

BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

The BASW Annual Survey of Social Workers and Social Work: 2023

A summary report



Foreword



▶ Julia Ross
Chair, BASW



▶ Ruth Allen
Chief Executive, BASW

Welcome to the summary report of the 2023 BASW annual survey of social workers. In this report you will find the views of social workers and social work students over a wide range of topics including workload, challenges in the workplace and the profession, experiences of bullying, harassment and discrimination, sustainability and supporting people to vote.

This is now our third year of the annual survey and looking at the findings from the last three years shows little change in that time for repeated questions. Peer support remains the bedrock of positive experiences in the workplace, something most, if not all, of us will have experienced with our colleagues. It is also pleasing to see that the majority of respondents also report being happy working in the profession.

More concerningly, the issues and challenges also remain the same, indicating that change isn't happening, or isn't happening quickly enough for the workforce. Staffing levels, access to resources, workload, cuts to local services and the funding of social care remain areas of core concern for respondents. Disappointingly, this year's findings also show that experiences of bullying, discrimination and harassment in the workplace are still being confronted by a substantial minority of participants, something we have in common with other professions including health.

BASW will continue to use these results to push for better conditions for the workforce, both in the workplace and at the broader level of policy. BASW will be producing a manifesto of key calls for change ahead of the upcoming general election.

These pressures, if they remain unaddressed, will undermine the sustainability of the profession. The 2023 survey also explored our understanding of sustainability in a much broader sense, gaining insight into the impact of climate instability and environmental damage on social workers and the people with whom we work.

We sincerely thank every social worker and social work student who took the time to complete the 2023 survey and share their views with us. We highly value your insights which mean BASW can represent your interests and well being. Thank you for sharing your views and experiences once again.

Julia Ross
Chair, BASW

Ruth Allen
Chief Executive, BASW



Key findings

In this summary report, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) presents the findings of its 2023 annual survey. The survey covered a range of issues including: workload, challenges facing the profession, experiences of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, sustainability and supporting people to vote.

Certain questions are repeated annually with the intention of allowing changes in views and feelings to be tracked over time. This allows trends in the data to be identified. These questions will be repeated in coming years to build up this data further. In some instances, findings are therefore compared with those from previous years to highlight consistency and change.

The 2023 annual survey took the opportunity to ask additional questions relating to previous findings to deepen understanding of core issues such as turnover of experienced staff or bullying, harassment and/or discrimination. 'Topical' questions are also included every year to create a 'snapshot' of respondents' views and attitudes on emerging issues of importance. For 2023, these questions related to issues of sustainability and supporting people to vote as part of the social work role.

BASW uses data derived from the annual survey to inform its work seeking to improve the framework and conditions of social work across the UK, as well as the circumstances of the people with whom social workers work. Consequently, some areas of the survey focus on challenges and pressures confronting the workforce. However, the survey also seeks to acknowledge some of the positives of working in the profession. Respondents' recognition of the challenges they confront, both as individuals and as a profession, is reflected in the qualitative comments, some of which are included in this report.

The survey was conducted across the four nations of the UK. It was hosted on the BASW website between 7 December 2023 and 15 January 2024 and was open to both members and non-members of BASW. 1215 social workers, educators and students completed the survey. We are grateful to all the respondents who willingly gave their time to complete the survey and contribute to BASW's work.

Key findings from the survey:

- ▶ **45.43%** of respondents say peer support has a positive impact on their workplace; **44.2%** say appropriate level of management/supervision has a positive impact – an increase from **32.27%** in 2022;
- ▶ **46.91%** identified adequacy of staffing levels as one of the biggest challenges in their workplace;
- ▶ **67.49%** identified cuts to local services as one of the biggest challenges facing the profession in the immediate future, the first time this has been selected more often than the funding of social care (62.22% in 2023);
- ▶ **65.19%** reported that the people with whom they work are negatively impacted by issues related to the climate crisis and/or environmental degradation;
- ▶ **76.63%** say access to local green spaces has a positive impact on the people with whom they work;
- ▶ **64.61%** of respondents report not being able to complete all their work during their contracted hours;
- ▶ **50.21%** reported not feeling able to manage their current workload;
- ▶ **41.15%** reported having experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination in the past 12 months, or were aware of someone that had;
- ▶ Respondents' views on how the public perceive social work and social workers, already negative in 2021 and 2022, worsened further in 2023.

A note on structure

The summary report contains the main findings of the BASW Annual Survey 2023. These findings take the form of descriptive statistics calculated based on the responses of all those who responded to the survey, unless otherwise specified.

