

JGreatBS

Understanding Essential Jobs in Social Care

Exploring an undervalued industry
in need of skills



"1.7 million people in the UK currently work in the care sector. With an average of 105,000 vacancies unfilled and an additional 226,441 new roles expected to open by 2026, it's evident that there are significant issues with labour shortages within the sector."

Kirstie Donnelly MBE

CEO City & Guilds

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Foreword

In 2021, we began the journey of researching and understanding the complexities of 'essential jobs' in the UK, or what we prefer to call Great Jobs. The result of this research, conducted in partnership with Emsi Burning Glass, has been published in our Great Jobs Report, and uncovers the realities of these 10 essential industries, the skills challenges being faced and the underlying opportunities.

105,000

vacancies remain
unfilled on any given
day in the Social Care
sector



Social care was one of the sectors we considered. Over the last two years it has received increasing attention, thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic shining a spotlight on the critical role of care workers in society. However, despite this positive attention, the social care industry still faces a significant – and growing – labour shortage. Although not a new challenge, the shortage of workers in social care has been exacerbated by Brexit and high staff turnover, which has been compounded by low salaries, Covid-burnout and a rapidly aging workforce.

The sector skills body Skills for Care recently reported that over the next five years, 226,000 new vacancies are expected to open up in adult social care, on top of the staggering 105,000 vacancies that already remain unfilled on any given day. Our research found that low salaries and unsociable working hours remain some of the key reasons why people wouldn't consider a career in social care. In addition, being perceived as a female industry means that men are often reluctant to even contemplate a role in the sector.

While some steps have been taken by the government to address the skills crisis in social care, the issue hasn't been resolved, so the question remains as to what more we could be doing to make sure that social care in the UK is fit for the future.



We clearly have much work to do collectively to improve how we attract talented workers into social care by improving awareness of the opportunities for development and professional growth that a long-term career in social care can offer and addressing the issues around poor perceptions of careers in this industry.

In this report, we unpack the complexities around social care that we discovered in our Great Jobs research. We will also offer our suggestions for how to address some of the issues we have uncovered in order to support this industry that is so instrumental in supporting the most vulnerable in our society. I hope you find it useful.

Kirstie Donnelly MBE
CEO
City & Guilds

Essential jobs – A country in search of skills

Although almost all respondents to the Great Jobs survey acknowledged that essential jobs are important and therefore technically 'secure', only 25% admitted that they would be interested in pursuing their own essential job career. In other words,

“it's a dirty job, but somebody (else) has got to do it.”

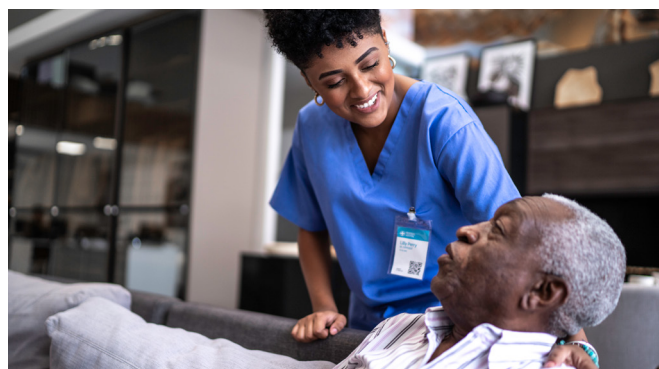


Taking a bird's eye view of the UK's essential industries, we can identify some of the most prominent skills recruitment challenges faced by employers on the ground.

- 65% of essential jobs are filled by workers aged 35 years and older, compared to a younger non-essential workforce. Fewer young people are entering essential jobs, for various reasons.
- The effects of Brexit have reduced essential sectors' access to a wider talent pool.
- Misperceptions of essential jobs hinder diverse people from entering careers that are typically considered 'male roles', such as construction or transport and logistics, or 'female roles', such as education and social care.
- Despite the huge value they add to society, essential job salaries are lower by £500 per year, compared to non-essential jobs.
- Essential industries suffer a typically higher staff turn-over. Currently, less than half (46%) of essential workers in the UK plan on staying in their roles for longer than 5 years. This was often related to low pay and a perceived lack of opportunities to progress.

