



The Daughters of Charity  
of St Vincent de Paul Services

2024

# SEARCHING FOR

# CONSENSUS

SURVEYING SOCIAL CARE IN ENGLAND



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# Foreword



Daughters of Charity Services are proud to set forth *Searching for Consensus*, outlining the key issues facing providers in the care sector today.

The state of the care sector in England, as indeed further afield, has been the subject of debate for quite some time, yet this has consistently failed to translate into serious policy discussion or proposals for the reform which the sector is so desperately crying out for.

For a brief period in the COVID-19 pandemic, carers appeared to be recognised for the extraordinary service they provide to some of the most vulnerable people in our society, but as quickly as this moment arose, it seemed to pass, and focus once again shifted away from this critical sector.

The report came about as a result of countless conversations which ended in the conclusion that somebody needed to ask care providers what issues they felt were central to the improvement of the sector. In *Searching for Consensus*, we hope to highlight some of the biggest structural issues which are serving as obstacles to the more effective development of social care in England that is so desperately needed.

**Mark Choonara**

*Chief Executive Officer*

*Daughters of Charity Services*

# Executive Summary

**This report serves to highlight the severe problems faced by the adult social care sector, analysing findings of the DCS' 2023 survey of social care providers, in order to understand how care organisations feel about the challenges they face and the potential solutions.**

We have distilled recommendations based on our survey data for government to take action on recruitment, retention, and funding of care services, to ensure that the system is robust and fit to face the next decade.

Our recommendations on **recruitment** stem from the fact that the system will struggle to meet future demand unless there is a massive, state-supported recruitment drive. The government should review contract rates, to ensure care work is an attractive career. Further, regional differences should be taken into account, to avoid inequality within the system due to geography. Further, and ahead of the general election and amid a difficult climate when it comes to immigration policy, parties must commit to supporting international recruitment.

**Retention** is also a pressing matter and will be going forward. The sector across the board has welcomed the Level 2 qualifications and the measures announced for workforce development in January 2024. But this can only be built upon. The government must develop more training resources that are free for care providers and ensure that contract pricing levels enable experienced care workers to gain promotion.

And finally, **funding**, which underpins most of the other issues within the system, must be addressed comprehensively; only by aiming for the £18.4bn figure set by the Health Foundation will we ensure that England's care system is fit for the future, and will both meet demand as well as improve access to care and improve standards across the country.

In order to deliver these recommendations, it is vital that the government **involves social care providers, to ensure they are at the centre of policy change.** There is a wealth of resources available from social care organisations – quantitative data, case studies and service users’ stories, experiences of office and front-line staff, that will prove extremely valuable to governments of all stripes when seeking to reform the care sector. To ensure care organisations are listened to, they must be involved throughout changes to the system and indeed should be encouraged to drive positive policy reforms.

It is the people receiving care that are ultimately affected by issues within the sector. People in care in England – and across the wider UK – deserve a system that is well-oiled and properly funded. Pope Francis has taught us that *“there are no lasting changes without cultural changes,”* and we must therefore re-evaluate attitudes towards care in our culture to ensure people with care needs get the support they so deserve.



# Introduction

In recent years, adult social care has come under increased focus. The outbreak of COVID-19 exacerbated this, but longstanding issues had been in the press in the years leading up to the pandemic, in light of England's rapidly ageing population.

Although adult social care serves vulnerable working-age adults as well as older people, the majority receiving care are elderly. In 2023, there were 11 million over-65s, which was expected to reach 12.1 million by 2028 and 14.5 million by 2043.

It is welcome that people are living longer and healthier lives. However, this increase has already increased pressures on the system. NHS figures from October 2022 showed that there were more than 2 million requests for adult social care support – equal to 5420 requests per day in England, an increase of 170 per day compared to the previous year.

Despite a number of government measures in recent years – including the landmark 2022 reforms and £7.5bn of funding pledged in that year's Autumn Statement, the challenges with recruitment, retention and funding of the system remain.

It is clear that ambitious solutions are required to solve these challenges, and the only way to do this is through hearing from social care providers directly.



Therefore, to understand how care providers themselves view the problems facing the sector, and the solutions that could be presented to government, in the summer of 2023 the DCS conducted a survey of 205 social care providers in England.

This report disseminates the findings of our original research, analysing the views submitted by social care providers whilst linking in research from other organisations, and suggests policy changes to recruitment, retention and funding that will help ensure the sector is on a good footing for the future.

