

# The Big Opportunity

Special AI edition:  
How to roll-out AI-powered tech and overcome fear of change



# Sona.

## People are at the heart of Social Care.

So, where do technology & AI fit?

Fundamentally, what carers need, what registered managers need, what leaders and directors need - everyone in care - is time. Time to spend with the people they support, time to build a strong organisational culture, time to look back on the strategies that worked and those that didn't and improve.

But in my experience, most of that time ends up in admin tasks. And I think this is where AI can make a difference. Not in trying to replace human interactions, we can't replace that and I don't think anyone wants to replace that, but in taking care of admin, whilst making time for people to interact. What stood out to me about The Big Opportunity survey was just how open people are to technology if the change is communicated well and the benefits are clear.

To me that means all that's left is for leaders to take a proactive stance and work with their teams to identify the gaps, and together build a stronger, more effective and - ultimately - more caring sector.



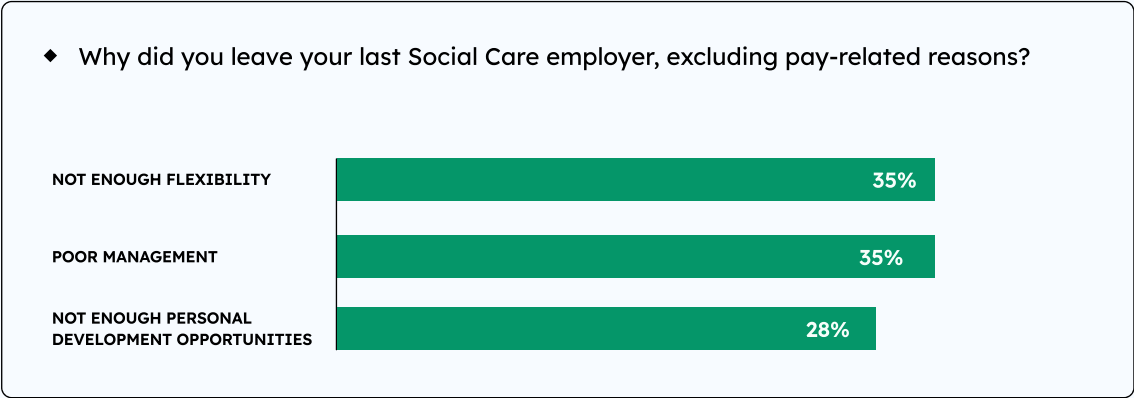
Karolina Gerlich  
CEO of The Care Workers' Charity



# Executive summary

Technology is embedded in everyone’s life. From communications, to media, navigation, and entertainment - interacting with tech platforms happens mostly without people acknowledging it. And yet, when considering new professional tech, leadership teams are apprehensive of their employees’ reaction - particularly in Social Care.

When considering the main themes present in Sona’s previous 1,000 Care professionals surveys - [The Big Reshuffle](#) (2023) and [The Big Exit](#) (2022) - there is a clear trend pointing towards the sector’s need for flexibility, good management, and personal development opportunities. Respondents to this year’s survey see the three benefits as the main areas technology can improve (details on page 6) and that would make an impact on their decision to stay with an employer.



This report will be of particular use to C-level executives in HR, Operations, Wellbeing, and People. It will look at trends seen in the last year, meaningful changes compared to 2023, and highlight practical steps for Social Care organisations to become tech leaders and better target the needs of both those who deliver care and those who receive it.

# Is there a disconnect between leaders and the frontline when it comes to tech?

The youngest survey respondents were generally open or neutral to new tech, similar to the oldest, although the expectation would have been for them to be the most tech-positive. A [Guardian](#) article pinpoints one potential cause: “They may be digital natives, but young workers were raised on user-friendly apps – and office devices are far less intuitive.”

## ◆ How open are you to using new technology solutions implemented by your organisation?

	18-24 YO	25-34 YO	35-44 YO	45-54 YO	54+ YO
VERY OPEN	44%	56%	59%	53%	42%
OPEN	36%	36%	31%	36%	42%
NEUTRAL	19%	7%	9%	8%	11%
RELUCTANT	1%	1%	2%	3%	6%

When it comes to satisfaction, one challenge operators have experienced with legacy software is low tech adoption rates from their staff and high levels of daily frustrations. Consumer-grade design - the type that is as intuitive and accessible as personal use apps - can make a positive impact on large scale implementations.