45% of respondents reported that they were experienced social workers, and almost one-quarter reported they were managers.

45% of respondents reported working with children and families and almost seven-tenths of respondents identified themselves as employees.

A full breakdown of the professional profile of respondents is available in Appendix A. Appendix B contains questions that were specific to independent/self-employed social workers. A discussion of the way in which the survey was conducted, including the limitations of the methods used, can be found in Appendix C – How we conducted this survey.



Feelings about being a social worker

► **Figure 1: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I feel secure in my current job.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	227	18.68%	800 = 65.84%
Agree	573	47.16%	
Disagree	190	15.64%	247 = 20.33%
Strongly disagree	57	4.69%	
Not applicable	75	6.17%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

This question about job security was first asked in 2022. In the 2023 annual survey, almost two-thirds (65.84%) of total respondents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, which is comparable to the proportion in 2022 (64.17%). The percentage of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing decreased slightly from 24.5% in 2022 to 20.33% in 2023. Those studying for a social work qualification ($n = 88$) were not asked these questions.

► **Figure 2: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am happy in my current job.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	176	14.49%	675 = 55.56%
Agree	499	41.07%	
Disagree	283	23.29%	393 = 32.35%
Strongly disagree	110	9.05%	
Not applicable	54	4.4%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

The proportion of respondents reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement decreased from 61.8% in 2022 to 55.56% in 2023. Some of this decrease could be attributable to the lower total number of respondents in 2023. The proportion of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement increased from 28.16% in 2022 to 32.35% in 2023. This may suggest a small shift away from respondents being happy in their current jobs.

► **Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am happy in the social work profession.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	224	18.44%	735 = 60.49%
Agree	511	42.06%	
Disagree	257	21.15%	346 = 28.48%
Strongly disagree	89	7.33%	
Not applicable	41	3.37%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

The proportion of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement in 2023 was three-fifths (60.49%). This is consistent with the 2022 finding (59.17%). The percentage of those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing decreased slightly from 31.21% to 28.48%.

Public Perception

“I think one of the most significant issues is that we don’t have a public image, we exist in silence, we are not visible in mainstream media in the way that the NHS is.”

On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is “poor” and 10 is “excellent” How would you rate the public’s current perception of social workers?

Average: 3.07

The average this year represented a slight decrease on previous years at 3.07. In 2021, the average was 3.6 and in 2022, it was 3.3. The 2023 finding thus represents a further incremental worsening in how social workers believe they are perceived by the public.

Benefits and challenges of doing social work

► **Figure 4: Of the following options, please choose 3 that have the most positive impact on your current (or most recent) workplace experience.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Peer support	552	45.43%
Appropriate level of management and supervision	537	44.2%
Effective multi-agency and/or partnership working	350	28.81%
Training and learning opportunities	323	26.58%
Space and time for reflective practice	239	19.67%
Sufficient resource for people I work with	223	18.35%
Service development and improvement opportunities	184	15.14%
Career progression	165	13.58%
Research and knowledge sharing opportunities	161	13.25%
Engage in rights-based practice	157	12.92%
Trade union membership, knowledge, advice and support	126	10.37%
Effective workplace policy on anti-discriminatory practice	75	6.17%

The number one most chosen option has been consistent since the start of the annual survey – peer support (chosen by 45.43% of respondents in 2023). The proportion of those choosing this option has decreased from 2022 (57.24%) but aligns with the finding from 2021 (46.75%). The second and third most chosen options remain the same as 2022 with ‘appropriate level of management and supervision’ registering an increase in the proportion of respondents choosing it compared with last year (2022: 32.27%; 2023: 44.2%). The fourth and fifth most elected options, ‘training and learning opportunities’ and ‘space and time for reflective practice’ respectively, both registered an increase compared with last year from 22.28% to 26.58% for training and learning, and from 14.17% to 19.67% for reflective practice.

While there are no clear trends beyond the relative consistency of the most selected options, some of the variation is potentially accounted for by the consequences of working in a more isolated fashion during the Covid-19 pandemic compared with now. However, some variation can also be attributed to changes in the number of respondents in successive annual surveys.

Recent years have seen discussion of a number of measures intended to improve workplace conditions for the social work workforce. However, it is not yet clear how widely such measures are being implemented or what impact, if any, they are having. The following question was therefore introduced to see if respondents had noticed any improvements on these issues in their workplace in the previous 12 months.

