A black and white photograph of a caregiver, a woman in a leopard-print top, smiling and assisting an elderly woman with a walker. The elderly woman is wearing a shawl and looking towards the camera. They are in a well-lit living room with a coffee table, armchairs, and a decorative wall piece.

**The size and structure of the adult
social care workforce in England
Workforce supply and demand trends
2022/23**

Workforce supply and demand trends

Workforce supply and demand is a key issue for the adult social care sector and 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 also context surrounding this topic.

This report looks at changes in the workforce since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and before where relevant, using Skills for Care's workforce estimates sector between 2012/13 and 2022/23.¹

It also shows more recent changes between March 2023 and June 2023 using Adult Social Care Workforce Dataset (ASC-WDS) data completed by independent sector employers during that period. This information has not been weighted to represent the whole sector but should be indicative of recent changes and developments. Skills for Care is continuing to track these metrics every month. This information can be found on the workforce intelligence website.

Skills for Care has also included qualitative information and evidence gathered from care providers to add context to the statistics.

Changes between 2021/22 and 2022/23

The total number of adult social care posts was 1.79m in 2022/23 (an increase of 0.5%)

The number of posts that were filled increased by 1% to 1.635m (20,000 posts)

The number of vacant posts decreased by 7% to 152,000

Around 70,000 people joined the sector from outside the UK into direct care providing roles

1. Introduction

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

¹ The 2019/20 period is comprised of data from local authority staff as of September 2019 but is predominantly made up of independent sector workers from March 2020 (close to the start of the epidemic in England).

The majority of the data comes from the workforce intelligence that we collect in the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS), which is an online data collection service that covers the adult social care workforce in England. There are currently around 20,000 care providers using the ASC-WDS service completing details from over 600,000 staff in the sector.

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 estimate the size, structure and characteristics of the adult social care workforce in England and at a local level, annually.

2. Total posts, filled posts and vacancies.

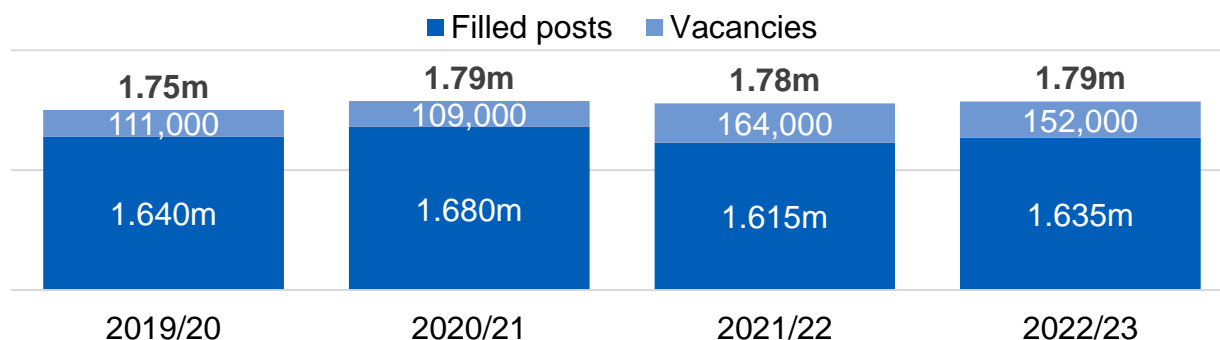
The total number of posts in the adult social care sector in 2022/23 was 1.79 million (up 0.5% from 2021/22). Of these posts, 1.635m were currently filled by a person (filled posts) and 152,000 were posts that employers were actively seeking to recruit somebody to (vacant posts).

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

Also, some vacant posts may be covered by temporary staff. As at 2022/23 there were around 117,000 bank or agency staff working on any given day in the independent and local authority sectors (this equates to 8.4% of filled posts in 2022/23 compared to 7.9% of posts in 2021/22).

Chart 1. Estimated number of adult social care posts (including filled posts and staff vacancies), in England, 2019/20-2022/23

Source: Skills for Care estimates



In 2021/22, Skills for Care workforce estimates showed a decrease in the number of filled posts. Overall, the decrease was around 4% (60,000 posts). In 2022/23, the number of filled posts increased by 1% (20,000 posts), therefore overall filled posts are not back to the levels of 2020/21.

