

NMDS-SC briefing

Social workers in the adult social care sector

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Social workers play a critical role in the social care system. There is currently an opportunity to reposition social work and social workers at the heart of the transformation of health and social care, requiring new approaches to the way local authorities commission and deploy social work services

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Social worker is a protected title which can only be used when registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) following completion of a HCPC approved honours or postgraduate degree. This briefing takes a look at the data available from the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC) to examine what it can tell us about this key role.

The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) state that there are 16,500 social workers employed by England's local authorities (adult services), as at September 2013¹ (see table 1). This information is derived from the NMDS-SC, which has been the mandatory workforce return for local authorities since 2011. As such, the NMDS-SC contains information on all statutory (adult) sector social workers. This briefing focuses on local authority adult social workers, whilst acknowledging that social workers also work in the independent sector and the health sector.

The term 'social workers' in this briefing will refer to registered social workers in the statutory sector (local authority) providing care for adults. In addition where 'statutory sector' is used as a comparator group – the group is comprised of all workers employed in local authority adult social services departments.

Social worker numbers and trends

The total number of social worker jobs has been relatively stable between 2011 and 2013 (in the context of a decrease in the total number of statutory sector jobs), since the NMDS-SC became the mandatory return for local authorities (see table 1). It would seem therefore that social workers have been less affected by austerity measures than other parts of the statutory sector workforce.

Table 1: Social worker jobs, headcount and whole time equivalent (WTE) jobs in the adult statutory sector

		2011	2012	2013
Statutory sector jobs		159,400	150,700	140,700
Social workers - jobs	Number	16,200	16,600	16,500
	% of workforce	10%	11%	12%
Social workers - people (headcount)		16,000	16,300	16,200
Social workers - whole time equivalent		14,500	14,500	14,800

¹ [Personal Social Services: Staff of Social Services Departments](#) at 30 September 2013 - HSCIC England



The numbers of whole time equivalent (WTE)* jobs and people doing these jobs (headcount) have also been consistent over the reported period, although WTE jobs rose in 2013 (see table 1). The WTE jobs ratio of social workers (0.90) is higher than that of all statutory sector WTE jobs (0.80).

Demographic profile

Social workers have a comparable demographic profile to the statutory sector as a whole. For example, for 2011, 2012 and 2013, female workers made up 82% of the statutory sector and 79% of social worker jobs.

The average age of social workers is 45 years old, compared to 47 years old for workers in the statutory sector. Comparison of age bands reveals that 31% of social workers are younger than 40 years old, whereas only 25% of statutory sector workers are under 40 (see chart 1). These proportions have been stable since 2011, as has the average age of both social workers and the statutory sector average.

The proportion of social worker jobs filled by black and minority ethnic (BME) workers has risen slightly since 2011, from 18% in 2011 to 20% in 2013. The majority of this group are asian/asian british and black/black british workers. A similar trend over the same period is apparent for all statutory sector jobs, albeit at a marginally slower rate (see chart 2).

In 2013, the majority of statutory sector worker (94%) and social worker (92%) jobs were filled by British workers. Around 3% of social workers were European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and the remaining 5% made up by non-EEA nationals. These proportions were similar in 2011 and 2012.

Experience

As at October 2013, 11% of social workers in England had started working in their current role during 2013 (see chart 3). This proportion is slightly higher than the statutory sector workforce (10%). It should be acknowledged that some of these workers may have previously worked as a social worker elsewhere prior to their current role.

Further to this finding, as at 2013, 50% of social workers started working in their current job between 2009 and 2013, compared to 44% in all statutory sector jobs. Similarly, 56% of all workers in the statutory sector began working in the current role before 2008, compared to 50% of social workers.

* Whole time equivalents are calculated by the actual hours worked per week as a proportion of a 37 hour working week

Chart 1: Age profile of adult social workers

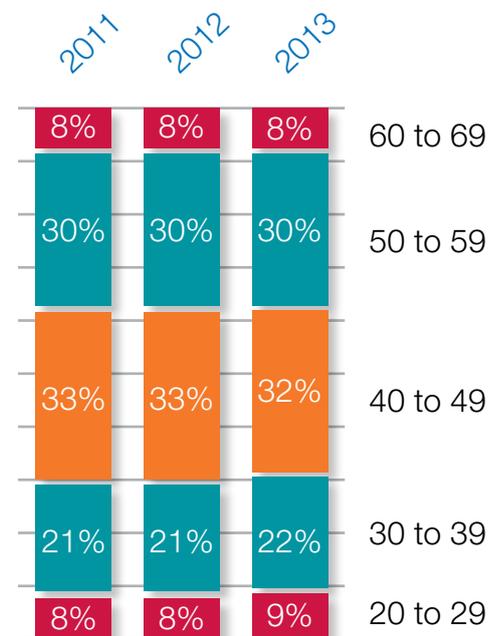


Chart 2: Proportion of all statutory sector jobs and statutory sector social worker jobs made up by BME workers