► **Figure 5: Have you noticed any positive changes in your workplace in the last 12 months? Please check all that apply.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
None of the above	479	39.42%
Improved flexible working policy	263	21.65%
Better team working and relationships/culture	207	17.04%
Effective wellbeing support/supportive environment for self-care	153	12.59%
Better peer support	125	10.29%
The organisation has a clearer direction	114	9.38%
Better supervision	110	9.05%
Greater access to CPD	109	8.97%
Better career development opportunities	75	6.17%
More manageable workload	74	6.09%
Better pay for overtime worked	7	0.58%

Respondents could select as many options as they felt applied. This question reflects that many respondents do not feel they have seen positive changes with almost two-fifths (39.42%) selecting the ‘none of the above’ option. The most frequently selected change was ‘improved flexible working policy’ chosen by just over one-fifth of respondents (21.65%), followed by ‘better team working and relationships/culture’ (17.04%). As echoed by responses to the question on overtime pay, better pay for overtime worked was the least selected option at 0.58% of respondents.

► **Figure 6: Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be the biggest challenges to you in your workplace.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Adequacy of staffing levels	570	46.91%
Access to resources for the people I work with	560	46.09%
Workload demand	530	43.62%
Demands of administrative tasks	524	43.13%
Inadequate reflective time, space and or practice supervision	192	15.8%
Management of change in organisation	168	13.83%
Keeping up with professional development and/or mandatory training	165	13.58%
Inadequate managerial support	164	13.5%
Lack of career progression	118	9.71%
Bullying and/or harassment	106	8.72%
Lack of autonomy in my work	77	6.34%
Support and induction for NQSWs	77	6.34%
Discrimination	62	5.1%
Relationships with colleagues	46	3.79%

Here there was a clear gap between the four most selected options and the rest. The biggest concern reported by 46.91% of respondents was ‘adequacy of staffing levels’, followed closely by ‘access to resources for the people I work with’ on 46.09%. The third and fourth most selected options are closely related – ‘workload demand’ and ‘demands of administrative tasks’ on 43.62% and 43.13% respectively. These represent the same top four as in the previous two surveys, although this is the first time that ‘adequacy of staffing levels’ has been the most chosen option, having been third most selected in 2022 (34.89%) and second-most selected in 2021 (42% of the total number of respondents).

► **Figure 7: Of the following options, please choose 3 that you consider to be the biggest challenges for the social work profession now and in the immediate future.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Cuts to local services	820	67.49%
Failure to adequately fund social care	756	62.22%
Recruitment and retention	501	41.23%
Not enough time to spend with people using services	381	31.36%
Cost of living crisis	366	30.12%
Privatisation and profit-driven models in health and social care	238	19.59%
Widening/deepening poverty	183	15.06%
Abuse or violence at work	116	9.55%
Public perception	112	9.22%
Media/TV/news perception	104	8.56%
Meeting requirements of the regulators	65	5.35%
Encouraging/promoting social work activism and campaigning	58	4.77%
Recruiting and encouraging social workers to be active trade unionists	37	3.05%
Communicating digitally with the people I work with	34	2.8%

“Not properly funding social work, for too long, has had a detrimental impact on social care, and many services are hanging by a thread. This has a detrimental impact on all of us trying to keep services going. It’s devastating to see my colleagues struggle, knowing how hard we all work, and I often feel taken advantage of by those who decide to continue to underfund social care.”

The top two most-selected options were very clear in the 2023 survey with ‘cuts to local services’ (67.49%) and ‘failure to adequately fund social care’ (62.22%). There was then a drop to the third-most selected option of ‘recruitment and retention’ (41.23%) and a further drop to the fourth and fifth most-chosen options of ‘not enough time to spend with service users’ (31.36%) and ‘the cost-of-living crisis’ (30.12%).

This is the first year that ‘failure to adequately fund social care’ has not been the most-selected option for this question. However, it continues to be a major area of concern. ‘Cuts to local services’ was the second-most selected option in 2021 (50.34% of the total number of respondents) and third-most selected in 2022 (42.38%), demonstrating that this is an area of increasing concern. ‘Recruitment and retention’ remains a significant issue, having been the second-most chosen option in 2022 (54.18%).