“It’s so much simpler and it’s on my phone, so I can see it at all times, there’s no issue with finding anything really on it. It’s so simple to use. My personal wellbeing has absolutely benefited massively from it.”



**Jack Neighbour**  
Team Lead - Yorkshire Care Group

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These are some key usability factors which can become KPIs for leadership teams to track:

- Percentage (and demographics) of employees logging into the app every day
- Time spent on the app for each employee
- Number of app crashes
- App-related feedback



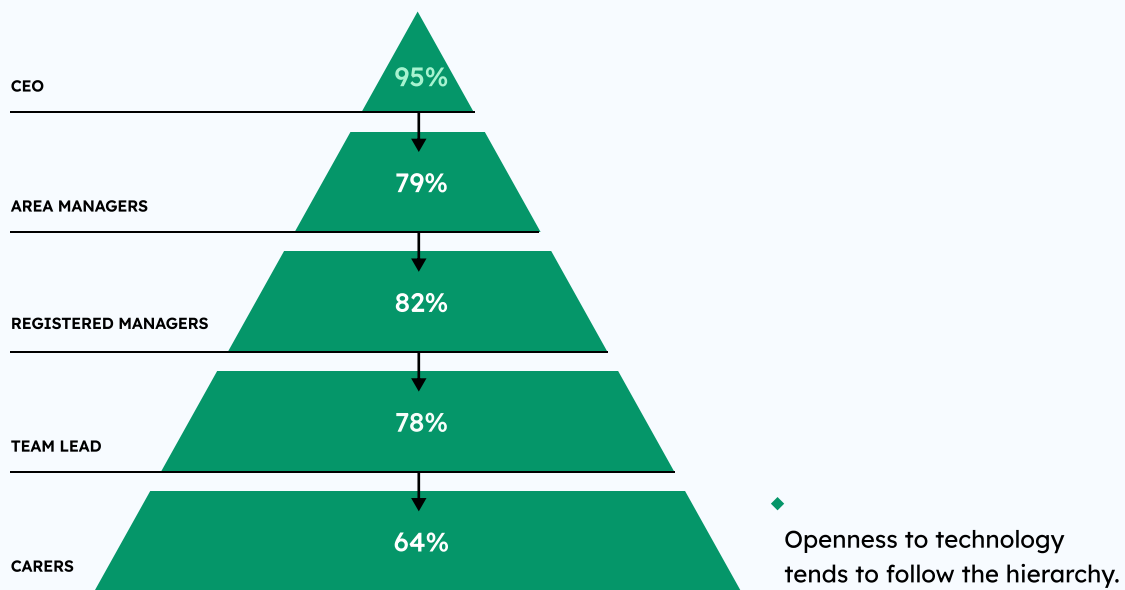
### WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO TODAY:

Set usability and accessibility KPIs for any existing tech, then track employee feedback to highlight improvements needed.

## Which levels of an organisation are the most open to AI?

Depending on their priorities, some levels of a Care organisation can be more open to technology than others. Understanding these pain-points is key to successfully communicating the benefits of new tech and gaining staff buy-in.

- ◆ Percentage of respondents that don't use AI but would like to.



One potential cause for carers and team leads being slightly less open to AI is having had a past negative experience with legacy software creating more process and paperwork, instead of increasing efficiency. The C-suite usually has full access to tech roadmaps and benefits from having the best understanding of the potential gains a new solution can bring. Sharing this knowledge with the rest of the organisation is an effective way to maximise openness.

Similar to how digitisation became the standard in organisational management, AI will be the next big leap in terms of available tech. As the graph above shows, many leadership teams are considering adding AI to their tech stack.

One example of the impact AI will have in Social Care is auto-scheduling. By forecasting service demand based on commissioned hours and care plans, an auto-scheduling feature has the potential to release team leads and managers from a significant number of hours of admin per week - which as the following section shows, is a priority across organisational levels.



### WHAT CAN ORGANISATIONS DO TODAY:

Ask potential tech providers about their AI & tech roadmap to gauge whether their solutions is future-proof.