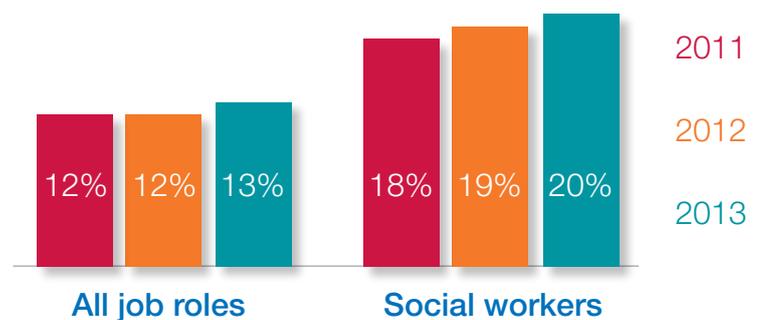


Chart 3: Year started in current job of all statutory sector workers and statutory sector social workers



The email newsletter *Community Care Snapshot* recently stated that “One in 10 local authority social workers across the UK is newly qualified”². The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) helps newly qualified social workers (NQSWS) to develop in their first year of employment. In 2012-13 there were over 800 registrations to ASYE, 12% of these being social workers employed in the private, voluntary and health sector, as opposed to the statutory adult social care sector.

The number of ASYE registrations for 2013-14 was just over 1,000. Data relating to these registrations suggest that the proportion employed in non-statutory social care sectors may be increasing.

Pay

The nominal³ whole time equivalent (WTE) annual pay for social workers (not adjusted for inflation) rose from around £31,200 in October 2011 to £32,000 in October 2013, a 2.7% increase (see chart 4). However, real-term⁴ WTE pay (adjusted for Consumer Price Index inflation) shows a 2.2% fall over the period. This means that the increase in average (median) pay for social workers between 2011 and 2013 was not as great as the increase in prices by inflation over the same period (i.e. the ‘real’ value of their pay has decreased).

Chart 4: Nominal and real term pay % change 2011-12 and 2012-13



² [‘Community Care Snapshot’](#) 29 January 2014.

³ ‘Nominal’ pay refers to the actual monetary value at each given period. It is not adjusted for inflation.

⁴ ‘Real’ pay refers to nominal pay that has been adjusted for inflation rates over a given period. In the present report, Consumer Price Index (CPI) WTE pay values at 2011 and 2012 have been expressed at 2013 prices to show social worker pay in context of the economy as a whole.

Recruitment and retention

In 2013, social worker recruitment and retention measures (starter, turnover and vacancy rates) are relatively close to the statutory sector average for all jobs (see chart 5).

Social workers have slightly higher starter and vacancy rates and a lower turnover rate than the average for the statutory sector.

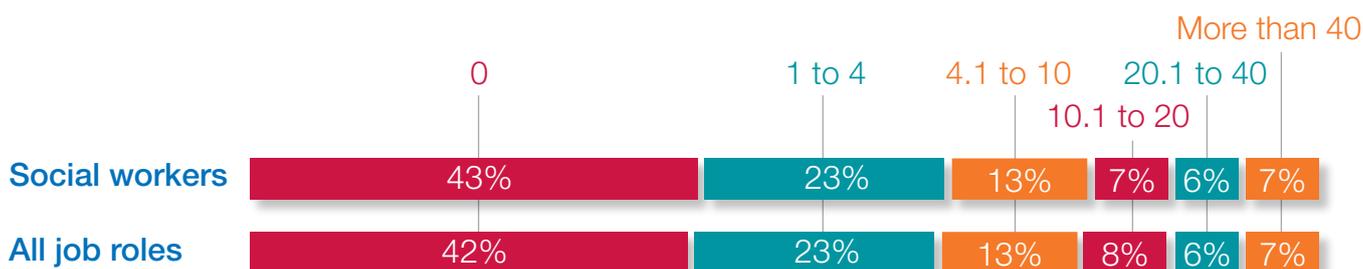
Chart 5: Staff recruitment and retention measures, statutory sector jobs and social workers jobs, 2013



Sickness

No difference was identified between social workers and the statutory sector as a whole in the average number of days lost due to sickness (10 days in the previous 12 months). One in every 5 statutory sector workers and social workers had more than 10 sickness days off work per year (see chart 6). The proportion of workers taking more than 40 days off sick was 7% for both of these groups. Two thirds (66%) of social workers had 4 days or fewer off work due to sickness, the same as the wider sector.

Chart 6: Sickness days of all statutory sector workers and statutory social workers



Summary

Registered social workers account for around 12% of the adult social care statutory sector workforce, a proportion that has increased slightly between 2011 and 2013. The total numbers of jobs, people and WTE jobs have been steady since 2011, as have the demographic profiles reported above. Due to the relatively low turnover rate at present, statutory sector social workers appear to be quite stable in terms of recruitment and retention, showing little difference from the statutory sector as a whole.

Perhaps of most interest is the fact that more than 1 in 3 adult statutory sector social workers are aged 50 or above, while ASYE data is beginning to highlight the prevalence of social workers working in other parts of the sector.

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