► **Figure 8: From the following list, please choose the three activities that you would most like to see BASW engage in to support you and the organisation you work for to improve working conditions.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
More campaigning for higher pay and better working conditions	661	54.4%
Actions to change public and media perceptions of social work	582	47.9%
More direct work within social work employers to improve conditions for practice	532	43.79%
More visible campaigns and a louder voice for social work on practice, policy and ethical issues	527	43.37%
More support for member wellbeing and self-care	305	25.1%
More professional and career development opportunities across all career stages	208	17.12%
Individual coaching, mentoring and/or career development support	163	13.42%
More access to individual Advice and Representation for employment and/or regulatory matters	154	12.67%
More diverse expert topic groups for BASW members	95	7.82%
Other	46	3.79%
None of the above	12	0.99%

For this question, respondents were offered the opportunity to choose three activities they would like to see BASW engage with more deeply. The most chosen option, chosen by more than half of respondents (54.4%) was ‘more campaigning for higher pay and better work conditions’. This was followed by ‘actions to change public and media perceptions of social work’ (47.9%), echoing the belief that there is a poor public perception of social work and social workers.

This was followed by two options that received almost equal amounts of support – ‘more direct work within social work employers to improve conditions for practice’ (43.97%) and ‘more visible campaigns and a louder voice for social work on practice, policy, and ethical issues’ (43.37%).

There was then quite a significant drop to the fifth most-selected option ‘more support for member wellbeing and self-care’ (25.1%). For some of the less frequently selected options, it is possible that these are items where respondents feel BASW has sufficient offer, rather than the items being considered less important per se.

Workload

► **Figure 9: Are you able to complete all your work within your contracted hours?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	245	20.16%
No	785	64.61%
Not applicable	93	7.65%
Non-responses	92	7.57%

Almost two-thirds of the total number of respondents reported being unable to complete their work within their contracted hours. This aligns with the findings of the 2021 and 2022 annual surveys where 59.6% and 68% of the total number of respondents reported that they were unable to complete their work within their contracted hours. The results indicate that a majority consistently feel unable to complete their work within the contracted hours. Those studying for a social work qualification were not asked these questions.

► **Figure 10: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I feel able to manage my current workload.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	88	7.24%	448 = 36.87%
Agree	360	29.63%	
Disagree	388	31.93%	610 = 50.21%
Strongly disagree	222	18.27%	
Not applicable	65	5.35%	
Non-responses	92	7.57%	

In another repeated question, half of respondents (50.21%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they felt able to manage their current workload, with just over one-third (36.87%) agreeing or strongly agreeing.

In terms of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, the results have been consistent since the survey began, with just over one-third of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (34.48% in 2021; 36.14% in 2022). The number of those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing jumped sharply in 2022 following the removal of the 'Neither agree nor disagree' option, from 37.6% in 2021 to 52.19% in 2022. In 2023, responses have once again suggested that when asked to choose, around half of respondents have negative views about their ability to manage their current workload.

► **Figure 11: In an average week, do you work any additional hours to complete your work?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
No, I do not work any additional hours	226	18.6%	
Yes, up to 1 hour per week	52	4.28%	
Yes, between 1 and 5 hours per week	360	29.63%	766 = 63.05%
Yes, between 5 and 10 hours per week	286	23.54%	
Yes, between 10 and 15 hours per week	120	9.88%	
Yes, over 15 hours per week	78	6.42%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

Most respondents reported working some additional time in an average working week. Almost two-thirds (63.05%) reported working between 1 and 15 additional hours a week, with 6% saying they worked more than 15 hours. Just under one-fifth reported that they did not work additional hours in an average week.

The percentage of respondents reporting that they do not work any additional hours has increased since the survey was introduced – 2.13% of total respondents in 2021; 6.8% in 2022. The percentage of those reporting working between 1 and 15 hours extra every week has also increased.

► **Figure 12: Are you paid overtime for the additional hours you work?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
No, I am not paid overtime for any of the additional hours I work	816	67.16%
Yes, I am paid for all of the additional hours I work	18	1.48%
Yes, I am paid overtime for some of the additional hours I work	56	4.61%
Non-responses	325	26.75%

Just over two-thirds of all respondents indicated that they were not paid overtime. This has increased from 53.39% in 2021. Taken as a percentage of those responding to the question, the proportion of those not being paid overtime remains at around nine-tenths.

Turnover

► **Figure 13: In the last twelve months, have you noticed an increase in the turnover of experienced social workers (5+ years of practice) in your workplace?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	793	65.27%
No	150	12.35%
Not applicable	161	13.25%
Non-responses	111	9.14%

This question was asked in response to concerns being raised about more experienced social workers leaving roles in the workplace and the potential impact of that loss of experience for more recently qualified colleagues and for the overall delivery of social work services. Almost two-thirds of respondents (65.27%) reported that they had noticed a turnover of more experienced staff in the last 12 months. A further 13% said that it was not applicable in their current situation. This suggests there has been a noticeable drain of experienced social workers from the workforce, although it is not clear whether they are taking up social work roles elsewhere, retiring, or taking roles outside social work.