**Mark Corea – Research and Policy Officer**

# Recruitment

## Understanding the problem

Recruitment of social care staff has been one of the most pressing topics within the sector in recent years. Much government action has focused on staffing issues, with £500 million pledged from 2022-25 to “provide support in professionalising and developing the workforce,” to provide mental and occupational health support to care workers, and to support further reforms set out in the social care [White Paper](#).

Yet, major problems remain. Skills for Care [data](#) show that there were 152,000 vacant posts a day in 2022-23 with vacancy rates at **9.9%** - “significantly higher than that of the wider economy.” The reasons for the shortage have been widely reported, with headlines usually revolving around low pay, lack of experience and qualifications, and the lasting impact of COVID-19 on the profession.

Unfilled vacancies and recruitment struggles have negative knock-on effects on the number of people that social care organisations can serve and creates stress for management. To understand the views of social care organisations on workforce issues, we asked about the difficulty they had faced with recruitment.

### How difficult has it been to recruit carers since January 2022?

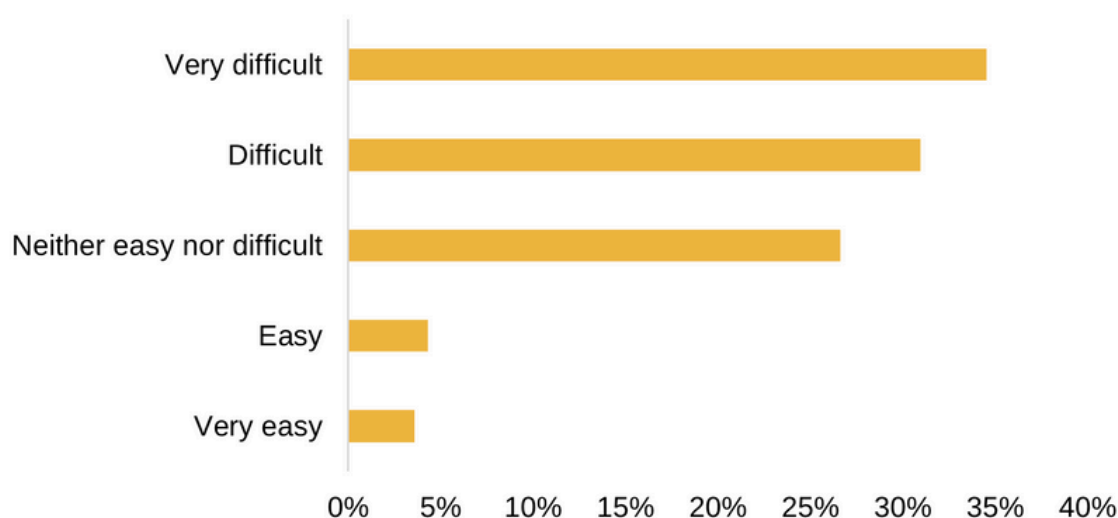


Figure 1: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

As highlighted in Figure 1, **66%** of social care providers reported that it was difficult or very difficult to recruit care workers since January 2022, whilst only **8%** viewed it as easy or very easy. One responder noted that *“the first quarter of 2022 was the most difficult year we have had in 30 years of business”* for recruiting care workers; others said that they had very few applicants for each position, or that they could not find applicants with the right skills.



Recent interventions have been welcome – for example, in January 2024, the government set out plans to develop the domestic care workforce, such as creating a national care career structure, founding the Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate, and funding apprenticeships and digital skills.

However, without urgent action and given the ever-growing size of the service user base, the situation will only worsen. Skills for Care data show that in order to meet projected demand on the system in 2035, England will need 440,000 more care workers. In order to fill the **9.9%** vacancy rate, and the increased number of roles needed over the next decade, the government must build upon the recent announcements. Policy must be developed from the bottom-up, to ensure that the voices of care organisations are at the heart of the solutions.

In our survey we asked what changes from government would help solve the recruitment crisis. **59%** of organisations named wages as the key to solving the crisis, with one provider stating that *“the Government needs to set a minimum price at which both Local Council and NHS Commissioners can purchase their care services at - preferably at rates advised by the independent body.”*

Parties of all stripes must commit to safeguarding domestic recruitment and ensure that care work becomes a viable career option for the hundreds of thousands of positions we will need to fill over the next decade.

