



Briefing Caring and Caring Workers

Summary statement

Caring is the foundation of our society and yet we continue to undervalue it. More than three in five (62%) childcare workers and social care workers earn less than the real living wage. Even before the cost-of-living crisis, 1 in 5 care workers lived in poverty.

Working conditions for care workers are also well-researched to be so poor as to have a significant impact on worker well-being: risk of suicide amongst carers is 70% higher than the national average.ⁱ

What do we mean by care work?

This briefing refers to all those employed in the social care, childcare and early education sectors.

Social care workers help vulnerable people manage their additional needs (potentially resulting from illness, disability, or age to name a few) and day-to-day life. 1.54 million adults are currently employed in the UK social care sector.ⁱⁱ

A childcare and early education worker is responsible for the care and supervision of children in various settings, such as daycare centres, preschools, and private homes.

Care workers in Bristol:

In 2021/22 there were approximately 14,000 posts in adult social care in Bristol, and it was estimated that the number of adult social care workers would increase by 32% between 2021 – 2035.ⁱⁱⁱ

On average Bristolian care workers had an average of 8.8 years of experience and 71% of the workforce had worked in the sector for at least 3 years.^{iv}

- 78% of the workforce in Bristol were female with the average age being 43 years old.^v
- 77% of the workforce in Bristol identified as British, 15% identified as an EU national and 9% as a non-EU national.^{vi}
- The care sector employs a disproportionate number of women (82%) and Black and minoritised people (23%)^{vii} exacerbating intersectional gender pay gaps and social inequalities.

Care work and poverty in Bristol

The lack of investment in the caring economy in Bristol particularly impacts on care workers in the city. The average salary for care worker in Bristol is £25,292, 8% less than the average national salary for care workers.

Nationally nine out of ten care workers earn less than £15 an hour and 73% of care workers are paid less than the real living wage of (£10.90).^{viii}

In Bristol, nursery workers can get paid as little as £14,000 per year.^{ix}

Furthermore, the average Bristol care worker salary is 30% less than the average salary across Bristol,^x contributing to women's, particularly Black and minoritised women's, economic inequality.

Many nurseries experience poor working conditions and there are only 12 remaining local authority-run nursery schools (11 are struggling with budget deficits).^{xi}

Bristol City Council are signatories to the UNISON Ethical Care Charter which commits to paying the national Living Wages to work workers, however anecdotal evidence indicates their care home nursery contracts do not provide sufficient budget for this.

A YouGov survey of 1,000 carers revealed that 29% are now unable to live on the money they earn - 1 in 12 carers have stopped driving due to fuel prices.^{xii}

Economic difficulties are a significant contributor to poor mental health across childcare, early years and social care workers and the risk of suicide amongst carers is 70% higher than the national average.^{xiii}

Why Value the Caring Economy?

Restructuring the economy to a 'caring economy' through public investment, progressive taxation (on wealth and energy windfalls) and use of government bonds into social care work^{xiv} will lead to an increase in carer job opportunities (creation of 928,000 new direct and indirect jobs) in the UK.^{xv}

Investment in the caring economy would address the poor pay and conditions and reduce the mental health impact for child care, early years education and social care workers, benefiting individuals, their families, the economy and society as a whole.

Adequate investment in the caring economy would address regional inequality through the creation of jobs in poorer areas and well as addressing the care crisis: 1.8 million people have unmet care needs – the vacancy rate for social care is at a record 10.7%.^{xvi}

Raising all social care sector wages to a minimum of £15 per hour would lead to a GVA boost of 144% per capita in the Southwest.^{xvii}

Investment in the caring economy would reduce the burden on those with caring responsibilities – most of whom are women family members – who are prevented from working and living their lives as a result of insufficient care sector infrastructure (see briefing on Caring and Carers). New, better paid, higher status (than is currently the case for care work) jobs would also provide work for those leaving shrinking sectors (retail and aviation) and incentive for carers to stay in the sector.

Such investment and increase in value for the caring economy reflects public opinion: the Women’s Budget Group Poll revealed that 75% would pay more tax to support investment in free social care for adults over 65 and disabled persons.^{xviii xix}

Investment in the caring economy would be in line with the national government’s, West of England Combined Authority’s and Bristol City Council’s commitments on climate change. Investment in social infrastructure jobs tend to be ‘greener’ producing 30% less greenhouse gas emissions than construction jobs and 200 times less than agriculture jobs. (See the briefing on Caring and the Environment)

ⁱ Office for National Statistics (2016) Suicide by occupation, England: 2011 to 2015.

ⁱⁱ National Careers Service, *Care Worker*. Available at: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/care-worker> (Accessed: 05/10/2023); Bedford S and Button D (2022) *Universal Quality Social Care: Transforming Adult Social Care in England*: New Economics Foundation, Women’s Budget Group; NHS (2022) *Working in Social Care*. Available at: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-social-care> (Accessed: 05/10/2023).

ⁱⁱⁱ Skills for Care (2022) *A summary of the adult social care sector and workforce in Bristol*. Leeds: Skills for Care

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Skills for care (2022) *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England*. Available at: <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/national-information/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England.aspx> (Accessed: 05/10/2023) ; Diskin R (2022) *A Green and Caring Economy*: Women’s Budget Group.

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- viii Adzuna, *Bristol Care Worker salary stats*. Available at <https://www.adzuna.co.uk/jobs/salaries/bristol/care-worker> (Accessed: 05/10/2023); TUC, *£15 minimum wage for care workers would boost England's economy by £7.7 billion*. Available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/ps15-minimum-wage-care-workers-would-boost-englands-economy-ps77-billion#:~:text=Low%20pay%20and%20job%20insecurity,employed%20on%20zero%2Dhours%20contracts>. (Accessed: 05/10/2023)
- ix Deeney, Y. (20th November 2022) *Bristol's underfunded nurseries at 'crisis' point as costs surge and staff are cut* Bristol Post <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/bristols-underfunded-nurseries-crisis-point-7838517>
- x Adzuna (n 7).
- xi Diski R (n 6); Bristol Live (2022); *Bristol's underfunded nurseries at 'crisis' point as costs surge and staff are cut*. Available at <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/bristols-underfunded-nurseries-crisis-point-7838517> (Accessed on 20/11/2023).
- xii Bristol Live (2022); *Third of Social Care workers find their salary too low to live on*. Available at <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/third-social-care-workers-find-7657769> (Accessed on 05/10/2023)
- xiii Office for National Statistics (2016) *Suicide by occupation, England: 2011 to 2015*.
- xiv Diski R (n 6).
- xv Bedford S and Button D (n 1).
- xvi TUC (n 7).
- xvii Ibid.
- xviii Women's Budget Group (2020) *New polling: Public wants an economy that prioritises care and equality and they are willing to pay more tax for this* <https://wbg.org.uk/media/press-releases/new-polling-public-wants-an-economy-that-prioritises-care-and-equality-and-they-are-willing-to-pay-more-tax-for-this/>
- xix Bedford S and Button D (n 1); Diski R (n 6).