



Staff vacancies in care services 2023

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HAPPY TO TRANSLATE

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Introduction

This Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2023 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 2023, and is based on information registered care services provided as part of their annual returns to the Care Inspectorate.

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

We know there are still many parts of the social service 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 2023:

- 48% of care services reported vacancies
- in 12 of the 32 local authority areas, 50% or more services reported vacancies.
- care at home services, housing support services, care homes for older people and care homes for adults¹ faced the most challenge filling vacancies.

The most common reasons for vacancies not being filled are too few applicants, too few applicants with experience 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 Scottish Government and others to help employers to recruit, retain and develop their staff.

We continue to work closely to support workforce planners in social services to meet these challenges. The SSSC publishes a range of statistics in support of workforce planning, including annual official statistics on the social services workforce. The most recent report on the whole workforce, the [Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2023 Workforce Data](#)² was published in August 2024. It shows a 0.6% growth in the sector's workforce between December 2022 and December 2023. Other publications are available on the [SSSC data website](#). The SSSC is working to provide more current data to workforce planners and now publishes data on [social worker-filled posts and vacancies](#) every six months.

A new data website will be developed in 2025/26 and will provide planners and others with more interactive data tools so they can easily access the specific data

¹ Includes only service types with more than 100 services

² Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2023 Workforce Data

they require. This will include access to more data from the [SSSC Register as well as the wider workforce data set](#).

The SSSC has published more of its Register data over the past couple of years, including [how many people are registered with the SSSC](#) and in which parts of the sector, data relating to [Fitness to Practise activity](#), and an [analysis of registrant equality data](#). Further publications are planned in 2025 including data relating to why people leave the sector, and a qualifications report. It is anticipated that providing a wider range of, and more detailed, workforce and registrant data will better support workforce planners and help them and others at a national and local level better understand the recruitment and retention issues in the sector.

A wider workforce survey was undertaken by the SSSC at the beginning of 2025 and provides all workers with an opportunity to share their thoughts on working in the sector, what works well for them, and what else is required. The results of the Having Your Say survey will be published later in 2025 and will be used to support a range of activities, including providing an evidence base for workforce wellbeing activity.

In addition to this existing activity, a new sub group of the Social Care Data and Intelligence Programme Group is being established in 2025 to focus on the collation and use of workforce data. It will be chaired by the SSSC and include a range of stakeholders interested in using workforce data to support planning and other activities.

The SSSC's careers website continues to provide information on getting started in the sector and tools and guidance for employers. The SSSC has, with partners, developed new guidance to support employers in the recruitment of 16 and 17-year-olds and this will be published early in 2025. Further career stories from people working in the sector have been added to the website and more are planned, including from refugees and asylum seekers who now work in the sector.

A Career Opportunities Tool for social care workers has been developed and will be available on the careers website from spring 2025. It will provide workers with information on different roles in social care, the requirements for these roles, and how to develop careers across social care.

The SSSC provides support via our education and workforce development activity. The SSSC's model of Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) has been revised and now includes mandatory and core learning for SSSC-registered workers. A CPL website provides access to a range of resources to support registrants with their learning, and this is aligned to the SSSC's Learning Zone.

A new National Induction Framework for adult social care workers has been developed and will be published in 2025. It sets out induction requirements, linked to National Occupational Standards, and provides access to learning resources which help workers to develop the knowledge and skills they require in each area. The learning will be recorded via the SSSC's MyLearning app so that learners can take their learning from one employer to another rather than having to do it again, saving the learner and employer valuable time and resources.

The SSSC has revised the qualification requirements for registered workers to allow more flexibility and acceptance of benchmark qualifications across the Register. These have been in place since summer 2024 and there is evidence of them being used by workers. The new integrated health and social care qualification is also now

available. It is hoped that this flexibility, along with the new CPL model and induction framework, will help to improve retention levels across the workforce.

Additionally, the supported first year in practice for newly qualified social workers ([NQSWs](#)) is now in place and provides new social workers with more structured support and learning at the beginning of their careers.

Further support for achieving qualifications, specifically in support of adult social care where vacancy levels are high, has been a specific focus of activity for the SSSC and its partners in 2024 and continues into 2025. A group of stakeholders is developing a plan, based on evidence from the sector of skills needs in adult social care, focusing on how to access more funding for qualifications, developing system capacity and delivery models, and developing different approaches to learning.

