

NCFE

NCFE 175TH ANNIVERSARY

Sector Spotlight: Social Care

October 2023



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Foreword

By Deborah Jenkins MBE DL,
Chair of the NCFE Board of Trustees

Back when what is now NCFE was founded in 1848, change and revolution were sweeping through Europe and beyond. From France and Hungary to Brazil, people were rising up against rulers and deposing regimes.

Garibaldi returned to Italy and started the military campaigns against the Austrian Empire which would lead to the reunification of Italy. Marx was fomenting revolution in Berlin, Paris and London.



The North East of England was going through a golden age of industry..."

The North East of England was going through a golden age of industry, growth, extraordinary new technology and scientific advancement. Mining, shipbuilding and engineering were booming, and architectural marvels were being built throughout the region's cities.

In Newcastle alone, William Armstrong opened his gigantic Elswick Works, William Smith launched the Blenheim from his shipyard on the Tyne, Robert Stephenson was appointed as chief engineer of the new Newcastle and Berwick railway line, and the new High Level Bridge across the Tyne opened.

The beautiful Catholic cathedral had been completed by Pugin the year before, and the grand Central Station would be opened by Queen Victoria two years later. The Newcastle School of Medicine and Surgery had been founded 15 years earlier and already had grand buildings in the centre of the city and a great pride in the expertise it was bringing to the region.

There was a huge and constant demand for skilled workers and the industrialists, scientists and landowners of the North East knew that they had to fuel this growth and prosperity – not only by drawing in experienced people from far afield, but by providing training and opportunities for the people in the poor slums of the cities and the isolated villages of the rural communities.

Within this cauldron of change, people came together to found the Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutes (what is now known as NCFE) to "become a centre from whence the elements of knowledge and civilisation shall go on with an unceasing progress, conferring intellectual, scientific and moral blessings throughout the length and breadth of the Northern Counties."



There is once again the spirit of social unrest in the air."

175 years later, in 2023, we are once again in a time of change and turbulence. Advances in technology and industry are quite literally unbelievable to some older generations. They also have unknown consequences for the young who are growing up in a world which may not provide them with the opportunities for work which were assumed by previous generations.

There is once again the spirit of social unrest in the air. Dissatisfaction with inequalities, rejection of old norms and aspirations by many, and an overwhelming sense for some that existing structures and systems are not keeping pace with the speed of change create a sense of anxiety which often outweighs the exhilaration of the new.



...shaping learning for the society of today so that it is fit for the society of tomorrow."

Our charitable mission at NCFE has not fundamentally changed all that much since that of our founders in 1848. We continue to devote our resources to shaping learning for the society of today so that it is fit for the society of tomorrow. We want people of all ages and stages of life to find learning that helps them to enter and navigate an increasingly volatile and challenging labour market.

Increasingly, we are looking for ways to strengthen cross-cutting and underpinning human skills which will build resilience, agility, creativity and adaptability, as well as technical and vocational skills aiming at particular sectors.

Like our founders, we believe in the great power of learning to transform lives and unlock unexpected futures – and as the guardians entrusted with NCFE's future, we will continue to do our best to "go on with unceasing progress".

Introduction

By **Philip Le Feuvre**,
Chief Operating Officer at NCFE

At NCFE, we're on a mission to maximise our contribution in delivering a fairer and more inclusive society through education.

Over the last 175 years, NCFE has adapted and grown to support more learners each year, but one fundamental thing has remained the same – our promise to provide the best possible products and services that are aligned to the needs of learners, educators and employers.



Supporting some of the most important, essential and emerging industries and sectors has always been at the heart of what we do..."

Supporting some of the most important, essential and emerging industries and sectors has always been at the heart of what we do, and many of them need help now more than ever.

That's why we're going far beyond the remit of a traditional awarding organisation to stimulate debate, find solutions, and unlock the limitless potential that these sectors hold.

To mark NCFE's 175th anniversary, we have invited collaborators from across the sector to develop a series of spotlight reports is focused on four key sectors that are essential to the future of the UK. They include early years, digital, and Further Education (FE) sector itself on this one, social care.