65%

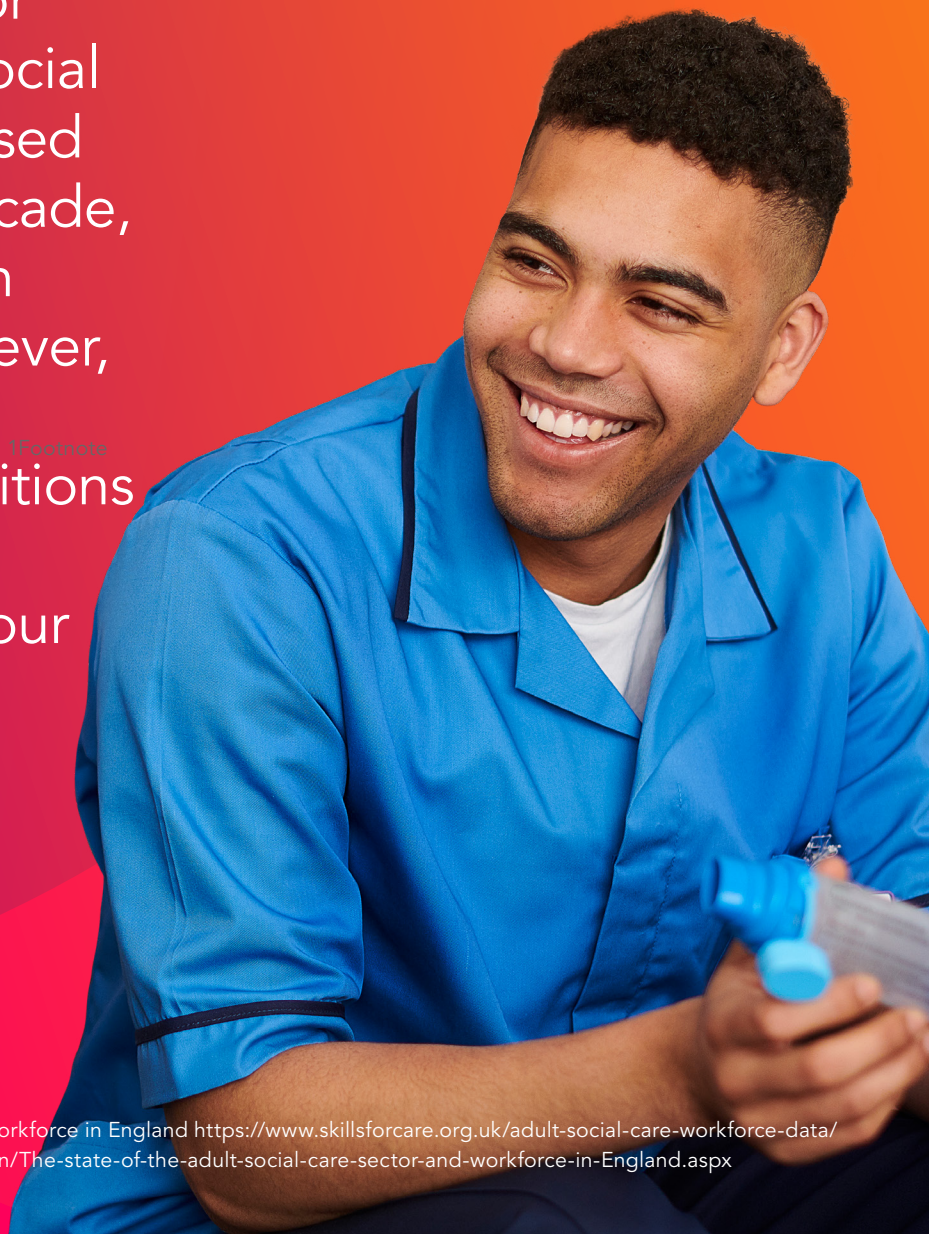
of essential jobs are filled by workers aged 35 years and older.