SSSC data shows that a number of people in team leader or first line manager roles require support to complete qualifications. The SSSC has developed and is delivering a series of supervision events for this group in 2025. It is hoped that this will help them to feel more confident in their supervision role, provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to be more effective supervisors, and positively impact retention for this group and those they supervise. As part of the discussion, feedback is being obtained on what further supervision support is required and this will be used to revise the content of the SSSC's supervision resource in 2025.

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 and support the whole social care sector in the implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. 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 desktop application at: [Right Decisions Service](#).

We work with providers, sector staff and partner agencies to support the development and publication of learning resources that keep people informed and up-to-date. In Autumn 2024, for example, 1,024 people participated in a series of webinars for the Adult, Children and Young People, and Early Learning and Childcare sectors.

The SSSC supports our work with the whole social care sector. For example, we developed an open badge award to enable staff to increase their knowledge and capability about safe and effective staffing that is appropriate to their role. The open badge is a digital certificate which recognises learning and achievement. [CI Safe and effective staffing - SSSC MyLearning](#)

In 2024, the SSSC and NHS Education Scotland (NES) also supported two cohorts of the Care Experience Improvement Model in adult care homes (CHIP). 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. [Care Home Improvement Programme | Care Inspectorate Hub](#)

The Care Inspectorate also worked with colleagues from SSSC to test the devolved delivery of the Scottish Improvement Foundations Skills (SIFS) programme in one health board area.

We work with other agencies to ensure new guidance and standards inform social care practice. We are commissioned to lead a quality improvement programme, Meaningful Connection ([Anne's Law](#)) 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 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.

Our 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 developed guidance and 'self-evaluation tools for quality improvement' and are testing methodology for self-evaluation in adult services. This is designed to support care services to evaluate their own performance.

We meet with staff to help them understand our process, provide support for improvement, provide professional advice, encourage the sharing of experience and signpost to good practice.

This 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 care, its workforce and how it is funded. We will continue to play our part in promoting this.

Jackie Irvine
Chief Executive
Care Inspectorate

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Chief Executive
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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 31 December 2023, there were just over 11,013 registered services providing care and support for children, young people, adults, and older people across Scotland. 3,225 of these services were childminders, which are not included in this report. The remaining services employed an estimated 190,470² staff – an increase of 0.6% on the previous year's estimate. The social service workforce (registered care service staff including childminders and also social work staff) makes up approximately 8.1% of all Scottish employment³.

Services reporting vacancies

(See tables 1a – 1f)

At 31 December 2023, 48% of services reported having vacancies. The last available comparison for the wider labour market, the Scottish Government's Employer Skills Survey in 2022, which covers all types of employers, found that 25% of all establishments across all sectors in Scotland reported having a vacancy⁴.

The percentage of care services reporting vacancies has remained stable over the past three years: it decreased by 1 percentage point over the last year but was up 1 percentage point from 2021. 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 2021⁵.

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

Care homes for older people (74% of services), housing support services (69% of services), care at home services (67% of services), care homes for adults (68% of services) and care homes for children and young people (56% 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.

Midlothian (59% of services), Orkney (57% of services) Edinburgh, Clackmannanshire, Dundee (all 56% of services) and North Lanarkshire (55% of services) had the highest proportion of services with vacancies of all local authority areas. Midlothian, Edinburgh, Dundee, and North Lanarkshire had a significantly

3 SSSC: Scottish Social Service Sector: Report on 2023 Workforce Data

4 Scottish Government: Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2022

5 Care Inspectorate: Staff Vacancies in Care Services 2021 [Staff vacancies 2021.pdf](#)

higher proportion of services with vacancies than the national average for all care services.

Scottish Borders (38% of services), East Renfrewshire and Na h-Eileanan Siar (both 39% of services) and Highland (41% of services) had the lowest proportion of services with vacancies of all local authority areas. 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

