Northern Ireland Social Care Council

The Social Care Council Register for

Social Workers
Social Care Workers
Social Work Students

in Northern Ireland







Live Register Report at 30 June 2026 (Qtr 1)

Introduction to the Register

The Social Care Council maintains a Register of all Social Workers and Social Care Practitioners (previously referred to as Social Care Workers) who have been assessed as suitable to practise in Northern Ireland. The Social Care Council also registers all students studying on the Degree in Social Work courses in Northern Ireland. All registrants must meet the Social Care Council Standards for their Conduct and Practice.

The Register is split into three Parts:

- Part 1 is for qualified Social Workers;
- Part 2 is for those in designated Social Care roles covered by compulsory registration;
- The third part of the Register is for Social Work Students.

This report gives a snapshot of the Social Care Council Register on **30 June 2026.** which shows a total of 49415 registrants (6782 Social Workers, 41790 Social Care Practitioners and 843 Social Work Students). It provides an overview of workforce demographics, where they are working and the areas of care in which they are providing services.

The Register experiences minor changes every day as people move in and out of the workforce, or as students join/leave Social Work Degree courses. Currently, the workforce is composed of **84.9% Social Pare practitioners**, **13.8% Social Workers** and **1.3% Social Work Students.**

	Register at 30 June 2025	**Register at 30 June 2026**
Social Workers	6806 (13.8%)	6782(13.9%)
Social Care Practitioners	41824 (84.9%)	41790 (84.5%)
Students	655 (1.3%)	843 (1.7%)

Maintaining the Register

All registrants and their employers have access to their registration records through the online **Registration Portal** and the corresponding **Employer Portal**; and all are encouraged to keep their employment details regularly updated and are reminded to do so at their annual fee payment point. At the end of every registration renewal period (either 3 or 5 years, depending on the registration status), registrants are required to renew their registration. As part of the renewal process, they are asked to confirm that they have the minimum compliance of 90 hours continuous professional development; and review and update their registration record, which helps to provide an insight to the demographics of the registered workforce.

Not everyone on the Register will currently be working, or be practising in the work setting they are registered against. Some may have been redeployed to related roles in Social Care, or perhaps taken a career break for personal or study reasons. Social Care registrants must be employed in social care to remain on the register and social work students must be progressing through their social work degree at a recognised University. Social Work registrants not in employment are permitted to remain on the Register providing they maintain their registration, including continuing with the learning and development requirements for their professional development.

Real-Time Access to Register Information

Following a collaboration with the Department of Health and further Social Care Strategy investment, an online real-time registration dashboard has been built which provides monthly snapshots from November 2021 and built in analytics to support research and decision making. The dashboard is open access and is available at this link : Social Care Council Live Register Dashboard.

Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland social care workforce continues to demonstrate stability and modest growth, with the Register increasing by 0.3% over the year to 49,414 registrants at 30 June 2026. Social Care Practitioners remain the largest staff group, accounting for 85% of the workforce, while Social Workers represent almost 14% of all registrants. Workforce growth has been driven primarily by increases in Adult Residential Care and Supported Living roles, reflecting continued demand across adult social care services.

Analysis of employment sectors highlights two distinct workforce models. Social Workers are increasingly concentrated within statutory services, with HSC Trust employment rising from 68.7% in 2023 to 74.9% in 2026, alongside a substantial reduction in agency employment. In contrast, Social Care Practitioners continue to be primarily employed in the independent sector, with 61% working within private and voluntary organisations. These trends suggest increasing workforce stability within social work services and continued reliance on independent sector provision to deliver social care services across Northern Ireland.

Key Highlights

- The Register increased by 0.3% during 2025/26, reaching 49,414 registrants, with growth primarily driven by Social Care Practitioner registrations.
- HSC Trusts strengthened their position as the principal employer of Social Workers, increasing from 68.7% in June 2023 to 74.9% in June 2026.
- Agency employment among Social Workers reduced from 2.3% to 0.3% over the four year period, indicating improved workforce stability and reduced dependence on temporary staffing arrangements.
- Social Care Practitioners remain predominantly employed in the independent sector, with the private and voluntary sectors accounting for more than 61% of employment in 2026.
- Workforce growth continues to be concentrated in adult services, particularly services for Older People and Adults with Learning Disabilities, reflecting ongoing demographic and service pressures.

1. Size of the Register

On **30 June 2026** (end of Q1) the Register totalled 49415 as outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

