Staff vacancies in care services 2024

Published January 2026

HAPPY TO **TRANSLATE**

Keeping The Promise at
the heart of what we do

Contents

Data tables in Excel format are published alongside this report

Introduction

This Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2024 report is jointly published by the Care Inspectorate and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). This report provides data on vacancies reported by care services as at 31 December 2024, and is based on information provided by registered care services in their annual returns to the Care Inspectorate. 92% of services (excluding childminders) completed an annual return with the required staffing information completed. We have not made statistical adjustments for those services that did not complete returns.

The Care Inspectorate independently regulates, inspects and evaluates the quality of care delivered by registered care services to make sure that they meet the right standards. Our scrutiny and assurance programmes are vital to our improvement work. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulator for the social work, social care, and children and young people workforce in Scotland, responsible for protecting the public by registering workers, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training, and education and by supporting their professional development.

The report highlights the extent of the current recruitment and retention challenges being faced by the social care sector at a time when services are experiencing continued pressure.

We know there are still many parts of the social care sector finding it challenging to fill vacancies, and this has been a persistent issue for several years. We remain grateful for the dedication and commitment of the skilled and qualified workforce during a time that remains challenging due to continued demands on staff and services.

This report shows, at 31 December 2024:

- 44% of care services reported vacancies, an improvement from 48% at 31 December 2023

- In 9 of the 32 local authority areas, 50% or more services reported vacancies. This has decreased from 12 of 32 local authority areas at 31 December 2023

- Housing support services, care at home services, care homes for older people and care homes for adults[1] faced the most challenge filling vacancies.

The most common reasons for vacancies not being filled are too few applicants with experience, too few applicants and too few qualified applicants. That means it's essential we continue to prioritise our work to attract people into careers in social services, providing accessible training, learning and qualifications for people before and after they join the workforce. We need to make sure workers feel valued, respected and supported to continue their social service careers.

This report is just one aspect of the workforce planning activities undertaken by the Care Inspectorate and the SSSC. Both organisations continue to work closely with the Scottish Government and others to help employers to recruit, retain and develop their staff.

This year has seen a number of important developments to support workforce planning and strengthen the social services workforce in Scotland. The SSSC has

---

[1] Includes only service types with more than 100 services

continued to expand the range and detail of published workforce data, with regularly updated figures on registrant numbers, sector breakdowns, fitness to practise activity, and equality and diversity analysis available on the data website. New publications, such as the [Register Leavers Survey Report](), provide a more detailed understanding of recruitment, retention, and workforce development issues at both national and local levels.

Responding to the ongoing demand for qualifications, the [Workforce Skills Report (March 2025)]() identified a gap between the number of workers needing to meet qualification conditions in the next five years and the current capacity for training delivery. To support the sector, the SSSC increased flexibility for existing SVQs to be used across different parts of the sector and has introduced the SVQ Integrated Health and Social Care at SCQF 7. The launch of the Next Generation HNC Social Services at SCQF 7 which is in a pilot phase will help meet future sector demands. The SSSC's Learning Zone has also been updated with improved search functions and direct links to the core learning elements of the Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) requirements, supporting ongoing professional development.

As the sector continues to evolve, ensuring that qualifications and training remain aligned with current practice and future needs is essential. Central to this is the ongoing review of National Occupational Standards (NOS) in Health and Social Care and Child Care Learning and Development, scheduled to conclude by December 2025. The NOS underpin the qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks required for registration with the SSSC. This review is being carried out in partnership with UK colleagues and has involved extensive engagement with stakeholders, including people with lived experience, to identify gaps and priorities such as trauma-informed practice, neurodiversity, supervision, and sustainability. Once the NOS review is complete, the SSSC, SQA, Skills Development Scotland and other partners will update the benchmark Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and apprenticeship frameworks to reflect the revised standards and current sector needs. Formal consultation on the reviewed qualifications and apprenticeships has begun, with Qualification Design Teams and sub-groups actively shaping the frameworks through feedback, functional analysis, and employer and employee surveys. These changes will help ensure that qualifications and apprenticeships remain fit for purpose, support effective practice, and align with priorities for the workforce.