“Everyone appears to be working on an escape plan from social work, due to the stress, poor pay and lack of support.”

► **Figure 14: Has the loss of more experienced staff impacted your workplace, practice and/or the ability to deliver services?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n = 1215)	Percentage (n= 793)
There has been a negative impact on the workplace and practice	730	60.08%	92.06%
There has been a positive impact on the workplace and practice	7	0.58%	0.88%
There has been no discernible impact	50	4.12%	6.31%
Non-responses (Fig 14 not applicable = 161)	428	35.23%	

A follow-up question for those who answered ‘Yes’ to the previous question asked about the impact of this perceived turnover. Of those, more than nine-tenths (92.06%) stated that it had had a negative impact on workplace and practice.

Bullying, harassment, discrimination

► **Figure 15: Have you experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination in your place of work or study over the past 12 months or are you aware of someone who has?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	500	41.15%
No	710	58.44%
Non-responses	5	0.41%

Yet again, around two-fifths of respondents (41.15%) reported that they had experienced bullying, harassment and/or discrimination or were aware of someone who had. In fact, as a proportion of total respondents, those reporting this to be the case has increased year-on-year.

Respondents who responded ‘Yes’ to the preceding question were asked a series of follow-up questions.

► **Figure 16: Please indicate which of the following you have experienced in your place of work or study in the past twelve months.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n= 793)
I have personally been a victim of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	291	58.2%
I have witnessed at least one person experience bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	187	37.4%
At least one person has confided in me about their experiences of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	266	53.2%
I have witnessed at least one person do/say things that I consider to be bullying, harassment and/or discrimination	193	38.6%

Almost three-fifths of these respondents (58.2%) reported having personally been a victim of bullying, harassment and/or discrimination, and more than half (53.2%) had been told of such experiences by another person. Almost two-fifths (38.6%) reported having witnessed activity they considered to be bullying, harassment or discrimination and more than one third (37.4%) had witnessed someone receiving such treatment. These findings are largely consistent with previous years.

The 2022 survey asked further questions around the reasons felt to be behind the bullying, harassment and/or discrimination and the nature of the relationship between those involved. The 2023 survey asked questions about the reporting of incidents.

► **Figure 17: Did you report your experience(s) of the incident(s) that you witnessed to your manager/supervisor and/or Human Resources?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n = 500)
Yes	302	60.4%
No	172	34.4%
Non-responses	741	

Three-fifths (60.54%) of those who reported experiencing or witnessing such incidents had reported the incidents to their manager/supervisor and/or human resources.

► **Figure 18: Were concrete steps taken to address the situation?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n = 500)
Yes	91	18.2%
No	265	53%
Don't know	103	20.6%
Non-responses	756	

Just under one-fifth (18.2%) of those who had experienced or witnessed such incidents reported that concrete steps were taken to address the situation. This constitutes just under one-third of those who indicated they had reported an incident.

► **Figure 19: Did these actions provide you with a satisfactory outcome?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n = 500)
Yes	47	9.4%
No	294	58.8%
Don't know	104	20.8%
Non-responses	770	

An even smaller proportion reported a satisfactory outcomes for actions taken in response, with less than one tenth of respondents in this sub-group agreeing that this was the case (9.4%).

“Expectations were made unrealistic, we were set up to fail, we were harassed and told we were not performing well enough. Gradually we all left for other jobs and that service is now failing.”

Cost-of-Living Crisis

► **Figure 20: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: The number of people I work with has increased as the cost of living has increased.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	242	19.92%	622 = 51.19%
Agree	380	31.28%	
Disagree	218	17.94%	268 = 22.06%
Strongly disagree	50	4.12%	
Not applicable	232	19.09%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

Slightly over half of respondents (51.19%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This is similar to the results for this question in the 2022 survey (49.88%). 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared with 23.97% in 2022. Only 4% of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement in 2023.

► **Figure 21: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I work with more people living in poverty now than before the cost-of-living crisis.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Strongly agree	353	29.05%	775 = 63.79%
Agree	422	34.73%	
Disagree	127	10.45%	152 = 12.51%
Strongly disagree	25	2.06%	
Not applicable	195	16.05%	
Non-responses	93	7.65%	

Approaching two-thirds of total respondents (63.79%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with one-eighth (12.51%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 16% of respondents reported that this statement was not applicable in their situation. In 2022 more than two-thirds (68.67%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, indicating the continued impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the people with whom social workers work.