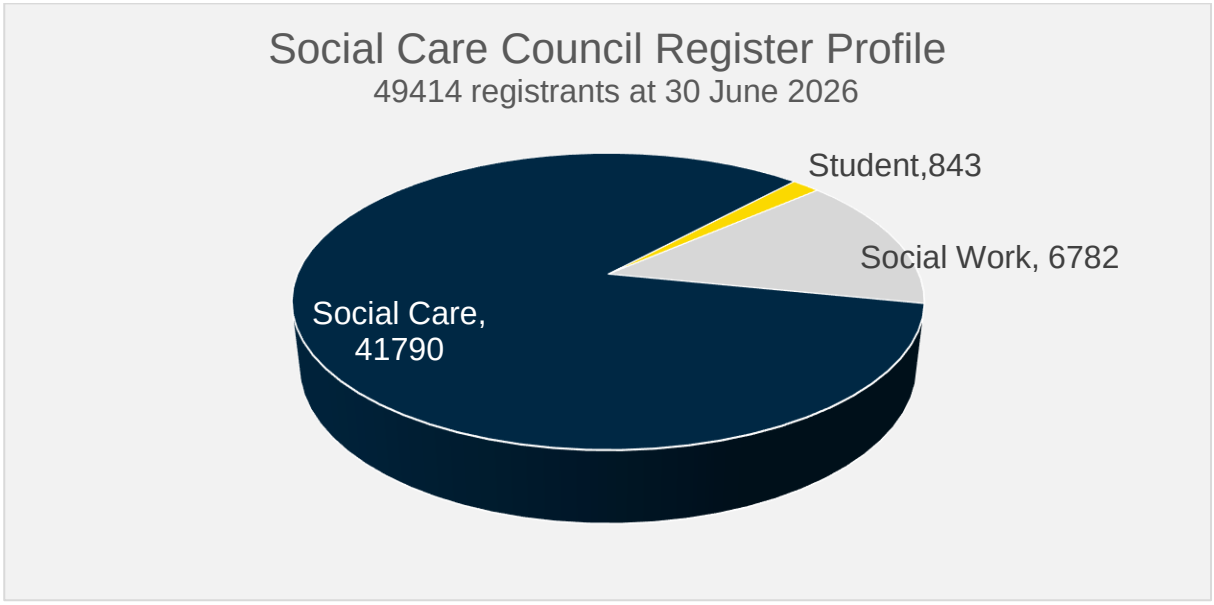
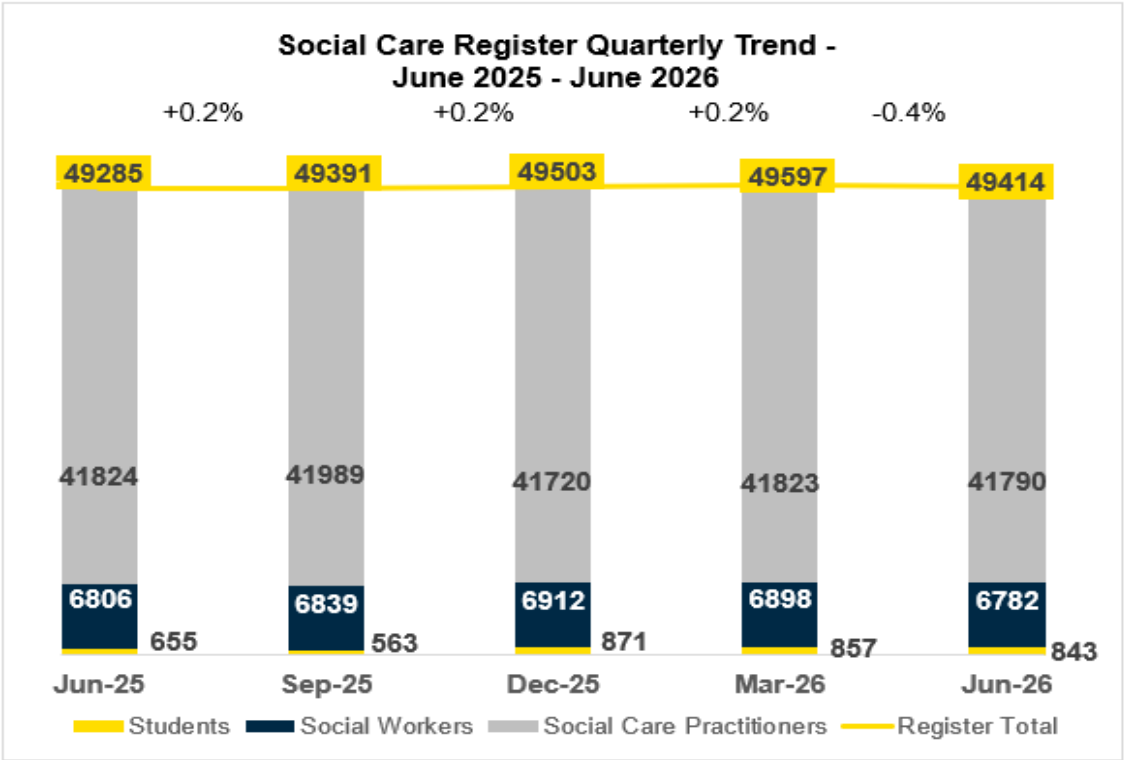


Figure 2a below shows the Register profile trend between **Qtr 1 2025/2026 – Qtr 1 2026/2027**

The Social Care Council quarter periods run from April to June (Q1), July to September (Q2), October to December (Q3) and January to March (Q4) each financial year. The variation in the figures for registration across months is also influenced by removals for non-payment of fees and the time it takes to re-new and process new applications for registration.

It should also be noted that student numbers will equate to the academic points of graduation and new intakes across the programmes which explains why the numbers vary across periods.