**We recommend that the government launch a broad-based review of social care contract pricing, with a focus on increasing basic wage levels for care workers. This must involve care organisations throughout, and take a long-term view accounting for future demand.**



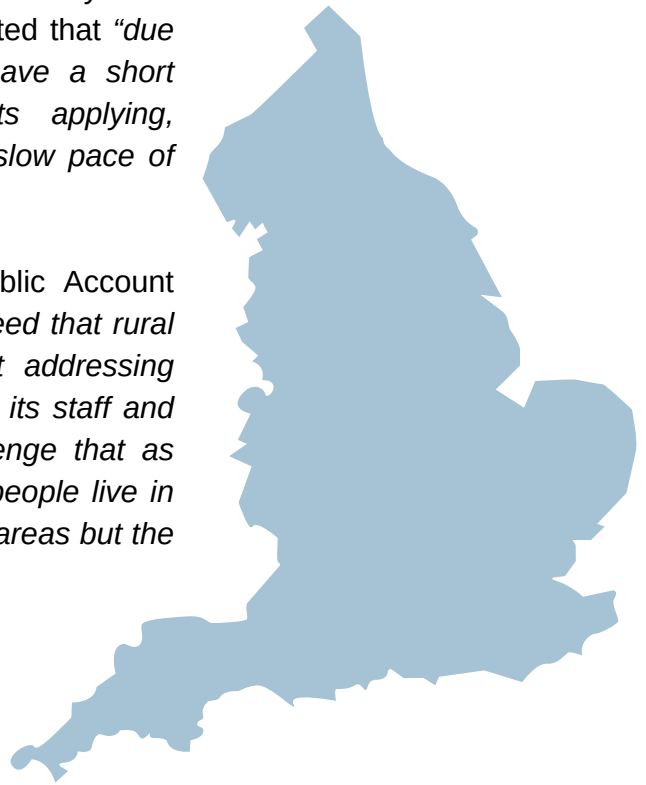
## Review location-based recruitment issues

Another important point to note is that there are location-based recruitment challenges that must be addressed separately from wider workforce reforms. One survey respondent noted that *“due to Blackpool being a seasonal resort we only have a short recruitment window where we have applicants applying, throughout the rest of the year we have a steady/slow pace of recruits.”*

The government is aware of this; as per the Public Account Committee’s [report](#), the Department for Health *“agreed that rural areas were undoubtedly worse affected and that addressing geographical disparities was a high priority for both its staff and local authorities. The Department noted the challenge that as more young people live in cities and more elderly people live in rural and coastal areas, demand was higher in rural areas but the people to deliver care were in the cities.”*

The government must work to ensure that the elderly and other vulnerable adults receiving care are not left behind due to geographical recruitment challenges.

**We recommend that the government works with local authorities to conduct a review of location-based recruitment issues and devise a strategy to ensure that people with care needs in rural areas – which will have the most need going forward – are not left behind.**



## Continue to support international recruitment



Many care organisations are turning to international recruitment in order to fill vacancies. Behind improving wage rates for social care staff, international recruitment was the second-most mentioned solution to the problem in the responses to our survey.

International recruitment widens the talent pool and allows care organisations to meet their recruitment needs where they face challenges hiring domestically and will be an important tool to meet demand going forward.

The government has actively supported recruiting care workers from abroad following a challenging period of recruiting international workers. Following a 2021 report on the significant negative impact that the ending of free movement had on the social care workforce, the government changed the health and care visa, “to make social care workers, care assistants and home care workers eligible for a 12-month period.” The result was positive, with nearly 78,000 care workers obtaining long-term visas between June 2022 and June 2023.

Financial support has also been made available to help aid overseas recruitment. For example, £15 million was made available for 2023-24 to “help support international recruitment within the adult social care sector.”



The responses to our surveys highlight that English social care organisations are increasingly looking to recruit overseas care workers to fill vacancies.

- Only **40%** of providers reported that they had hired care workers from outside the UK prior to 2020, but this had risen to **54%** by September 2023.
- **20%** of survey respondents hired 40% or more of their care workers from outside the UK, compared with just **7%** pre-2020.
- **9%** of organisations hired more than half of their care workers abroad as of September 2023, compared to **5%** prior to 2020.

Evidently, international recruitment is vital to care organisations in England, and we are likely to see this trend increase given challenges with domestic recruitment. Yet, we are living through an unclear climate with regards to the future of immigration. Rhetoric both within government and amongst opposition parties has been about reducing immigration, but it is clear that international recruitment is currently helping keep the adult social care sector afloat in England.