Social Care – Growing opportunities in an undervalued sector

According to key findings published by Skills For Care in 2021, adult social care jobs have increased by 12% in the last decade, and by 2.8% between 2020 and 2021. However, data shows a 1.8% decrease in filled positions which is unsurprising given the current labour market crisis.

¹Footnote



Our Great Jobs report shows that there are currently 1.7 million jobs in social care in the UK with a further 226,441 vacancies expected to open by 2026 – a 13% growth rate. This is likely to exacerbate the labour shortages the sector is already facing without further intervention. There are some key factors that are influencing the issues:

The challenges vary:

Poor retention:

20% of social care workers we surveyed stated that they plan to leave the sector within the next year, although Skills for Care's data tells us that in 2020/21 a staggering 28.5% of the workforce left the sector.

Aging workforce:

The social care workforce consists of a largely aging population, with relatively little "new blood" flowing into the sector. This factor, combined with the ongoing and accelerating increase in vacancies in the UK, will make the staffing issues in social care progressively more pronounced.

Reduced talent pool:

Prior to Brexit, approximately 15.2% of social care workers were of Non-British nationality. This figure has already slumped to 12.8%, and continues to decline.

Shift to increased domiciliary care:

Skills for Care research indicates that an unprecedented shift in demand away from residential care homes toward domiciliary care means even more care workers are required, to meet the needs of attending to many private homes.

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of social care workers we surveyed stated that they plan to leave the sector within the next year.



What are the challenges facing social care?

While social care has been under pressure for some time, the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit are certainly being felt, both by employers and the workers themselves.

£18,600

per year - social care has the second lowest average salary out of all 10 essential job sectors





Social care workers



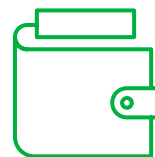
Due to staff shortages, social care workers are working more hours, over and above their typically long hours.



Extra hours are often worked out of mere dedication, without extra pay.



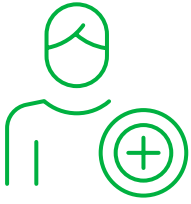
Feedback shows that care workers are experiencing mental and physical burn-out post Covid.



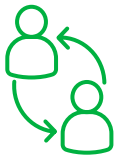
Low pay for social care workers remains an issue, with the average salary being around £18,600 per year – the second lowest out of all 10 essential job sectors.



To support this, research shows a significant increase in sick leave days, from 5.1 days pre-pandemic to 9.5 days per year in 2020/2021.



Employers



Poor staff retention rates (approximately 28.51% turnover in 2020-21) create multiple challenges for employers:

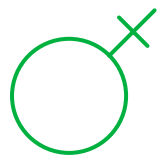
- Ongoing disruptions to service delivery
- Increased recruitment costs
- Negative impact on staff morale
- Difficulty filling vacancies
- Hesitance to upskill or train staff who seem likely to leave



While other industries may rely on technology and automation to fill certain skills gaps, there is little scope for automation to lessen the need for human, empathetic staff in social care.



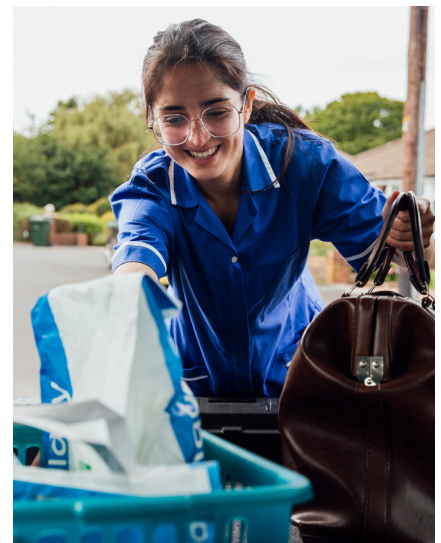
With the aging workforce, and many about to retire, there are few new candidates embarking on social care careers. Employers are finding it difficult to attract new and young candidates, due to a lack of understanding of the benefits a career in the industry could offer.