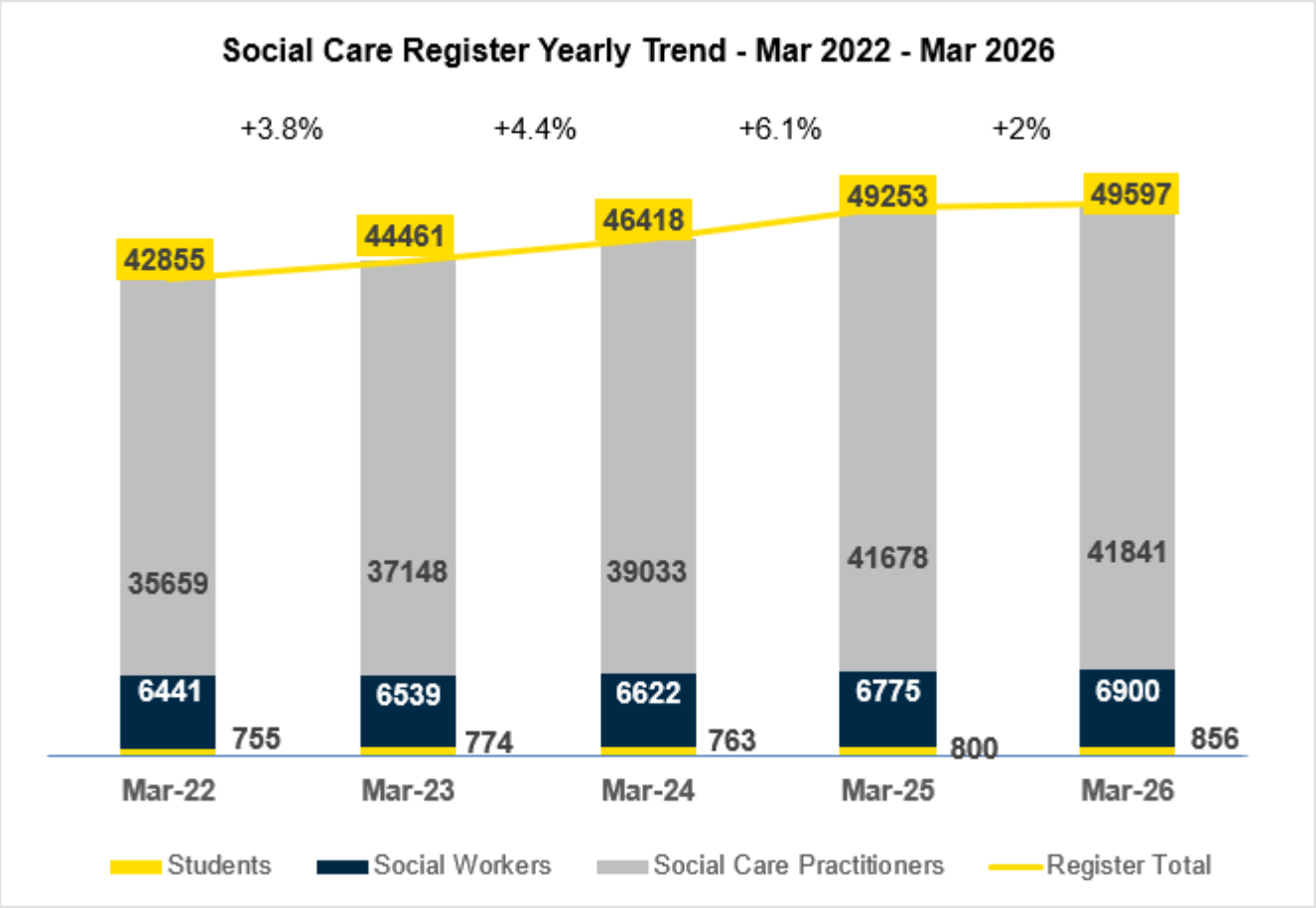
Figure 2a



The data shows that the workforce is consistently dominated by Social Care Practitioners, who account for over four-fifths of all registrants across the period. Their numbers increase steadily from 37,148 (83.6%) in Q4 2023 to 41,841 (84.3%) in Q4 2026, indicating sustained growth alongside a stable proportional share. Social Workers also increase in number, rising from 6,539 to 6,900 over the same period; however, their proportion of the workforce declines slightly from 14.7% to 13.9%, reflecting overall workforce expansion rather than reduced capacity

Figure 2b shows a 15.7% increase in the number of registrants observed between Qtr 4 March 2022 and Qtr 4 March 2026. During 25/26 the register growth has slowed to a rate of 0.7% and activity during the quarters indicates a similar trajectory for 26/27. Across these years, the workforce proportions are consistently similar.

Figure 2b



Key insights –

- Social Care Practitioners consistently account for the largest proportion of the workforce.
- Workforce numbers have increased across the three parts of the register.
- Social Workers are growing in number, but their proportional share is slightly decreasing.
- Social Work students show modest growth, indicating a stable future pipeline
- Workforce composition remains consistent over time with no major structural shifts.
- Overall trend reflects steady expansion with stable role distribution

2. Structure of the Register

Registrants identified themselves across 22 Job Roles (Sub-Parts of the Register) as shown below.

- Sub-Parts of Part 1 of the Register are Qualified Social Workers and Internationally Qualified Social Workers (Social Workers qualified outside of the UK)
- Sub-Parts of Part 2 of the Register are those in designated Social Care Worker roles covered by compulsory registration and also a number of non-mandatory roles agreed with the Council where employers have required their staff to register.
- The third part of the Register is for Social Work Students currently engaged in the Social Work Degree Programme.

In Table 1 below Social Care represents 84.56 % of the Register, the most significant groups of Social Care staff identified as Adult Residential Care Workers (35.37%) and Home Care Workers (30.78%). The next largest groups within Social Care are Supported Living Workers (7.17%) and Day Care Workers (4.91%). These are the mandatory registration groups for social care. These proportions remain in keeping to that observed in the previous quarters for 2025/26. However, the growth in the social care register since Qtr 1 June 2025, is mainly due to Adult Residential Care Workers (increased by 0.6%) and Supported Living Workers (increased by 1.5%) joining the register.

Table 1

	Job Role	Live Count at 30 June 2026	% of the Register
PART 1	**Social Worker**	**6782**	**13.7%**
	Social Work Student	**843**	**1.7%**
	Social Care Practitioner	**41790**	**84.56%**
PART 2	Adult Residential Care Worker	17482	35.37%
	Home Care Worker	15211	30.78%
	Supported Living Worker	3545	7.17%
	Day Care Worker	2429	4.91%
	Residential Child Care Worker	762	1.54%
	Social Work Assistant	538	1.08%
	Home Care Manager	517	1.04%
	Youth and Family Support Worker	490	0.99%
	Outreach Worker	300	0.6%
	Residential Home Manager	161	0.32%
	Day Care Centre Manager	115	0.23%
	Personal Advisor	56	0.11%
	Advocacy Worker	53	0.1%
	Residential Family Centre Worker	36	0.07%
	Rehabilitation Officer for the Blind	32	0.06%
	Driver	29	0.05%
	Education Welfare Officer w/o SW Qual	21	0.04%
	Environmental Technical Officer	9	0.01%
	Education Welfare Officer Manager	4	0.01%

The workforce profile has remained largely stable between 2023/24 and 2026/27, with Social Care Practitioner roles continuing to account for the vast majority of the registered workforce, representing approximately 84.6% of all registered roles in 2026/27. Within the social care workforce, Adult Residential Care Workers and Home Care Workers remain the dominant job categories, together comprising over three-quarters of all Social Care Practitioner roles. Growth has also been evident in Supported Living Workers, Residential Child Care Workers and Social Work Assistants, reflecting increasing demand for community-based and specialised support services. While the number of Qualified Social Workers has remained relatively stable over the period, there has been a notable increase in Social Work Students, suggesting a strengthening pipeline of future professionals entering the workforce.

