

Assessment of compliance with the Code of  
Practice for Statistics

# **Statistics about the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England**

(produced by Skills for Care)

## Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of government statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those found to comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code are given accredited official statistics status (called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007). We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

# Introduction

## Background to the statistics

- 1.1 Skills for Care is a charitable organisation providing freely accessible statistics on adult social care for the benefit of the public. Skills for Care asked the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) to assess its statistics on [the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England](#) against the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). After taking over the publication of these official statistics from NHS Digital (now NHS England) in 2021, Skills for Care was named as an official statistics producer in the [Official Statistics Order 2023](#) and is demonstrating its commitment to produce statistics that meet the standards required of [accredited official statistics](#).
- 1.2 The statistics being assessed include information on staff employed (directly and indirectly) by local authorities in England. Specifically, data are submitted to the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set by local authorities who provide adult social care services to members of the public. The latest official statistics relate to workers in post as of September 2023. Data are published at various geographic levels covering the workforce size and selected characteristics, such as:
  - gender
  - age
  - turnover rates and starter rates
  - vacancy rates
  - mean number of sickness days
  - care workers' pay
- 1.3 The users we spoke to widely valued the statistics. Local government and NHS bodies use them to understand the composition and trends of the adult social care workforce at both local and national levels. Central government bodies use the data to monitor recruitment policy, for example, the employment of staff from other countries. The data are used to benchmark local authorities, to perform workforce projections and for planning by central government, local government, NHS commissioners and service providers. Organisations like think tanks and lobby organisation also use the statistics to perform research and answer media queries.
- 1.4 The statistics are published in a variety of formats, including an annual pdf report, data tables and a downloadable PowerPoint. These publications include several different charts, diagrams and tables to help users to visualise the data.

## Adult social care statistics in England

- 1.5 Statistics on the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England are part of the wider statistics on the adult social care sector in England. In early 2020, OSR published the [Report on Adult Social Care Statistics in England](#). In

this report, we note that adult social care is a major public policy area being developed in the absence of adequate statistics, provided free of charge. We consider that the most impactful long-term solution to improve the coverage and quality of social care statistics would be a transformation of the social care data collection and analysis systems. Modernising data collection systems provides the opportunity to reduce the burden on data suppliers, speeding up data processing for secondary uses and the publication of statistics.

- 1.6 Since 2006, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has commissioned Skills for Care to collect and publish data on adult social care providers and their workforces. This data collection is called the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (WDS). Skills for Care publishes several [statistical reports and analyses](#) using data from the WDS. In 2021, Skills for Care took over responsibility for publishing official statistics on the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England from NHS Digital (now NHS England).
- 1.7 Other statistical publications by Skills for Care include its comprehensive report, [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#), which provides information about independent providers, as well as the local authority sector. While not the subject of this assessment, Skills for Care notes that the independent provider sector's overall participation rate in the WDS is low at around 50%, which could indicate problems with the mechanisms for collecting adult social care workforce data for secondary use.
- 1.8 Since multiple organisations are involved in collecting and processing data in the adult social care sector in England, individual organisations need to work together to improve statistics on adult social care. To assist this effort, Skills for Care's Lead Official sits on DHSC's Provider Data Advisory Group. This collaboration enables Skills for Care to work with other organisations in the sector in England, such as the Care Quality Commission and DHSC, who are trying to find a way forward to improve data collection across the sector.

## Next steps

- 1.9 We have identified three requirements that Skills for Care needs to address for its statistics on the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England to become accredited official statistics. Skills for Care intends to meet these requirements by February 2025, when the next release will be published.

## List of Requirements

**Requirement 1:** To ensure that users remain at the centre of statistical production, Skills for Care should be clearer about how it considers user input, informing users openly about how their views will or will not be acted upon.

**Requirement 2:** To increase transparency around its processes, resources and stakeholder relationships to support its role as an official statistics producer, Skills for Care should:

- publish details of its statistical governance structures and processes
- engage with stakeholders to develop its statistical work and plans for improvement, including how it can improve the comparability of adult social care workforce statistics across the UK
- publish its statistical work programme

**Requirement 3:** To be open and reduce user confusion, Skills for Care should review its statistics and metadata to ensure that they are presented clearly, and consistent terminology is used throughout.

## Findings

### Acting on user feedback

- 2.1 The commentary is presented impartially throughout the statistics report and supported by appropriate tables and charts to aid understanding. The report provides insightful information on the adult social care workforce employed by social services departments. The users we spoke to appreciate the detailed commentary provided. However, some users identified where they would like to see more data for further insight into the adult social care workforce, such as data on the gender pay gap. Other users mentioned that the timeliness of the annual survey does not meet their needs. The Workforce Intelligence team responsible for publishing the statistics has welcomed the additional user insights we have provided as part of this assessment as they cover views that have not been previously shared with the team. We are reassured by the team's commitment to reach out to more users and consider how it can respond to this user feedback.
- 2.2 Before we assessed these statistics, Skills for Care published trend information, not the back series of data. Following the user feedback that we gathered during this assessment, the Workforce Intelligence team has adjusted and published the back series of data with current methods and variables to allow for comparability. Skills for Care acts as its own archive, and more-granular datasets using back series of raw data are available for academic research upon request. Following feedback from users during this assessment, the team has collated and published a [data directory](#) to allow users to understand what data are available for academic research before they make a request.
- 2.3 The users of statistics and data should be at the centre of statistical production. We expect producers of official statistics to provide the means for users to meaningfully engage with them in open and constructive ways. Skills for Care engages with stakeholders through regular meetings, ad hoc meetings and social media. It also asks users for feedback in the statistics report and on the statistics landing page. Users were content with the amount of interaction they had with the Workforce Intelligence team members and found them helpful when answering queries or providing information.
- 2.4 Skills for Care recently explored user needs with a comprehensive stakeholder survey, but it has not transparently set out how it will act on stakeholders' views.

