

Mitigating, Tackling and Responding to the Skills Impact of Brexit

Scottish Government Debate

S6M-00382

June 2021

Introduction

Age Scotland welcomes the opportunity to brief MSPs ahead of the Scottish Government Debate on mitigating, tackling, and responding to the skills impact of Brexit.

We are concerned about the impact of Brexit on social care staffing and how this will compound shortages already existent in the sector and the pressures of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Scottish Government's continued commitment to upskilling and retraining is welcome. There must be support for older workers built into the Scottish Government's recovery from coronavirus and efforts to reskill people for the future.

Social Care Staffing

The Scottish Government has estimated that there are almost 10,000 EU nationals working in Scotland's social care sector, providing essential, round the clock support to older people and those with disabilities.¹

Even before the coronavirus pandemic and the end of the Brexit transition period, the social care sector was under immense pressure:

- As at December 2019, 39% of care services reported having vacancies – a slight increase from the previous two years.²
- Care homes for older people had the largest proportion of services reporting vacancies at 63%.³

Key statistics

- An estimated **10,000** EU nationals work in social care sector in Scotland
- **39%** of social care services reported vacancies at the end of 2019
- **One third** of the Scottish workforce are now over 50
- Over **one in five** 55-74-year-olds in permanent employment have lost their job, been furloughed, or had their pay or hours reduced because of the pandemic
- **82%** of 55-64-year-olds see their age as a disadvantage when applying for a job

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/contribution-non-uk-eu-workers-social-care-workforce-scotland/>

² https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/StaffVacancies/Staff_vacancies_in_care_services_2019.pdf

³ https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/StaffVacancies/Staff_vacancies_in_care_services_2019.pdf

- The main reason why services found vacancies difficult to fill was not having enough or appropriate applicants applying for vacancies.⁴

Given that these figures date from before the end of the Brexit transition period, there is a real concern they could be exacerbated if a substantial number of EU nationals have left Scotland or if fewer come to the UK. This impact will be felt strongly in parts of the country where EU nationals account for a greater proportion of the social care workforce. The sustained and intense pressure faced by the social care sector over the course of the pandemic is also likely to have impacted on staffing levels. Social care staffing shortages are happening in the wake of ever-increasing demand as our population lives longer and with multiple long-term health conditions.

Age Scotland recognises that we cannot rely on immigration alone to fill vacancies. More people from all backgrounds need to see social care as a fulfilling career, with better pay and status across the profession. The Scottish Government's efforts to help recruit and retain staff must be continued and not reliant on single recruitment drives. We welcomed the publication of the final report of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, including its recommendations for improved opportunities and conditions for staff – something we have been repeatedly calling for.

EU Settlement Scheme

We believe it is likely that many EU, EEA, and Swiss nationals will not be aware of the requirement to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme by 30 June 2021, despite efforts to raise awareness of the scheme. The pandemic has dominated public consciousness and made it difficult for this message to cut through as it usually would. We remain concerned that many people of EU nationality of all ages, including a small but significant number of older people, will not have applied to the scheme by the deadline. We recently joined with organisations from across the UK, including Scottish Care, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, and Age UK, to call on the UK Government to extend the deadline to apply.⁵

Older Workers

Support and retraining opportunities for older workers must be central to the recovery from coronavirus. A third of the Scottish workforce are now over 50 and there are twice as many people aged 65 and over in employment in Scotland today compared to 10 years ago. Research by Aviva has found 63% of over-50s are planning to retire later than they thought they would 10 years ago.⁶ This number is set to rise as changes to retirement and state pensions make working beyond 65 more common.

⁴ https://data.sssc.uk.com/images/StaffVacancies/Staff_vacancies_in_care_services_2019.pdf

⁵ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/latest-news/2021/may/urgent-call-to-extend-eu-settlement-scheme-deadline/>

⁶ <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/08/UK-over-50s-work-longer/>

We know that older workers who lose their jobs are less likely to find a new one, or one at a similar level, than those who are younger than them.⁷ This has an immediate impact on National Insurance contributions and pension savings, and people nearing retirement age who find themselves in this position may have to start using any savings they have earlier than planned. This may mean they end up living for longer with a lower income. This may contribute to an increase in the number of pensioners living in poverty – which has already begun to rise in recent years.⁸

Similar to younger people, older workers have been severely impacted by the pandemic. More than one in five 55–74-year-olds in permanent employment have lost their job, been furloughed, or had their pay or hours reduced.⁹ Older workers may be more concerned about the impact to their health if they return to their workplace, especially if they have been unable to work from home. Older workers must not be left behind in the economic recovery from Covid-19 and the Scottish Government should send a strong message that they are a valuable asset to business, the economy, and the country.

With 82% of 55–64-year-olds seeing their age as a disadvantage when applying for a job, more must be done to embed age inclusive workplaces across Scotland. Age inclusive workplaces benefit employees of all ages and contribute to tackling ageism and discrimination in the workplace.

We would urge MSPs to support:

- The provision of inclusive support for older workers who have been impacted by Covid-19 with thorough support to retrain and upskill where required.
- Efforts to remove barriers to ensure older workers can continue to contribute to the labour market.
- The promotion of age inclusive workplaces to combat negative stereotypes about older and younger workers.

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/factsheet/2017/06/partnership-action-for-continuing-employment-clients-over-50/documents/pace-services-experiences-clients-aged-50-pdf/pace-services-experiences-clients-aged-50-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/PACE%2Bservices%2B-%2Bexperiences%2Bof%2Bclients%2Baged%2B50%252B.pdf>

⁸ <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/persistent.html#Pensioners>

⁹ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-scotland/documents/election-2021/action-for-older-people---scottish-parliament-2021-election-asks---age-scotland.pdf>

Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland. Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

Further information

Contact the Age Scotland Policy, Communications and Campaigns team:

policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

0333 323 2400

Twitter [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Facebook [/agescotland](https://www.facebook.com/agescotland)

LinkedIn [Age-Scotland](https://www.linkedin.com/company/age-scotland)

www.agescotland.org.uk