# Who benefits from AI the most?

In order for machine learning engines to develop accurate forecasts, large amounts of historical data is needed. This will give larger providers an option to reap the benefits of AI - particularly in terms of revenue, growth through acquisition, and operational efficiency - earlier and at a bigger scale.

In terms of organisational levels, there is general alignment on the potential benefits of AI which suggests a few topics to prioritise in roll-out communication strategies.

- What do you think AI could help Social Care organisations with most? (select all that apply)

	GENERAL	CARERS	REG. MANAGERS	AREA MANAGERS	C-LEVEL
ADMIN	60%	59%	64%	65%	74%
TRACK EMPLOYEE WELLBEING	47%	45%	50%	46%	60%
INTEGRATE NEW LOCATIONS INTO PROCESSES QUICKER	41%	36%	42%	52%	58%
TRACK SUPPORTED INDIVIDUALS WELLBEING	38%	33%	42%	42%	42%
FORECAST DEMAND ON SERVICES	37%	33%	32%	43%	52%
TAILORED INSIGHTS (E.G. GENDER PAY GAP ANALYSIS)	36%	31%	44%	40%	42%
SUPPORT HIGHER ROI	27%	20%	29%	36%	45%
I DON'T THINK AI CAN HELP SOCIAL CARE ORGANISATIONS	10%	16%	8%	10%	3%

- Admin reduction

Repetitive operations and processing large amounts of data are ideal tasks for AI.

- Tracking employee wellbeing and preventing churn

When employees are able to give feedback after every shift, leads and managers are handed a wealth of data to gauge sentiment across locations. However, AI can add another layer of insight by using forecasting algorithms to predict when team members are likely to churn.

- Accelerating growth through acquisitions

Being able to accurately forecast staffing requirements and labour costs puts leadership teams in a unique position to select which acquisitions will be the most successful. AI can also enable operators to easily handle massive personnel and capacity growth without losing efficiency, lowering employee satisfaction, or risking compliance errors.

“Tech has given us the confidence to grow. We can now say ‘We’ll take all three acquisitions,’ because we know we can take them and streamline them into our processes, no problem, and while we’re doing that, we can go and look for the next ones rather than have the team’s entire focus be on a laborious implementation process.”



**Claire Bunker**  
Growth & Development Director

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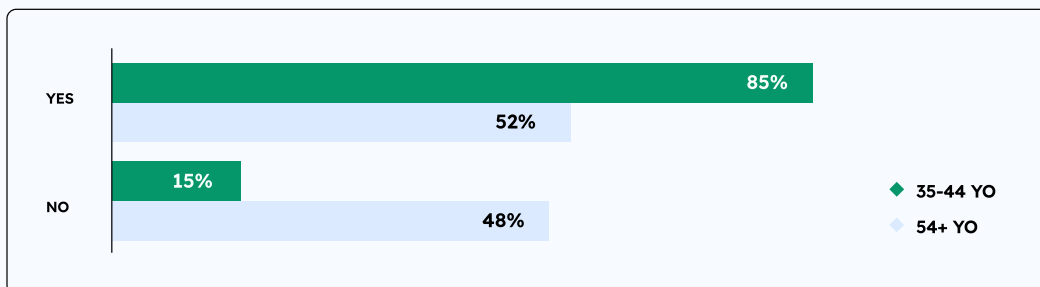
# How to combat fear of change amongst staff members?

Embracing change fosters a mindset that values learning and adaptability, but in order to achieve this, change must be implemented strategically. Communicating the plans and benefits, consulting teams on their preferences (e.g. online or in-person training), and engaging with their feedback can help leadership teams ensure a successful roll-out.

## What would make you more open to using new technology?

I'M ALREADY VERY OPEN TO NEW TECHNOLOGY	51%
IF MANAGEMENT PRESENTED THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN BEFORE STARTING THE ROLL-OUT	38%
IF ONLINE TRAINING WAS PROVIDED	35%
IF IN-PERSON TRAINING WAS PROVIDED	30%
IF I KNEW WHAT THE EXACT BENEFITS WERE	21%
IF MANAGEMENT REWARDED GOOD USE OF TECHNOLOGY	21%

## Have you provided feedback on the current technology used within your role?



The cohort most open to tech (35-44 yo) is also the one that provided feedback most often (85%). On the other hand, the cohort least open to tech (54+ yo) is also the one least likely to have provided feedback (48%). Whilst unsurprising, surveys are the ideal way to identify staff preferences which can, in turn, increase the chances of a successful roll-out.

