

Demand for Social Workers

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Executive summary

This report examines data from a range of sources on the supply and demand for social workers in Scotland. It begins with admissions and completions from social work training courses and looks at the numbers who then register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) as newly qualified social workers (NQSWs). It then considers the total number on the Register and the numbers employed as practising social workers (PSWs) by local authorities. Sections 4 and 5 consider drivers of demand and projected numbers of social workers required in the future. The final section provides some conclusions and suggestions for action.

Key findings

The number of completions from qualifying social work courses in Scotland has fallen for the last five years in succession (2013-2018). This has been driven by the fall in admissions seen between 2009-2015 which in turn appears to be related to the closure of two undergraduate courses within the last eight years.

Analysis of what happens to new social work graduates in Scotland found that within two years of graduation seven out of eight (87.4%) register with us as NQSWs. By six years after graduation three-quarters of them (75%) were still registered as NQSWs or social workers.

The overall number of people registered as social workers declined by 4% between 2014 and 2018. It fell by a further 2.2% between January 2018 and January 2019. This means there are over 840 fewer social work registrants than there were five years ago.

The headcount and whole time equivalent (WTE) of local authority PSWs rose by 32% between 2002/03 and 2009/10 to an all-time high. From 2009/10 to 2017/18 the growth was 2%. The number and WTE of support staff in local authority fieldwork teams has fallen by 29% since 2008, while the number of social work assistants has remained almost the same.

Vacancy rates for PSWs (5.7%) are not historically high but are nearly double the average for the Scottish economy (3.1%). Retention rates for PSWs are typical of the sector as a whole.

There is an increasingly large group (19%) of PSWs who are aged over 55 and similar growth in those under 35.

1 Introduction

This report examines data on the supply, stock and demand for social workers primarily within local authorities. It begins with a discussion of the supply of social workers to the sector before looking at what we know about their employment, drawing on data from the SSSC Register and our annual survey of local authority social work staff. It then looks at demand for social workers. At the end of each of these main sections there are summaries of the key points identified. The final section provides the first stage of a scenario on the numbers of social workers required in the future.

This is one of a series of reports produced by the SSSC on demand of social workers every two years since 2012 but is the first to be published.

2 Supply of social workers

This section of the report looks at the supply of social workers to the sector. It looks at data on the numbers training to be social workers and the numbers who then register as NQSWs. It is important to note there is no government regulation of the number of places available to study for a social work qualification and no control of intake targets, as there is for many health professions.

2.1 Social work training – background

During 1996-2003 local authorities experienced significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining PSWs. Between 1996/97 and 2002/03 on average 394 people qualified as social workers each year in Scotland. Social work vacancies grew substantially during this period reaching a high of 13% in October 2003. To tackle the problems of recruitment and retention the Scottish Executive introduced the 'fast track initiative' and other measures to increase the number of people undertaking social work training. There were four cohorts of fast track students with the final intake of trainees starting in 2006/7. This led to a jump in admissions from approximately 450 per year to 700 and a corresponding increase in the numbers qualifying.

2.1.1 Admissions and completions

The data in table 1 gives a breakdown of the numbers of people starting and completing a social work training course from 2003/04 to 2017/18. There are two types of courses; a four-year honours degree and a two-year postgraduate course. We gather data on all of these annually as part of the quality assurance process for approved social work courses. The table covers the 15-year period from the beginning of fast track to the most recent year we have data for.

Table 1: Social work training admissions and qualifications 2003-2018

Year	Admissions	Qualifications
2003/04	787	422
2004/05	696	512
2005/06	639	702
2006/07	697	685
2007/08	721	564
2008/09	647	500
2009/10	702	509
2010/11	682	518
2011/12	618	552
2012/13	618	518
2013/14	564	529
2014/15	572	486
2015/16	568	478
2016/17	634	452
2017/18	596	432

Source: SSSC

The high number of admissions in the early years of the period covered in the table reflects the fast track and similar initiatives to boost numbers of social workers. In the first five years of the period the average number of admissions was 708 per year, in the next five years the average had dropped slightly to 653. In the last five years admissions have been above 600 only once and have averaged 587. The declining trend in admissions has led to falls in the number of people qualifying. In 2017/18, 432 qualified, almost the same as the number of graduates at the start of the period in 2003/04. Two new postgraduate courses have been approved in the last couple of years which should increase capacity in the system.

2.1.2 Numbers of courses and places

We now look in more detail at the undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In 2007/08 there were 11 undergraduate social work courses that admitted students and six postgraduate courses. In 2018/19 there are now nine and eight respectively. There is currently only one part time postgraduate course.

Table 2 below shows the number and percentage of undergraduate and postgraduate course admissions from 2007/08 (the first year after fast track) to 2017/18. Overall postgraduate admissions fluctuated little, staying close to 185 per annum +/-20 throughout the period. Undergraduate admissions on the other hand have fallen from over 500 at the start of the period to less than 400. In the five years from 2013/14 onwards undergraduate admissions have been 400 or less, apart from 2016/17. 2017/18 saw postgraduate admissions make up their greatest share of admissions at just over one-third (34.4%).