By analysing data and bringing together leading voices from across the different areas, as well as hearing from those working on the frontline of their respective fields, we can begin to identify current or upcoming challenges, as well as potential opportunities.

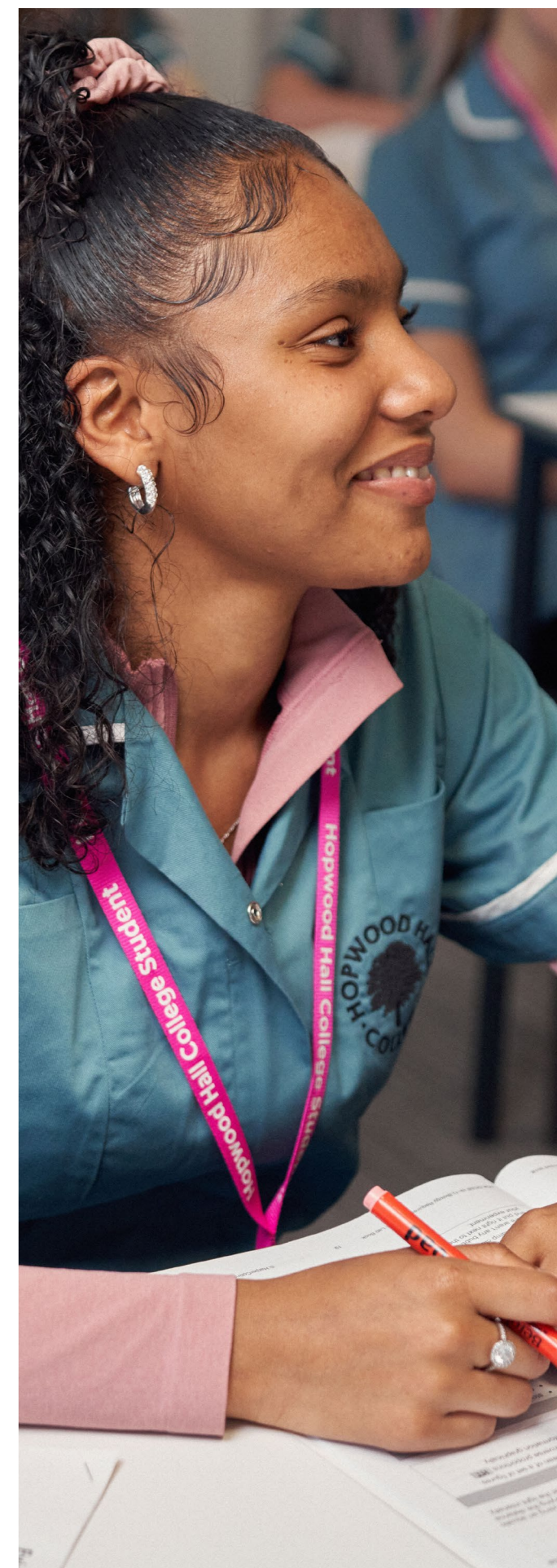


...we can begin to identify current or upcoming challenges, as well as potential opportunities."

What's clear from the insights in these reports is that continuing as we have been isn't an option. The issues represented by the respective sectors' skills gaps are only going to continue, and failure to act will only exacerbate the problems that have been highlighted by our experts.

We are simultaneously releasing a paper on transforming the skills landscape, drawing in data and deep insight from employers and further sector experts, to create a bold and exciting vision for post-16 education.

NCFE was born at a time of revolution – and that's exactly what's needed again if we are to ensure both the survival and long-term prosperity of these critical sectors.



Executive summary

As an educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning, NCFE's core purpose is to promote and advance learning. This means helping more individuals to realise their true potential – in turn, establishing more sustainable communities.

NCFE's series of sector-based reports – of which this Social Care sector paper is the second – provides an opportunity to use data and insight to reflect on some of the biggest skills challenges the UK is currently facing, as well as look ahead to what could happen if the changes required aren't implemented.

