

THE SOCIETY OF CHIEF OFFICERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN SCOTLAND



The Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland

Report to Members:
Environment Health – Workforce Sustainability

August 2025



Background

Since 2016 members of the Society have been asked to submit an annual update on the resources available and the age profile of officers in post delivering the Environmental Health functions involving EHO’s, FSO’s and Technical Officers.

The trend over this period has highlighted a decline in the Environmental Health establishment at councils and an increase in the number of vacant posts on the establishment. This coincided with the age profile illustrating an aging workforce with no indication the number of new officers coming into the profession was sufficient to replace those leaving. Reviewing the statistics each year provides an opportunity to identify any new trends emerging and specific data to discuss resourcing Environmental Health functions with Scottish Government and external partners.

Resource Profile – EHO/FSO/TO posts

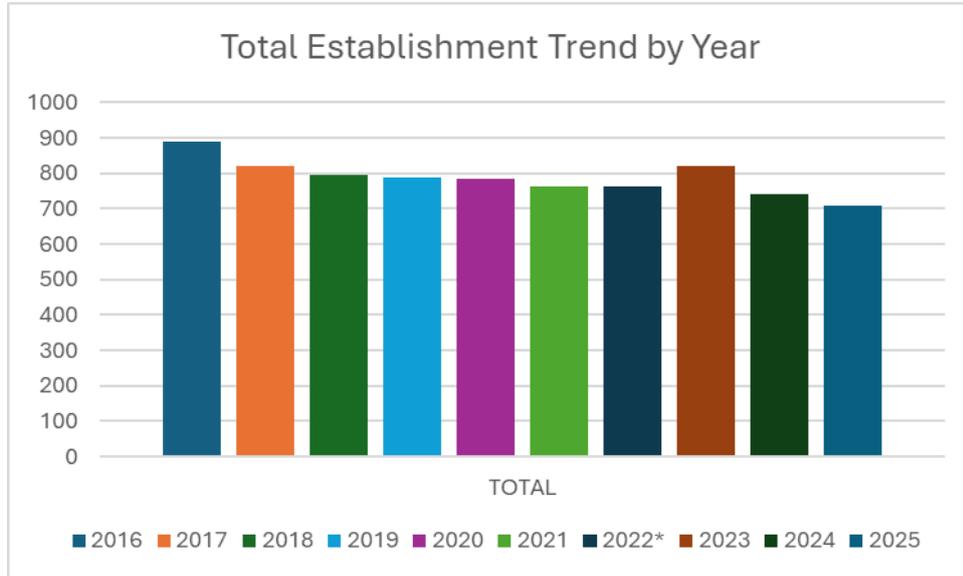
The following table summarises the annual workforce survey from 2016.

Age profile band	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
21-34	110	77	73	68	62	62	57.4	57	62.5	62
35-49	408	363	329	309	298	256	258.2	267	234.9	219.3
50-54	162	160	169	168	161	164	161.7	149	129.7	130.8
55-59	128	128	132	142	140	118	136.3	151	150.4	133.1
60+	56	56	60	62	62	84	75.7	93.25	89.25	82.65
TOTAL WORKING	864	784	763	749	723	684	689.3	717.25	670.35	627.85
Vacant										
On establishment	26	37	32	40	61	78	72.7	103.75	71.3	83.8
TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT	890	821	795	789	784	762	762	821	741.65	711.65

Table 1



The following chart illustrates the steady reduction in the overall establishment since 2016.



Over this period, we have seen a 20% reduction in the total establishment for these posts. The reduction is more concerning when comparing the number of officers in post, which shows there has been a 27.3% reduction in the number of officers in post over the period. This equates to a reduction of 236.15 FTE officers in post.

346.55 officers in post are 50 or older, which is 55.2% of those in post as of April 2025. This is a reduction of 20.8 FTE since 2024 and could reflect the number of officers who have retired since April 2024.

The recent increase in officers aged 21-34 across EHO's, FSO's & TO's, has steadied. Increases in this category were seen for FSO and Technical Officer posts and this could reflect the difficulty in recruiting qualified EHO's and councils taking a more flexible approach to recruitment.