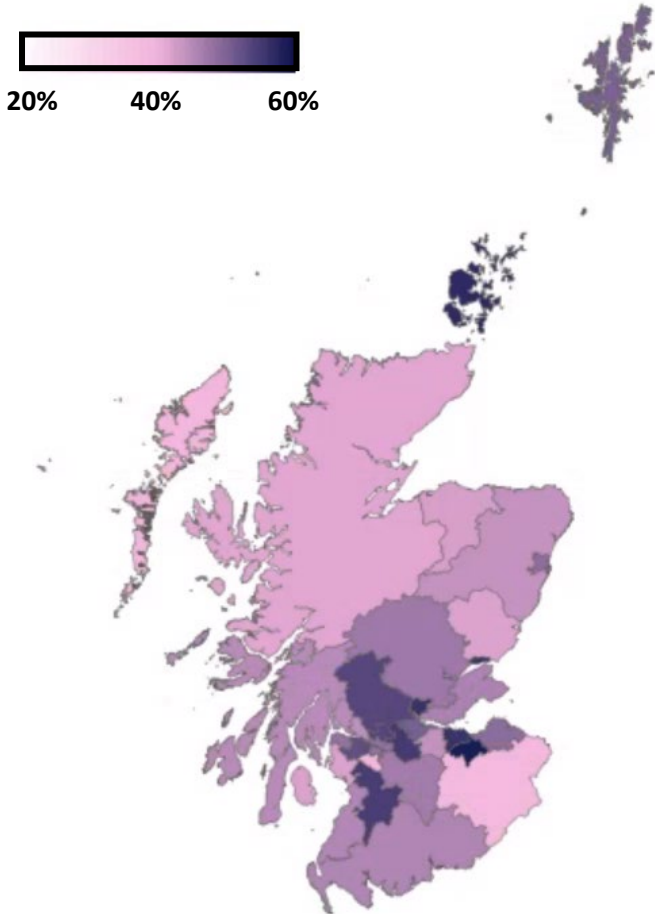


Figure 1 shows the percentage of services reporting staff vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting vacancies.

Rate of whole-time equivalent (WTE) vacancies

(see tables 1g – 1k)

At 31 December 2023, the rate of WTE vacancies per 100 WTE workforce for all services in Scotland was 7.5%, down from 8.7% in 2022. This was higher than the overall vacancy rate across all establishments in Scotland of 4.8% reported in the Scottish Government’s Employer Skills Survey 2022.

Nurse agency services (25.0%), care at home services (10.2%), housing support services (9.5%) and childcare agencies (58.3%), although relating to a small number of services, had a significantly higher rate of WTE vacancies than the national average.

Figure 2: Rate of WTE vacancies by local authority area

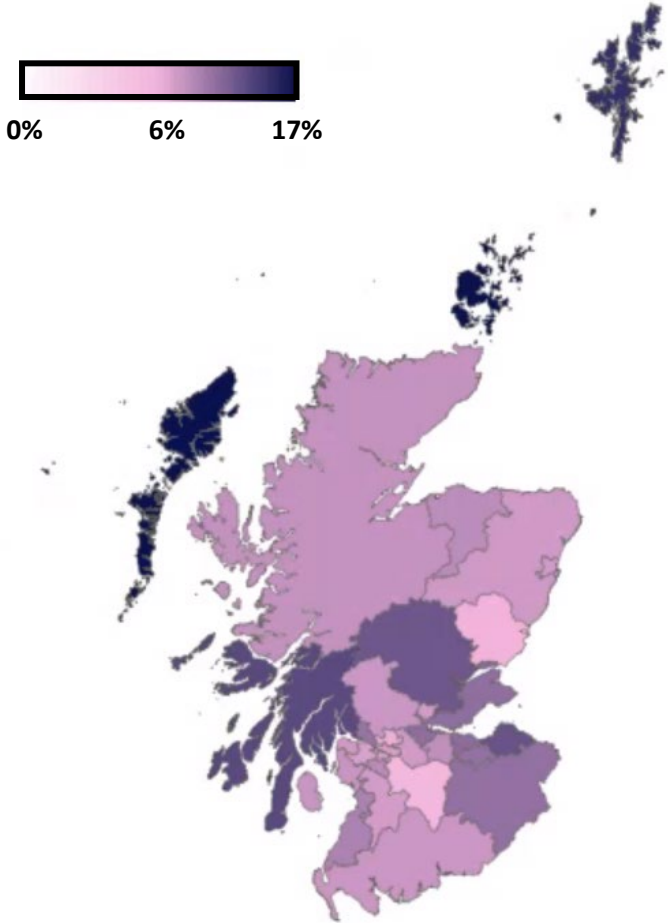


Figure 2 shows the rate WTE vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the rate of WTE vacancies.