Social care remains a female dominated industry (83%). Employers are finding it difficult to recruit male staff, who are suitable for many roles in social care.



High staff turnover rates are affecting all levels within social care, from registered managers (20.7% turnover) to on-the-ground care workers (24.4% turnover).



Employer Case Study



Unique Senior Care

Jo Cleary,
Learning & Development Manager at Unique Senior Care

Unique Senior Care is a leading, local family-owned home care provider for the elderly, and adults over the age of 18 with additional needs.

With almost 25 years in health and social care, Jo Cleary shares her experience of the industry's progression and the impact that Covid-19 has had on social care specifically.

According to Cleary, finding staff for social care work was already a challenge prior to the pandemic. Now, post-pandemic, the industry faces a new anomaly. Those who joined the social care industry during the pandemic, after losing their jobs in different industries, are now able to return to their original roles. The result? A mass exodus of staff from a sector already short on skills.

Unique Senior Care has turned to innovative solutions to adapt to the changing environment and emerging skills needs:

- The organisation runs weekly inductions to ensure that new staff are brought on board as quickly as possible and provided with ongoing support in their new roles.
- Unique Senior Care has incorporated incentives, such as bonuses and referral schemes to encourage workforce growth and dedication.
- They also actively nurture relationships with colleges and schools to raise awareness about the opportunities within social care for young people.
- Unique Senior Care partners with Skills for Care on various recruitment campaigns.



They also focus on developing their staff and 'growing their own' talent. In Unique Senior Care's management team, 90% embarked on their careers from junior roles, assuming more responsibilities as they progressed through the company's career development and succession planning programmes. Cleary explains that, although specific skills are not required to enter the industry, there's a misperception that social care is 'unskilled work'. On the contrary, those who do go into social care will be given opportunities to learn, progress and gain qualifications.

Jo Cleary,
Learning & Development Manager at Unique Senior Care

Social care – the unsung heroes of the UK

Despite the important work being done – that of caring for adults who need assistance in caring for themselves – social care remains the most undervalued sector of the UK.



We look at some of the dynamics of these essential jobs.



What does the general public think about social care?

The City & Guild's Great Jobs 2022 report found that only 25% of people would consider a career in social care.

- Respondents reported the following reasons that they wouldn't work in social care:

23%

are deterred by comparatively low salaries

18%

are unwilling to work unsociable hours associated with social care

24%

believe they lack the skills and experience necessary

- Overall, social care work has a desirability rate of just 12%. So clearly more needs to be done to make jobs in the sector more appealing and allow employers to fill skills gaps.



What do social care workers think about the sector?

Research findings show a mixed attitude amongst social care workers. The industry is known for its sense of community, with many saying that they enjoy healthy co-worker relationships and a daily sense of accomplishment.

- **Pride:**

80%

of social care workers are proud of their job.

- **Purpose:**

83%

say that the work that they do gives them a sense of purpose.

- **Value:**

89%

of social workers feel that they are making a valuable contribution to society.

- **Income:**

67%

of social care workers say that higher income would make them feel prouder to do their job.

Employee Case Study



Home Instead

Wendy Griffin & Dinah Ball, Caregivers at Home Instead

Home Instead has been at the forefront of specialised home care for the elderly, and supporting those being cared for, and their families, for many years.

During the course of the pandemic, many displaced or unsettled workers found themselves exploring industries they may never have considered before. Two such people were Wendy Griffin and Dinah Ball.