Table 2: number of admissions to social work courses each year by the number and percentage which are postgraduate (PG) or undergraduate (UG), 2007-18

	PG	UG	Total	%PG	%UG
2007-08	205	516	721	28.4	71.6
2008-09	173	474	647	26.7	73.3
2009-10	197	505	702	28.1	71.9
2010-11	199	484	683	29.1	70.9
2011-12	210	408	618	34.0	66.0
2012-13	195	423	618	31.6	68.4
2013-14	165	400	565	29.2	70.8
2014-15	178	394	572	31.1	68.9
2015-16	181	387	568	31.9	68.1
2016-17	194	440	634	30.6	69.4
2017-18	205	391	596	34.4	65.6

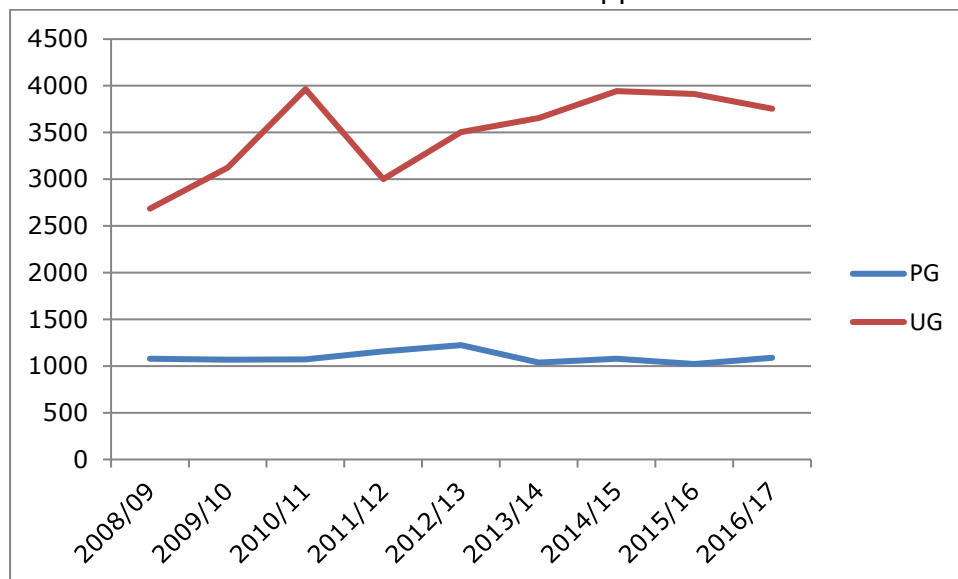
Source: SSSC

2.1.3 Applications

Chart 1 and table 3 show numbers and percentages of applications to undergraduate and postgraduate courses between 2008 and 2017 (the most recent data available at the time of writing). The data comes from each of the courses on the number of applications they received. As applicants can apply for more than one course it is not possible to say how many actual applicants there were each year.

As can be seen from the chart, postgraduate applications have stayed relatively constant throughout the nine-year period with the exception of 2011/12 and 2012/13. They have averaged 1,092 per year. Undergraduate applications on the other hand have fluctuated more and have averaged 3,505 per year.

Chart 1 UG and PG social work course applications 2008/17



Source: SSSC

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of UG and PG applications 2008-17

	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
PG	1080	1069	1073	1158	1224	1037	1079	1022	1088
UG	2685	3123	3964	3002	3506	3654	3945	3914	3754
Total	3765	4192	5037	4160	4730	4691	5024	4936	4842
% PG	28.7	25.5	21.3	27.8	25.9	22.1	21.5	20.7	22.5
% UG	71.3	74.5	78.7	72.2	74.1	77.9	78.5	79.3	77.5

Source: SSSC

Given that the number of postgraduate students, applications and courses (until recently) has stayed relatively constant it appears that the fall in the number of undergraduate courses is the main reason for the fall in overall admissions. While the number of postgraduate courses has increased, the number of postgraduate bursaries has remained constant, though bursaries are not currently available for part time postgraduate students. The impact of this has been to slightly reduce the proportion of postgraduate students on each postgraduate course who receive bursary support and increase the proportion of self-funding students. We are currently reviewing postgraduate bursaries with a view to maximising the impact of this funding across the programmes.

2.1.4 NQSWs

Once someone successfully qualifies as a social worker, they must then register with us as a NQSW in order to practise in Scotland. They stay a NQSW for between three to six years, depending on whether they work full time or part time, before becoming registered as a social worker.

Table 4 provides a snapshot of the Register in November 2018. It gives a breakdown of the registration status of all students who graduated¹ during the calendar years 2012 to 2018. (Please note, as the data is based on calendar years it is not wholly comparable with the data in table 6 which is based on academic years.)

¹ This was based on the date of removal from the student register where the removal reason was student completed course.

Table 4: Registration of social work students who qualified each year 2012-2018

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
NQSW (full time)	6	16	12	156	266	230	175
NQSW (full time) + other parts	1	0	3	11	16	26	18
NQSW (part time)	1	7	7	31	107	79	34
NQSW (part time) + other parts	0	1	1	4	8	8	8
Social workers	385	406	336	199	1	3	5
Social workers + other parts	21	23	11	7	0	0	1
Not registered	114	104	92	76	60	64	174
Single part (not social worker)	12	15	17	22	12	20	36
Multi - not social workers	9	3	5	7	5	4	18
Total	549	575	484	513	475	434	469
% registered as social workers/NQSW	75.4	78.8	76.4	79.5	83.8	79.7	51.4
% registered	79.2	81.9	81.0	85.2	87.4	85.3	62.9
% not registered	20.8	18.1	19.0	14.8	12.6	14.7	37.1

Source: SSSC Register

As might be expected the year with the fewest graduates so far registered is 2018. Most students will have graduated in the latter half of 2018 and the process of re-registering would not have been completed in all cases by November. There is in fact a higher percentage of graduates from 2017 not registered than is the case for 2016. The reasons for this are not clear. The latter is the high point with 84% registered as a social worker or NQSW and 87% registered in total. Looking at those who graduated pre-2016 we can see the percentage registered as a social worker declines almost year on year so that just 75% of those who graduated in 2012 are still on the Register as a social worker or NQSW, with 79% registered in total.