Whilst providers face challenges recruiting from the domestic labour market it is vital that the government continues to allow and support the recruitment of care workers from overseas. **We therefore recommend that all political parties commit to supporting international recruitment of care workers in the run up to the general election to be held on 4 July 2024 and commit to retaining the changes made to the health and care visa.**

# Retention

## Improving staff retention

Along with recruitment, retention of social care staff has been a pressing issue for the sector. Skills for Care [estimates](#) that the turnover rate for social care staff in 2022/23 was **28.3%** - approximately equal to 390,000 people leaving their jobs that year. Additionally, **34%** of respondents to our survey declared it had been difficult or very difficult to retain care workers since January 2022, compared to **24%** who said it had been easy or very easy.

Although many stay within the sector, turnover creates disruption not only for the care organisations themselves, but also for care workers and patients. Care workers and their clients develop a relationship, and patients may find it overwhelming having to frequently get used to new care workers.

It's important that we create a culture of retention within the sector. Many providers already do this well – but the government must help to facilitate this across the country.

### Turnover rate for junior care workers, April 2021-March 2022

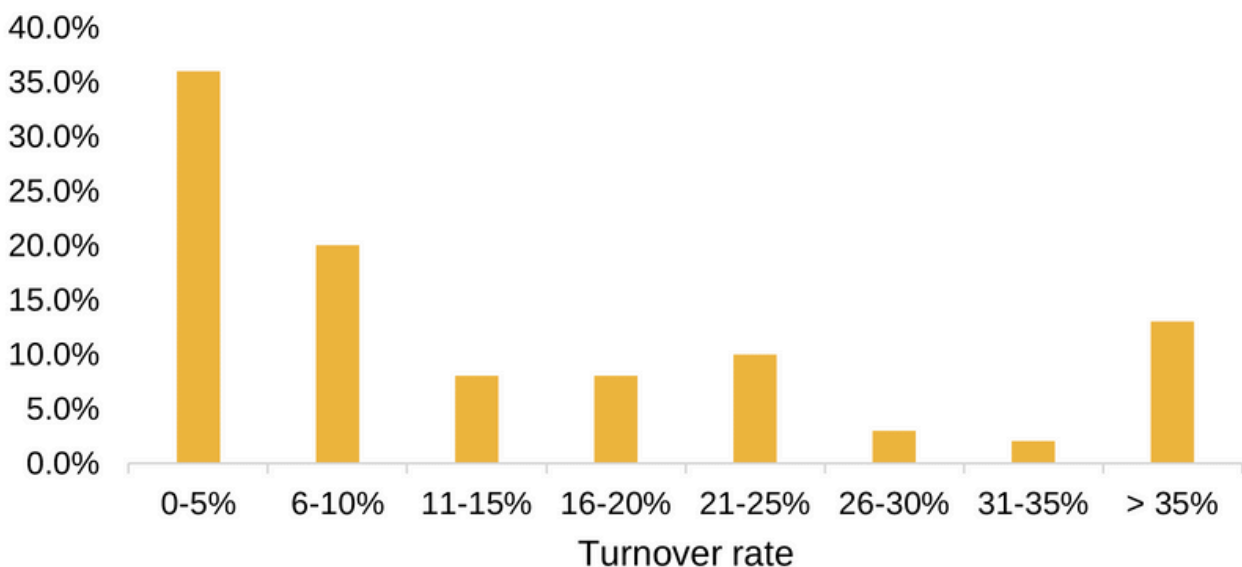


Figure 2: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

As shown in Figure 2, in the 2021-22 financial year **28%** of responding organisations had a turnover rate of 21% or higher for junior or entry-level care workers, whilst **36%** had a turnover rate of 6-20%. Given the essential work that care workers perform, retention must be seen as a priority for governments of all stripes going forward.

There are a number of ways the government can facilitate a culture of retention in the social care sector and establish social care as a viable long-term career option. These are skills and training, pay and progression, and supporting social care providers to foster a culture of retention.

## Skills and training

Career development through opportunities to learn new skills and complete professional training is already a large part of the offer for care workers. **94%** of organisations we surveyed offered or subsidised professional development opportunities and training for care workers.

However, there can be issues with delivery. One organisation noted that it *“can be difficult to find the additional money required to fund the training and support employees taking time to development and train, rather than provide direct care.”*

Further, sufficient government funding for training can be an issue – one organisation stated that they *“cannot afford to [offer training] without adequate Government funding for the domiciliary care sector.”* This could be paid for through the funding pledged in the 2022 Autumn Statement.



