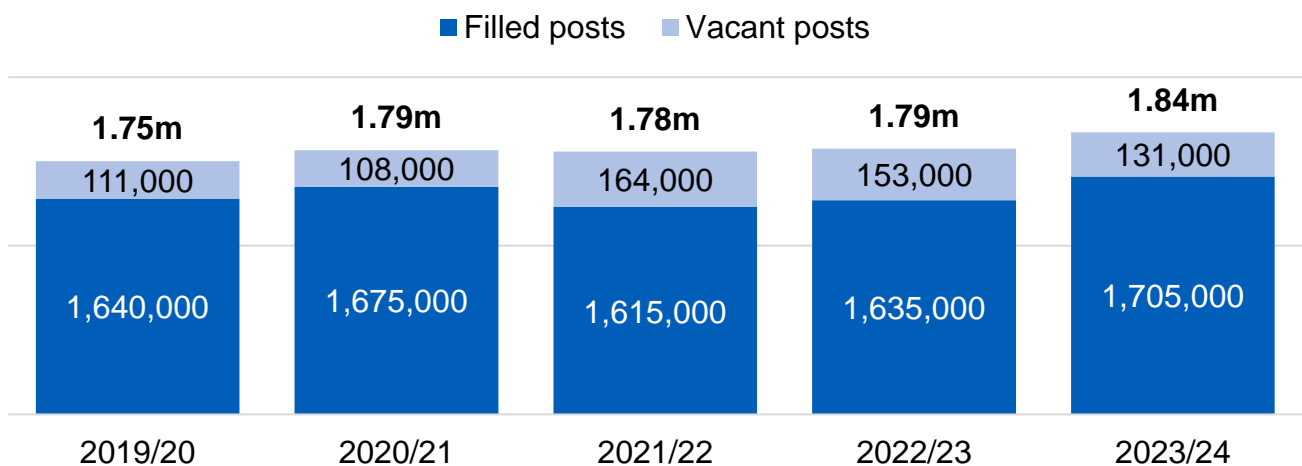
The total number of posts in the adult social care sector in 2023/24 was 1.84 million (an increase of 2.6% from 2022/23). Of these posts, 1.705m were currently filled by a person (filled posts) and 131,000 were posts that employers were actively seeking to recruit somebody to (vacant posts).

The number of vacant posts includes posts that are vacant in the short term due to recent or anticipated staff turnover, as well as posts created by employers who want to expand and grow their businesses. It also includes more persistent vacancies where the offer to potential staff is not sufficiently competitive in the local labour market.

Some vacant posts may be covered by bank or agency staff. In 2023/24 there were around 126,000 bank or agency staff working on any given day in the independent and local authority sectors (this equates to 8.6% of filled posts in 2023/24).

Chart 1. Estimated number of adult social care posts (total posts, filled posts and vacant posts) in England, 2019/20 to 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates



2 Filled posts

In 2023/24, the number of filled posts increased by 4.2% (70,000 posts) following an increase of 25,000 posts in 2022/23. The increase in 2023/24 was the largest seen since Skills for Care's records began in 2012/13.

In 2021/22, the number of filled posts had decreased for the first time on record (by 60,000 posts). However, with the increases seen in the subsequent two years, the number of filled posts (1.705m) now exceeds the previous highest number on record (1.675m in 2020/21).