One thing that does seem clear is that not all social work graduates will register with us. If we assume that 2016 is a typical high point, then it appears that as many as one in eight will not register. The reasons for this are not known but it is likely to include some students who come from outwith Scotland returning to their home nation to work. The numbers of students from outwith Scotland is not currently recorded nationally. We know from work we conducted in November 2017 on our Register data that 1.7% of social work registrants at had an award achieved outside the UK.

2.1.5 Support for NQSWs

We are keen to make sure that Scotland has a professional social service workforce supported by good quality learning and development opportunities. The Scottish Government, in their **Vision and Strategy for Social Services in**

Scotland, recognise that 'excellent social work services depend on supporting and sustaining a skilled, valued and resilient workforce' (2015).

One of the outcomes of the Review of Social Work Education, was to establish a supported year in practice for NQSWs. In 2017, a draft NQSW Standard was developed and in 2018 three pilot sites were identified to pilot this and associated assessment methods. Existing intelligence from sector engagement and SSSC commissioned research, including **Post Qualifying Learning in Social Work in Scotland: A research study** SSSC (2019), indicated that support to NQSWs is variable. While there are pockets of excellent practice, protected learning time which is currently a requirement of post registration training and learning (PRTL) for NQSWs is not always in place. There is an external evaluation of the pilots and the findings will inform the national model for a supported and assessed year in practice for NQSW that we will consult on during 2019/20.

At the present time, there is no time series data available in Scotland on work-based experiences, professional development and retention of NQSWs as they progress in their careers. Scotland lacks important information on how new social workers experience professional socialisation and how professional development is supported. In 2016 we commissioned a five-year longitudinal study on NQSWs which aims to incrementally develop a national picture of how NQSWs experience and navigate their first years in practice. We've published two interim reports on the research.

2.2 Key points

- The number of new social work graduates has been falling for some years.
- This parallels earlier falls in admissions to social work programmes.
- The rise in admissions seen in 2016/17 was not sustained in 2017/18 when admissions fell by 6% to fewer than 600.
- The number of students qualifying as social workers each year has fallen by 23% since 2007/08.
- Roughly seven out of eight social work graduates had registered us within two years of graduation.
- Around six years after graduation 75% of graduates were still registered as a social worker.
- A number of existing developments to support and retain NQSWs are underway including pilots of a supported year and research into the experiences of NQSWs.
- A review of the postgraduate bursaries is underway.

3 The stock of existing social workers

3.1 Social work registrants' employment status

Details of the employment of social workers are captured at the point they register with us and should be updated by the registrant when there is a change. The figures in table 5 present data on social work registrants according to what we know of their employment status. We've extracted data as part of an internal report every other year since 2012.

Table 5: Headcount and percentage of social work registrants by employment status in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018

	2012	2014	2016	2018
Social services – local authority	8,100	8,281	8,242	8,416
% Social services - local authority	73.8	72.1	72.2	76.6
Social services - other	2,092	2,192	2,040	1,681
% Social services - other	19.1	19.1	17.9	15.3
Self-employed	136	223	201	179
% Self-employed	1.2	1.9	1.8	1.6
Other	652	787	934	713
% Other	5.9	6.9	8.2	6.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of individuals	10,980	11,483	11,417	10,989

Source: SSSC Register

Table 5 shows that since 2016 there has been a fall (3.7%) in the numbers registered as social workers with us. This is the lowest number of social workers registered with us since 2012.

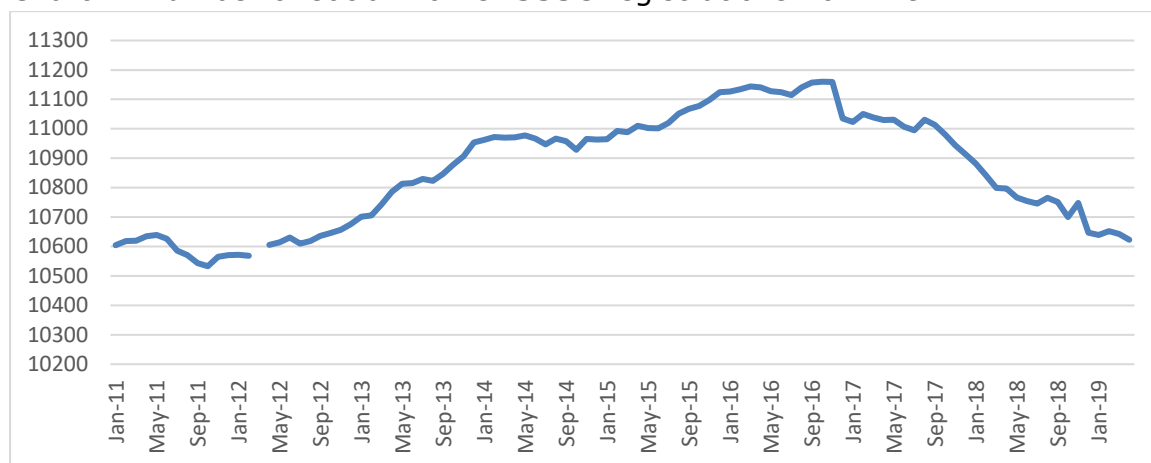
However, overall numbers of registered social workers employed by local authorities have risen. There have been falls in the other three categories. (Please note, the category 'other' includes, those who work out with social services; are retired; or whose employment is not known.) The reason for the fall in these categories is not clear. Overall it means that there are more leaving the register than entering it.