There was widespread support among our survey respondents for formalising care qualifications generally. Notably, **40%** agreed that their organisation would be willing to pay more for more formal training, compared to just **20%** who disagreed.

### Attitudes towards formalising care qualifications

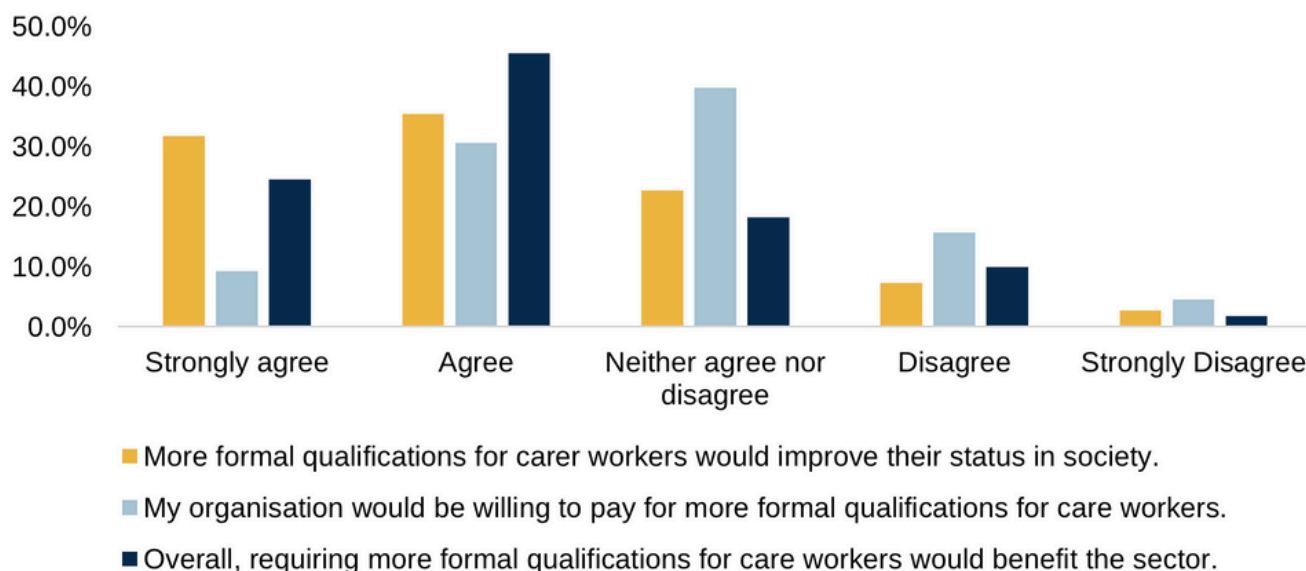


Figure 3: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

67% agreed that more formal qualifications for carers would improve their status in society.

There have been recent positive developments which we believe will benefit the sector going forward. Notably, the Level 2 Care Certificate was announced in January, backed with £50 million funding which should support 37,000 individuals to obtain the qualification. In addition to this, 116,000 courses and qualifications will be funded.

This was directly supported by our survey respondents - **51%** of organisations agreed or strongly agreed that the Care Certificate should be more formalised, with only **17%** disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Nevertheless, whilst this is a positive policy change in principle, there are concerns that the Certificate, which launches in June 2024, may not be enough. Vic Rayner, CEO of the National Care Forum, welcomed the January announcements as “*important first steps*,” but raised concerns that “*none of these commitments come with any focus on moving us closer to a set of pay, terms and conditions that match the skills and expertise laid out in the new pathway.*”

This echoes sentiments in the responses to our survey question. One respondent noted that:

*“We employ a full-time trainer, we do the majority of the mandatory training face to face, topped up occasionally with online specific courses. These can be costly - perhaps the govt could put together to online courses that can be accessed by the care industry free of charge. This would encourage providers to use them.”*

It is therefore clear that while the Level 2 Adult Social Care Certificate qualification and the raft of measures announced in January 2024 are welcome developments, they may not be enough, and well-designed online courses free to care organisations would be beneficial.

**We recommend that the Department for Health and Social Care expands the training offer with free, online, and accredited courses for care workers. Further, care organisations should be consulted on minimising disruption to services when care workers take leave to complete the Level 2 qualification.**

## Pay and progression

We have touched on pay being an issue for recruitment of social care workers, but it is also a concern for care workers looking to gain promotion and an associated increase in salary. As with all professions, care workers want to be able to progress in their careers, both in terms of increasing their salary and advancement by obtaining qualifications, earning promotions, and developing their skills through training.