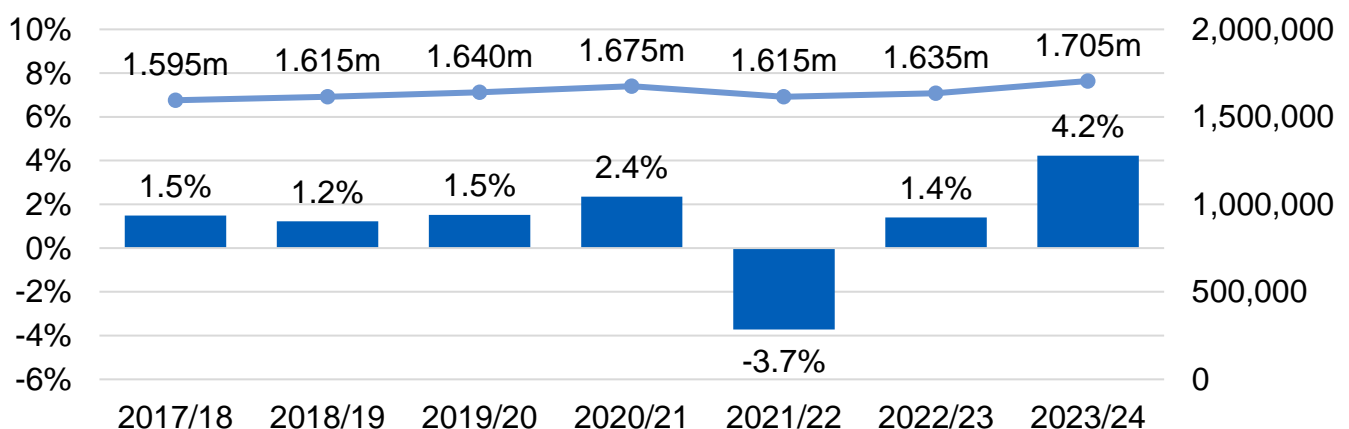
For independent sector care homes with nursing, the number of filled posts increased by 5.3% in 2023/24 (15,000 posts) and by 2.4% in care homes without nursing (7,000 posts). In independent sector domiciliary care services, the number of filled posts increased by 7.9% (43,000 posts).

There was also an increase in the number of filled posts in local authorities (3,500 posts or 3%) and a decrease in personal assistant filled posts (-7,000 posts or -5%).

The main driver behind the overall increase in filled posts is the number of international recruits entering the sector after care workers were added to the shortage occupation list in February 2022.

Chart 2. Estimated number of adult social care filled posts in England and the year-on-year percentage change, 2017/18 to 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates