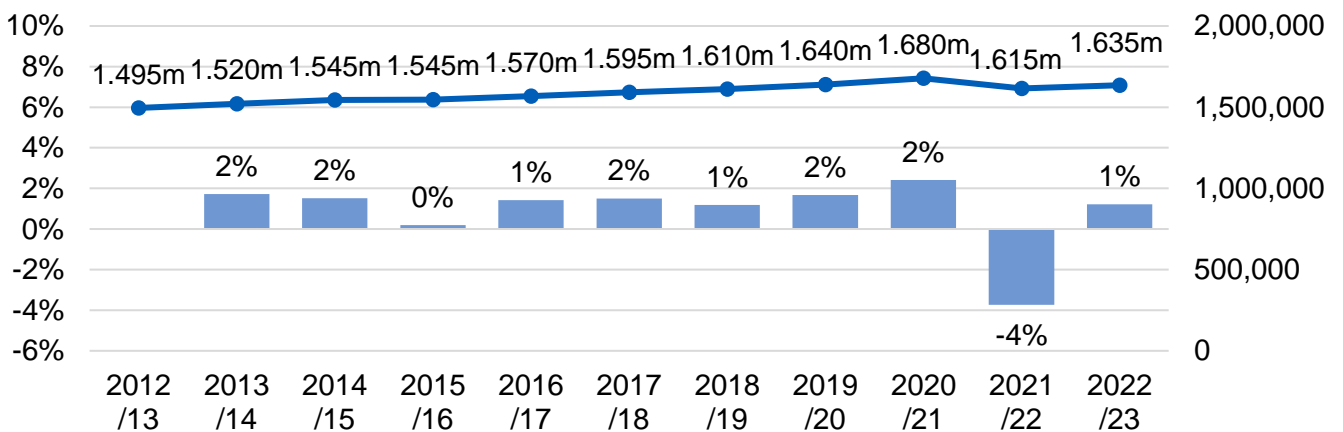
Monthly tracking of ASC-WDS data (not weighted to represent the whole sector) has shown a continuation in this trend with the number of filled posts in the independent sector increasing by a further 1.1 percentage points between March 2023 and June 2023.

For independent sector care homes, the number of filled posts increased by 3% (16,000). In independent sector domiciliary care services, the number of filled posts increased by 2% (10,000). There was a small drop in the number of Personal Assistants and posts employed by Local Authorities.

One of the factors behind this trend is the increased 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 and percentage change in the number of filled posts in England, 2012/13-2022/23

Source: Skills for Care estimates



The increase in the number of posts being filled in 2022/23 has contributed to a corresponding decrease in the number of vacant posts.

The vacancy rate had risen to 10.6% in 2021/22 (164,000 vacancies), the highest rate since records began in 2012/13. However, in the 2022/23, the rate decreased to 9.9%. A decrease of 11,000 vacant posts to 152,000 vacant posts in total.²

² Figures may not sum exactly to the annual change due to rounding.