Key insights –

- Social Care Practitioner roles continue to dominate the workforce, accounting for 41790 registrants (84.6%) in 2026/27.
- Adult residential care workers remain the single largest job group, increasing from 15609 in 2023/24 to 17482 in 2026/27.
- Data shows a shift towards community based and specialist roles alongside traditional care provision.
- Smaller roles remain stable, contributing to a balanced workforce structure.
- Trends are gradual and consistent, suggesting planned workforce development rather than rapid change.

3. Employment

3.1 Employment by Sector

- The register is split into four key employment sectors**,** employment agency, private, voluntary and statutory (including Health and Social Care Trusts, Education, Justice and NDPBs).

- The register currently lists 510 employing organisations across all the sectors.

In table 2 below at 30 June 2026, employment sectors for Social Workers and Social Care Practitioners continue to show significant differences, as previously reported.

The majority of Social Workers are employed within the Statutory Sector i.e. Health and Social Care Trusts (74.89%). As observed in Figure 4b, an increase of 2.9% Social Workers is observed in the Health and Social Care Trusts, since Qtr 1 June 2025. This is mainly due to Social Work students now graduated and transferring to Part 1 of the Register and the decrease of Recruitment Agency contracts where Social Workers are now gainfully employed in permanent or temporary posts.

Social Care Practitioners are mostly employed within the Non-Statutory Sector with the largest number employed within the Private Sector (44.98%). At the 30 June 2026, 20.87% are employed by Health and Social Care Trusts.

A small percentage of registrants have ‘not given’ recorded against their employer sector. As well as requests to registrants to update their employment which may have changed in period, employing organisations have permission and are encouraged to update the employment part of the records for those registrants who were their employees at a point in time. Both these activities help to increase the accuracy of the employment profile of the register.

Table 2

Employment Sector	% of Social Workers	% of Social Care Practitioners
HSC Trust	74.89 %	20.87%
Private Sector	1.74%	44.98%
Voluntary Sector	6.06%	16.37%
Recruitment/Employment Agency	0.32%	12.23%
FE/HE Education	3.83%	0.06%
Government	2.02%	<0.01%
Justice	4.42%	0.14%
Other	1.15%	0.04%
Regulation/Inspection	0.72%	<0.01%
Self Employed	1.24%	0.01%
Unemployed	1.84%	0.07%