With almost two centuries of experience to draw upon, this is an opportunity to learn from the past and forge a path forward in some of the UK's most important sectors.

Movements need collaborators, so by combining NCFE's deep knowledge with external experts and first-hand experiences, we get a more rounded picture of the unique challenges, but also opportunities, within this sector including:

- recruitment and retention
- career progression and professional development
- awareness and recognition
- employer and industry engagement
- pay gaps and funding.

The analysis presented in this report has incredible potential to sustain, revitalise and even transform the sector. Data from the last five years shows social care to be growing and the demand for the support it provides only increasing.

Now is the time for education, industry and policymakers to use insight like this to create a brighter tomorrow for social care, its current and future workforce, and the people that rely on it.

Setting the scene

As a career, social care offers diverse employment thanks to the range of opportunities and professions available. Most importantly, social care professionals make a huge and immediate difference to the lives of the people they look after – from helping someone to live independently at home again to providing companionship during end-of-life care.

The social care sector faces a range of challenges, including rising demand, funding constraints, and workforce shortages. Public debate focuses on reforming the system to ensure sustainable, accessible, and equitable care for all, with the sector calling for parity of esteem with the health colleagues when it comes to pay and professional recognition.

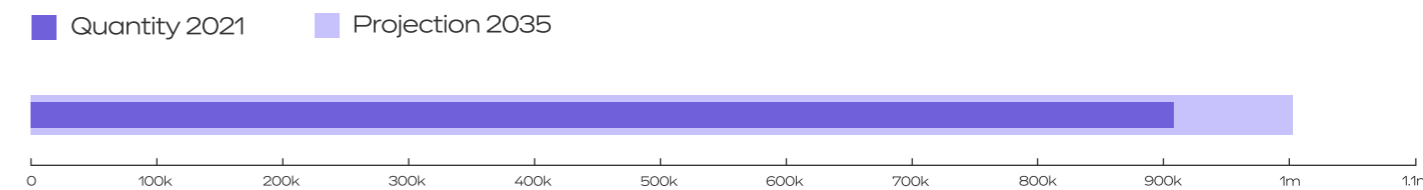
Table A: [ONS Labour demand volumes by profession and local authority, UK](#)

Number of job postings (2022)	1,352,810
Job postings 5-year change (2017-2022)	+416,705
Job postings 5-year % change (2017-2022)	+44.51%

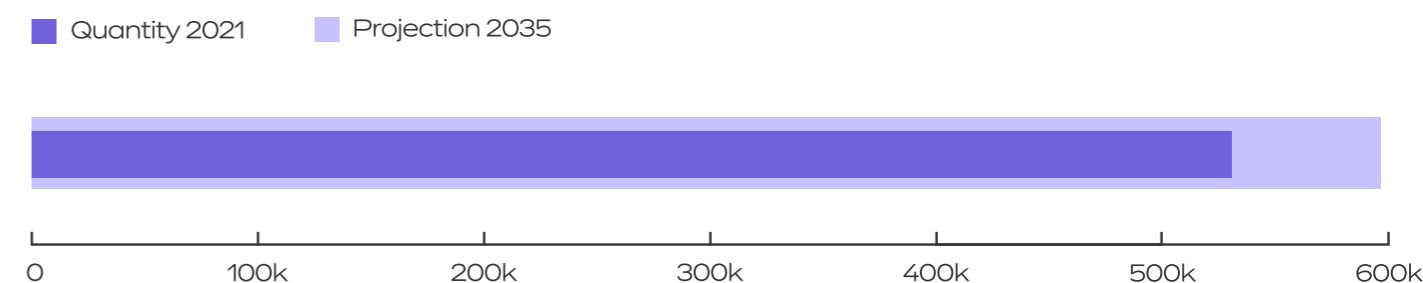
In 2022, there were over 400,000 more job postings within the social care sector compared with 2017. This growth includes brand-new jobs, known as emerging skills, as well as vacancies created by people leaving roles. Both result in a skills gap which, within the social care sector, has increased by more than 44% over the last five years.