“The fear of change is totally understandable and it often stems from a fear of the unknown and the potential impact on job security. By clearly communicating the benefits of a new system and the support structures in place, organisations can help staff - all staff - feel more secure and less anxious about the transition.”



**Louise Gibson**  
Change Consultant & Project Manager

[Watch the full webinar!](#)





# Flexibility is the no. 1 reason for leaving the sector - technology can help.

Both in The Big Exit (2022) and The Big Reshuffle (2023), more flexible work was in the top three reasons for leaving Social Care. Working from home might not be feasible for many Care professionals, but being able to receive schedules with 4+ weeks of notice, choose shifts, take time off, and work extra hours are all flexibility benefits.

## ◆ If pay is removed, why did you leave your last job in Social Care?

NOT ENOUGH FLEXIBILITY TO CHOOSE WHEN TO WORK	35%
POOR MANAGEMENT	35%
NOT ENOUGH DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES	29%

## ◆ In what way has technology improved your Social Care job the most?

1. Increased flexibility

2. Easier management of my schedule

3. Better access to company announcements, information and resources

Flexibility related benefits mean people can fit in the school run, commit to their studies, or spend time with loved ones - all elements that contribute to a healthy work-life balance and reduce burnout.

However, accommodating shift options, a marketplace-style feature for overtime, and other flexibility benefits can significantly increase the admin burden in the absence of intelligent tech.

## ◆ Aside from pay, what would have made you stay with your Care employer?

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	46%
HAVING THE OPTION TO BOOK SHIFTS WITH DIFFERENT LENGTHS	40%
A PROMOTION OR A CLEAR CAREER PATH	38%
BEING ABLE TO PICK UP OVERTIME ON AN EMPLOYEE APP	34%

“Our staffing levels have improved because our retention is better - from 32% to 18%. People are now getting the shifts that they want, when they want them, so our numbers of leavers have dramatically fallen. Retention has improved. We’re giving staff the flexibility they want to do the shifts they want, but we also fulfil our criteria as a Care provider.”



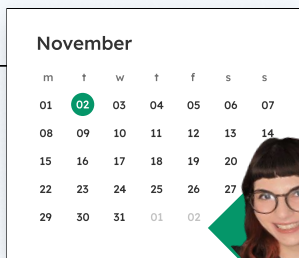
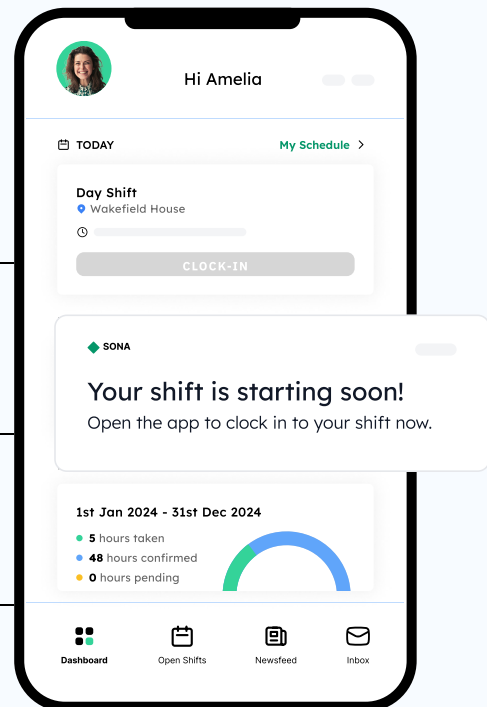
**Nick Swash**  
Deputy CEO - Yorkshire Care Group

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# The Big Opportunity

- ◆ **Organisations can support people joining the sector via:**
  - tech that enables flexibility and carries the admin load
  - an employee engagement platform to foster a positive culture
- ◆ **Without a wellbeing tracker, leadership is prevented from being proactive.** Anticipating churn underpins the ability to correctly staff each location when complemented by demand forecasts.
- ◆ **The final piece of the puzzle is a truly intelligent next-generation solution.** This delivers demand forecasts with maximum accuracy that leaders can trust when building long-term growth strategies.