The SSSC data website is currently being reviewed, with a relaunch planned for 2026. The new site will provide planners and stakeholders with improved access to interactive dashboards, detailed workforce datasets, and accessible HTML reports. It will be fully compliant with accessibility requirements and offer enhanced search and navigation features, making it easier for users to find and use the information they need.

Workforce wellbeing remains a priority. In early 2025, the SSSC undertook its first annual ["Have Your Say" Workforce Wellbeing Survey](), which received over 6,500 responses from across the sector. The survey provided valuable insights into wellbeing, pay, terms and conditions, support, access to training and qualifications, and general experiences of working in social services. Key findings included that 56% of respondents were satisfied with their current job, 60% felt safe at work, and 54% were satisfied with their terms and conditions. The survey also highlighted barriers to training, such as lack of time and limited access to courses, and identified priorities for making the sector more attractive, including better pay and improved recognition and support. The results are being used to inform workforce wellbeing initiatives and national policy development. Stakeholders are supporting the SSSC to develop the survey questions and introduce focus groups for 2026.

To further support workforce planning, a new sub-group of the Social Care Data and Intelligence Programme Group was established in 2025, chaired by the SSSC and including a wide range of stakeholders. This group is focused on improving the collation, analysis, and use of workforce data to support planning and development activities across the sector.

The SSSC's [careers website](#) continues to deliver information and guidance for those entering the sector and for employers. In 2025, new guidance was published to support the [recruitment of 16 and 17-year-olds in adult social care](#), developed in conjunction with stakeholders and partners. The SSSC also worked closely with NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to develop the new [Social Care Career Options Tool](#), which launched in summer 2025 and offers information on over 75 roles, qualification requirements, and career pathways, with inspiring stories to help users explore opportunities.

The [National Induction Framework for adult social care workers](#), launched in May 2025 and available on the NES Turas platform, provides a standard induction programme aligned with National Occupational Standards, with learning tracked through the MyLearning app. The framework was created to address the high level of movement in the social care workforce, where more than 2,250 new workers join each year and often move between jobs. Previously, this meant staff had to repeat induction training, expending valuable time and resources. The new framework aims to make induction easier, reduce repeated training, and help staff move between employers. The Joint Social Services Task Force (JSST) helped shape this work, which is delivered by the SSSC and NES with funding from the Scottish Government.

The Care Inspectorate's Quality Framework (QF) provides an open and transparent basis for scrutiny by setting out what we expect to see in high-quality care and support provision. Engagement with staff and other stakeholders is a crucial principle of the QF. In 2024 we continued to develop guidance, tools and resources (including webinars and workshops) across Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), Children and Young People (CYP) and Adult services. We are continuing to consider and shape how this can be used to support the Care Inspectorate's assurance and quality improvement activities.

The Care Inspectorate's Safe Staffing Programme was established in response to a commission from the Scottish Government. The purpose is to engage, collaborate, consult with and support the whole social care sector to implement the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 (the Act). The Act commenced in April 2024 and provides a statutory basis for the provision of appropriate staffing that enables safe and high-quality service provision and ultimately improves outcomes for people who use care services.

During 2024, the Care Inspectorate engaged and collaborated with the social care sector, other stakeholders and partner agencies to embed the duties and guiding principles of the Act into day-to-day workload and workforce planning practices. We published a Staffing Method Framework which was co-produced in collaboration with volunteer care home providers and staff. The Framework aligns with the Act and is now available for download or as a desktop application at: [Right Decisions Service](#).

The SSSC supports the Care Inspectorate's assurance and improvement work with the whole social care sector. For example, the Care Home Improvement Programme (CHIP) in 2024, targeted two cohorts of care homes that received adequate (grade 3) evaluations in specific areas highlighted in their most recent inspection reports.