Table B: [NFER The Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Longrun employment prospects for the UK, Baseline Projections](#)

Care worker and home carers



Nursing auxiliaries and assistants



Projections for skills demand have been researched by the Nuffield Foundation and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in the October 2022 paper, *The Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Long-run employment prospects for the UK, Baseline Projections*.

The paper acknowledges that it cannot foresee the future, but its predictions present a likely scenario of what will happen in the labour market in the coming years. By focusing on just two professions within social care, we can see that both will require a significant increase in numbers to counter rising demand.

According to the paper, it's expected that care workers and home carers will become the occupation that holds the highest share of the people employed in the UK. This growth in care work, and an increased demand for health services, can partly be explained by the recent effects of the pandemic. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projections also predict a growing older population which may also increase the demand for care work.



From the sector: Oonagh Smyth, CEO of Skills for Care

Oonagh Smyth is Chief Executive Officer of Skills for Care, the workforce development charity for adult social care in England. She has extensive experience working with organisations across the social care sector. Prior to starting at Skills for Care in 2020, Oonagh was the Executive Director of Strategy and Influence in Mencap. She is also a former Co-Chair of the Care and Support Alliance and an accredited executive coach.



Why the time for action is now

When we think about why there are skills gaps in adult social care there are many factors in play, but perhaps the biggest is that people are living longer with often complex needs – so people who work in care need to access learning and development throughout their careers to meet those increased day-to-day challenges.

Added to that are the increases in the use of technology and digitally enabled care and support that were accelerated in many services during the pandemic, plus the difficulty some employers have in recruiting and retaining staff in a sector with a vacancy rate of 9.9%, or around 152,000 vacancies on any given day.



One way employers can tackle some of those challenges is by identifying the skills shortages in their own workforce and being really honest about them."

It is true that around two thirds of those vacancies are filled by people moving around care, but that does make investment in learning and development more of a risk for employers until they can be sure that people will stay and develop with them.

The funding available for learning and development relative to the costs of purchasing training can be an issue for many employers, as is the lack of availability of suitable quality learning provision in some areas, and what can seem a bewildering number of training courses, qualifications and e-learning.

One way employers can tackle some of those challenges is by identifying the skills shortages in their own workforce and being really honest about them. This does require them to think hard about what skills are needed in their services – not just now, but those which will be needed in the future.

That means planning in advance rather than continually firefighting, which is easier said than done, and succession planning with staff who are looking to advance and develop can help so that skills can be learned ahead of demand. The work we are doing with the Department of Health and Social Care, consulting the sector around

what a Care Workforce Pathway would look like will help identify some of these new skills, and should help employers plan development needs more effectively.

We need to support the recruitment and retention of workers, including underrepresented groups like young people and men, and create cultures where learning starts on day one of the role and is built into what is expected of every care worker. Reducing the number of vacancies in a service will help employers to release existing staff to take on training and development opportunities.

As well as making sure quality of care isn't impacted, research tells us that the more investment employers make in the learning and development of their staff, the better the quality of care and support provided, and that in turn can be a factor in the inspection outcomes for a service.

Without a planned and continuous cycle of learning and development, ratings could change and impact on the organisation's ability to attract people.



...care workers already need to significantly develop their digital and data security skills..."

Not identifying where the skills gaps are and ensuring there are learning and development products which fill them could also mean that the sector falls behind in terms of innovation.

We have seen over just a few short years the increase in digital technology to manage and monitor care, as well as the advancements in digitally enabled care, which have meant that care workers already need to significantly develop their

digital and data security skills – not just for themselves, but also for the people who draw on care and support.

Our data supports the case for a social care workforce plan, including consideration of terms and conditions to ensure that social care employers are competitive in local labour markets. This will help to make sure that we have enough people with the right skills in the right places to support people who draw on care and support now, and for future generations.

Creating that workforce plan would involve a range of partners as social care is a large and diverse sector. Skills for Care is ready to work with local and national Government, employers, people who draw on care and support, and our sector partners to help deliver a sustainable plan for the adult social care workforce.

