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Understanding what Social Care organisations do to bring more young people into care roles and keep them in the job

Submission date 15/01/2026	**Recruitment status** Recruiting	[_] Prospectively registered [_] Protocol
Registration date 04/02/2026	**Overall study status** Ongoing	[_] Statistical analysis plan [_] Results
Last Edited 10/11/2026	**Condition category** Other	[_] Individual participant data [X] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Younger people have a lot to offer the adult social care sector, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives to improve care and support. However, social care struggles to attract and keep younger workers, who make up only a small proportion of the workforce. This study aims to understand what works well in recruiting and retaining younger people (aged under 30 years) in adult social care roles.

Who can participate?
1. Social care organisations that report data to the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS) (Skills for Care)
2. Senior personnel with responsibility for recruitment and/or retention of staff in adult social care organisations in England

What does the study involve?
This study will work with Skills for Care to analyse national workforce data and identify organisations that are successful in attracting younger staff. Then the senior staff in these organisations will be interviewed to learn about the strategies they use. Next, the study will carry out in-depth case studies to explore how these approaches work in practice. Finally, these strategies will be refined and shared with a wider group of employers to ensure they are relevant and practical for the sector.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
By sharing what your organisation is doing, participants will help shape practical strategies to attract, recruit, and retain younger people in the social care workforce, strengthening the sector for the future. It is hoped that they will enjoy sharing their experiences and views.

Where is the study run from?
University of Leeds (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
August 2025 to February 2027

Who is funding the study?
National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) (UK)

Who is the main contact?
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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
REC reference number: 47782

Study information

Scientific Title
Attracting, recruiting and retaining a yOunger Social CARe workforce

Acronym
OSCAR

Study objectives
The overall aim of the study is to identify organisational factors and approaches with potential to support social care employers to attract, recruit and retain younger people (aged up to 30 years) as care workers and regulated professionals in adult social care.

1. Identify employers that ‘excel’ in attracting, recruiting and retaining younger people to work in adult social care.
2. Understand what these employers are doing well and generate hypotheses about why and how strategies work.
3. Develop approaches with potential to support employers to attract, recruit and retain younger people, exploring the real-world relevance of these approaches with a representative sample of adult social care employers, including those employers who are not recruiting a younger workforce.
4. Refine and disseminate approaches with potential to be effective for adult social care employers and provide the foundations for development and evaluation of a complex intervention in the future.

Ethics approval required
Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 23/06/2025, King's College London Research Ethics Office (King's College London, 3rd Floor, 5-11 Lavington Street, London, SE1 0NZ, United Kingdom; -; rec@kcl.ac.uk), ref: 47782

Primary study design
Observational

Study design
Sequential, multi-method study combining secondary analyses of a national dataset, qualitative methods (interviews), in-depth case studies (interviews, documentary analysis) and stakeholder consultation workshops

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Adult social care workforce

Interventions
We will work with Skills for Care to analyse national workforce data and identify organisations that are successful in attracting younger staff. We will then interview senior staff in these organisations to learn about the strategies they use. Next, we will carry out in-depth case

studies to explore how these approaches work in practice. Finally, we will share and refine these strategies with a wider group of employers to ensure they are relevant and practical for the sector.

Using Positive Deviance methodology, we will undertake qualitative interviews (WP1) and case studies (WP2) to explore the approaches and strategies used by Social Care organisations that successfully employ a younger (under 30) workforce. These will be analysed using thematic analysis. Findings from the interviews and case studies will be discussed in consultation groups with social care representatives to explore their applicability to the sector. Study outcomes will include evidence-based resources providing information on important contextual considerations alongside strategies and approaches to recruiting and retaining younger workers in social care.

Intervention Type
Other

Primary outcome(s)
1. The approaches and strategies used by Social Care organisations that successfully employ a younger (under 30) workforce measured using qualitative interviews (WP1) and case studies (WP2); these data will be analysed using thematic analysis at one time point

2. Explore the findings from the interviews and case studies and their applicability to the sector measured using consultation group discussions with social care representatives at one time point

Key secondary outcome(s)

Completion date
28/02/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Organisations that report data to the ASC-WDS (Skills for Care)
2. Senior personnel with responsibility for recruitment and/or retention of staff in adult social care organisations in England

Participant type(s)
Employee, Other

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
1. Organisation does not submit data to ASC-WDS (Skills for Care)
2. Organisation is outside England
3. Staff employed to provide direct care only
4. Care recipients or their family and friends
5. Senior personnel employed by organisations that provide children's social care
6. Health care professionals (e.g., medics, nurses, social workers)

Date of first enrolment
18/08/2025

Date of final enrolment
30/11/2026

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
University of Leeds
Woodhouse Lane
Leeds
England
LS2 9JT

Sponsor information

Organisation
King's College London

ROR
https://ror.org/0220mzb33

Funder(s)

Funder type
Not defined

Funder Name

National Institute for Health and Care Research

Alternative Name(s)
National Institute for Health Research, NIHR Research, NIHRresearch, NIHR - National Institute for Health Research, NIHR (The National Institute for Health and Care Research), NIHR

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
National government

Location
United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
Individual participant data will not be shared publicly. Skills for Care will retain ASC WDS source data; only anonymised summary statistics will be shared with the research team. Qualitative data (interviews and consultations) will be stored securely on University of Leeds servers, pseudo-anonymised, with access restricted to named investigators. Audio recordings will be deleted after analysis; consent forms will be retained for 10 years. Data may be shared with the Sponsor (King's College London) and Funder for audit under explicit consent. Final storage arrangements will comply with Sponsor requirements.

IPD sharing plan summary
Other