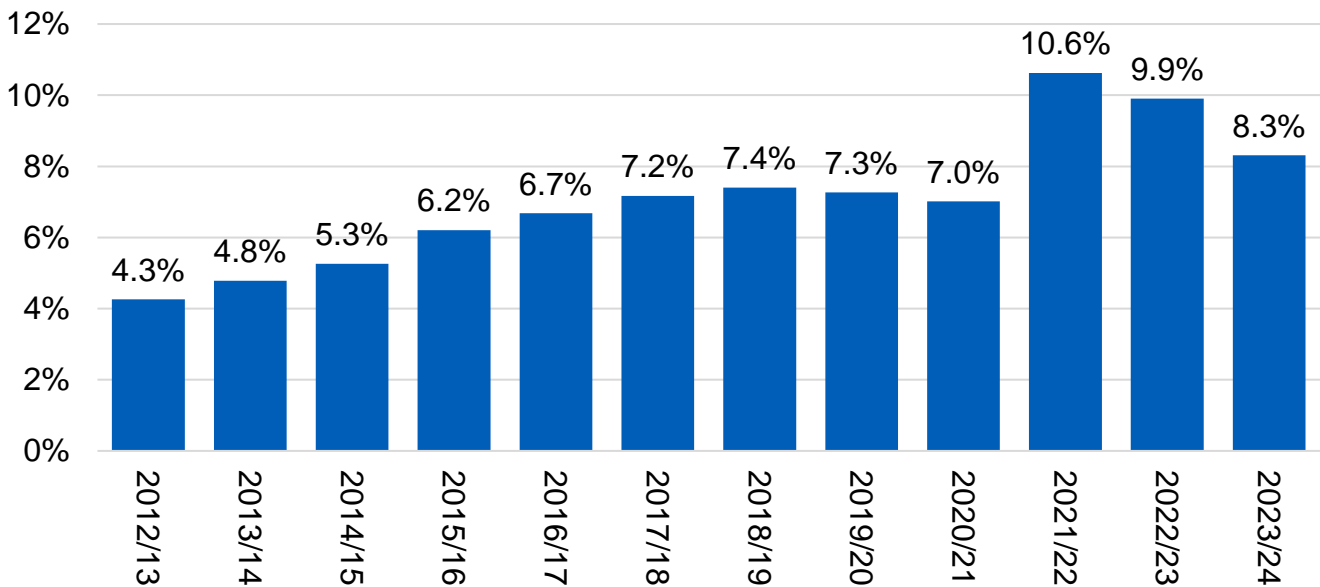
3 Vacant posts

The increase in the number of posts being filled in 2023/24 has contributed to a corresponding decrease in the number of vacant posts. In 2023/24, the vacancy rate decreased to 8.3%, or 131,000 vacant posts, a decrease from 9.9% and 153,000 vacant posts in 2022/23. In 2021/22 the vacancy rate was 10.6% (164,000 vacant posts), the highest rate since records began in 2012/13.

The vacancy rate in 2023/24 remains high, however, compared to historical levels and other sectors. This shows that some recruitment and retention difficulties in the sector persist despite decreases in the vacancy rate over the past two years. Skills for Care has received anecdotal evidence that recruitment and retention difficulties have eased for some employers but for others it remains challenging.

Chart 3. Vacancy rate in adult social care, 2012/13 to 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates



In the independent sector, similar decreases in the vacancy rate were seen across different service types. Vacancy rates decreased by 2.4 percentage points in care homes with nursing, by 1.2 percentage points in care homes without nursing and 1.0 percentage points in domiciliary care.

Table 1: Independent sector vacancy rate by main service type, 2020/21 to 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates

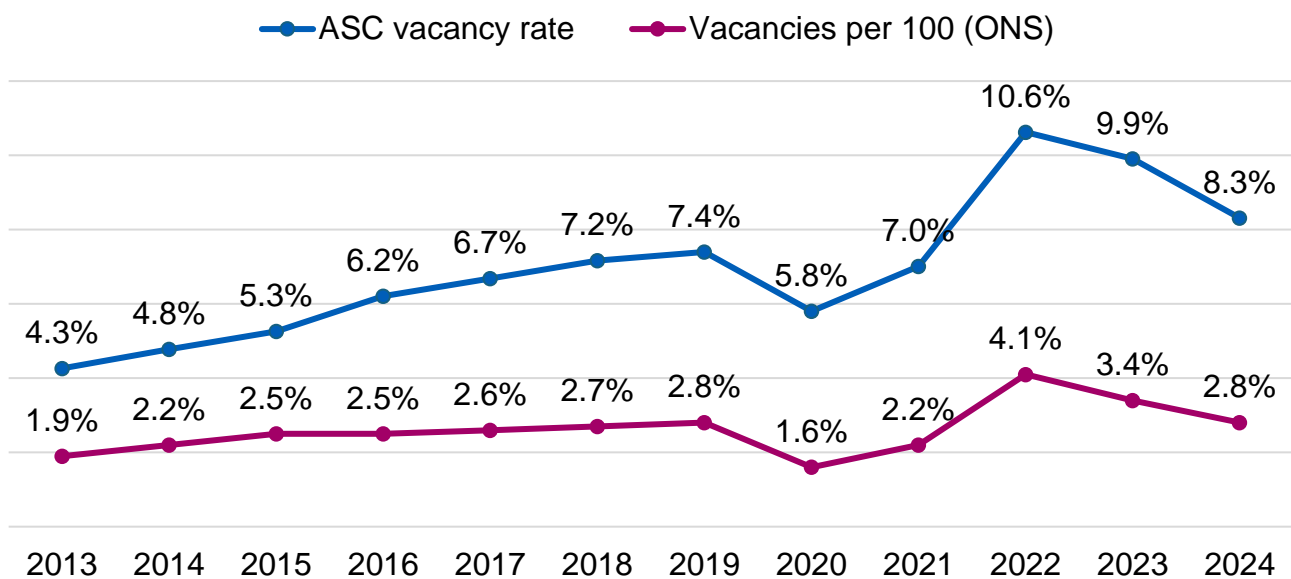
Main service	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Care only home	4.4%	7.7%	6.2%	5.0%
Care home with nursing	5.4%	8.8%	7.4%	5.0%
Domiciliary Care	9.3%	13.2%	12.9%	11.9%

4 Vacancies in adult social care vs the wider economy

The chart below shows how the adult social care vacancy rate is correlated with the number of jobs available in the wider economy. There are other factors influencing these figures (international recruitment for example), but it demonstrates that, in general, when there are more jobs available in other sectors, fewer adult social care posts get filled.