Nurse vacancies

(see tables 1l – 1q)

At 31 December 2023, 52% of services reported having nursing vacancies (where services employed nurses). This was a decrease of 9 percentage points on the proportion of services with nursing vacancies at 31 December 2022 (61%).

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, 56% of services reported nursing vacancies a decrease of 9 percentage points from 2022. In nurse agency services 47% of services reported a nursing vacancy, a decrease of 21 percentage points from 2022.

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

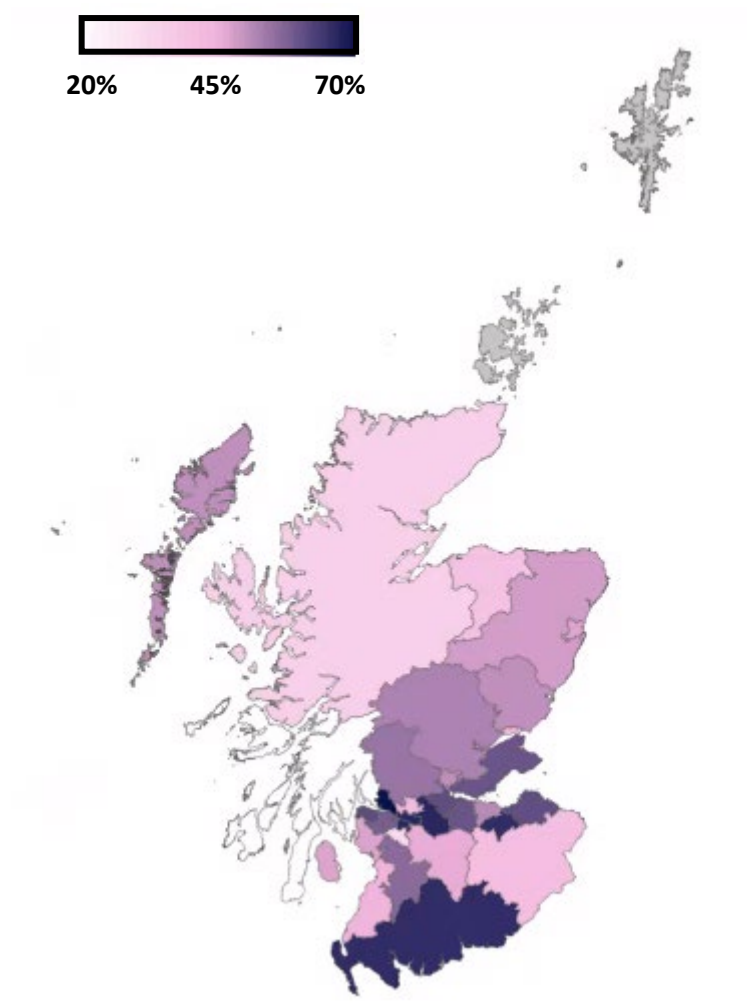


Figure 3 shows the percentage of services reporting nursing vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting nursing vacancies.

Rate of whole-time equivalent (WTE) nursing vacancies

(see tables 1r – 1v)

At 31 December 2023, the rate of WTE nursing vacancies for all services (where services employed nurses) in Scotland was 12.4%, down from 17.4% in 2022.

Care homes for older people (12.5%) and care homes for adults (11.2%) had the highest rate of WTE nursing vacancies (of those service types with more than 10 services that employ nurses).

Glasgow (21.4%) and Renfrewshire (21.2%) had the highest rate of WTE nursing vacancies of all local authority areas.