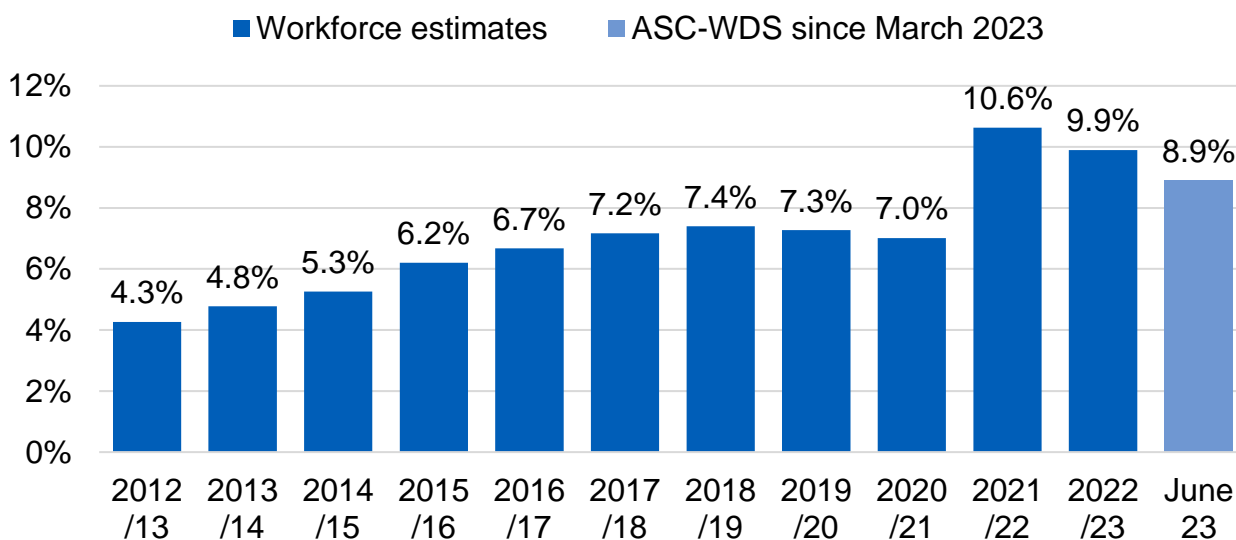
In the independent sector, the decrease in vacancy rates was larger in care homes (down from 8.2% to 6.8%) than it was in domiciliary care (down from 13.2% to 12.9%).

Monthly tracking of data in ASC-WDS from independent sector employers between March 2023 and June 2023 (not weighted to represent the whole sector) has shown this trend continuing, with the rate decreasing by a further 1 percentage point.

The vacancy rate remains high, however, compared to historical levels and other sectors. This shows that recruitment and retention difficulties in the sector persist despite improvements this year.

Chart 3. Change in the adult social care vacancy rate

Source: Skills for Care estimates and Skills for Care monthly tracking



The high staff vacancy rate can impact the ability of care providers to deliver care and support. If more of these posts were filled, providers would be able to deliver support to more people and maintain higher ratios of staff to people drawing on care and support.

In 2022/23, the starters rate in the independent sector increased from 32% to 34%. A large part of this increase can be attributed to the level of international recruitment seen during the year.

At the same time, in 2022/23, the turnover rate in the independent sector decreased from 32% to 30%. Early evidence from ASC-WDS data collected between 2022 and 2023 (up to May) suggests that international recruitment may have also played a part in this, with the turnover rate for international recruits being around half that of people recruited from within the UK.

3. Social care vacancies vs availability of jobs in the wider economy

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were fewer jobs available in the wider economy (there were 472,000 vacancies or 1.6%). This contributed to a fall in vacancy rates in adult social care as people losing their jobs elsewhere took up roles in the care sector while fewer people left their care roles.

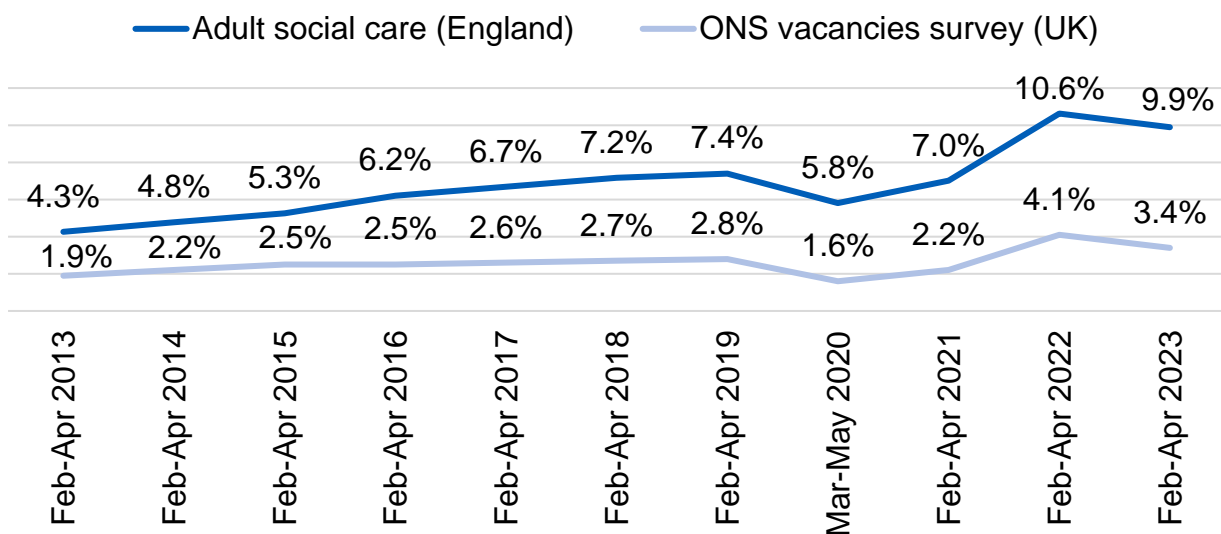
As at March 2022, as the economy opened back up, there were more job opportunities in the jobs market with 1.3m vacancies at this point (4.1%). At the same time, the adult social care vacancy rate increased substantially and was back above its pre-pandemic levels at 10.6%.