When asked about the barriers to promotion for care workers, the most common reason was that care workers did not feel the increased responsibility was met with an adequate rise in pay.

### What are the barriers to promoting carers to more senior positions?

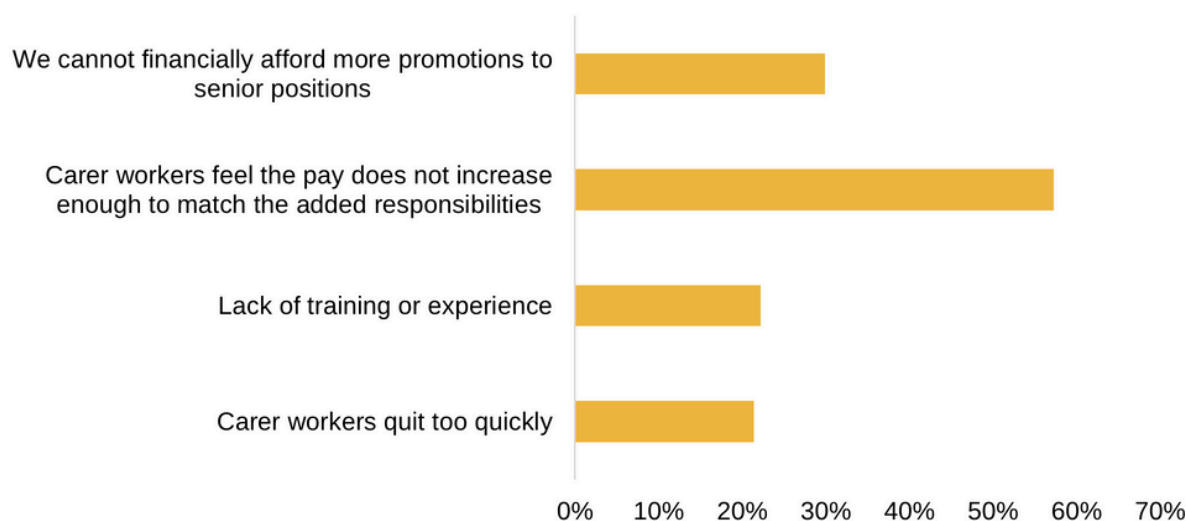


Figure 4: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

A look at numbers may help illustrate the issue. As of November 2023, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) placed median hourly earnings for all employees at £15.88. In contrast, real term median hourly pay for care workers in March 2023 was £10.11. Whilst this was an increase of £2.83 from March 2016, it's still below the median.

Further, a majority (**56%**) of respondents to our survey stated that the average rate of pay for senior or management-level care workers within their organisations was between £11-£13.50 per hour – still below the median rate.

This is concerning. People in care and care providers alike need senior care workers, for management, team leadership, and to draw on their experience. Additionally, there runs the risk that care workers looking for promotion may move to look to leaving their organisation for a promotion or leaving the care sector altogether.



As one organisation put it, *“with the Council rates as they are, promotions aren't easily given even if the care worker deserves the post.”* Like any other career, people in care deserve to be rewarded for their work through opportunities for promotion, and the pricing of social care contracts must be designed to facilitate this.



Earlier, we recommended that contract pricing should be reviewed to ensure that wages are attractive to prospective care workers. To add to this, **we recommend formalising care work as a recognised career pathway, and that opportunities for pay progression and promotion are a focus of contract pricing going forward, to prevent the sector losing experienced care workers.**

# Funding

## A pressing concern

Along with recruitment and retention, funding for the social care system across the board is a key concern within the sector at present.

The adult social care sector in England is diverse, encompassing a mixture of NHS service, local authority contracts, private care and unpaid care provided by people to their loved family members. State-supported social care is provided by the local authority and is means-tested, meaning that only those with the most needs and low levels of financial assets will receive state-funded support.

In the 2022 Autumn Statement, £7.5bn of funding was announced for adult social care. This funding was intended to *“to put the adult social care system in England on a stronger financial footing and improve the quality of and access to care for many of the most vulnerable in our society.”*

The promised funds were split into different areas, including:

- £600m in 2023/24 and £1bn in 2024/25 to support moving people from hospitals to care homes
- £3.1bn for charging reforms
- An estimated £1.7bn from the increase in the Adult Social Care Precept part of council tax

Despite this investment being welcomed at the time, it has simply not been enough, and in some cases, has been delayed. For example, the £3.1bn for charging reforms was originally intended to take effect from October 2023 but has now been delayed to October 2025.