The programme aimed to help these care homes implement meaningful changes to improve the quality of care provided. The CHIP was delivered collaboratively with both national and local partners, with the SSSC providing full support throughout its design and delivery.

In 2024, the SSSC, Care Inspectorate and NHS Education Scotland (NES) supported two cohorts of the Care Experience Improvement Model in adult care homes (CEIM). The programme enabled providers and staff to undertake improvement projects in a specific area of practice, to test change and ultimately improve outcomes for people who experience care.

The Care Inspectorate continues to work with other agencies to ensure new guidance and standards inform social care practice. We are commissioned to lead a [Meaningful Connection](#) project, that supports the promotion of people's rights so that connections, visiting and community involvement are enabled and maintained when people experience care.

The Care Inspectorate's current websites – careinspectorate.com and The Hub - are currently being reviewed. They will be replaced with a new and accessible website to improve user experience and engagement. We plan to launch this new site in 2026. The improved website will offer better functionality for all those who access our site, including those who experience care and their families, services, the public and all stakeholders we engage with. The new website will ensure that information on care, resources and guidance is easier to find and will sit alongside other regulatory information to help support improvement.

This statistical report is produced annually and helps us, the Scottish Government, regulators, and others to monitor the staff vacancy levels in the workforce, raise awareness of the challenges the sector faces and consider how we can provide support. As a society and a country, we need to properly recognise and reward social service workers with beneficial terms and conditions and proper investment. We continue to advocate for the need for fair work, fair terms and conditions, and an effective voice for the workforce. We strongly welcome the ongoing debates about the value of social care, its workforce and how it is funded. We will continue to play our part in promoting this report.

Jackie Irvine   Maree Allison

Chief Executive   Chief Executive

Care Inspectorate   Scottish Social Services Council

Summary of key findings

The Care Inspectorate is the independent scrutiny body that supports improvement and is responsible for regulating a wide range of care and support services in Scotland. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulator for the social work, social care, and children and young people workforce in Scotland responsible for protecting the public by registering workers, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training, and education and by supporting their professional development.

At the end of 2024, the social service workforce (registered social care service staff including childminders and social work staff) made up approximately 8.1% of all Scottish employment[2].

At 31 December 2024, there were 10,811 registered services providing care and support for children, young people, adults, and older people across Scotland. This includes 3,040 childminders which are not included in the remainder of this report. The remaining services employed an estimated 192,480[2] staff – an increase of 1.1% on the previous year's estimate.

Please ensure you read the **Sources and Use of Data in this Report** section at the end of this report, which contains key information on the quality, methodology, and use of terminology throughout the report and associated tables.

Services reporting vacancies

(See tables 1a – 1f)

At 31 December 2024, 44% of services reported having vacancies. The latest available comparison for the wider labour market, the Scottish Government's Employer Skills Survey in 2024, which covers all types of employers, found that 19% of all establishments across all sectors in Scotland reported having a vacancy[3].

The percentage of care services reporting vacancies has dropped over the past three years: it decreased by 4 percentage points over the last year and was down 5 percentage points from 2022. The percentage of care services reporting vacancies had been consistent over time up to and including 2020, before a large increase of 11 percentage points was reported in 2021[4].

The distribution of services reporting vacancies varies by type of service and by geographical location.

Care homes for older people (69% of services), housing support services (67% of services), care at home services, and care homes for adults (both 63% of services) and care homes for children and young people (58% of services) had the highest proportions of services reporting vacancies where the service type had more than 100 services. These service types, along with secure accommodation services and residential special school care accommodation services, all had a proportion of services with vacancies significantly above the national average for all care services.

East Dunbartonshire, Orkney and Midlothian (all 56% of services), East Ayrshire, and Shetland Islands (both 55% of services), West Dunbartonshire (53% of

---

2 SSSC: Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2024 Workforce Data
3 Scottish Government: Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2024
4 Care Inspectorate: Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2021 Staff vacancies 2021.pdf

services) and North Lanarkshire (52% of services) had the highest proportion of services with vacancies of all local authority areas.