As at April 2023, the number of vacancies in the wider economy decreased to 3.4% (1.1m vacancies in total). The rate is still at a high level comparing back historically however, and the number of opportunities available in other sectors will still be making it difficult for adult social care employers to find all the staff they need. This is reflected by the adult social care vacancy rate decreasing but remaining at higher levels than in previous years.

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 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

Source: ASC-WDS³ and ONS: Vacancies and jobs in the UK



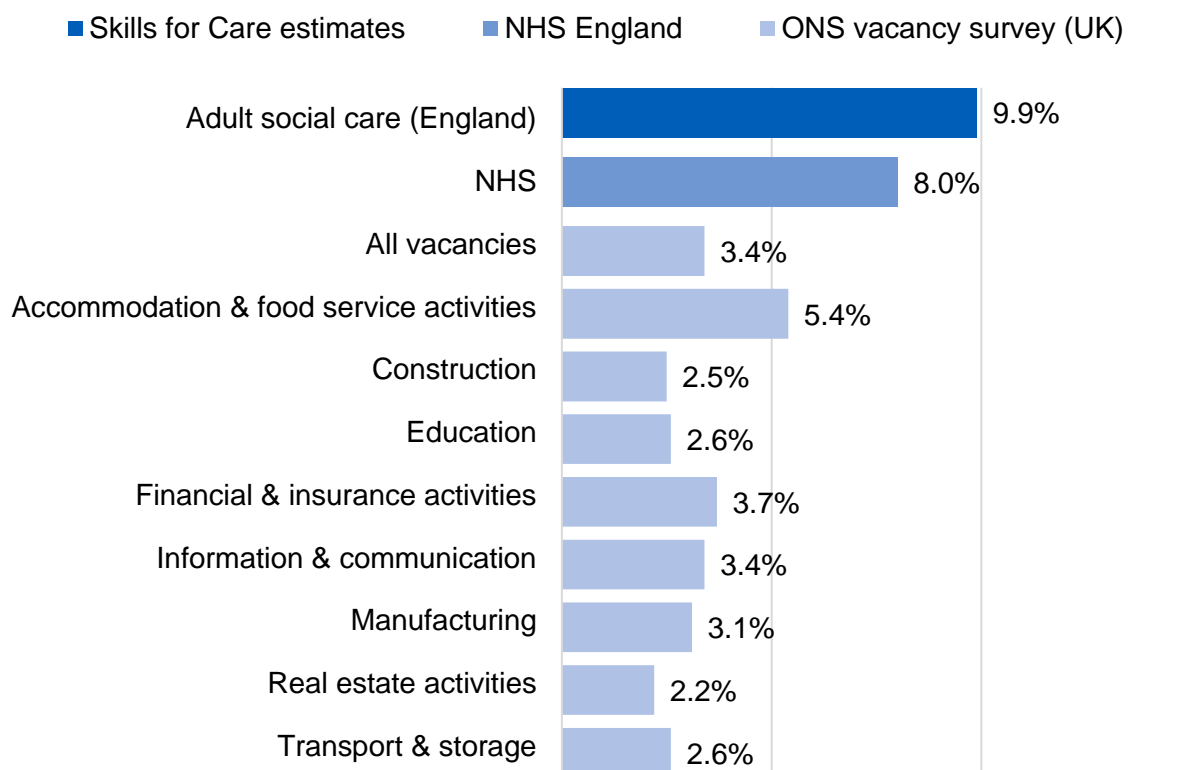
³ The March to May period was used for 2020 because February to April straddled the start of the pandemic when vacancies fell sharply in adult social care.