Chart 4. Adult social care vacancy rate trend in comparison to the wider economy vacancy rate, 2013 to 2024

Source: Skills for Care estimates¹ and ONS: Vacancies and jobs in the UK²



Since 2022, the UK vacancy rate has decreased from 4.1% to 2.8%. At the same time, the adult social care vacancy rate has decreased from 10.6% to 8.3%. Although there are other factors at play, the falling UK vacancy rate is likely a contributing factor to the decrease in the adult social care vacancy rate.

High vacancy rates are not unique to adult social care. Chart 5 below shows, however, that the adult social care sector is under significant pressure with a vacancy rate higher than the NHS³, the economy as a whole and many other sectors.

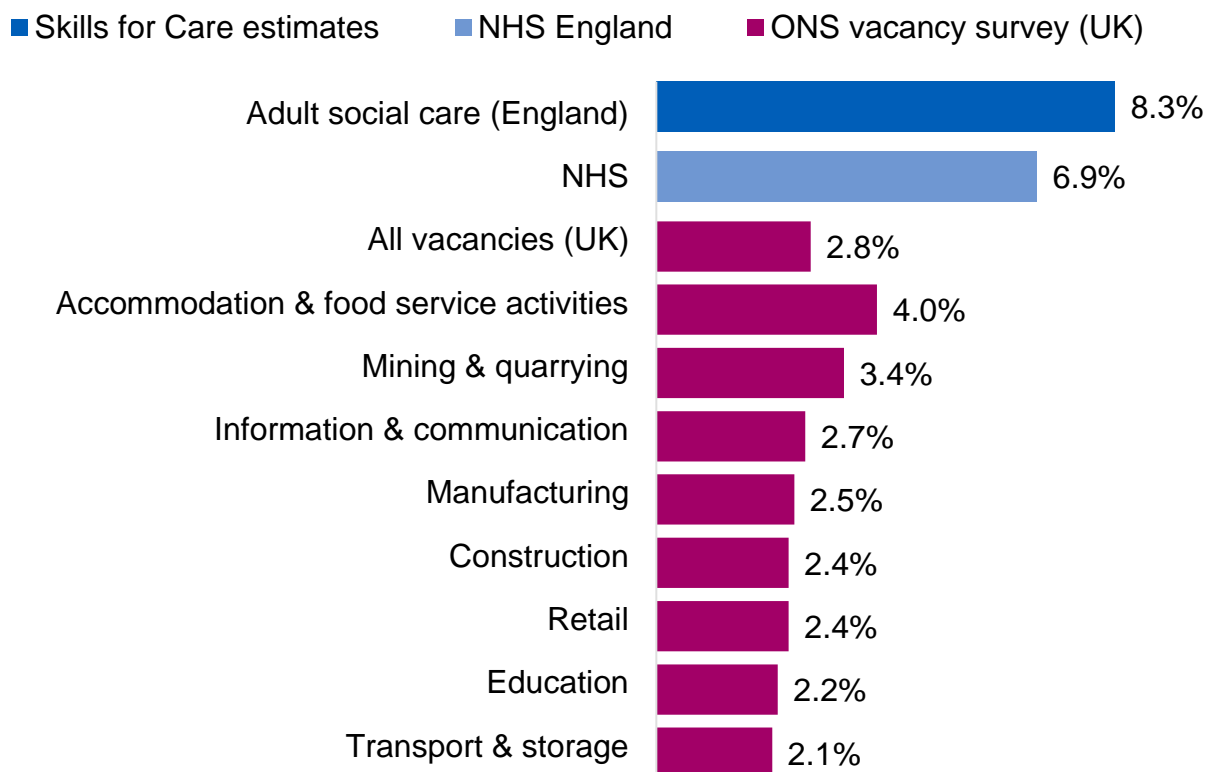
¹ Each year represents the rate as at the end of March, with the exception of 2020 where we chose May to highlight the dip in vacancy rates at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