The social workers in the 'social services – other' category work for organisations that are not local authorities. This includes; non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs); universities; government departments; as well as private and voluntary sector care providers. There has been an 18% fall in the numbers of social work registrants working in this category since 2016.

Chart 2 shows the numbers of social workers registered with us during the period 2011 to 2019. It shows there has been a gradual fall in the number of

social work registrants since Autumn 2016. Excluding those with status 'other' and 'self-employed' the drop was 1.8% between 2016 and 2018. This is important as social work registrants are the main 'pool' from which employers recruit social workers. It means there are fewer social workers available for employment and we know from table 5 that 83% of those in employment (excluding self-employed and other) currently work for a local authority.

Chart 2: Number of social worker SSSC registrations 2011-19



Source: SSSC Register

3.2 Local authority – PSWs

In addition to the registration data discussed above, we also have access to data on social workers employed by local authorities obtained from the annual local authority social work services (LASWS) survey. This data is collected and published by us as part of the annual report on the social service workforce (SSSC 2018a). The survey provides information on those employed by local authorities as PSWs. PSWs are defined as all those working in a social worker or senior social worker post.

We know from table 5 that in 2018 over 8,400 social work registrants were employed by local authorities. However, not all of these were employed in roles as PSWs with many in senior management roles etc.

Table 6 provides data on PSWs in local authorities from 2002 (just before the start of the fast track initiative) up until December 2017. Before fast track started local authorities employed fewer than 4,400 PSWs. By 2013/14 it was just over 5,900, an increase of 35%. Since 2013/14 the number of PSWs has remained at essentially the same level, averaging 5,911 for each of those five years with a very slight fall (0.5%) in the last four years.

The increase is not the result of an increase in part time working. This is clear from the column second from right in table 6, which expresses the WTE figure as a percentage of the headcount figure. This shows that the percentage of WTEs to

headcount has remained almost constant throughout the period ranging only in value from 90.5% to 91.7%.

The final column on the right of table 6 expresses the WTE figure as a percentage of the total population of Scotland². From 1981 to 2001 Scotland's population declined by 2.2% but has been on the increase since. Despite the growth in population, the impact of fast track meant the proportion of social workers per 1,000 population still increased. In 2002/03 the year before the fast track initiative began the WTE per 1,000 population was just 0.79, however, by 2017/18 it had risen to almost 1.10, an increase of approximately 37%.

There has been some suggestion that demand for social workers within local authorities has been falling but the data do not appear to support this. Total numbers both in headcount and WTE have for the last five years continued to remain at their historic highs of around 5,900 and 5,350 respectively.

Table 6: Headcount and WTE of PSWs employed by local authorities³ 2002-17⁴

Year	Headcount (HC)	WTE	WTE as % of HC	WTE per 1,000 population
2002/03	4,382	4,017	91.7	0.793
2003/04	4,511	4,102	90.9	0.809
2004/05	5,036	4,576	90.9	0.900
2005/06	5,191	4,760	91.7	0.931
2006/07	5,415	4,946	91.3	0.964
2007/08	5,504	4,986	90.6	0.964
2008/09	5,559	5,072	91.2	0.975
2009/10	5,784	5,235	90.5	1.001
2010/11	5,714	5,201	91.0	0.988
2011/12	5,717	5,220	91.3	0.986
2012/13	5,676	5,183	91.3	0.975
2013/14	5,909	5,367	90.8	1.007
2014/15	5,921	5,369	90.7	1.004
2015/16	5,987	5,429	90.7	1.010
2016/17	5,833	5,283	90.6	0.977
2017/18	5,905	5,344	90.5	1.089

Source: Scottish Executive, SSSC and NRS

3.2.1 Mental Health Officers (MHOs)

MHOs are qualified social workers who are employees of a local authority and have undertaken an approved MHO training course. Social workers operating as PSWs are the main pool from which MHOs are trained and recruited.

² To calculate this the mid-year population estimates from the National Records of Scotland were used except in 2011 when the census figure was used.

³ Data on social workers employed by Highland Health Board is reported by ISD in their NHS workforce publications and has not been captured by the LASWS survey since 2012.

⁴ There is a slight discontinuity in the sequence; up until 2011 the data was collected in October, however, since 2011 it has been collected in December.

As table 7 indicates the number of MHOs employed by local authorities has increased in recent years. This is at least partly driven by the rise in demand for MHOs which has been seen since the advent of adults with incapacity and associated legislation (details of demand are published by the Mental Welfare Commission).