Sustainability

As part of improving understanding of the relationship between social work and different forms of sustainability, the 2023 survey asked a number of questions relating to the impact of the climate crisis and environmental degradation on their work, the personal and professional use of green spaces and green initiatives and the policies of employers, where relevant. An in-depth report on the findings of this section will be published in June 2024.

Some of the headline findings include:

- Based on qualitative comments submitted, we know that social workers have grave concerns about the sustainability of the profession
- 65.19% of respondents report that the people with whom they work are negatively impacted by issues related to the climate crisis and/or environmental degradation
- 25.1% of respondents agreed that the people with whom they work had regular access to green initiatives with 42.72% reporting that access to green initiatives had a positive impact on those people's lives
- 76.63% say access to local green spaces has a positive impact on the people with whom they work yet only half (51.03%) reported that those people had regular access to local green space.

We also asked about different kinds of climate impact and the risk they were perceived to pose to the people with whom respondents work.



► **Figure 22: Climate change can impact anyone, but some people are more acutely affected than others. The extent to which people are affected depends not only on their exposure to events like floods and heatwaves but also on various forms of social vulnerability. Disability, absence of community support and lack of private transport and income can all make people more vulnerable to climate impacts**

With this in mind, please consider the list below and tick those that you believe pose a risk to the people you work with.

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Access or affordability of nutritious food	906	74.57%
Extreme cold	722	59.42%
Flooding	602	49.55%
Air pollution	576	47.41%
Heavy rainfall and storms	512	42.14%
Reliance on fossil fuels (gas, oil, coal)	470	38.68%
Loss of green space	462	38.02%
Extreme heat	428	35.23%
Psychological impact of climate crisis	389	32.02%
Fire	226	18.6%
None of the above	49	4.03%

The most prominent risk identified by respondents is the impact of lack of access to and/or affordability of nutritious food, selected by almost three-quarters of respondents (74.57%). This was followed by extreme cold, selected by almost three-fifths of respondents (59.42%). Almost half of respondents selected flooding (49.55%), followed by the impact of air pollution (47.41%) and heavy rainfall and storms (42.14%). Almost all options were selected by almost a third or more of respondents, indicating the wide range of challenges that are being thrown up by changes to the climate or environmental degradation and which are predicted to become more acute going forward.

The impact of climate injustice is an important topic of discussion in international social work which highlights the consequences for the most vulnerable members of communities everywhere. Beginning to capture the views of UK social workers allows these to be contributed to the ongoing debate about how social work can and will need to take account of predicted changes to the climate and environment.

“It doesn’t mean much at the moment but I think it should mean more. We should be looking for long-term funding models instead of the current crisis-based sticking plaster approach (in England at any rate). We should also be thinking more about social work’s environment (in every sense) and working with the communities in which we live to support them to live more sustainably.”

Promote the Vote

A UK general election is due to be held before the end of January 2025. The BASW Code of Ethics 2.1.3 highlights social workers promoting the right to participation for the people with whom they work, in all aspects of decisions and actions that affect their lives. With that in mind, the annual survey addressed the issue of helping the people with whom social workers work to vote when they are eligible to do so.



► Figure 23: Do you think social workers have a role to play in promoting voting, for example through encouraging voter registration or helping to arrange reasonable adjustments to make voting accessible?

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	825	67.9%
No	388	31.93%
Non-responses	2	0.16%

Over two-thirds of respondents (67.9%) agreed that social workers had a role to play in promoting voting. Just over three-tenths (31.9%) disagreed.

► **Figure 24: Have you supported someone to vote in previous elections as part of your social work practice?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	232	19.09%
No	981	80.74%
Non-responses	2	0.16%

Just under one-fifth of respondents (19.09%) reported they had supported someone in this way in the past. It is likely that in some areas of practice there will be few or no opportunities to engage in this support, whereas other areas of practice may offer far more.

Those that answered ‘Yes’ were invited to provide examples of how they had supported someone to vote. The examples included care experienced young people; people with disabilities; those living in residential care homes; and people detained under the Mental Health Act. Many reported supporting people with registering and/or the logistics of voting, whether by proxy, postal, or attending in person. Social workers also discussed how to find information and emphasised that everybody’s voice matters.

The survey also asked respondents ‘On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is not at all confident and 10 is total confidence, how confident are you in addressing the subject of voting with eligible adults with whom you work?’

The average score was 5.43. There was a wide and even spread in responses from not being at all confident to total confidence. This may reflect available opportunities to offer support based on area of practice or how recently a respondent qualified.