This trend matches feedback received from some care providers who advise that recruitment and retention continue to be an issue with opportunities in other sectors providing competition for labour.

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

Chart 5. Adult social care vacancy rate in comparison to the NHS and the wider economy 2022/23

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



4. International recruitment

New immigration rules came into effect in the UK on 1 January 2021⁴. The new 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 professional roles and 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 April 21).

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-immigration-system-what-you-need-to-know>

In February 2022, however, 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.

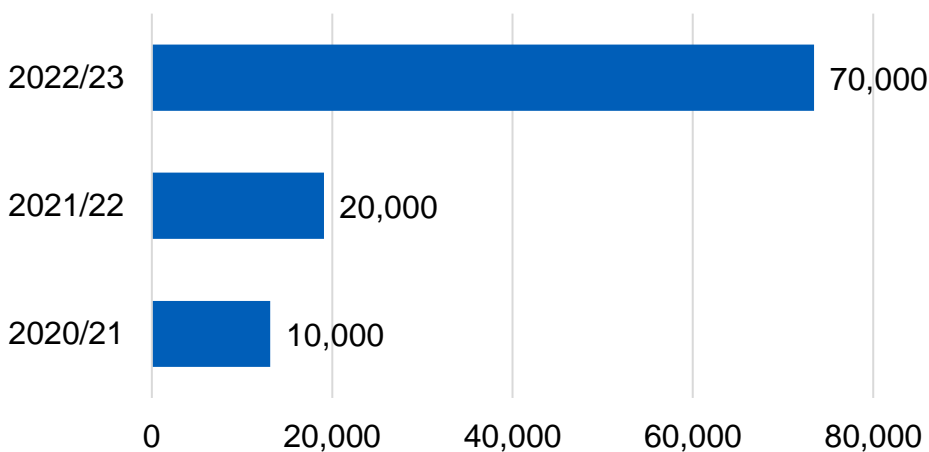
Between March 2022 and March 2023 an estimated 70,000 people have started direct care providing roles in the independent sector having arrived in the UK during that period.

This estimate is higher than figures from the Home Office⁵ which shows 58,000 Skilled Worker visas issued to care workers and senior care workers. The estimate of 70,000 in this report includes people arriving in the UK via other routes such as family permits as well as the 58,000 receiving Skilled Worker visas.⁶

This is a substantial increase in international recruitment on previous years (20,000 in 2021/22) and it has played a part in the increase in filled posts and reduction in vacancies seen over the period.

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

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2023/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-to-work>

⁶ Please note that these figures are not as precise as others in the report as employers do not always record year of arrival to the UK data in ASC-WDS

5. Summary

The number of filled posts has increased in 2022/23 and this has contributed to a decrease in the number of staff vacancies.

However, the vacancy rate remains at a high level compared to historical trends and the number of filled posts has not fully returned their 2020/21 levels.

International recruitment has played a part in this recovery by providing an additional recruitment option for employers with 70,000 people joining the workforce from outside the UK to take up direct care providing roles in the independent sector.

However, the availability of jobs in the wider economy is still at a high level. These jobs are often higher paid and perceived to be less demanding than social care jobs. At the time of writing, this competition for staff from other sectors appears to be contributing to continued recruitment and retention challenges for the adult social care sector.

Skills for Care will continue to monitor filled posts and vacancies in the sector every month⁷.

⁷ <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/Monthly-tracking/Monthly-tracking.aspx>