Figure 3a

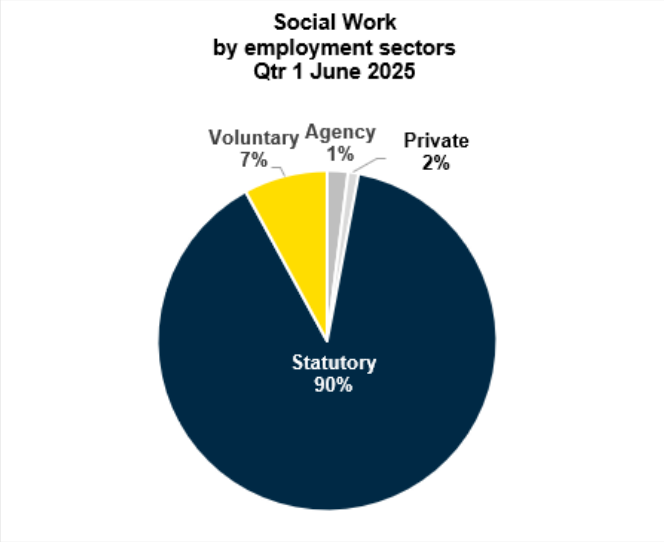


Figure 3b

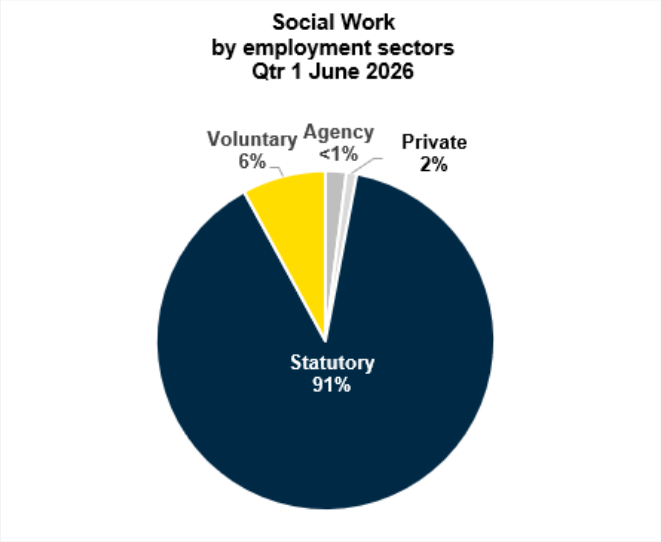


Figure 4a

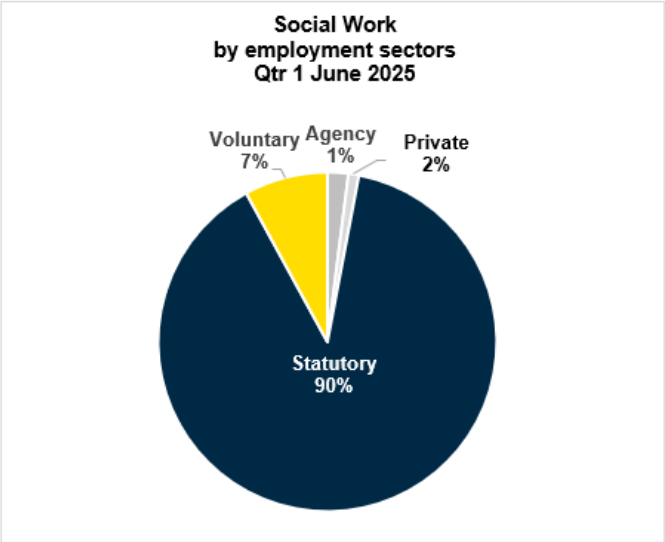
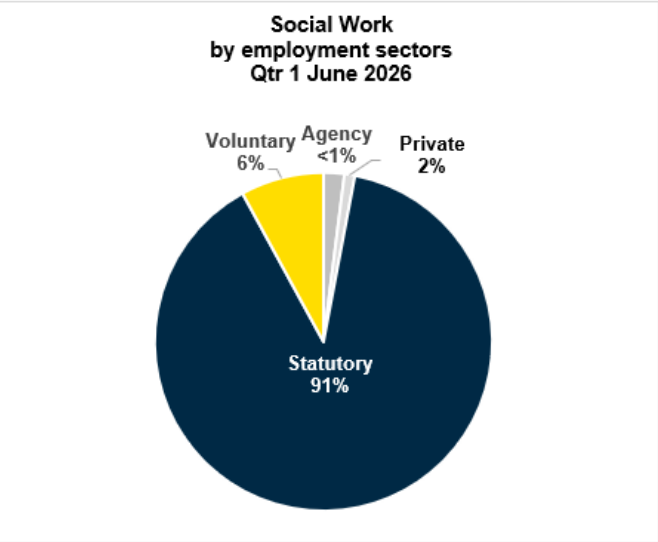


Figure 4b



The workforce continues to be concentrated in a small number of employment sectors, with the majority of Social Workers employed within HSC Trusts and the majority of Social Care Practitioners employed within the private sector. Between 2023/24 and 2026/27, the proportion of Social Workers working in HSC Trusts increased from 68.7% to 74.9%, reinforcing the central role of statutory services in the delivery of social work functions.

In contrast, almost half of all Social Care Practitioners (45%) were employed in the private sector in 2026/27, with a further 20.9% working in HSC Trusts and 16.4% in the voluntary sector. Overall, the data indicates a stable workforce distribution, with Social Workers remaining predominantly located within public sector settings, while Social Care Practitioners continue to be dispersed across a more diverse range of providers, particularly within the independent sector.

Key insights -

- HSC Trusts remain the principal employer of Social Workers, accounting for 74.9% of the workforce in 2026/27, an increase from 68.7% in 2023/24.
- The private sector is the largest employer of Social Care Practitioners, employing 45.0% of the workforce in 2026/27.
- The voluntary sector continues to play a significant role, accounting for 6.1% of Social Workers and 16.4% of Social Care Practitioners.
- Reliance on agency employment remains relatively low and stable, representing 0.3% of Social Workers and 12.2% of Social Care Practitioners in 2026/27.
- Workforce distribution has remained broadly consistent over time, indicating stability in employment patterns across statutory, private and voluntary sector providers.

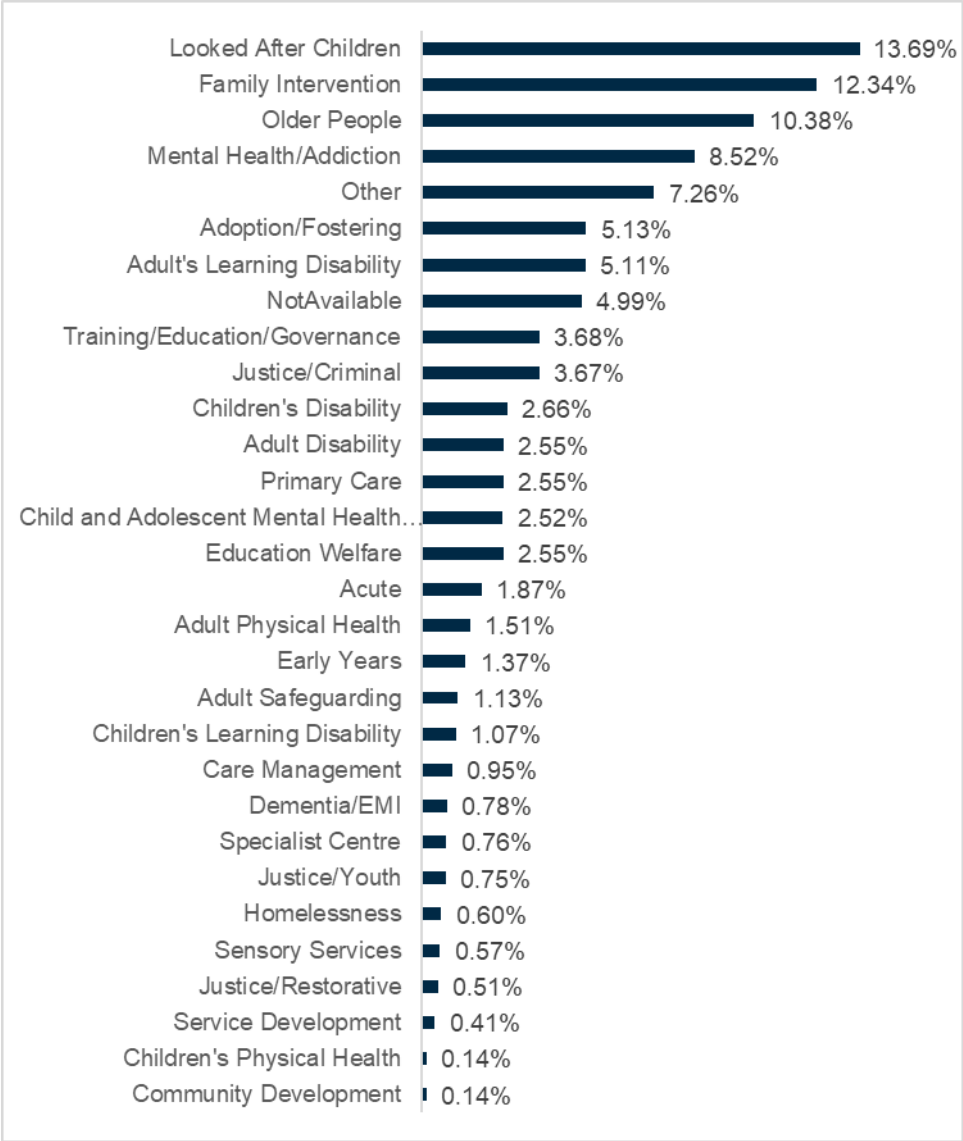
3.2 Social Workers – Employment by Work Focus