² As above, each year is Feb-April with the exception of 2020 which is Mar-May. [ONS Vacancies and jobs in the UK](#)

³ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-vacancies-survey>

Chart 5. Adult social care vacancy rate in comparison to the NHS and the wider economy 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates, NHS England and ONS: Vacancies and jobs in the UK



5 Turnover and starter rates

In 2023/24, the turnover rate in the independent sector decreased from 30% to 26%. Evidence from ASC-WDS data collected between 2023 and 2024 suggests that international recruitment may have played a part in this decrease, with the turnover rate for international recruits being around 15 percentage points lower than the turnover rate for people recruited from within the UK.

At the same time, the starters rate in the independent sector decreased from 34% to 31%. The starters rate decrease is largely a result of the lower turnover rate. Around two-thirds of people leaving their roles do so to take up another job in the sector. So, fewer people leaving roles contributes to fewer people needing to start new roles. The high level of international recruitment in 2023/24 has been the main driver behind the starters rate this year being 5 percentage points higher than the turnover rate and the resulting growth in filled posts.

6 International recruitment

Changes to immigration rules came into effect in the UK on 1 January 2021. These rules effectively meant that people could not come to the UK to take up care worker roles. People could still arrive to take up some regulated professions roles and from April 2021 workers could also come to the UK to take up senior care worker roles, after this role was added to the Shortage Occupation List and Health and Care worker visa route.

In February 2022, care workers were added to the Shortage Occupation List and the Health and Care worker visa route. This meant that providing workers met the salary threshold of £20,480 and had a licenced sponsor, they could come to the UK to take up care worker roles.

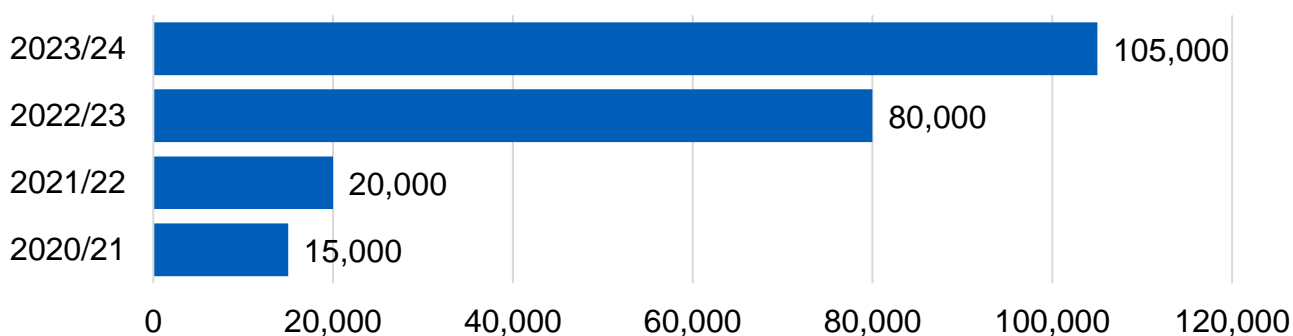
Between March 2022 and March 2024 an estimated 185,000 people have started direct care providing roles in the independent sector having arrived in the UK during that period (80,000 in 2022/23 and 105,000 in 2023/24). Therefore, in 2023/24, around one in three starters in direct care roles in the independent sector (31.8%) were recruited internationally, the rest of these starters were recruited domestically (from inside the UK).

Our estimate for the number of international recruits between March 2022 and March 2024 is higher than the [Home Office figures](#) which show that 141,000 Skilled Worker visas were issued to care workers and senior care workers over the same period. The estimate of 185,000 in this report includes some international recruits moving between jobs, people arriving in the UK via other routes such as family permits and the 141,000 people arriving on Health and Care worker visas.

