



Carer retention in the first year

Why the first year matters most, and practical steps for induction, rotas and support.



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About this PDF

This guide is a tagged PDF with headings, bookmarks and alternative text. You can also read it online at caresque.co.uk/guides/carers-retention-in-the-first-year. Need this in another format? Email hello@caresque.co.uk.

The numbers

Skills for Care reports that the turnover rate in the independent sector fell from 24.7% in 2024/25 to 23.6% in 2025/26. [\[S34\]](#) In 2025/26 the vacancy rate was 6.2%, or 96,000 vacant posts. [\[S34\]](#)

The first year stands out. Among independent sector care workers, those with less than one year of experience in their role had a turnover rate of 33.7%, compared with 12.6% for those with 20 years or more. [\[S35\]](#)

Watch out

Skills for Care is careful to say that its turnover analysis shows an association, “not necessarily the cause or reason for workers leaving”. [\[S35\]](#) Use the figures as a guide to where to look, not as proof of why people leave.

Why early leavers cost so much

Every leaver means advertising, checks, induction, training and often agency cover while a post is empty. A report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated that recruiting a new care worker costs providers a median of £7,870 per hire. [\[S36\]](#) That estimate is based on data from 11 providers, and the report says its sample is not necessarily representative of the care sector, so treat it as an indication rather than a benchmark. [\[S36\]](#)

The first week, month and quarter

The first week

- A named buddy and a named manager, both introduced on day one.
- Shadowing before solo visits, with time to ask questions.
- A clear plan for the first month, written down.

The first month

- A short check in every week, at a time that suits the new starter.
- Feedback on what is going well, not just what to fix.
- A simple way to raise a worry without waiting for a meeting.

The first quarter

- A review at twelve weeks, looking back and looking ahead.

- Agreement on training and next steps.
- A chance to say what would make the job easier.

Rotas and guaranteed hours

Skills for Care found that care workers on zero hours contracts had a turnover rate of 29.8%, compared with 19.1% for those with 35 or more contracted hours. [\[S35\]](#) Contracts are a decision for each provider, but rotas you can rely on, realistic travel time and enough notice of changes all help.

Training and progression

Skills for Care looked at five positive employment factors: local authority area average pay or more, guaranteed hours, full time hours, receiving training, and a relevant social care qualification. Care workers with all five in place were less likely to leave (15.3%) than workers with none in place (34.3%). [\[S35\]](#)

- Make training short, practical and easy to use on a phone.
- Show new starters what progression looks like, and how to get there.
- Recognise new skills when people gain them.

Managers who notice

Skills for Care also reports that the average number of sickness days lost was 4.9 per employee. [\[S35\]](#) Managers who notice when someone is tired, stretched or unhappy can often act before that person decides to leave.

What to measure

- Starters and leavers each month, and how long leavers had been with you.
- Reasons people give when they leave, recorded in the same way each time.
- Sickness absence.
- Training completed in the first twelve weeks.

Tip

Keep these on one simple dashboard that managers look at every month. The trend matters more than any single month.

A 12 month checklist

- ☐ Day one: buddy, manager and first month plan in place.
- ☐ Week one: shadowing complete before the first solo visit.
- ☐ Weeks one to four: weekly check ins.
- ☐ Week twelve: review, training plan and next steps agreed.
- ☐ Month six: check in on rota, hours and wellbeing.
- ☐ Month twelve: look back on the year and agree the next one.

Sources

1. **[S34]** Skills for Care, The size and structure of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, 2026, published 24 June 2026. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/workforceintelligence/resources/Reports/National/The-size-and-structure-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England-2026.pdf>
2. **[S35]** Skills for Care, The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England, 2026: Executive Summary, published 14 October 2026. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/workforceintelligence/resources/Reports/National/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England-2026-Executive-Summary.pdf>
3. **[S36]** Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The hidden cost of low pay in the social care sector, written by Cordis Bright, published 27 February 2026. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/care/the-hidden-cost-of-low-pay-in-the-social-care-sector>

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