Social Worker 'work focus' provides an indication of the area of care and groups of people they provide services for as part of their job role. There are currently 30 different types of work focus recorded for Social Workers.

In Figure 5 below, analysis of Social Worker data for work focus[1] shows that the greatest number of Social Workers (26.04%) work in services for Family & Child care, this includes Family Intervention and Looked After Children teams. The next largest work focus group (10.38%) are working in services for Older People.

Figure 5

[1] *5% of Social Workers have not specified their work focus as this level of detail was not required when Social Worker registration was first introduced. This information is being requested as Social Workers complete their 3-year renewal of registration or when they enrol in the Professional in Practice Framework (PiP) for their CPD.*



The distribution of workforce activity has remained broadly stable between 2023/24 and 2026/27, with Social Workers continuing to be concentrated in children and family services, particularly Looked After Children (13.7%) and Family Intervention (12.3%). In contrast, Social Care Practitioners remain predominantly focused on adult service provision, with Older People services accounting for the largest area of practice (40.2%), followed by Adult Learning Disability (14.3%) and Older People with Dementia/EMI (6.3%). Over the period, there has been notable growth in Social Care Practitioner roles supporting older people and adults with learning disabilities, while the proportion of Social Workers in Looked After Children services has increased modestly. These trends reflect continued demand across both children's services and adult care provision, particularly in response to the needs of an ageing population and individuals requiring long-term support.

Key insights –

- Looked After Children is the fastest growing area, indicating increased emphasis on children’s services.
- Family Intervention shows a small decline, suggesting a shift in service mix.
- Adult and health-related services remain broadly stable, including mental health and older people.
- Small increases in support functions (e.g. training and governance) suggest strengthening infrastructure.

- Changes are incremental and consistent, reflecting planned workforce adjustment.

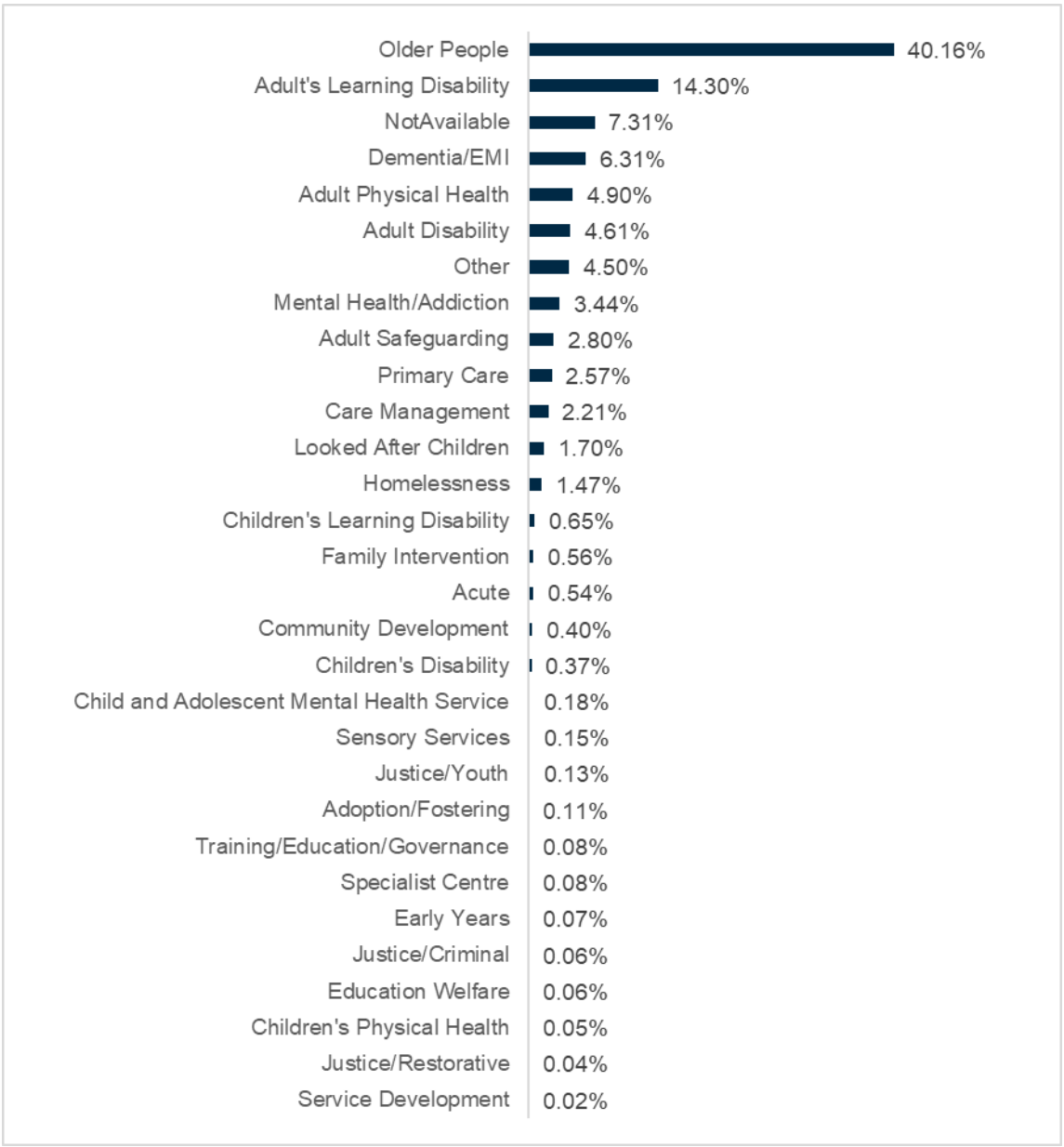
3.3 Social Care Practitioners – Employment by Work Focus