It is also unclear that the rest of the promised funding will be delivered on time, and that it will be effective in helping the sector.

For example, the Public Account Committee has raised concerns that the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) had not delivered on its ambitions. As stated in the committee's [report](#) from March 2024:

*“When we asked what the Autumn Statement funding had delivered, the Department told us it had achieved ‘an awful lot’ but acknowledged this was not as much as it had wanted and there was more to come. The Department did not quantify how much the MSIF funding had contributed to its three objectives of increased staff pay, increased fee rates paid to providers, or reduced waiting times.”*

We are clear that any delays to the funding will have a severe negative impact on the sector and is vital that the funding is delivered on time and in full. Ahead of the election, the major parties must commit to delivering this funding on time over the next few years.

## Attitudes towards government interventions

Our survey questions on funding sought understand how care organisations perceived the funding increases detailed above.

### **The additional funding will make a noticeable, positive difference for my organisation.**

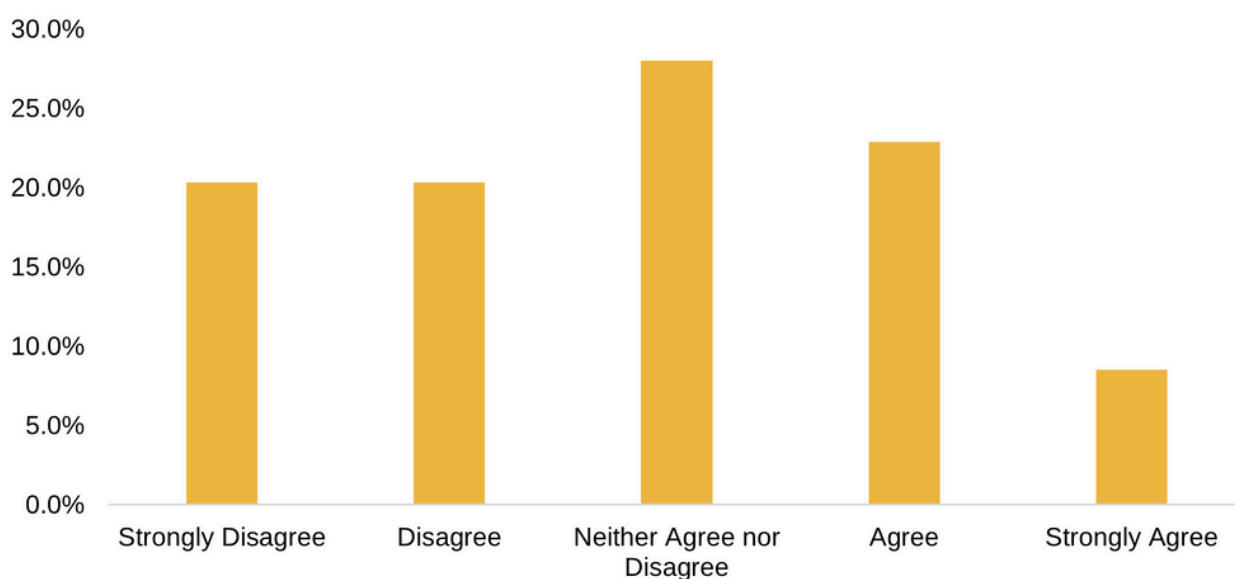


Figure 5: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

As shown in Figure 5, **40%** of organisations disagreed with the statement that the funding announced in 2022 would positively benefit their organisation, with only **31%** agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Organisations raised concerns that the funding would not filter into their organisations' income streams, and therefore into care workers' wage packets, with one noting that *"The funding has not significantly impacted my organisation, as clients are still paying less than what could accommodate the care workers' wages."*

This is also supported by the research of other organisations. **40%** of organisations surveyed by Hft and Care England reported a budget deficit in 2023, and **84%** of organisations reported that the funding delivered up to 2023 had no impact on their financial sustainability.

