

Fair Care for Scotland

Social care workers provide essential care and support in communities and residential homes across Scotland. Their work is underpaid and undervalued, and the sector struggles to recruit and retain workers. Care service delivery is fragmented, and all too often delivered by private providers who prioritise profit over quality of care.

Trade unions, service user groups and employers agree that Scotland's social care sector faces an escalating crisis as local authority budgets are cut and demand for care increases.

This leads to increasing concern from your constituents who need care, their families and those who deliver care. In its current form, the National Care Service Bill will do little to alleviate this crisis. Moreover, the Bill fails to address fundamental issues of ownership in the sector, and risks further outsourcing and undermining of Fair Work.

The 2021 Independent Review of Adult Social Care declared that “if we want a different set of results, we need a different system.” The Scottish Government duly promised to create a National Care Service (NCS) based on people's human rights, high quality care, fair work for care workers and a voice for all in decisions that affect them.

However, perhaps surprisingly, the proposals do not involve any substantive changes to who actually provides care. The Scottish Government's current approach of being ‘ownership neutral’ in the design of the NCS leaves service users all too often at the mercy of private providers.

The STUC is calling for a NCS that is truly worthy of the name. The current Bill provides a framework for a National Care Service but fails to articulate the detail of how this service will be structured or delivered in any way that suggests it differs from the current model. While there is widespread agreement that Scotland's care service needs reform or overhaul, the Bill, as proposed, does not address the key issues that undermine the provision of social care, namely:

- lack of funding to support the provision of quality care;
- the leakage of public money into profit making companies;
- the absence of Fair Work and sectoral collective bargaining.

STUC research, Profiting from Care, published in 2022 clearly shows that the quality-of-care provision, conditions for workers and value for money are all reduced by the provision of services by for-profit providers.¹

Key findings from the research include:

- Nearly 25% of care homes run by big providers had at least one complaint upheld against them in 2019/20, compared to 16% in the rest of the private sector and 6% in homes not run for profit;
- In older people's care homes, staffing resources are 20% worse in the private sector compared to the not-for-profit sector;
- Over the last six years, the public sector has paid on average £1.60 more per hour to care workers than the private sector;
- £28 of every £100 received in care home fees leaks out of the most profitable privately owned care homes in the form of profits, rent, payments to directors and interest payments on loans. While not all this extraction is illegitimate, it compares to only £3.43 of every £100 for the largest not-for-profit care home operators;
- A growing concentration of residential care provided by large for-profit companies leaves residents and workers at the mercy of market failure.

Trade unions believe it is time for a rethink on social care and are committed to a National Care Service. However, the STUC cannot support the NCS Bill in its current form.

We are calling on MSPs to put service users and care workers before profit and call for a National Care Service that delivers:

- Improved terms and conditions including a minimum wage of £15 per hour for carers and proportionate increases for other care staff;
- Fair Work and Sectoral Bargaining;
- Pay parity with the NHS across the whole wage structure;
- Full sick pay from day one;
- A not-for-profit care sector delivered through local authorities to ensure democratic accountability.

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¹ <https://stuc.org.uk/files/Reports/Profiting-from-Care-Report.pdf>