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

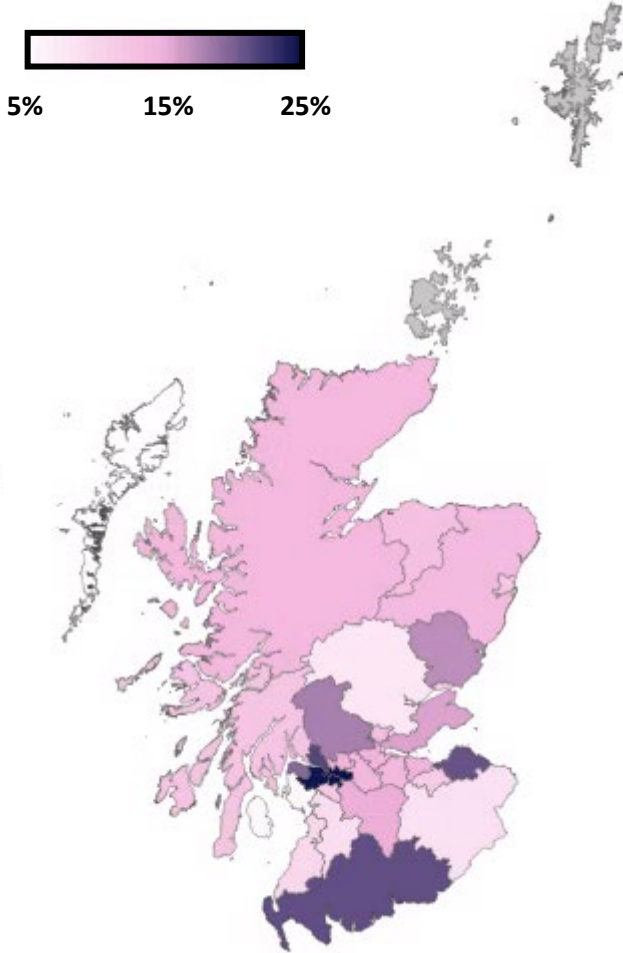


Figure 4 shows the rate of WTE nursing vacancies by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the rate of WTE nursing vacancies.

Services reporting problems filling vacancies

(see tables 2a – 2f)

At 31 December 2023, 63% of services reported having problems filling their vacancies, the same proportion as in 2022. This varied by type of service and geographical area.

Care at home services (77%), housing support services (75%), care homes for older people (73%) and care homes for adults (71%) were all significantly above the national average for all care services.

East Dunbartonshire (75%), Argyll & Bute (75%), Edinburgh (73%) and Fife (70%) were significantly higher than the national average.

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

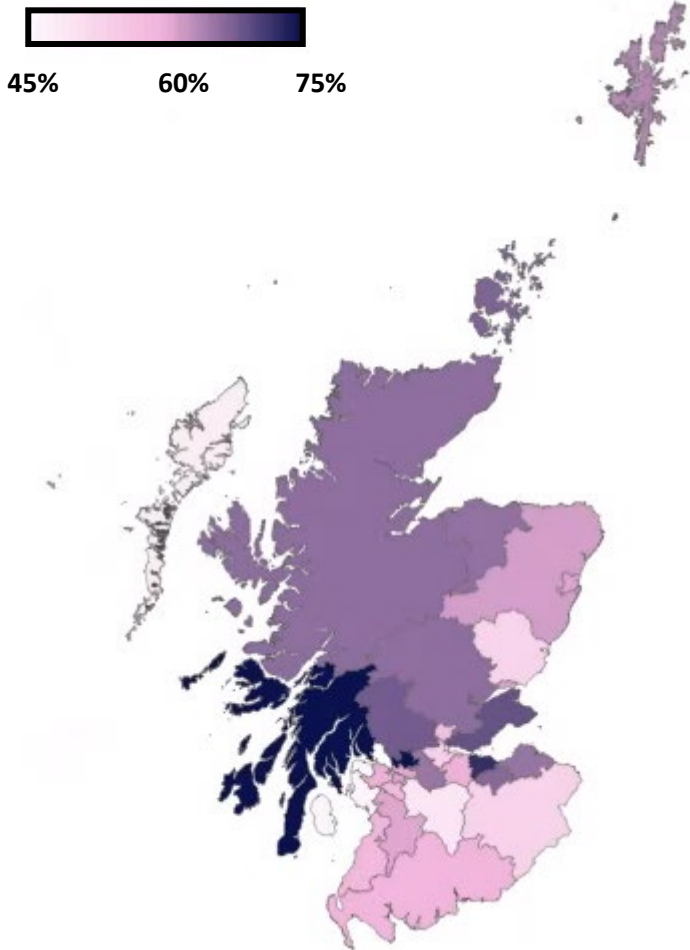


Figure 5 shows the percentage of services reporting that vacancies were hard to fill by local authority area. The darker the shade, the higher the percentage of services reporting that vacancies were hard to fill.

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 in general (66%), too few applicants with experience (63%), and too few qualified applicants (53%) were the most common themes within most 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 2023, 94% 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 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 funded places but remain separate organisations and as employers 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, out-of-school care 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 generally 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.

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?

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