Despite the increase in international recruitment within adult social care, it should also be noted that the vacancy rate in 2023/24 for direct care roles in the independent sector remained high, compared to previous years and other sectors, at 9.3%, or 93,000 vacant posts. This indicates that while employers are using all the recruitment opportunities available to them, including international recruitment, there is still a demand for more staff.

Chart 6. Estimated number of people starting direct care providing roles in the adult social care independent sector, having arrived in the UK during each year

Source: Skills for Care estimates



Where information was recorded in the ASC-WDS, over 95% of people arriving from outside of the UK to take up direct care providing adult social care posts since 2022/23 were from non-EU countries. The most frequent countries of birth were Nigeria, India, and Zimbabwe.

The table below shows that the number of posts filled by people with a British nationality has decreased by around 70,000 since 2021/22 (by around 40,000 in 2022/23 and 30,000 in 2023/24). The number of posts filled by people with a non-EU nationality has increased over the same period by 160,000 (by around 65,000 in 2022/23 and 95,000 in 2023/24).

These trends demonstrate how the increase in international recruitment has played an important part in the increase in filled posts since 2021/22 and how there are still challenges with domestic recruitment with the number of British people in the workforce falling for the past two years.

Table 2: Number of filled posts by nationality, 2021/22 to 2023/24

Source: Skills for Care estimates

Nationality	Filled posts			Percentage of filled posts		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
British	1,260,000	1,220,000	1,190,000	84%	80%	75%
EU	100,000	95,000	95,000	7%	6%	6%
Non-EU	140,000	205,000	300,000	9%	14%	19%

From 11 March 2024, care workers arriving from outside of the UK were no longer allowed to bring dependants (that is, partners and children) on their visa. Care providers sponsoring international recruits were also required to register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Following the announcement of these changes, according to data from the Home Office, the number of Health and Care visas granted decreased substantially with 3,300 visas granted in quarter one of 2024 compared to an average of 26,000 per quarter throughout 2023⁴.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>

Summary

The number of filled posts increased substantially in 2023/24 and this contributed to a decrease in the number of staff vacancies. However, the vacancy rate remains higher than in the NHS and most other employment sectors.

International recruitment has played an important part in this recovery by providing an additional recruitment option for employers with 105,000 people joining the workforce from outside the UK to take up direct care providing roles in the independent sector in 2023/24.

Domestic recruitment remains a challenge for the sector with the number of posts filled by British people decreasing by around 70,000 over the previous two years. The high availability of jobs in the wider economy is also contributing to this decrease. These jobs are often higher paid and perceived to be less demanding than adult social care roles.

Early evidence suggests that changes to immigration rules in March 2024 will result in much lower levels of international recruitment in 2024/25 in the adult social care sector. Given this possibility, and the ongoing difficulties with domestic recruitment, it will be challenging for the sector to continue to grow in-line with demand in 2024/25.

Skills for Care will continue to monitor filled posts and vacancy rate trends in the sector via our [monthly tracking](#).

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. To access our reports and visualisations, please refer to the relevant pages on our [Workforce Intelligence website](#).

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 2023. Updated information is due in October 2024.

A workforce strategy for adult social care in England

Skills for Care has led the development of the 'Workforce strategy for adult social care in England', working in collaboration with a wide range of organisations and people with a stake in the future of the adult social care sector. It combines data from our workforce intelligence reports along with in-depth insights and experience of the sector to address the issues facing the workforce.

The strategy identifies the workforce needed over the next 15 years and sets out a plan for ensuring the sector has enough of the right people with the right skills. It will help employers and commissioners with workforce planning, support the reform agenda and complement the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

For more information and to read the strategy in full, visit: www.ascworkforcestrategy.co.uk
Latest version, July 2024.

Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set

The Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS) is a free online data collection service that covers the adult social care workforce in England. The service helps care providers run their business and manage their staff training needs. It can also provide access to funding for staff training.

The data collected is vital to the Government, the Department of Health and Social Care, local authorities and the Care Quality Commission as it allows them to plan, fund and monitor the sector.

[Learn more about the ASC-WDS account benefits.](#)



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