Before entering social care, Wendy's career had been varied – she'd tried her hand at IT, PR Marketing and Office Management. Still dissatisfied and in search of a career that would give her a greater sense of purpose, Wendy decided to take on a role as caregiver at Home Instead. *"I can honestly say I'm the happiest I've ever been in what I'm doing now,"* she says. *"There's a reason why the other jobs were never quite right for me and I'm now doing more of what I wanted to do, which is helping people."*

On the other hand, Dinah was returning to the world of work after taking a career break to raise her family. With previous experience as a district nurse, Dinah would have no trouble returning to her old career path, but she found that she was hesitant to do so, because her career in nursing had progressed beyond hands-on patient care, and she longed to be more involved with those who needed help.

Now working together as caregivers at Home Instead, Wendy and Dinah voice their frustration at the skills shortage in the industry. From an employee's perspective, they express that there are many factors that could be addressed more efficiently to catalyse the change that's needed:

- More emphasis needs to be placed on the pride and sense of purpose that workers experience when in a social care role, so as to attract individuals whose personal values will be fulfilled by those attributes, more so than higher income and professional status.
- Public perception of social care needs to change, as it's not just the elderly and frail that need help, but a diverse range of adults with varying needs. There are also many different roles to explore.
- There should be a greater awareness of the training and career progression pathways available within social care to challenge the perception that it's an 'unskilled' or 'low skilled' profession with limited opportunities.

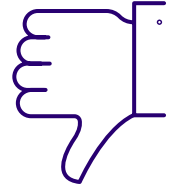
"Every day you are making a difference to someone's life," says Dinah. *"Clients will often start by saying how they didn't want to have carers come into their homes, but then will go on to say how they couldn't have managed without you. Once you start working with a family, it changes their world. A lot of that isn't always there for the outside world to see but the impact is phenomenal."*

Wendy Griffin & Dinah Ball
Caregivers at Home Instead

Exploring practical solutions to social care skills shortages

While low salaries and strenuous working conditions may be considered the leading reasons why fewer people are attracted to careers in social care – and these are certainly factors that government and industry leaders need to focus on improving – our research found that there are a number of other factors that can be addressed to draw new and young employees into the sector.





1. Address the negative reputation of the sector

Jobs in social care are all too often overlooked, particularly by Gen-Z, due to lack of knowledge about the career opportunities in the industry. Organisations, training providers and government should address these misperceptions through recruitment initiatives and awareness campaigns across the UK, in order to make jobs in social care more attractive, aspirational and affordable – and to attract a wider pool of diverse candidates.



2. Emphasise career development potential

We need to ensure that prospective candidates are aware of the potential for career development within social care. Create career pathways that either progress into management roles or into specialised forms of care to attract new staff, as well as to retain and inspire the existing workforce.

3. Offer other benefits

In an economic environment where salary increases can be hard to achieve, organisations are finding creative ways to reward employees for hard work. Where possible, this could include more flexible working hours, or preferred staff rates negotiated at local suppliers or service providers, or lifestyle benefits offered at work. Organisations can make their social care workers feel valued through a number of methods, outside of salary increments.



4. Targeted recruitment

By actively recruiting from underrepresented groups, such as male workers in this case, employers can reach a largely untapped talent pool and draw in new skills and willing workers. Educating the public about career opportunities will form an important part of this, as men typically see 'social care' as women's work and remain entirely unaware of the diversity of roles in the industry.



5. Educate young people about social care

To attract younger people into successful and exciting careers in one of our most noble sectors, we need to ensure that young people are more informed about it. We've identified the following important messages that employers and providers should consider communicating.

- **Entry-level social care roles do not require training in advance.**

Aside from certain childcare and social worker roles, there are a variety of positions available in the industry that have no training prerequisites. Skills are predominantly learned on the job, through training programmes. This opens up opportunities for all kinds of people, many with experience in other fields that could be valuable to the social care sector.

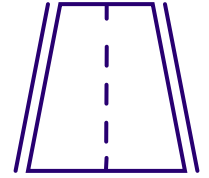
- **Social care workers are hired for their values.**

While transferable social care skills can be gained through training, most social care employers are looking for candidates with human-focused values, excellent communication, and compassionate, empathetic personalities.