► **Figure 25: Were you or anyone you work with unable to vote in the most recent local elections as a direct consequence of changes to requirements for voter ID, for example, not having an accepted form of identification or having their identification refused?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	134	11.03%
No	481	39.59%
Don’t know	598	49.22%
Non-responses	2	0.16%

Not all parts of the UK will have experienced elections under changed requirements for voter identification. However, more than one-tenth of respondents (11.03%) reported that either they or someone with whom they worked had been unable to vote as a consequence of recent changes. In parts of the UK where voter identification changes have not been introduced for local and national parliamentary elections, the voter identification requirements will apply for UK general elections.

Appendix A – Workforce Profile

► **Figure 26: Which best describes your social work qualification?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Have a social work qualification	1114	91.69%
Do not have and am not studying for a social work qualification	8	0.66%
Studying towards a social work qualification	88	7.24%
Non-responses	5	0.41%

Over 90% of respondents to the survey were qualified social workers. A further 7.27% were working towards qualifying as social workers. Those studying towards a social work qualification were not asked all of the questions in this Appendix.

► **Figure 27: What best describes your current (or most recent) employment status?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Self-employed/Independent	130	10.7%
Agency	92	7.57%
Employee	847	69.71%
Retired	57	4.69%
Unemployed	13	1.07%
Other (please specify)	39	3.21%
Non-responses	37	3.05%

Almost seven-tenths of respondents (69.71%) reported being employees of an organisation. A further 10% described themselves as independent or self-employed and 7.5% reported that they worked for an agency.

► **Figure 28: Which best describes your current (or most recent) professional status?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Manager	293	24.12%
Experienced	556	45.76%
NQSW	97	7.98%
Other	51	4.2%
Educator/academic	64	5.27%
Supervisor	62	5.1%
Non-responses	92	7.57%

As with the 2021 and 2022 surveys, the majority of respondents reported being experienced social workers or holding more senior positions. More than two-fifths (45.76%) identified themselves as experienced and almost one quarter (24.12%) reported being managers. Almost 8% of respondents were Newly Qualified Social Workers.

► **Figure 29: Please specify your current (or most recent) area of practice.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Adults	436	35.88%
Emergency duty	72	5.93%
Children and families	553	45.51%
Youth/young adults	71	5.84%
Mental health	218	17.94%
Justice	56	4.61%
Social work educator/academic	107	8.81%
Immigration	24	1.98%
Other	89	7.33%

The most frequently reported area of practice was in Children and Families (over 45%), with just over one-third working with Adults (35.88%). Approaching one-fifth of respondents (17.94%) reported working in mental health. Respondents were able to choose more than one option for this question.

► **Figure 30: Which of the following best describes the sector where you predominantly work?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Government	31	2.55%
Local authority	825	67.9%
NHS	83	6.83%
Private	60	4.94%
Voluntary/charity	62	5.1%
Other (please state)	61	5.02%
Non-responses	93	7.65%

In a new question this year, respondents were asked to choose the best description for the situation in which they work. More than two-thirds (67.9%) reported that they worked predominantly in local authorities. The next most frequently selected sector of employment was the NHS (6.83%). This question helps to demonstrate and understand the different types of organisation in which social workers find employment.

► **Figure 31: Where did you (or will you) qualify as a social worker?**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
In the UK	1136	93.5%
Outside of the UK	52	4.28%
Not applicable	12	0.99%
Non-responses	15	1.23%

Just over 4% of respondents to the survey reported qualifying outside the UK. This compares to 5% in the 2022 survey. Social workers who qualified outside the UK represent a growing proportion of the social work workforce. Of those who qualified outside the UK, the most commonly identified countries of qualification were Australia, South Africa, the United States and Canada, followed by Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

Appendix B – Independent/Self-employed Social Workers

Two questions from this survey focused specifically upon the role of independent/self-employed social workers. The responses to these questions are collated here.

► **Figure 32: Of the following options, please choose three ways in which you think BASW could best support good independent practice.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage
Tailored CPD	90	69.23%
Specialist and/or thematic networks	70	53.85%
Regional networks	58	44.62%
Business skills development	44	33.85%
Career advice and/or coaching	40	30.77%
Payroll and employment services	25	19.23%
Other (please specify)	23	17.69%
Advice in response to discrimination	20	15.38%

Independent social worker respondents were asked about the best ways in which BASW could offer support good independent practice. The most commonly chosen option was ‘specially tailored CPD’, chosen by almost seven-tenths (69.23%) of respondents. This was followed by specialist and/or thematic networks (53.85%) and regional networks (44.62%). Respondents were also given the opportunity to offer other suggestions, and these will also be considered going forward.