Pages 4 and 5 of the statistical report contain generic information on the users and uses of the data, but these pages should provide more information about the wide range of users and uses for the data. An analysis of the recent stakeholder survey could provide the Workforce Intelligence team with more-detailed information about users and uses and enable it to update this part of the statistical report.

- 2.5 The Workforce Intelligence team is considering the actions arising from the stakeholder survey findings that might affect the statistics. The team told us that the feedback from the survey will feed into its business plan and that some of the proposed actions include improving the current website. We expect that users would welcome website improvements, since some said that they found the website confusing to navigate.

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## Ensuring continuing statistical improvement

- 2.6 Skills for Care has assigned a Lead Official whose role is to uphold and advocate the standards of the Code, strive to improve statistics and data for the public good and challenge their inappropriate use. In order to receive expert independent advice, the Lead Official at Skills for Care has established a professional relationship with the new Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) during this assessment.
- 2.7 Organisations should have effective business processes and appropriate resources to support their statistical functions and be open about their plans, priorities and progress. Skills for Care operates as a charitable body that is commissioned by DHSC to collect and publish data on the adult social care workforce in England. Skills for Care and DHSC maintain a strong relationship with an open dialogue. Skills for Care acts promptly to implement necessary changes to data collection and handle data in a trustworthy manner. Any changes to the contractual relationship between DHSC and Skills for Care should be handled carefully to ensure continuity and quality.
- 2.8 Official statistics on the adult social care workforce are also published by other governments across the UK and can be accessed using this [interactive data toolkit](#). The Government Analytical Function has published an [analysis](#) of several statistics about adult social care, noting whether or not the data can be compared across the UK. For workforce data, the statistics are not directly comparable. The Lead Official is establishing a working relationship with the cross-UK group for Adult Social Care statistics to be part of discussions about data comparability in the future.
- 2.9 Skills for Care published an organisational [strategy](#), but it does not mention the production of official statistics, nor the governance structure in place to support this work. It is therefore difficult to understand the relative importance of the publication of official statistics within Skills for Care's portfolio of work and how it is overseen. Additionally, a published work programme, developed with stakeholders, could help to manage users' expectations about how future developments are being prioritised and what further value can be obtained from the statistics, for example, by

considering how to improve the comparability of statistics about the adult social care workforce across the UK.

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## Methods and quality information

- 2.10 Skills for Care curates and develops the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set to provide information about the adult social care workforce and providers in England to meet user needs. The Workforce Intelligence team told us it is working with a team of data scientists and coders to process and publish its data using [reproducible analytical pipelines](#). The aim of this development work is to reduce the time taken to process data and speed up publication to meet a wider range of user needs, which is good practice.
- 2.11 Producers of statistics should provide information about the sources and methods used for statistics production, the reasons for their selection, their strengths and limitations, and measures taken to assure their quality. The Workforce Intelligence team recently reviewed and improved the [methodology](#) document that is published to describe all their statistics. Section 1.1 of the methodology document relates to the collection of data from local authorities with adult social services responsibilities. The methodology document includes a process map which shows the steps taken to produce the statistics, from data collection to publication, identifying any risk points throughout the process and explaining the actions that are taken to ensure the quality of the statistics at these points. The data processing is clearly described and illustrated, with working examples throughout.
- 2.12 The statistics report tells users which data have undergone minor revisions. Appropriate statistical disclosure controls are applied to the data to prevent the identification of individuals. For example, users are told within both the statistics report and the methodology document that the data are rounded.
- 2.13 In line with our expectations around [communicating these types of uncertainties within the data](#), the authors of the statistics report highlight the limitations and strengths of the data collection, and their treatment of biases and errors due to sampling. The users we spoke to were generally happy with the quality of the statistics and were aware of the limitations of the data. The Workforce Intelligence team makes use of alternative approaches and wider sources to inform areas of missing data and makes efforts to measure the impact of varying levels of question response.
- 2.14 The annual completion of some variables, but not others, is mandatory for authorities with adult social services responsibilities. However, the statistics report does not make clear which variables are part of the mandatory collection and which

are not. For transparency and to aid the use of the data, we suggest that the statistical report and data tables in the next round of publication should explain more clearly which data are counts and which are estimates.

- 2.15 In the glossary of the methodology document, 'coverage' is defined as the proportion of establishments that have provided some data and indicates the participation rate in the overall survey. The 'completion rate' is defined as the proportion of establishments that have responded to a particular question. However, the text prominently refers to an undefined term – 'response rates' – when describing 'completion rates'. This is confusing for readers, as beyond this survey 'response rate' is commonly understood to mean the participation rate in an overall survey. Skills for Care should define and use a consistent term in the text.

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