- **Employers may recruit people under 18 years.**

There is a misguided belief that in order to enter social care, you need to be over 18 years of age. This is false – younger candidates may embark on a career in social care but will need supervision. (The flip side of this is that hiring a school leaver may mean incurring additional costs of supervision).

Walking the road together



What the experts say – a City & Guilds podcast

In a recent podcast hosted by City & Guilds' CEO Kirstie Donnelly, a panel of industry experts discussed the challenges that the adult social care sector in the UK faces.

We heard some fascinating stories and sage insights from our esteemed guests:

1. Nigel Taylor – Group Head of Learning and Development at CareTech
2. Sarah Gribbin – Learning and Development Manager at Home Instead
3. Lindsey Appleby-Flynn – Head of Development and Design at Cera Care

There are many moving parts to addressing the skills shortages in many of the UK's essential sectors. However, there are some areas that can be identified as key influencing factors – these come up time and again in the conversations we have with industry experts.

1. We need to better professionalise the sector

Nigel Taylor of CareTech urges organisations to change the perception of social care as a profession, saying:

“Part of the problem is that people do see social care as unskilled, and for people who don't want to aspire to much. We're trying a one-size fits all solution, or trying to fix one part, when actually we need to look at the whole process. Reward and recognition, parity, and professionalising the sector is always going to ring the bell.”



2. Recruit with honesty

Highlighting that most people who leave their jobs in social care do so within the first 3 months of employment, Sarah Gribbin of Home Instead encourages employers to be transparent about roles and responsibilities:

“When it comes to recruitment, we need to be honest about what the role is. When seeing some of the adverts, there is a lack of honesty – social care isn’t just going out for coffee with Doris. We need to be honest, so that people will stay with us.”

3. Retain through better staff care

Lindsey Appleby-Flynn of Cera Care points out that social care staff are often lost to burn-out. People who go into social care roles typically have a heart for the work and are prone to over-committing – employers need to find ways of minimising the immense pressure placed on these individuals:

“Burnout is key in our sector. Have effective wellbeing and mental health strategies in place to recognise and help people before they get to the point of burnout. A lot of social care staff leave because they’re burnt out.”



4. Use recognition effectively

Taylor notes that the social care industry could make better use of recognition to both encourage and retain existing staff, and to attract new workers:

“We’ve got to make social care attractive to the public. We have to address our current workforce and make sure they get recognised and rewarded, and skilled up. But then we’ve got to attract new people into the sector, especially young people.”