Table 7 – Filled MHO posts 2012-17

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Filled MHO posts	674	655	655	685	722	745

Source: SSSC MHO report (2018a)

Most but not all MHOs will be PSWs. Some social workers operating as MHOs will be in management posts and in December 2017 there were 619 PSWs who were MHOs and the remaining 126 MHOs were qualified social workers in other roles (primarily management). This means that 10.4% of PSWs were operating as MHOs in December 2017 (this is the same proportion as 2016). Of those MHOs that weren't in PSW roles, half of them (63) were in posts as team managers/leaders. A further 33 were identified as 'case managers' and 14 as service managers.

Despite the growth in the number of MHOs employed by authorities table 8 below provides information on the MHO shortfall reported by authorities. As can be seen 22 authorities reported a shortfall in 2017. The shortfall has risen from approximately 25 WTE MHOs in 2013 to just over 40 four years later.

Table 8 – MHO staffing shortfalls (hours per week) 2012-2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Number of local authorities with a shortfall	14	20	21	21	20	22
Total additional hours required	894	916	1,162	1,550	1,289	1,471
Approximate number of WTEs	24.8	25.4	32.3	43.0	35.8	40.9
Average shortfall in hours	63.9	45.8	55.3	73.8	64.4	66.9

Source: SSSC MHO report (2018a)

3.3 Key points

- The number of social work registrants fell by 5% between Autumn 2016 and Spring 2019. This is the lowest number of social workers registered with us since 2012.
- There was a large fall (17.6%) between 2016 and 2018 among social work registrants working in 'social services – other'.
- The numbers employed by local authorities increased by 2.1% between 2016 and 2018.
- The numbers working as practising social workers have remained roughly constant since 2013/14 at a high of around 5,900.

- Demand for MHOs has been rising and increasing numbers of MHOs are being employed by local authorities.
- Despite the increase in MHO numbers, the number of local authorities reporting a shortfall has increased rather than decreased.

4 Demand for social workers

This section of the report turns to the demand for qualified social workers and in particular the demand to produce/supply more of them to the sector. We will look in turn at possible drivers of demand that may result from changes in:

- population (size, age profile etc)
- legislation and/or government policy
- distribution of work among fieldwork teams
- vacancy rates
- retention of social workers
- retirement rates.

4.1 Population

In terms of demand from population change we know from data published by the National Records for Scotland that the population increased by 7.1% during the period 2002-17 (the period 1981-2002 had seen a drop in Scotland's population of just over 2%). We also know from the discussion of table 6 that the number of social workers recruited from 2003 on more than kept pace with the population increase during the period.

Table 6 showed that the number of PSWs employed by local authorities rose from less than 0.8 per 1,000 population to over 1.0 per 1,000. As population is currently projected to rise slightly in the coming decade it seems likely we can expect to see demand for social workers rise too.

4.2 Legislation and policy

Highly trained and skilled social workers make specific contributions to a range of complex circumstances which may or may not involve formal statutory intervention, and it is essential that continues. There are however several local authority social work functions which only registered social workers should be accountable for.

These include statutory functions in relation to children or adult in need of protection and/or at risk, for example; recommendations to the children's hearing or court that an individual requires to be the subject of compulsory protection measures; criminal justice social work functions involving significant judgments impacting on, for example, whether individuals on licence should be returned to prison or be permitted to remain in the community; duties of a MHO as set out in the Adults with Incapacity Act 2000, Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 and the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007; and the role and functions of the Chief Social Work Officer.

Changes to legislation or government policy may lead to the creation of new or augmented duties for social workers, which in turn lead to the need to employ more social workers. Recent examples of this include the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) legislation may result in an increase in referrals to child protection services.

4.3 Work undertaken

Another cause of increase in demand might arise from a shift in the work undertaken by social workers. **The 21st Century Review of Social Work** (Scottish Executive, 2006) identified the importance of social workers being freed from tasks other staff could undertake to focus on work that only social workers can do. There is anecdotal evidence of local authorities reducing the number of business support staff to support social workers. To investigate the extent to which the balance between social workers and support staff has changed in the last 10 years we looked at data on the numbers of social work assistants and business support staff employed to work alongside social workers in field social work teams. Table 9 below provides a breakdown of social work assistants by headcount and WTE. It shows that WTE has remained roughly constant while headcount has increased by around 2%. We know that there was a 5.4% increase in PSWs WTE (see table 6) during the period 2008-17 so it appears that the growth of social work assistants has not occurred at the same rate as that of social workers.

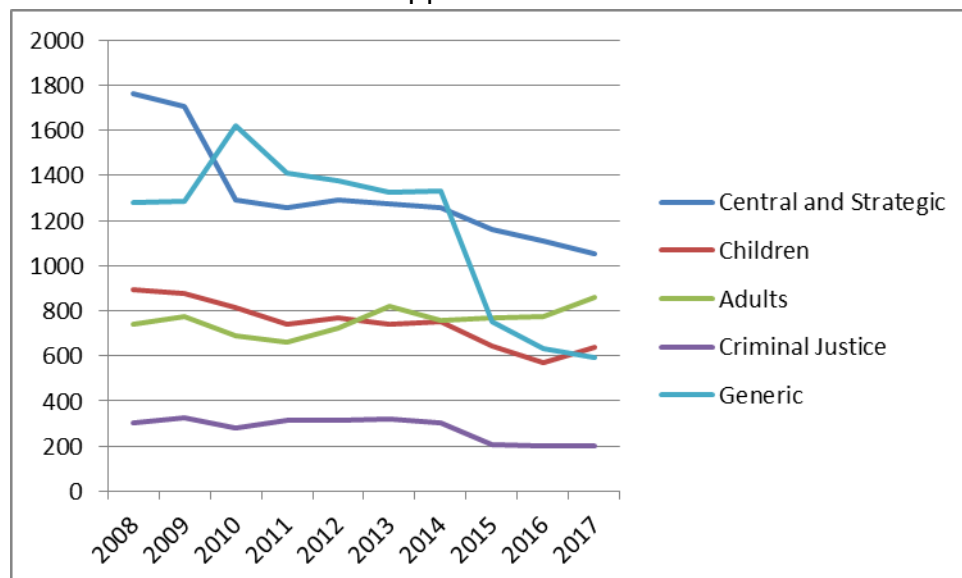
Table 9: Social work assistant (SWA) WTE and headcount (HC) 2008-17