Social Care Practitioner 'work focus' provides an indication of the area of care and groups of people they provide services for as part of their job role. There are currently 28 different types of work focus recorded for Social Care Practitioners.

In Figure 6 below analysis of Social Care Practitioner data for work focus shows that the greatest number of Social Care Practitioners (40.16%) work in services for Older People. The next largest work focus group (14.3%) are working in services for Adults with a Learning Disability.

These proportions of Social Care Practitioners' work focus groups remain in keeping with reporting in previous quarters for 2025/26.

Figure 6



The workforce profile for Social Care Practitioners demonstrates a clear and sustained concentration in adult services, with this emphasis strengthening from Q4 2023 to Q4 2026.

Older people services remain the dominant area of focus and continues to grow steadily, supported by increases in Adult Learning Disability, Mental Health/Addiction, and Adult Safeguarding, reflecting the ongoing demand associated with complex adult care needs. At the same time, there is evidence of minor rebalancing within adult services, with slight reductions in areas such as Primary Care and Adult Physical Health. Children's services account for a much smaller proportion of workforce activity, although Looked After Children shows modest growth over time. Overall, the pattern indicates a stable but gradually evolving workforce distribution, with incremental changes aligned to shifting service demand rather than significant structural change.

Key insights –

- Older people services is the largest focus area for social work practitioners, reinforcing its central role in service delivery.
- Adult services dominate overall workforce focus.
- Some rebalancing within adult services, with small declines in primary care and physical health.
- Children's services retain a smaller share, with modest growth in Looked After Children
- Changes are gradual and consistent, indicating a stable workforce responding to evolving demand.
- Overall distribution reflects a strong emphasis on adult care within a broadly balanced service model.

3.4 Social Workers – Engagement in the Professional in Practice (PiP) Framework for Social Worker CPD

Social Workers are required to complete 90 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) during every three-year registration period. The PiP Framework provides certificated recognition of competence across the professional spectrum, providing a range of pathways to support Social Workers' in meeting the requirements for their on-going learning and development. Currently, engagement in PiP activity is compulsory for newly qualified Social Workers who are required to complete PiP requirements within the professional Consolidation Award following completion of their Assessed Year in Employment. 56% of Social Workers on the live Register have achieved or are working towards awards within the PiP Framework to fulfil their CPD requirements.

Table 3

PiP Engagement

Award Status	Social Workers on the Live Register
1 Achieved Award	39%
2 Waiting Award	2%
3 In Progress	15%
4 Withdrawn from Award	26%
5 No PIP Engagement	18%

Of those Social Workers on the Register who have completed Awards, 23% hold the NI Consolidation Award, 29% hold the NI Specialist Award and 3% hold the NI Leadership & Strategic Award. 3 Social Workers hold the PiP Advanced Scholarship Award.

The employment sectors for Social Workers holding awards are closely matched to the proportion of registered Social Workers employed in each of these sectors. 76% are employed in Health and Social Care Trusts, 6% are employed in the Voluntary Sector, 4% in Justice and 4% in Education.

4. Workforce Age and Gender

As reported in Figure 7b & 8b below for Qtr 1 June 2026, Social Work and Social Care show similar patterns in gender split, with 82% of the workforce identifying as female. Representation across the age bands remains steady, with 33% of Social Workers and 50% of Social Care Practitioners in the under 40 age bands. This proportion is in keeping with Qtr June 2025.