Midlothian, Edinburgh, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire had a significantly higher proportion of services with vacancies than the national average for all care services.

Angus (30% of services), East Renfrewshire (32% of services), Aberdeenshire (34% of services), Scottish Borders (35% of services) and Highland (38% of services) had the lowest proportion of services with vacancies of all local authority areas.

Angus, East Renfrewshire, Aberdeenshire, Scottish Borders, and Highland had a significantly lower proportion of services with vacancies than the national average for all care services.

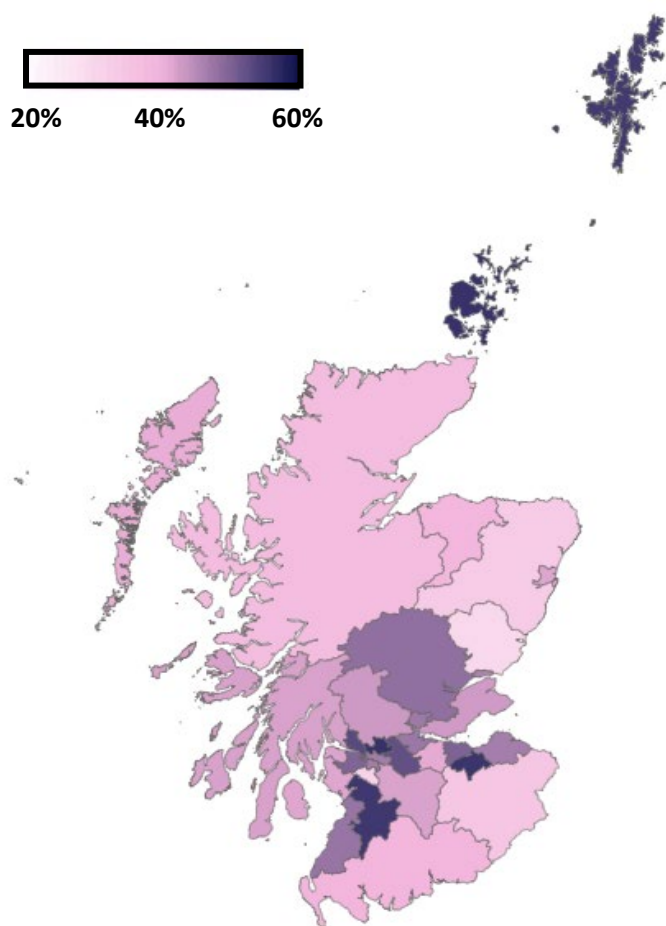Figure 1: Percentage of services reporting staff vacancies by local authority area

Figure 1 shows the percentage of services reporting staff vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting vacancies.

Rate of whole-time equivalent (WTE) vacancies

(see tables 1g – 1k)

At 31 December 2024, the rate of WTE vacancies per 100 WTE workforce for all services in Scotland was 6.4%, down from 7.5% in 2023. This was higher than the overall vacancy rate across all establishments in Scotland of 3.0% reported in the Scottish Government's Employer Skills Survey 2024.

