This briefing looks at vacancy rates in the adult social care sector, identifying recent trends, examining links with the quality of care provided and with other workforce measures and issues.

Vacancy rates are an important measure for any business or sector as they can provide an indication of challenges in terms of future growth, workforce supply and the use of agency staff.

The vacancy rate of an establishment is defined as: “The number of vacancies for directly employed jobs at a given time as a percentage of the total number of directly employed jobs, both vacant and filled.”

### Number of vacancies on completion date

| Number of vacancies on completion date | + | Total permanent and temporary roles |

Vacancy rates in the adult social care sector are influenced by a variety of factors including:

- **A growing workforce**: employers seeking to increase the size of their organisation will have vacancies as they seek to fill new posts. The number of adult social care jobs has increased by an average of 50,000 jobs each year between 2009 and 2014 and is projected to continue to grow in the future.

- **Staff turnover**: posts can be temporarily vacant as employees leave. Vacancy rates can therefore reflect short-term ‘back-fill’. As at 2015, the turnover rate in the adult social care sector was 26%, this equates to around 350,000 people leaving their jobs each year that need to be replaced.

- **Short supply**: some vacancies can be hard to fill as employers seek appropriate candidates. This is more likely to occur in roles with higher entry requirements (such as regulated professional roles, e.g. registered nurses).
Vacancy rates in the adult social care sector

As at September 2015, the vacancy rate in the adult social care workforce was estimated at 6.5%. This means that for every 15 permanent or temporary roles in social care there is one vacant post.

The adult social care sector has been growing year-on-year since 2009. Therefore a portion of this vacancy rate is likely to be related to new jobs being created in the sector.

The rate of annual growth as at September 2014 was 3%. This is comparable to the annual increase in the size of the labour market in England (2%\(^1\)).

However, as at September 2015 the vacancy rate for the United Kingdom was 2.7%\(^2\), substantially lower than the adult social care sector in England (6.5%). This suggests that not all of the relatively high vacancy rate in adult social care can be attributed to growth in the sector.

Vacancy rate trends

The vacancy rate for the independent sector of the adult social care workforce increased slightly between September 2013 and September 2015, although the change over this period was less than 1 percentage point (from 6% to 7%). The statutory sector also saw a slight increase in vacancy rates over this period (from 7% in 2013 to 8.5% in 2015).

Vacancy rate trends by sector

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**Vacancy rates by service type**

The vacancy rate of CQC regulated non-residential services was higher than for CQC regulated care homes with and without nursing.

The workforce in CQC regulated non-residential services has been growing at a faster rate over recent years than other parts of the workforce, the number of jobs increasing by more than 40% between September 2009 and September 2014. This relatively high vacancy rate could indicate that this part of the workforce is likely to continue to grow. It could also be the product of the typically high staff turnover rates in domiciliary care.

**Vacancy rate of selected service types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Vacancy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CQC regulated care homes with nursing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQC regulated residential services without nursing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQC regulated non-residential services</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vacancy rates by sector**

Local authorities have a relatively high vacancy rate; jobs in the statutory sector of the adult social care workforce have been decreasing over the stated period with some councils undergoing restructures. The higher than average vacancy rate in local authorities could therefore be a reflection of higher entry requirements in this part of the sector. A larger proportion of local authority jobs are in regulated professions (mainly social workers and occupational therapists) and, similarly, workers in direct care providing roles also tend to be qualified at a higher level than those in the independent sector.

**Vacancy rate, care worker qualifications and workforce make-up by sector**

- **Vacancy rate**
  - Local authorities: 8%
  - Independent sector: 6%

- **Care workers with a care-relevant qualification**
  - Local authorities: 86%
  - Independent sector: 48%

- **% of workforce in managerial roles/regulated professions**
  - Local authorities: 29%
  - Independent sector: 12%
**Association between vacancy rates and turnover rates**

Vacancy rates are associated with staff turnover. Assuming an employer is not actively seeking to increase or decrease the number of staff at their organisation, the vacancy rate should mirror posts that are left vacant by leaving staff.

Analysis of the NMDS-SC revealed that establishments that were categorised as having low or medium turnover had lower vacancy rates (5% and 6% respectively) compared to high-turnover establishments, which showed a higher vacancy rate (9%).

Similarly, a positive correlation between turnover and vacancy rates was identified, such that where an establishment had high turnover they were also likely to have a higher vacancy rate. This relationship demonstrates that, in tackling recruitment and retention issues in the sector it is important to consider vacancy rates as well as staff turnover.

**Vacancy rate by turnover group**

![Vacancy Rate Chart]

One major benefit of retaining staff is that the continuity of care is preserved\(^3\). It follows that establishments with high vacancy rates or long-standing, hard-to-fill vacancies (that are a product of staff turnover) are more likely to see a disruption of the continuity of care, which could adversely affect the people for whom care is being provided.

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Vacancy rates by job role

Another factor by which vacancy rates tend to vary is job role. In adult social care, the jobs with the highest vacancy rate as at September 2015 were: registered managers at CQC-regulated organisations (12%), registered nurses in the independent sector (10%), social workers and occupational therapists at adult social services departments (12% and 10% respectively). These roles have high entry requirements compared to other roles in social care (e.g. independent sector care workers, 8% vacancy rate) and they tend to require specialised qualifications and experience. As a result, candidates for these roles are in relatively low supply compared to care workers where entry requirements are not as stringent.