	SWA WTE	SWA HC	WTE as % of HC
2008/09	2044	2297	89.0
2009/10	2041	2304	88.6
2010/11	1983	2226	89.1
2011/12	1819	2041	89.1
2012/13	1954	2198	88.9
2013/14	1922	2214	86.8
2014/15	1978	2331	84.9
2015/16	2187	2491	87.8
2016/17	2114	2404	87.9
2017/18	2050	2347	87.3

Source: Scottish Executive LASWS, SSSC LASWS

The LASWS survey we undertake gathers data on business support staff as well as those working directly with people using services. Chart 3 shows the WTE of support staff working in each of the four field social work team types and 'central and strategic services' of local authority social work services.

Chart 3: WTE of LASWS support staff 2008-17



Source: Scottish Executive LASWS, SSSC LASWS

Only one type of team has seen a growth in support staff (16%) and that is adult fieldwork teams. There has been an average loss across all team types of 32.9% of business support staff. If we exclude the central and strategic staff group and focus just on the support staff in fieldwork teams, the drop is still 28.7%. The anecdotal evidence has pointed to social workers undertaking more administrative tasks than was previously the case and the above data does not contradict that. However, it is not clear to what extent business support staff in other local authority departments may provide support (for example, minute-taking of child protection meetings) to social work teams.

4.4 Vacancy rates

We know that demand from local authorities at the turn of the millennium, due to a recruitment crisis, led to a sharp increase in the number of people training as social workers. A measure of the recruitment difficulties at that time was the PSW vacancy rate which reached 13% in October 2003 where almost one in seven social work posts were vacant. This rate gradually fell as more people successfully completed social work training courses as a result of the fast track initiative.

Table 10 below provides a breakdown of the PSW vacancy rate during the period 2011-17. It also shows the number of authorities who provided vacancy data each year and the proportion of all PSWs they employed.

Table 10: % of PSW WTE vacancies 2011-17

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
% WTE vacancies	5.8	7.5	5.9	5.9	7.0	8.1	5.7
No. of local authorities responding	27	28	27	27	25	23	27
% of total PSWs in responding local authorities	81.4	80.9	79.7	80.1	75.3	58.2	79.1

Source: SSSC LASWS

The vacancy rate in December 2017 was 5.7%. This is only slightly lower than the overall level of vacancies within all registered care services which was 5.9% (see Care Inspectorate/SSSC report **Staff Vacancies in Care**, 2019). However, the Department for Education’s recently published (UK) **Employer Skills Survey 2017** identified an average vacancy rate for the whole of Scotland’s economy of 3.1%.

So, while the current vacancy rate for PSWs is well below that of 2003 and is slightly lower than the sectoral average it is also nearly double the average for the Scottish economy.

4.5 Retention

While we can’t reliably measure turnover of social workers we can measure their retention by local authorities by calculating the percentage working for the same authority and in the same post type one year on. This measure is referred to as the stability index. If someone is in the same post type but has moved authority in the past year they will not be regarded as being retained as they changed employer during the period in question. This analysis is based on data from 27 of the 32 local authorities as five were unable to provide data on ‘start date in post’ on which this analysis is based (this included three of the largest authorities).

Table 11 shows the average stability index (retention) for all local authority social workers and senior social workers for the last two years compared with the retention for the whole sector. As can be seen the stability index for PSWs is very close to the average for the whole sector.

Table 11: Stability index (%) for LA PSWs 2016-17

	2016	2017
PSWs	76.9	77.5
All social services	78.0	77.1

Source: SSSCLASWS

4.6 Retirement

We do not have accurate data on the number of social workers who retire each year. However, as the age profile of a workforce is likely to be linked to the rate at which it loses staff to retirement table 12 sets out data on the age profile of PSWs for the period 2010-17. This aims to give us a better understanding of the extent to which retirement rates might change as a result of an ageing workforce.