Childcare agencies (35.3%, although this relates to a small number of services), nurse agency services (22.3%), and housing support services (8.1%) had a significantly higher rate of WTE vacancies than the national average.
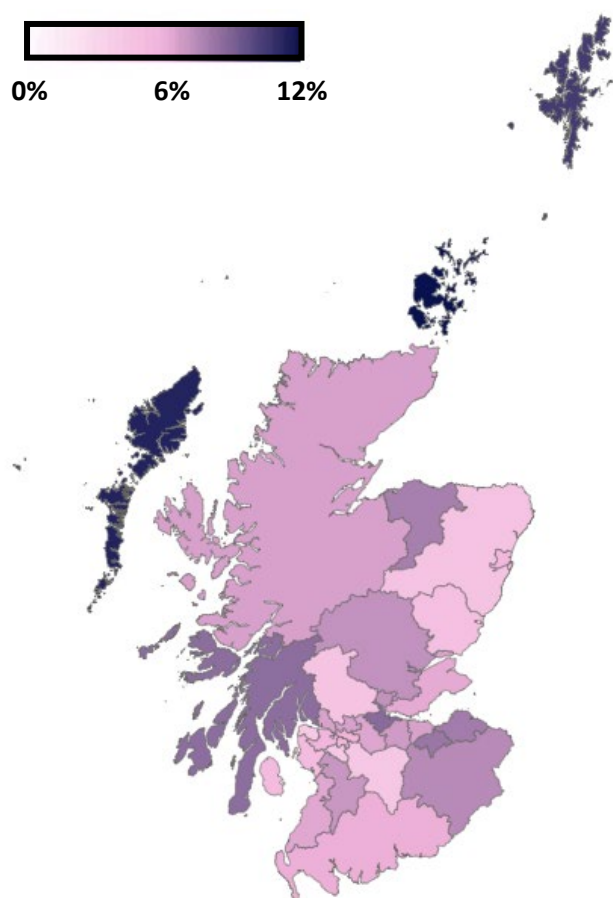
Figure 2: Rate of WTE vacancies by local authority area

Figure 2 shows the rate of WTE vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the rate of WTE vacancies.

Nurse vacancies

(see tables 1l – 1q)

At 31 December 2024, 41% of services reported having nursing vacancies (where services employed nurses). This was a decrease of 11 percentage points in the proportion of services with nursing vacancies at 31 December 2023 (52%).

Not all care services require nursing staff. 97% of all nurses working in the sector work in care homes for older people or for nurse agencies. In care homes for older people, 43% of services that told us they employed nurses reported nursing vacancies - a decrease of 13 percentage points from 2023. In nurse agency services, 43% of services reported a nursing vacancy, a decrease of 4 percentage points from 2023.

Figure 3: Percentage of services reporting nursing vacancies by local authority area
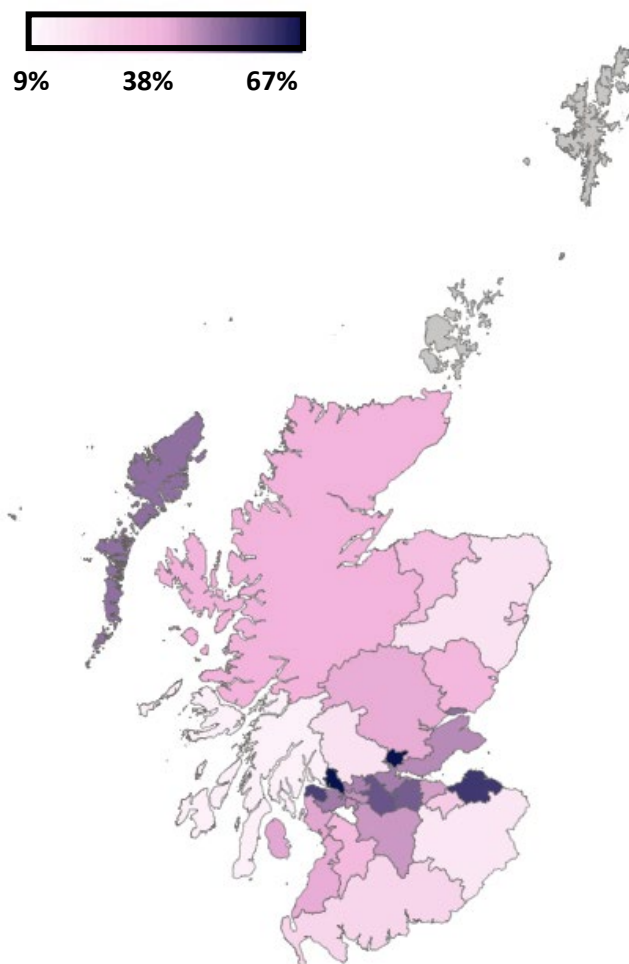

Figure 3 shows the percentage of services reporting nursing vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting nursing vacancies.

