

nmds-sc briefing



Issue 18 - spotlight on social workers and workforce planning

This issue of NMDS-SC Briefings provides a spotlight on social workers and workforce planning and is the first time that a single job role has been analysed in this way in a published briefing. Using the NMDS-SC¹ also means that the analysis is based on working social workers in the field – not just those registered as social workers.

The National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC) collects data for social workers and social care staff working in Adults' Services and Children's Services and across England. Detailed information was collected from local authorities for the first time in 2011 as the primary workforce data return (having replaced the previous SSDS001 workforce return). Analysing data on these variables for social workers in both Adults' Services and Children's Services provides an important insight for service providers and workforce planners².

This briefing identifies:

- there are lower social worker vacancy rates in Children's Services
- social workers in Children's Services have higher pay rates
- whilst nearly half of social workers have had no days sickness in the past year - over one fifth have had over 10 days off
- nearly one fifth of social workers are nearing an age at which they may retire.

Total social worker numbers in Adults' and Children's Services

Analysis of NMDS-SC data estimates there to be 16,200 social worker jobs in Adults' Services being performed by 16,000 social workers. In terms of Whole Time Equivalents (WTE) – there were 14,500 WTE social worker jobs in Adults' Services reflecting that most social worker jobs are full time. The total number of social workers in Adults' Services has changed very little between 2010 and 2011.

The data returns for local authority Children's Services were much lower than for Adults' Services and so caution is required in coming to firm conclusions³. However, data was returned on over 5,000 social workers in Children's Services.

¹ Based on data received during the local authority upload window (September / October 2011)

² The analysis below, for both Children's and Adults' Services, excludes senior social workers with a supervisory role who are classified as 'first line managers' in NMDS-SC.

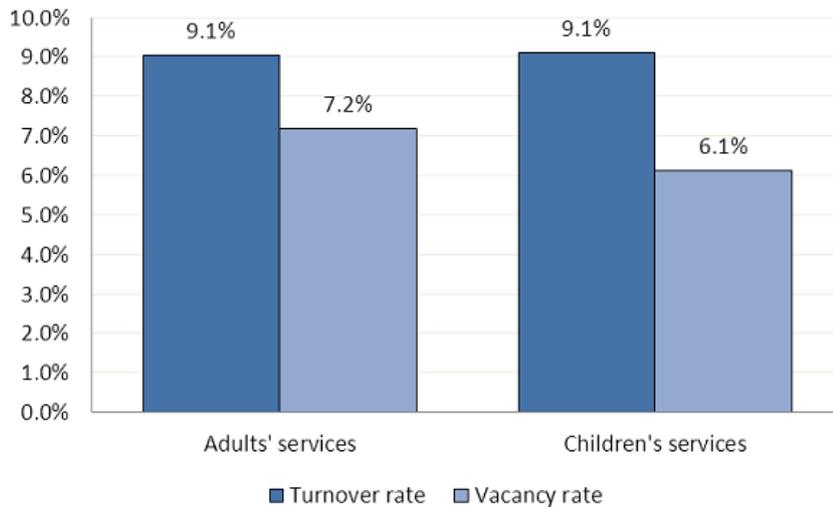
³ The Department for Education asked only for a voluntary return of data from local authorities in 2011.



Retention and Recruitment

Although turnover rates of social workers are the same for Children's and Adults' Services at 9% there is a difference in vacancy rates at 6% and 7% respectively.

Chart 2: Starters, turnover and vacancy rates of social workers in Adults' and Children's Services, England

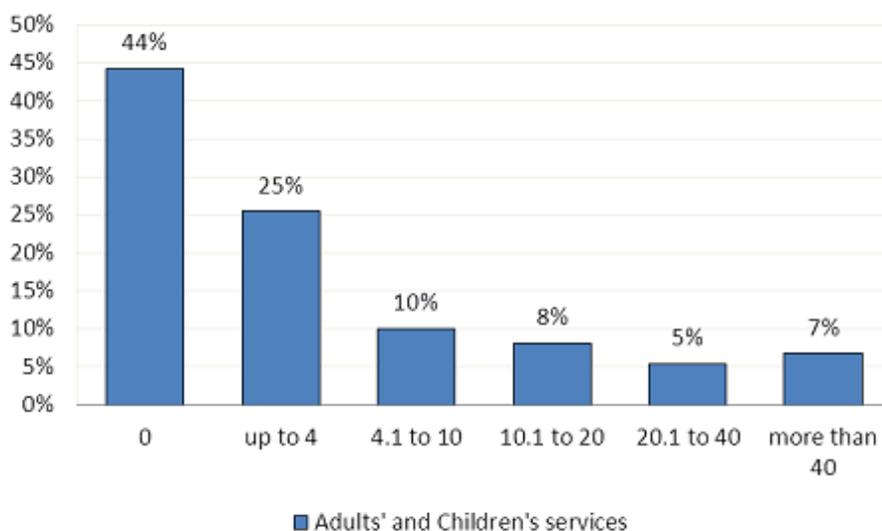


Sickness

Whilst 44% of social workers employed by local authorities in Adults' Services and Children's Services had no days off work due to sickness, over a fifth of social workers had over 10 days off work due to sickness. Seven per cent of social workers have had more than 40 days or 2 months lost to sickness. This indicates that some social workers may need more support in undertaking what can be a difficult and stressful job.