## How does your digital strategy stack up?

When intelligent AI-driven forecasting technology is embedded into an end-to-end WFM solution, it can help leaders truly reconcile employee wellbeing needs with business productivity demands.

Interested in seeing how your tech strategy compares to that of other Care leaders?

[Book a 15-minute consultant call](#)



"We've built a culture of aspiration and I think that's new. And Sona again helped with that because we said what could we achieve? Well, actually what we've got with Sona is so much better than what we had, but what can we have next? Rather than 'oh, no, you've changed something,' it's actually 'we've changed something and we'll change it again and we'll make it better and better.'"

And I think that as a culture piece is, it makes it an amazing place to work."

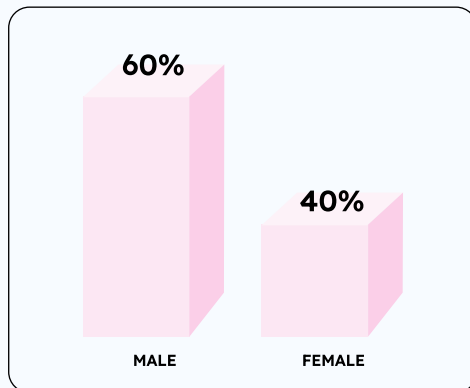


**Claire Bunker**  
Growth & Development Director

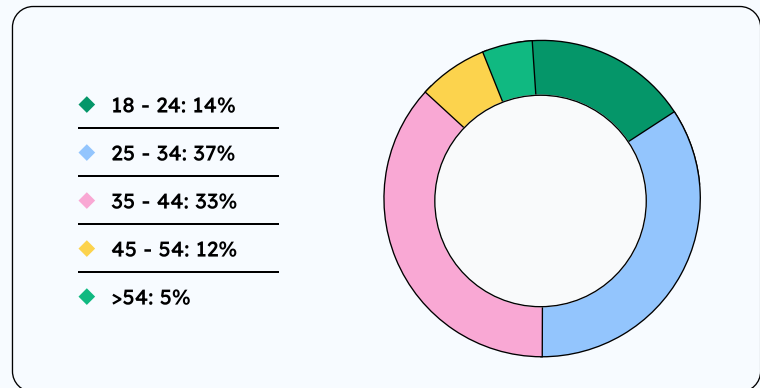
# Methodology

We surveyed 1000 Social Care leavers and joiners in the UK over the course of July and August, 2024.

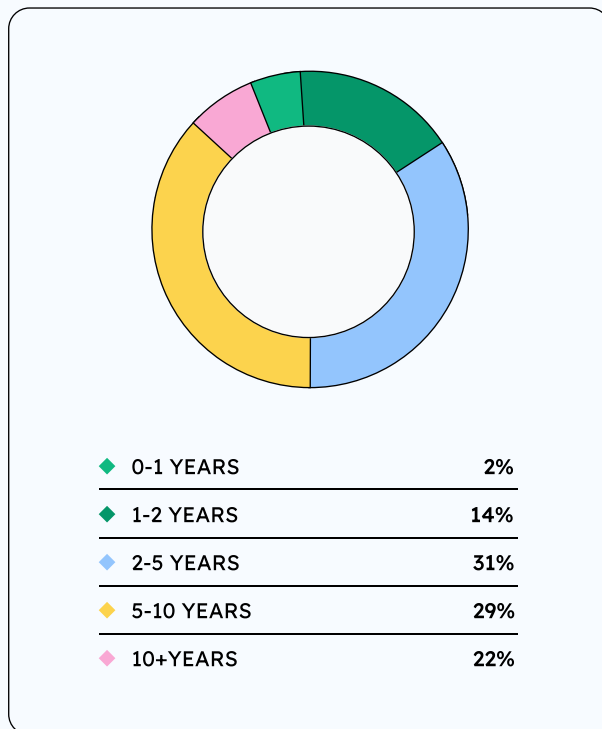
The polling audience was 60% male and 40% female.



The age ranges were as follows:



How long have you worked in the Social Care sector in total?



What type of Social Care setting did you work in?