Rate of whole-time equivalent (WTE) nursing vacancies

(see tables 1r – 1v)

At 31 December 2024, the rate of WTE nursing vacancies for all services that employed nurses in Scotland was 7.2%, down from 12.4% in 2023.

Care homes for adults (9.7%) and care homes for older people (7.1%) had the highest rate of WTE nursing vacancies (of those service types with more than 10 services that employ nurses).

East Dunbartonshire (13.5%) and East Lothian (12.6%) had the highest rate of WTE nursing vacancies of all local authority areas.

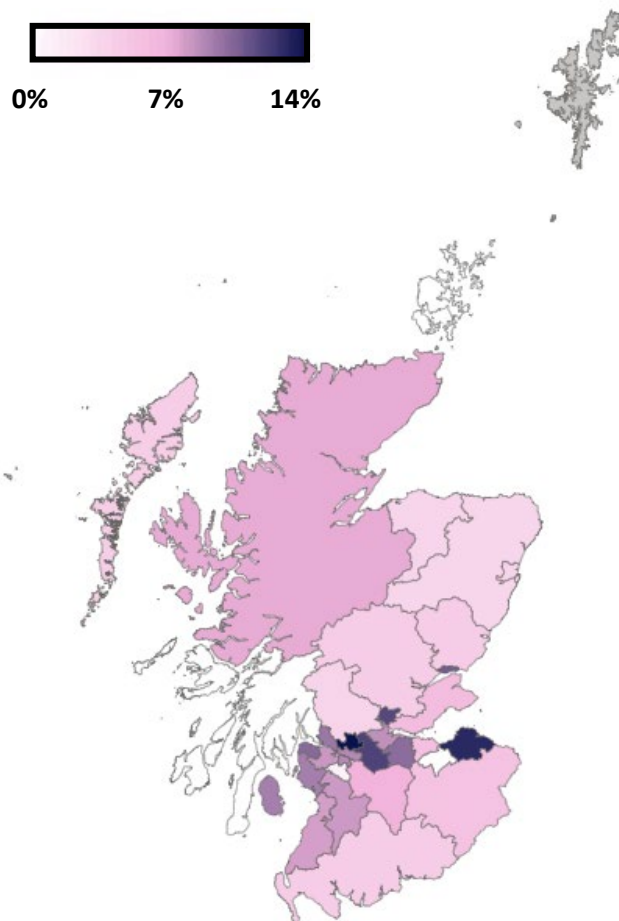Figure 4: Rate of WTE nursing vacancies by local authority area

Figure 4 shows the rate of WTE nursing vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the rate of WTE nursing vacancies.

Services reporting problems filling vacancies

(see tables 2a – 2f)

At 31 December 2024, 61% of services reported having problems filling their vacancies, down 2 percentage points on 2023. This varied by type of service and geographical area.

Housing support services (71%), care at home services (70%) and care homes for older people (69%) were all significantly above the national average for all care services. Although in these three service types, the percentage of services that report problems filling vacancies has reduced from last year.

East Dunbartonshire (79%), Argyll & Bute (76%), Midlothian (72%), Edinburgh (70%), and Highland (69%) were significantly higher than the national average.