Table 12: Percentage of local authorities PSWs by age band 2010-2015

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 26	2.2	2.6	0.4	3.1	1.9	3.3	3.2	3.5
26 - 35	20.2	20.2	17.4	21.6	21.7	23.2	23.5	23.0
36 - 45	28.4	26.9	24.9	25.2	24.8	25.1	25.1	25.4
46 - 55	33.4	34.0	32.6	32.0	30.8	30.2	29.5	29.0
56 - 65	15.5	16.0	22.5	17.5	20	17.6	18.0	18.3
Over 66	0.4	0.3	2.2	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8

Source: SSSC LASWS

Table 13 then simplifies the age data further by looking just at those above and below 46-years-old. As can be seen there has been a small growth (just one percentage point) in the proportion of social workers under 46, which suggest that workforce may be getting slightly younger. However, as is apparent from chart 3, which looks at three age cohorts (under 36, 36-55 and over 56), the growth has been at either end of the age spectrum. The 36-55 age cohort has reduced in size with the over 56 group at 19.2%, up from 15.5% in 2010 and the under-36s increasing their share from 22.4% to 26.5%. This means that the under-36s and the over-56s have increased their share of the workforce by 18% and 20% respectively while the 36-55 age group has decreased in size by 12%.

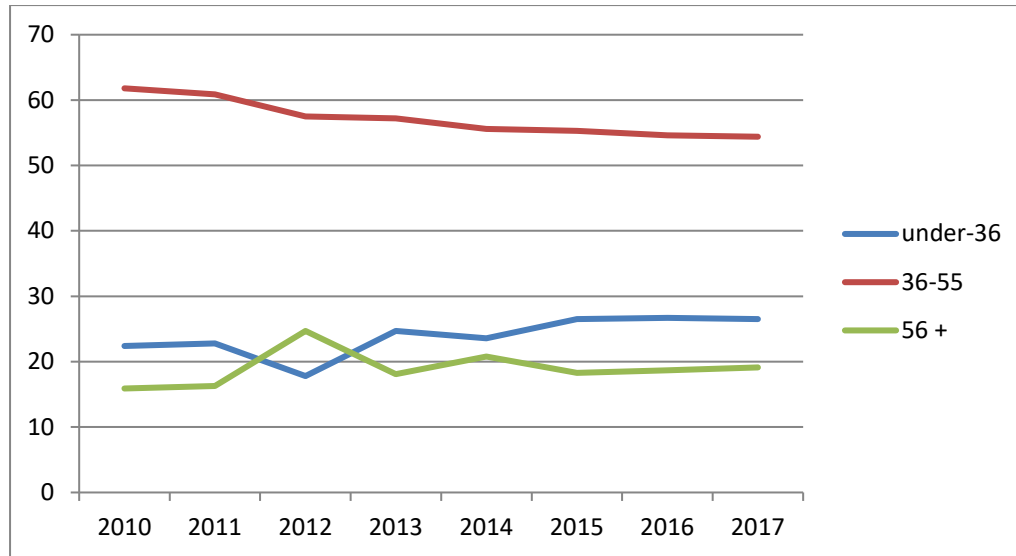
Table 13: Percentage of LA PSWs over and below 46 years old in 2010-2015

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Under 46	50.8	49.7	42.7	49.9	48.4	51.6	51.8	51.9
46 or over	49.3	50.3	57.3	50.1	51.6	48.4	48.2	48.1

Source: SSSC LASWS

It is sometimes suggested that the age profile of social workers in Scotland is gradually increasing over time (for example, increasing proportion of staff over 46, over 55 etc). However, the above data indicates that it is more complex than that, with an increase in the over-55s but also a similar increase in the under-35s. This increase in the numbers and proportions over-55 mean that we do have increasing numbers of social workers approaching retirement age.

Chart 3: Age cohorts for local authorities PSWs 2010-17



Source: SSSC LASWS

4.7 Key points

- Modest increase in population expected in next decade.
- Demand for MHOs continues to rise.
- Reductions in administrative support may be impacting social work capacity.
- Vacancy rates for PSWs are not historically high but are nearly double the average for the Scottish economy.
- Retention rates for PSWs are typical of the sector as a whole.
- There is an increasingly large group of PSWs who are aged over 55.
- And a similar increase in those below 36.
- Changes in policy and legislation may impact on the numbers of PSW needed within local authorities if the statutory functions reserved for social workers increase.

5 Scenario planning

This short section provides projections on possible numbers of social workers required over the next 10 years. Three scenarios have been created, each with its own assumption about growth and these are, no increase in demand over the next decade, an increase of 0.85% per annum and an increase of 1.7% per annum. The first is based on the PSW workforce having stayed at essentially the same level for the last five years. The third assumes growth of 1.7% per annum over the next decade. This is based on an estimate in the Medium Term Health and Social Care Financial Framework⁵ (MTHSCFF). The second takes the mid-point between the two and assumes growth of 0.85%. Table 14 sets out the projected numbers of PSWs for each of these assumptions.

The baseline figure for WTE is calculated as the reported WTE in December 2017 plus the WTE vacancies at that time. It has also been assumed that there will be no change in the ratio of headcount to WTE (this has stayed constant over the last 15 years).

Table 14: Estimated demand for WTE PSWs

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
0.0% no growth	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649	5649
0.85% increase	5649	5697	5745	5794	5843	5893	5943	5993	6044	6096
1.7% increase	5649	5745	5842	5942	6043	6145	6250	6356	6464	6574

Source: SSSC

No growth means of course that the PSW WTE would remain at its current level. The projected annual increase of 0.85% would lead to a 7.9% increase in WTE over the next 10 years. While the projected increase in PSWs in the 1.7% scenario would be 16.3%. These compare with a growth in the WTE for PSWs of 5.4% in the last 10 years between 2008 and 2017.