Figure 7a

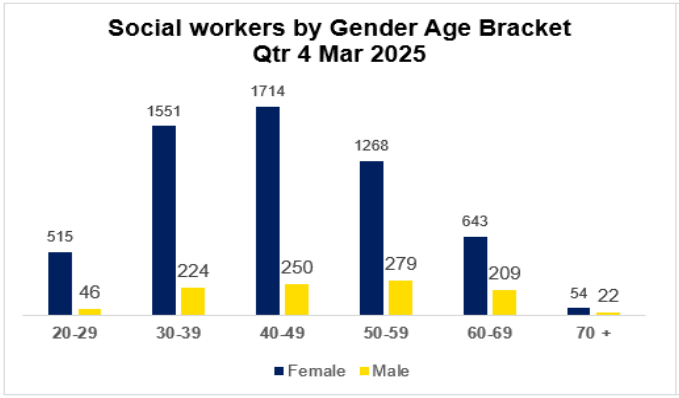


Figure 7b

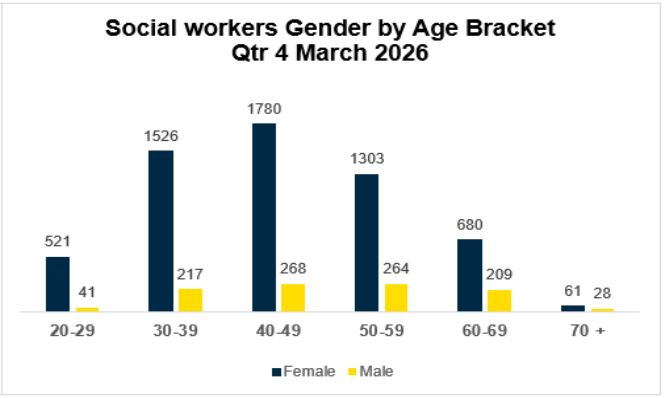


Figure 8a

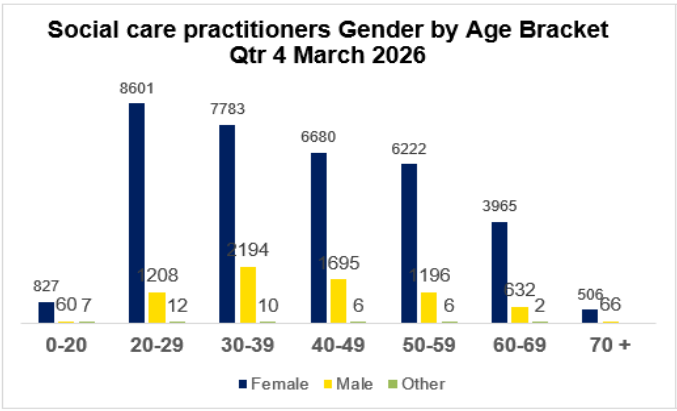
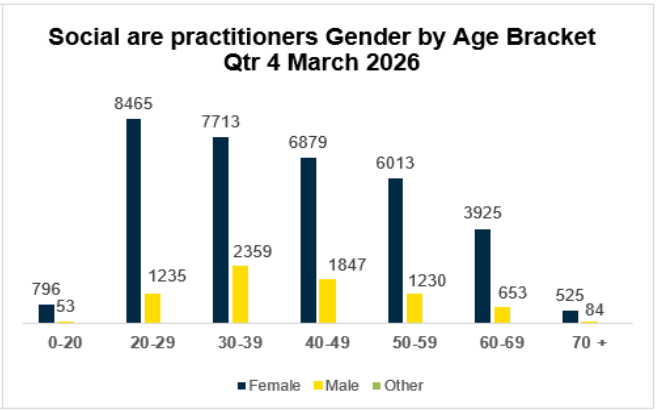


Figure 8b



The data shows that the workforce is predominantly female across both Social Workers and Social Care Practitioners, with this pattern remaining consistent between June 2023 and June 2026. Female staff account for the clear majority in every age group and year, particularly within social care practitioners where they represent over 4/5th of the workforce. While male representation is significantly lower, it remains stable over time, with modest increases in some age groups, indicating limited but gradual diversification of the workforce.

Across both staff groups, the age profile highlights a concentration in mid to late career ranges, especially within the 30–59 age bands. There has been steady growth in workforce numbers over time, with increases evident in most age categories, particularly among those aged 40–59. Older age groups (60+) also show gradual increases, suggesting a maturing workforce with rising retention in later career stages. In contrast, younger age groups represent a smaller share, although there is consistent entry at early career stages, supporting workforce continuity. Overall, the data indicates a stable workforce with a strong female majority and an experienced age profile.

Key insights –

- Workforce is predominantly female across all years and roles.
- Male representation remains stable, with slight increases in some age groups.
- Largest concentration is in ages 30–59, reflecting an experienced workforce.
- Growth in older age groups (60+), indicating extended workforce participation.
- Younger cohorts remain smaller but consistent, supporting future workforce supply.
- Workforce planning should prioritise succession, recruitment and retention to address the increasing proportion of staff nearing retirement age.

5 Conclusion

In Quarter 1 (Jun 2025), the Register experienced a marginal increase of 3.2%, from 2024, rising to 49,285. This was followed by a further incremental increase of 0.3% in Quarter 1 (June 2026), bringing the total to 49,414. Overall, growth seen over the past several years, has stabilised.

This growth has been primarily driven by an increase in Social Care Practitioners working in adult residential care, with numbers rising by 0.6% over the year.

Encouragingly, the workforce continues to show a strong representation of younger professionals, with 47% of registrants under the age of 40.

Social Care remains the largest segment of the Register, with Adult Residential Care Workers and Home Care Workers representing the most prominent groups. Employment patterns remain consistent, with most Social Workers employed within the statutory sector (e.g. Health and Social Care Trusts), while Social Care Practitioners are distributed across multiple sectors, predominantly within the private sector, where the majority of newly registered Social Care Practitioners are employed.

In terms of practice focus, Social Workers continue to concentrate primarily on Family and Child Care services, highlighting their critical role in supporting vulnerable families and children. Services for Older People also remain a key area of focus. Similarly, Social Care Practitioners are largely engaged in services for Older People, followed by a significant proportion working with Adults with Learning Disabilities.

Engagement with the Professional in Practice (PiP) Framework for Continuous Professional Development remains strong, with many Social Workers participating in learning activities assessed against professional standards and, in many cases, aligned with academic quality benchmarks.

Overall, there have been no significant changes in registrant numbers, employment sectors, areas of practice, or gender distribution compared with Quarter 1 2025/2026 and Quarter 1 2026/2027. This indicates a stable professional landscape. These findings provide valuable insight into workforce trends and dynamics, supporting informed decision-making and effective resource allocation for stakeholders.

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