Figure 5: Percentage of services reporting that vacancies were hard to fill by local authority area
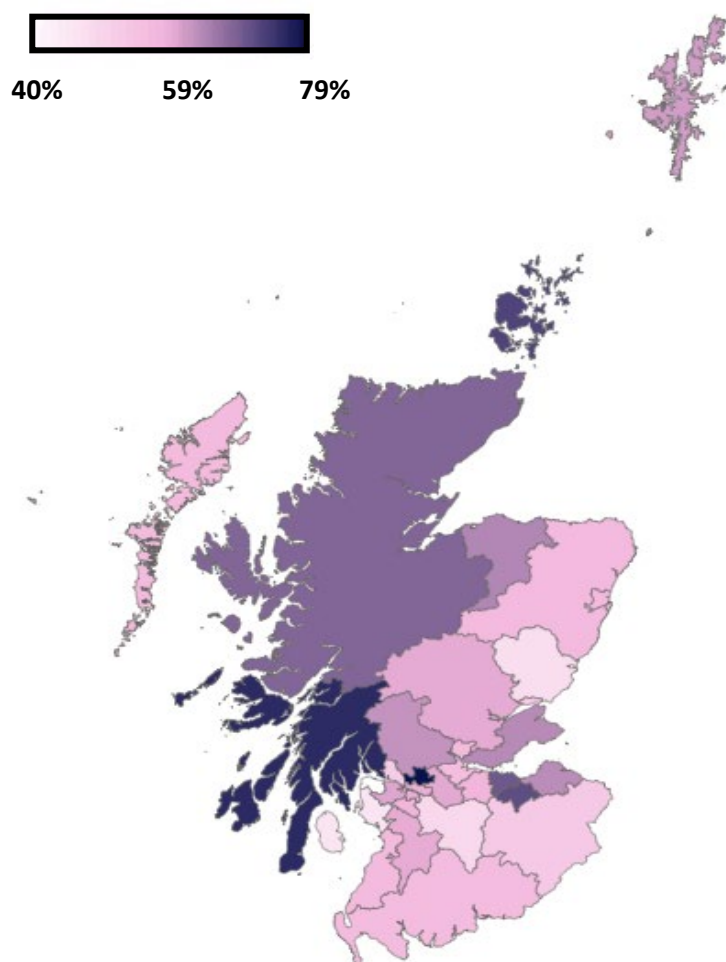

Figure 5 shows the percentage of services reporting that vacancies were hard to fill by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting that vacancies were hard to fill.

Reported reasons for vacancies being hard to fill

(see tables 3a – 3j)

Services were asked why they had found vacancies hard to fill. The following were the most commonly reported reasons.

Too few applicants with experience (63%), too few applicants in general (62%), and too few qualified applicants (53%) were the most common themes in service types that reported problems filling vacancies.

Sources and use of data in this report

The information in this report only relates to those services that completed an annual return. This includes services that were inactive but provided an annual return. We have not made statistical adjustments for those services that did not complete returns. In 2024, 92% of services (excluding childminders) completed an annual return with the required staffing information completed.

This report brings together data on the number of registered care services with a vacancy and data on whole-time equivalent vacancies reported by services. The data on the number of registered care services with a vacancy lets us see the proportion of services in local authority areas and service types impacted by them.

To avoid confusion, we use the Care Inspectorate's definitions for care services and their subtypes throughout in commentary. These definitions differ in some instances from those used by the SSSC (for example, care homes for children and young people and school care accommodation services). A comparison of the definitions the Care Inspectorate and the SSSC use for care services and subtypes is below. Full breakdowns of the vacancy data with the SSSC definitions are included in the Excel table files that come with this report.

SSSC to Care Inspectorate service type definitions

SSSC definition	Care Inspectorate definition
Subsector	**Service and service subtype**
Adoption	Adoption
Adult day care	Support service: other than care at home
Adult placement	Adult placement
Care homes for adults	Care home: adults Care home: older people
Childcare agency	Childcare agency
Day care of children	Daycare of children
Fostering	Fostering
Housing support/care at home	Housing support Support service: care at home
Nurse agency	Nurse agency
Offender accommodation	Offender accommodation
Residential childcare	Care home: children and young people School care accommodation: residential special Secure accommodation
School care accommodation	School care accommodation: mainstream

In the annual return, it was left for the care service to determine what a vacancy was defined as. The annual return did not provide any criteria to assist in this definition, so there will be variations between services in what they considered a vacancy. This is the same approach used in the Scottish Employer Skills report. Additionally, if a service provided a whole time equivalent (WTE) value for vacancies but replied 'No' to 'Did you have any staff vacancies at 31 December?' they were recategorised with a 'Yes' response.