### Without increased government funding, my organisation will still find a way to increase pay for care workers

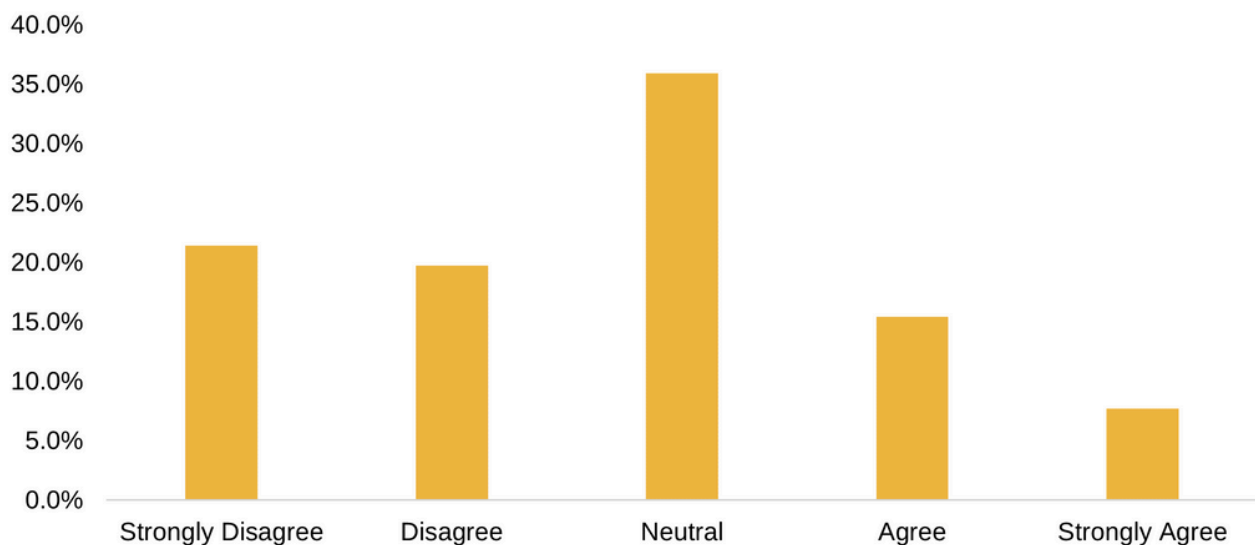


Figure 6: Daughters of Charity Services, 2023

Further, as shown above in Figure 6, **41%** of organisations surveyed noted they would be unable to increase pay for care workers without increased government funding, whilst only **23%** said they would be able to find the funds to do this.

It is therefore vital that the government not only increase social care funding beyond what has been pledged thus far, but also that government seeks to understand the perspectives of organisations on funding and policy reform going forward.

There have been steps in the right direction since we conducted the survey. For example, the government has pledged further funding – notably a further £500m for the Social Care Grant was announced in January 2024.

This is welcome – but it's clear that further funding will be needed. The Health Foundation, for example, has calculated that by 2032/2033, a further £8.3bn a year will be needed simply to meet future demand, whilst £18.4bn a year would be needed to *“meet future demand and improve access to care and cover the full cost of care.”*

The cost of inaction far outweighs these figures. We therefore recommend that the government commit to increase real terms funding from social care, with £18.4bn by 2032/2033 as the target.

This will ensure the system not only meets demand, but is fit for the future. Ultimately, without implementing the reforms advocated in this paper, many care providers will be forced to exit the market, and vulnerable people will not receive the care they need.



# Conclusions

The responses to our survey reinforce the urgency of action to solve the issues facing the adult social care sector over the coming years, to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness in the face of growing demand. Based on our findings, we have recommended the following actions for the government:

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## **Recruitment**

Implement a massive, state-supported recruitment drive, review contract rates to make care work an attractive career, address regional disparities, and support international recruitment.

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## **Retention**

Build on the positive reception of the Level 2 qualifications and workforce development measures announced in January 2024 by providing more free training resources and ensuring contract pricing levels allow for career advancement.

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## **Funding**

Aim for the £18.4bn figure set by the Health Foundation to ensure the care system can meet future demand, improve access, and enhance care standards across the country.

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Only by meeting these recommendations will the next government protect the future of the system, and ensure care can be delivered to vulnerable adults across England. Crucially, care providers and frontline care workers themselves must be consulted in any policy changes, to utilise their expertise and experiences to drive reforms.





# About the Daughters of Charity Services

The Daughters of Charity Services is the parent organisation to six projects across the UK, including three social care projects – Vincentian Care Plus in Westminster, the Marillac Neurological Centre in Brentwood, and St Joseph's in Midlothian.

We seek to build on the legacy of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, seeking out those in poverty and providing services to them, whilst adhering to the Vincentian Values which have been at the heart of the Daughters' work for centuries.

Further information can be found on our [website](#).



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