We also need to work together as systems leaders to identify the skills needed for the future and to start to plan how they are best developed. That might be through qualifications or through other means, but we need a systems' approach in an already overcrowded market.

There are examples of good initiatives around what care might look like in the future to meet the changing needs and expectations of care for our population, and a shift to more work around prevention, community interventions and care and support in the home for longer.

We need to act on that now, starting with taking the time to think about what the most effective long-term knowledge and skills solutions are across the workforce.

From NCFE: Craig Wade, Head of Provider Development at NCFE

After a 10-year military career as a registered nurse in the Royal Navy, Craig joined NCFE as the Sector Manager for Health, Science and Social Care. He provides a deep understanding of the respective sectors and the occupational and labour market trends, advising NCFE on current specialist skills needs and predictions for future development.



The future can be bright for social care, but it needs our support

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) aims for everyone who needs care in England to have outstanding, quality care that empowers them to lead fulfilling lives and have the greatest possible independence.

We need care to be personalised to meet individual needs and give people choice and control, with joined-up services so that people's experience of health and social care is seamless.

Adult social care depends on the dedication of millions of people providing care. But the sector is facing an unprecedented and severe recruitment and retention crisis.

There are more people working in adult social care than in the NHS – 1.54 million on average compared to 1.3 million in the NHS – and the sector is predicted to grow by almost half a million jobs by 2035. Nevertheless, the adult social care sector faces an average turnover rate of 28.5% per year.

The DHSC wants everyone who works in care to feel valued and recognised as professionals. They want to build a

workforce of the right size with the right skills to meet the growing need for care and support.

Through multiple governments, social care has not had the attention, resource or support that it deserves. But times could be changing. The People at the Heart of Care white paper, published in December 2021, set out a 10-year vision for social care, with the current government committing to change.

“...the skills and compassion of care workers make all the difference to the lives of the people they care for, but their skills need to be recognised.”

By 2025, it is hoped that we will see real change within in social care, with an aim of recognition and support for the skills of care workers, driving digitalisation and innovation in social care provision, and changing how social care is planned for and commissioned.

It comes as no surprise that the skills and compassion of care workers make all the difference to the lives of the people they care for, but their skills need to be recognised.

DHSC has committed to supporting career development through a new plan for the care workforce, which includes the outline of a new care workforce pathway for adult social care, a new Care Certificate qualification, and a skills passport to provide a verifiable record of training and a range of new, funded training schemes.

The social care workforce reforms, which will see an investment of £250 million over the next two years, will start to provide the workforce with more support to develop progression.

Firstly, though, social care needs more recognition as a professional career and carers need to feel empowered to deliver high-quality care, and to develop and progress in their careers.

The new workforce pathway will hopefully clearly define what a career in social care means – offering universal definitions of roles and the knowledge, skills, behaviours and values needed to perform and deliver high quality care. But it requires organisations, like NCFE, to help deliver this recognition of a professional career in care.

As an educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning, NCFE certifies hundreds of thousands of learners each year. We're proud of our reputation for supporting social care through our qualifications in this vital area.

We recognise the need to make sure we're equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to work with some of society's most vulnerable people. But it becomes much more than certification; it is about empowering our learners – our future carers – to understand the profound impact they will have on society after completing an NCFE qualification and entering the profession.

This is why it is essential for NCFE and other experts within the sector to commit to ensuring we shape the current and future qualifications landscape so that learners can develop the skills and behaviours they need to progress into the sector.

An example of this is how NCFE is focused on the emerging digital skills requirements and the newly proposed digital leadership qualification based upon the Digital Skills Framework, whilst also ensuring we collaborate externally on key projects such as the development of the new Level 2 Care Certificate. The aim for the sector is for this to become the baseline standard for all new care workers as they join the profession.



“...whilst we hear a lot about the sector being in crisis, I do believe there are reasons to be optimistic.”

So, whilst we hear a lot about the sector being in crisis, I do believe there are reasons to be optimistic. Our outstanding social care workforce, and those wanting to join it, deserve all the recognition and support we can give them.