Care services were left to define what 'hard' meant in the 'Have you found vacancies hard to fill?' question. No criteria were provided in the annual return to define 'hard', so there will be variations between services regarding the definition. This is the same approach used in the [Scottish Employer Skills report]. The reasons why services find it hard to fill vacancies are only shown for those services that said they found it hard to fill vacancies. Where services said they did not find it hard to fill vacancies, but have nonetheless answered the question about why they found it hard to fill them, we have recategorised their initial response to a 'Yes,' and the reasons they detailed for vacancies being hard to fill are included in all analyses.

When we use the term 'care services,' we mean services registered under the auspices of the [Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010]. These are mainly care homes, early learning and childcare, support services including care at home services, housing support services and day centres. The term also includes more specialist services such as fostering and adoption agencies, nurse agencies, childcare agencies, school care accommodation and other support services. These operate across the private, voluntary, and public sectors. Those in the voluntary and private sectors are often commissioned by the local authority or integration authority to provide care and support, but remain separate organisations and are responsible for their own recruitment.

Daycare of children is defined by the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 as a service that provides care for children on non-domestic premises for a total of more than two hours a day and on at least six days per year. This includes nurseries, crèches, school-age childcare[5] and playgroups. Daycare of children services, along with childminder services, collectively make up early learning and childcare services.

Where we refer to local authority areas in this report, we are referring to the totality of care services operating in the geographical area of the local authority, not just to those services directly provided by the local authority itself. Geographical analysis for housing support and care at home services was determined by the location of the service base. Due to the nature of these services, they may operate in other or additional local authority areas than where the service base is located. Housing support services may also be combined with care at home services and share the same staff. For this report, reporting on housing support services includes both sole housing support services and those combined with care at home services. Data for care at home services is just for sole care at home services. Note that, when asked about staff vacancies, nurse agencies and childcare agencies may include vacancies in terms of staffing their own service as well as the staff they supply to other services. Although we have included these figures in our analysis, these vacancies are different in nature to the vacancies reported by other types of service directly providing a care service.

---

[5] Previously referred to as out-of-school care

Within this report, the term 'significantly' is used to indicate when a result is outside the 95% confidence interval.

Managers of care services provided the information in this report. The Care Inspectorate has collected this information for a number of years and has high confidence in the reports from care service managers, who are usually directly responsible for recruitment processes and decisions. All information relates to 31 December of the year displayed. The questions asked in the annual return are the following.

Staffing vacancies

1. Did you have any staff vacancies at 31 December? (Yes, No, Not applicable)

2. How many WTE all staff vacancies did you have at 31 December?

3. How many WTE staff vacancies did you have at 31 December of staff who work directly with people who use services?

4. Have you found vacancies hard to fill? (Yes, No, Not applicable)

5. If 'Yes', why have you found them hard to fill?

   Options:

   a. Too few applicants

   b. Too few qualified applicants

   c. Too few applicants with experience

   d. Can't afford wage demands

   e. Reason unknown

   f. Competition from other service providers

   g. Competition from other types of work

   h. Cost of living in the area is too high

   i. Candidates unable to work the hours needed

   j. Other reason

6. If 'Other reason', please specify. (open response text box)

7. Please tell us what you consider to be the main reason why it is hard to fill vacancies. (dropdown list of options from Question 5)

8. If 'Other reason', please tell us what it is. (open response text box)

Nursing vacancies

1. Did you have any nursing post vacancies? (Yes, No, Not applicable)

2. How many WTE staff vacancies did you have at 31 December for nursing staff?

Website: www.careinspectorate.com

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.