High levels of sickness will have a negative impact on service quality due to a lack of consistency and stability in the social work service being provided. The provision of good staff supervision and continuing professional development should play a role in reducing work related stress.

Chart 3: Annual sickness rates for social workers in Adults' and Children's Services, England





Demographics: gender and ethnicity

Social workers are predominantly female. There is a slightly higher proportion of female social workers in Children's Services (85%) than in Adults' Services (79%).

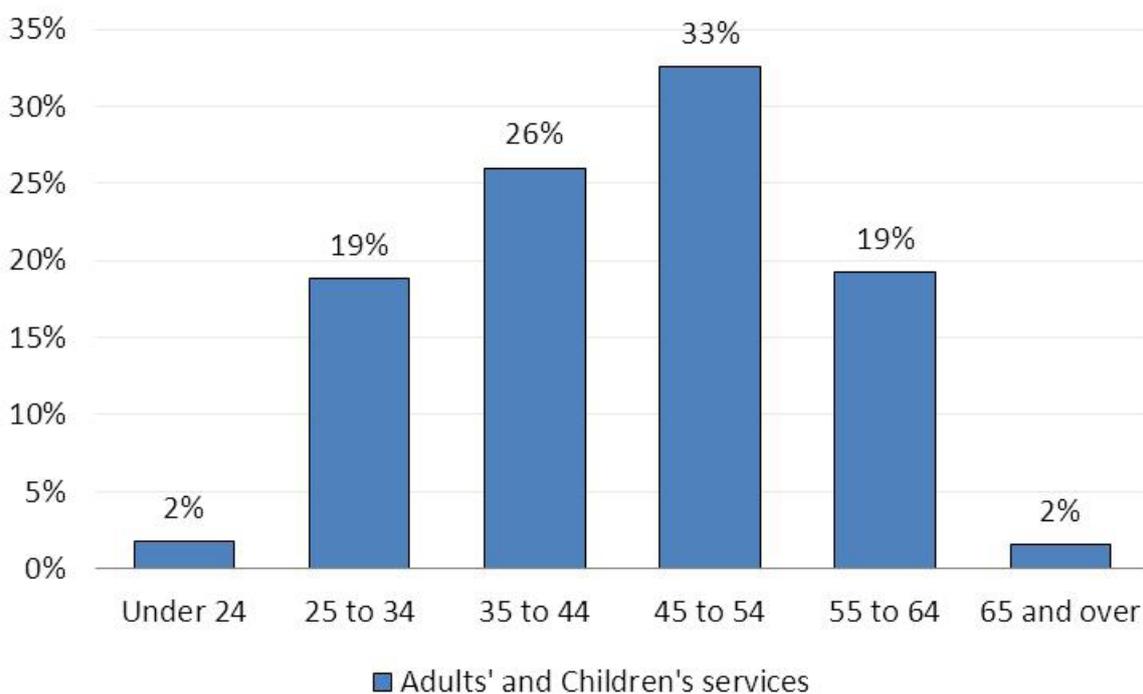
Approximately 80% of social workers across the statutory sector are white which broadly reflects the general population although this reduces to approximately 70% in the independent sector. This pattern also varies by region – in London 48% of social workers are from a BME ethnic background whilst this falls to 2% in the North East.

The largest non-white group of social workers is Black African/Caribbean or Black British at approximately 10% across the statutory sector and this rises to 19% in the independent sector (compared to 3% in the general population). Asian or Asian British ethnic groups appear to be slightly under represented in the social work workforce at 5% compared to 6% in the general population⁴.

Age

An analysis of the age distribution of social workers in Adults' Services and Children's Services indicates that over 20% are approaching an age where they may retire. Data from the NMDS-SC is now being used in the social work supply and demand model developed by the Centre for Workforce Intelligence with input from Skills for Care.

Chart 4: Age distribution of social workers in Adults' and Children's Services, England



⁴ All comparative figures are taken from the experimental¹¹ data release from the 2011 census by the Office for National Statistics

Pay

It can be seen from the table below that there is little difference in median salaries for social workers but social workers in Children's statutory services are paid more at both the lowest and highest pay bands (percentiles). It is possible that this differential helps explain why Children's Services have a slightly lower vacancy rate at 6% as opposed to 7% in Adults' Services.

Table 1: Full time equivalent annual salaries of social workers

	All sectors	Adults' services	Children's services
Percentile 95	£41,100	£40,700	£43,400
Percentile 75	£34,200	£34,100	£35,400
Median	£30,900	£31,200	£31,200
Percentile 25	£28,000	£28,600	£27,800
Percentile 05	£22,200	£22,200	£24,300

Conclusion

The importance of minimising social worker turnover and vacancy rates and reducing sickness levels is a constant in ensuring that people receive consistent, stable and good quality services. The use of NMDS-SC data for workforce planning and analysis is an important element in achieving this.

The Social Work Reform Board is implementing the recommendations made by the Social Work Task Force to improve the quality of social work. This is being done through the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme for newly qualified social workers⁵ and the Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework. The standards and framework set out the shared core expectations of employers which will enable social workers in all employment settings to work effectively.

For data on social workers in your area please download the local authority area profile report from the [NMDS-SC website](#).

⁵ Supported by Skills for Care and the Department for Education