Vacancy rate for selected job roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Role</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational therapist</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancillary and admin roles</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reports on the health sector also demonstrate that vacancy rates of skilled professional roles have increased in recent years. Health Education England (HEE) report that the vacancy rate for nurses in acute and community settings was 6.5%4 which, according to a recent King’s Fund report5, highlights “a general cross-sectoral difficulty in nurse recruitment”. Similarly, NHS Employers6 report that more than 90% of NHS provider trusts are experiencing a supply shortage of nurses and that almost 80% of vacancies categorised as being ‘hard-to-fill’ are in the field of nursing. This survey also reports a 10% vacancy rate for nurses at NHS provider trusts, comparable to the rate for those in adult social care.

Vacancies for hard-to-fill roles such as registered nurses and other aforementioned job roles are referred to as Skills Shortage Vacancies (SSVs). The UKCES Employer Skills Survey 20137 reported 22% of all vacancies in England are difficult to fill due to a skills shortage. The proportion of all vacancies categorised as SSVs was highest for ‘professionals’ (29%), ‘associate professionals’ (27%) and ‘skilled trades’ (38%) and lowest for ‘admin’, ‘sales’ and ‘elementary’ (all 14%). This suggests that the portion of regulated professional vacancies in social care that are ‘hard-to-fill’ is greater than for roles with lower entry requirements. From the same survey it was found that more than 4 out of 5 employers reported that having skills shortage vacancies that were difficult to fill resulted in an increase in workload for other staff.

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The NMDS-SC shows that employers where the vacancy rate was categorised as ‘high’ tend to utilise more workers who are not directly employed such as agency or ‘pool’ workers (18% of all their workers being non-directly-employed). ‘Medium’ and ‘low’ vacancy rate establishment tend to utilise casual staff to a lesser degree (15% of all workers). Moreover, vacancy rates and use of casual staff are related, whereby an increase in one corresponds to an increase in the other. The use of agency workers, whilst often necessary to ensure that people’s care needs are being met and that directly employed staff are not over-worked, can be expensive.

Vacancy rate by casual staff % of workforce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vacancy Rate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 50%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.01 to 50%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.01 to 40%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.01% to 30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.01% to 20%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vacancy rates and quality of care

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) highlights the importance of adequate staffing levels in social care:

In adult social care, good services [...] relied much less on external agency staff. In contrast, poor performing services had more prominent issues with staffing levels, often due to poor planning.\(^8\)

Evidently, high vacancy rates at an establishment can have a detrimental effect on the quality of care provided. In support of this, analysis of the NMDS-SC alongside CQC inspection ratings found that establishments that were categorised as ‘inadequate’ and ‘requires improvement’ had higher vacancy rates (both 7%) than those categorised as ‘good’ (5%) or ‘outstanding’ (1%). This is evidence of a negative correlation between the vacancy rate and the quality of a care-providing establishment. Staff turnover appears to follow the same trend, whereby better CQC ratings are associated with lower turnover rates. It is important to note that a high vacancy rate is not necessarily indicative of low-quality care at an establishment in all cases because, as discussed above, vacancy rates can reflect the growth of an organisation as well as the number staff having left.

\(^8\) www.cqc.org.uk/content/state-care-201415
Vacancy and turnover rates by CQC inspection ratings

Skills for Care's recruitment and retention offer
In order to provide employers with the appropriate tools to minimize the impact of vacancies on the quality of care provided, Skills for Care has produced a series of resources.

Recruitment and retention strategy (2014/2017)
This high level document explains the broad array of major programmes that are being taken forward by key stakeholders and how these are intended to raise the profile of adult social care, encourage and enable better recruitment practices and address the issue of above average turnover. Against each of these major programmes, links are provided to further information for those who want to find out more or get involved.

Finding and keeping workers
A practical online resource to support employers of all sizes with their recruitment and retention challenges. It includes a range of useful videos, case studies and websites to help employers deal with some of the most common issues.

All the information has been grouped into four sections which will help employers to attract the right people, foster talent and increase skills, and keep your colleagues for longer. There is also a resources library which you can use to search for information most relevant to you.

Overcoming barriers to employment
Skills for Care have been working in collaboration with Jobcentre Plus to identify barriers to recruitment into the social care sector and to support employers in recruiting to their organisation by making best use of facilities and resources provided by Jobcentre Plus. Part of this joint-working involved the development of a ‘Care Sector Knowledge Toolkit’ to ensure that Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches are able to offer guidance and support for people hoping to work in social care.

Further workforce intelligence and data analysis services
Skills for Care estimates there to be 1.55 million adult social care jobs being carried out by 1.48 million people. To perform your own analysis of NMDS-SC data visit the open access dashboards here or to view other workforce publications please click here.

To be kept up-to-date with Workforce Intelligence news please join our mailing list by registering with Skills for Care and selecting “workforce intelligence publications”. You can also follow us on twitter @SfC_NMDS_SC.

We provide an external analysis service and produce a range of in-depth reports depending on your specific requirements. For more information about this service please email analysis@skillsforcare.org.uk or call 0113 241 0969.