They're doing their job. It's now down to the rest of us to do ours.

From the frontline: Stephen Mordue

Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Sunderland and former social worker



"The lack of availability of resources to support people is problematic"



For me, helping people has always been at the core of social work. In fact, what first led me to working in this sector was receiving a chance comment from a family friend when I was a teenager, who said he thought I was a good listener and that I had a relaxed demeanor.

I soon decided to undertake some community-based youth work and then applied for a social work course following this. The more I learned on the course, I realised that the family friend had clearly seen the attributes in me that were appropriate because I immediately felt I'd found my home. Placements with Citizens Advice Bureau and Darlington Borough Council's Community Mental Health Team confirmed this.

There continues to be problems with recruitment and retention in social care and, as a result, social workers have higher caseloads, and they engage mainly in their

statutory responsibilities – which means the opportunities for therapeutic social work has become more limited. This often leads to people seeking support in the independent and voluntary sector, which has also been decimated by austerity. The consequence of this is people can be left without effective support.

I am fascinated by the human condition – about how people live their best lives. I'm also invested in considering how the world could be different in terms of political ideology and capitalism. On a personal level, I love interaction with people. I love hearing the stories people have to tell and the aspirations they have, and then trying to be part of realising those ambitions.



In terms of the university sector directly, the quality of students on our programme is high and they come with a good solid value base in terms of empowerment and strengths-based approaches to social work. To some extent, the current economic crisis has led to slightly lower numbers as people worry about student debt and their living standards while being a student.

More broadly in the social work sector, the impact of austerity in terms of numbers of social workers (and therefore high caseloads) and the availability of, or more correctly, the lack of availability of resources to support people is problematic.

I have always seen being a social worker and now a social work lecturer as a privilege. It's a privilege that people allow us as a profession into their homes and lives. We need to tread carefully when we're in there and hopefully help people to realise the power they have within themselves.



It's a privilege that people allow us as a profession into their homes and lives."

Conclusions

By using the data and each expert's perspective, we can see three clear themes emerging – retention, recruitment and professional development. If we're to address the current and projected skills gaps within social care, there are tangible changes we can make to help tackle each issue.

1 Recognition and retention

There is too much movement within and away from social care, with many transferring rapidly from employer to employer or completely outside of the sector. We must raise the profile of social care (showing the diverse opportunities within it and the vital role it plays) to parity with the health sector.

It's also important to give employers the confidence to invest in their staff, both in terms of time and training. This is so the sector does not get left behind when it comes to emerging skills, particularly digital skills.

2 Professional and career development

Development within the social care sector is too often unclear and at worst, unavailable. If we're to make a career in social care attractive and long-lasting, we need to look at professional development:

- Funding, cost, availability, and complexity are all factors when it comes to training to support professional and career development. Even when employers are more willing to invest in their staff, all too often there are many barriers to overcome. Accessing professional and career development needs to be clear and as straightforward as possible.
- We support the call for the creation of a social care workforce plan. This should ensure career pathways are clear and that local skills gaps are accounted for to enable access to care services according to need.

3 Recruiting a younger workforce

Unless young people have direct experience of social care, it will continue to be an unfamiliar sector to younger workers. [Skills for Care reported](#) that just over a quarter of the current social care workforce is aged 25 or under. This must be addressed as, over time, an ageing and eventually retiring workforce without younger recruits will only serve to compound and exacerbate existing challenges. As already identified, the workforce is transient and, without recruitment, increasing gaps in social care provision are likely.

- Reducing the number of pathways into social care will negatively impact the numbers going into the field. There need to be clear entry pathways for 16–19-year-olds.
- Action is needed to ensure that those who want to pursue a career in the sector can access a course that is right for them. This means addressing the absence of funded, specific qualifications for social care.
- There is a real concern that following the outcome of the Level 3 review, students could be left without viable options to pursue a vocational course in social care through a classroom-based route, which would further exacerbate the ongoing recruitment crisis.