► **Figure 33: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Practising as an Independent social worker enables me to adopt environmentally sustainable ways of working.**

	Number of respondents	Percentage (n = 130)	
Strongly agree	24	18.46%	98 = 75.38%
Agree	74	56.92%	
Disagree	17	13.08%	25 = 19.23%
Strongly disagree	8	6.15%	
Not applicable	7	5.38%	

This question appeared in the main survey and was therefore not asked exclusively of independent social workers. This led to respondents who had not reported themselves to be independent social workers responding to the statement. Consequently, Figure 52 has been filtered and run only for those respondents who reported being independent social worker (130).

Three-quarters (75.38%) of independent social workers responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed that practising as an independent enabled them to adopt environmentally sustainable ways of working. Just under one-fifth (19.23%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Appendix C – How we conducted this survey

The survey was conducted on-line through the BASW website. It opened on 7 December 2023 and closed on 15 January 2024. The survey was designed to allow social workers, educators, and students to reflect on their experiences in the profession during 2023 and is thus the 2023 BASW annual survey. Although hosted on the BASW website, the survey was open to non-member social workers to respond.

The survey consisted mostly of closed questions. For some questions, respondents were able to select multiple responses. Some questions included the option to enter a free-text response to either provide an answer that was not listed or to expand further on the responses selected.

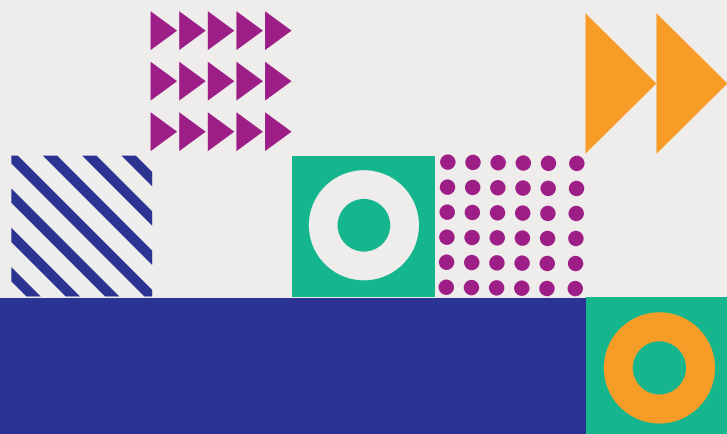
A number of questions adopted Likert scale responses, which are commonly used in surveys. The Likert scale is used as a way of establishing respondents' attitudes on an issue. The scale indicates the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with a given statement. In this instance, an option to indicate that the statement did not apply to their situation was also included. While Likert responses can include a 'neither agree nor disagree' option, this was not available for questions in the 2023 survey. For some questions in the 2021 annual survey this option was included. This means that some sets of responses are not directly comparable with the equivalent questions in the 2021 survey.

As an on-line survey, there are caveats that should be noted. Respondents represent a self-selecting sample, being those social workers, educators and students who felt motivated to respond. Consequently, this may result in bias if those with particular types of experience were more likely to respond.

In total, the survey received 1215 responses from across the UK. Descriptive statistics have been produced from the results. Not all respondents replied to all questions. Not all questions were asked of all respondents. Some questions applied only to independent/self-employed social workers. Certain responses to questions created skips allowing respondents to bypass questions that were not relevant to their situation.

Most of the descriptive statistics are calculated out of the full sample size of 1215. This creates some discrepancies when comparing results with questions repeated from the 2021 survey, as descriptive statistics in the 2021 summary report were calculated based upon the number of people responding to a specific question, not the overall sample. This change creates the impression that percentages have shifted more noticeably than is actually the case once the 2021 descriptive statistics are recalculated out of the overall sample size.

In the results, percentages have been calculated to two decimal places. Percentages may not total 100% due to non-responses and the rounding process. Where respondents were allowed to select more than one option in response to a question, percentages will not total 100%. Where respondents were allowed to select more than one option, Figures show the ranking of results in highest to lowest order, not the order in which options were presented in the survey.



Cite as: BASW. (2024). *The BASW Annual Survey of Social Workers and Social Work: 2023 – A summary report*. Birmingham: BASW.

Users are welcome to quote from this document so long as the source is correctly cited as above. Unattributed quotes are forbidden under copyright protection.

BASW

The professional association for
social work and social workers

www.basw.co.uk