5. Facilitate development

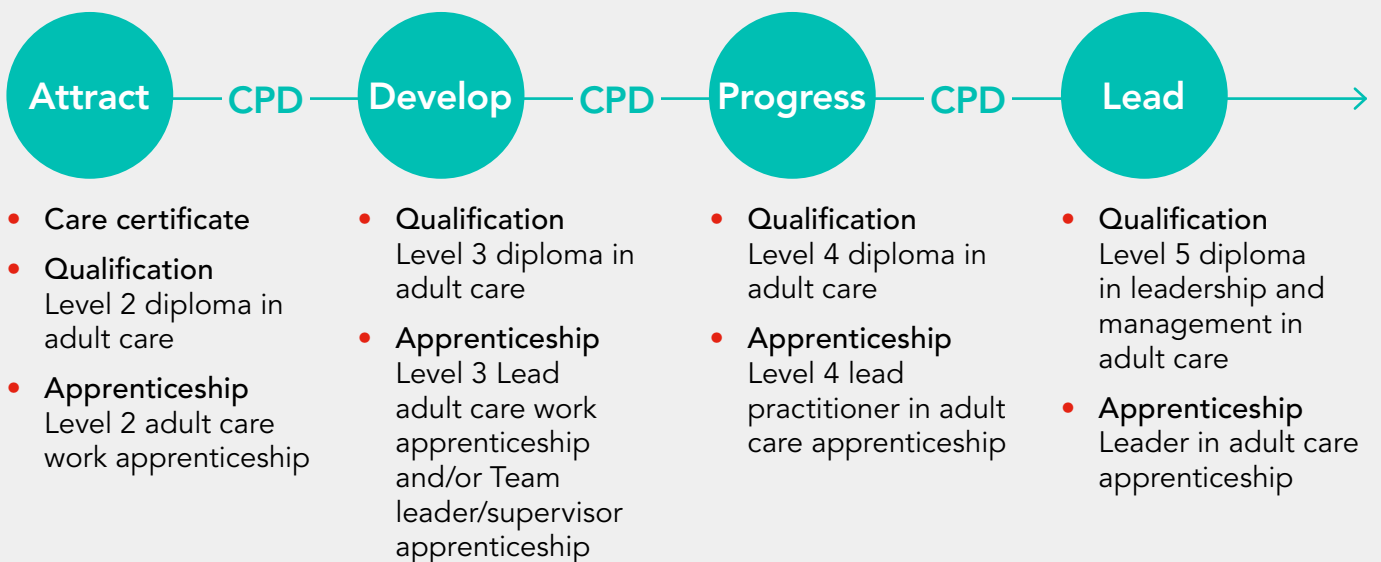
Shining a light on the influence that social care has on the lives of so many people, Lindsey Appleby-Flynn advocates the implementation of performance reviews and development programmes to enable workers to constantly improve their service and feel even greater accomplishment and pride:

“If something goes wrong in social care the results could be catastrophic, and that can be a huge responsibility for someone who’s new to the role. Review performance regularly, support them by identifying what they’re doing well, and what they need help and development in – and then give them access to that development.”

Supporting the champions of social care

Find out how City & Guilds can help you find the right path

City & Guilds adult care qualifications can be used to develop the required knowledge and skills, which the workforce needs. If you need support to attract, retain and offer progression opportunities for your staff, take a look at our range of qualifications and apprenticeships in the sector, as outlined in the framework below.



Find out more at [Health and Social Care | City & Guilds \(cityandguilds.com\)](https://www.cityandguilds.com/Health-and-Social-Care)

Functional skills

We've been offering qualifications in maths, English and ICT for close to 50 years with the aim of helping young people and adults succeed in all that they choose to do in work and life.

Our Functional Skills Maths and English qualifications, are designed to help learners of all ages and levels, supporting them to develop and demonstrate the practical skills needed in real-life situations confidently.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are already starting to see a higher take-up of our Apprenticeships and Adult Education programmes. This leads to the need for further development in both basic and flexible functional skills in English and Maths from Entry level up to Level 2, where valuable skills for work and life are needed now more than ever.

[Find out more](#)



Apprenticeships

Supporting your apprenticeship delivery

Welcome to our updated apprenticeship hub - here you'll find all you need to help you make the most of our apprenticeship support and services.

From unrivalled technical and personal EPA support from our dedicated team to on-programme resources and assessment preparation for EPA – our high-quality support and assessment resources give apprentices the confidence to succeed.

[Find out more](#)

Vocational qualifications

Vocational qualifications are either work-related qualifications designed to enable students to gain the skills required to perform a particular job, or qualifications that may be taken as part of a wider study programme or an apprenticeship.

City & Guilds is a leader in skills development, providing services to training providers, employers, and trainees across a variety of sectors to meet the needs of today's workplace. City & Guilds qualifications and apprenticeships are valued by employers across the world, helping individuals develop their talents and abilities for career progression.

[Find out more](#)

Recognitions services

Every organisation is unique, and so are your goals. High-quality, relevant and tailored training is key to remaining competitive, and recognising skills will set your business apart – making you fit for the future.

Our suite of recognition services supports your organisation to be future fit by adding value, credibility, and recognition to your brand. Find out which of our services will help you to meet your unique goals.

Discover our recognition services and let us help you unlock your growth potential through the power of skills.

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