If the annual projected increase in demand is similar to the 1.7% scenario then significant change will be required in the numbers qualifying and therefore the numbers being admitted to social work training courses. In the middle scenario the projected growth in PSW WTE is greater than that seen in the last 10 years. Assuming that retention remains the same, this projection would mean that supply would need to increase slightly to provide that higher growth.

However, projections are not predictions. Scenarios use data on current trends and conditions to try to anticipate future conditions. For example, the no growth

⁵ This uses the 4% figure suggested in the Medium Term Health and Social Care Financial Framework with the impact of wage growth removed.

scenario simply extrapolates the trend in PSW employment in the last five years and assumes it will continue over the coming 10 years. The 1.7% growth scenario is based on doing the same with demographic trends.

All three scenarios are also based on other assumptions, for example, that the WTE capacity of social workers remains as it is now. However, that capacity could be affected by another range of factors such as changes in levels of support to PSWs or an increasing proportion of PSWs engaged in MHO work. Models estimating workforce demand arising from an ageing population will also make assumptions, for example, about the levels of future need among older people and how that translates into demand for services. Some assumptions we may feel more confident of than others, for example the likelihood that the ratio between headcount and WTE of PSWs will remain the same (see table 6). This seems likely given that it has remained more or less constant since at least 2002. However, the further away we get in time from current conditions the less likely the accuracy of the projections.

In addition to the issue of uncertainty, some factors are difficult to include in these scenarios as they cannot be easily quantified (for example, anticipating demands arising from future changes in legislation, policy or practice). Models or scenarios therefore tend to be based on things we can count and which we believe to be significant and worth including.

While there are uncertainties and limitations to scenario building, it still provides us with a way of estimating future demand to guide planning. The issues highlighted mean that working models need to be updated regularly as new data becomes available so they pick up changes in the trends and conditions underpinning them.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this report has been to examine the supply and demand for social workers. We have seen how supply increased to meet demands from 2003 onwards and as a result the number of practising social workers working in local authorities grew substantially. The initiative was needed to meet demand from local authorities where vacancies for practising social workers had risen to 13% by October 2003. The growth in supply of social workers led to an increase in PSWs of 32% between 2003 and 2009. This meant that the number of social workers per 1,000 population grew from less than 0.8 per thousand to 1.0 per thousand. Since 2009/10 PSW numbers have grown more slowly at 2.1% but remain at a high of around 5,900 over the last five years.

The slowdown in the increase in numbers of PSWs occurred at the same time as the number of students qualifying from social work courses fell below 500 each year. That drop is linked to two undergraduate social work courses closing. In December 2017 the number of PSW vacancies in local authorities stood at 5.7% (this is almost twice the rate for the Scottish economy as a whole, 3.1%).

In terms of the capacity of PSWs we know that support staff working in social work services decreased by almost a third (29%) during the period 2008-17. It is understood that one consequence of the reduction in support staff has been that PSWs are more likely to spend time on administrative tasks than previously. This suggests there has been a reduction in their capacity to undertake work that only social workers can do.

In terms of demand for social workers, the data show that the number of MHOs has increased in recent years and reached an all-time high of 745 in December 2017. This increase in demand appears to have been driven by adults with incapacity and associated legislation. Demand for MHOs is expected to grow further and if PSW numbers do not increase at the same rate then further growth in MHOs would be expected to have further impact on PSWs capacity to undertake non-MHO work. In future, carers and other legislation are expected to lead to further increase in demand for PSWs, although the scale of this is currently difficult to predict.

Scenarios two and three both indicate a need for increasing the supply of social workers. The 1.7% growth assumption indicates that the PSW WTE will need to increase by 16% in the next 10 years. And the 0.85% growth assumption would see 7.9% growth in WTE between 2017 and 2026. These compare with actual growth of 5.4% in the last 10 years (2008/09 to 2017/18).

While growth in PSW numbers in the last 10 years was 5.4% there has been no real growth in the last five years, as reflected in the no growth scenario. At the same time demand has been rising (and is expected to continue to rise) for

specialist social workers such as MHOs. Demographic change will continue to increase the numbers of older people needing care and an increasing proportion of PSWs are now over 55 years old. These all suggest growth will be required to meet demand.

In order to attract, train and retain more social workers we are undertaking several programmes of work. This includes work to widen access to social work courses including career pathways from social care to social work, reviewing the postgraduate bursaries and working in collaboration with higher education institutes (HEIs) to revise the numeracy and literacy entrance requirements of courses. In order to support and retain NQSWs we have commissioned a five-year longitudinal research study to help us understand the experiences of NQSWs. We are also developing a national model for a supported and assessed first year in practice as well as developing a resource to support NQSWs.

The emerging policy and legislative landscape will continue to bring implications for the role and workloads of social workers as health and social care integration becomes further embedded. Developing a shared understanding of what the workforce planning issues are will require further work in partnership with the sector.

We will undertake an annual review of social work demand and develop the scenario planning for PSWs in 2019/20 and expect it to form part of the Workforce Skills Report we will publish next year. The Workforce Skills Report will examine the demand for skills to the sector, the supply of skills, the gap between the two, then identify the priority skills gaps and a plan to address these.

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Scottish Social Services Council
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY
Telephone: 0345 60 30 891
Fax: 01382 207215
Email: enquiries@sssc.uk.com
www.sssc.uk.com

If you would like to request this document in another format please contact the SSSC on 01382 207101.

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