The 35-49 age group remains the largest cohort for the whole establishment, though it has reduced from 45.8% of the total establishment in 2016 to 30.8% of the total establishment in 2025. This clearly illustrates the aging profile of the workforce across these three designations. The trend in the 50-54 and 55-59 age groups have remained reasonably constant which may demonstrate good retention rates for officers once they reach their mid-thirties.

Looking at the figures across various age groups, there may be a pattern emerging which could reflect the variation in graduate intake and key time periods for Environmental Health and councils. This could be related to variation in graduate recruitment and the impact of external factors on local authority recruitment in general.

The percentage of officers in post aged over 60 has grown since 2016. In 2025, 13.2% of the officers in post are aged 60 yrs or older; this compares to 6.5% of the officers in post in 2016.

Since 2023 the annual survey has asked members to expand on the detail of officers aged 60 or older. Examination of the expanded FTE for this age group is interesting and helps identify potential retirement trends.



The following table provides the detail or the breakdown within the 60+ age group in the survey:

Year	Aged 60-63	Aged 64-66	Aged 67 +	Total
2024	70.4	15.75	3.1	89.25
2025	63.85	14.9	3.9	81.65

The state pension age for officers in this group will be 66 or 67. So, it is reasonable to assume many of those aged 64 or older in 2025 will retire by work year 2028/29. Many officers in the 60-63 band could also retire, particularly if they have a long length of service.

The survey highlighted an increase in vacancies, which could reflect budgetary pressures and the need for councils to make savings. Since 2024, the survey has asked members to differentiate between vacant posts which were funded and could be filled and those which have been ‘frozen’. The 83.8 FTE vacancies reported in 2025 comprise 74.6 which are funded and could be filled and 9.2 FTE which have been frozen.

Further detail is provided in the tables in Appendix 1.

Demands

The diverse nature of the Environmental Health function means we will always operate in an ever-changing regulatory landscape. However, in recent years it has become evident both from our own data and the FSS audits and time recording exercises, there is insufficient resource to deliver current functions let alone an expanded remit. This requires members to prioritise resource deployment at their council. This has been recognised by Scottish Government and changes to the Business Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA) for new legislation now reflects the impact on enforcers of the planned legislation. The Regulatory Review Groups has also raised the resourcing impact on local authority regulators of proposed legislation, with Scottish Government.

The increased demands from the changes introduced by FSS in relation to the food law inspection arrangements are exacerbated by the reducing establishment across Environmental Health. The 2025 survey has indicated an increased number of FSO’s employed by councils, for the second year in a row. This could reflect the difficulty councils have had recruiting EHO’s and balancing the need to maintain statutory functions.

FSS has managed to secure funding for their SAFER programme which is intended to reform food law delivery in Scotland. FSS has indicated the programme will run for 4-5 years, so may not alleviate the un-resourced additional demands on food authorities from the Food Law rating System and the OCV inspection arrangements in the short to medium term.

It is worth noting food safety potentially accounts for 30-40% of the total Environmental Health workload and FSS has undertaken several exercises to quantify the resource needed to fully implement their increased workload by councils. These findings raise concerns for the level of resource deficit in other enforcement areas.



The most recent FSS time estimate exercise has also requested time estimates which may be required to provide an 'optimal service', which would be a gold-plated service going beyond statutory requirements. Members may wish to adapt the time measurement & estimation exercises developed by FSS and consider extending resource requirement calculations to the non-food functions of Environmental Health.

In June 2025, COSLA and Scottish Government published "Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025-2035". [[Scotland's Population Health Framework - gov.scot](#)] The framework is based on a preventative approach to improving the health of Scots. Environmental Health services can contribute to delivering these improvements though may need to reprioritise resources to support a more proactive health protection and prevention approach.

Discussion

Workforce capacity and resilience challenges are significant issue for Local Authorities, which have been highlighted by both the 2025 Accounts Commission report [Delivering for the future: Responding to the workforce challenge](#) and [Scotland's Local Government Workforce Report 2024](#) jointly produced by SOLACE, the Improvement Service and Society of Personnel Development Scotland (SPDS). These reports indicate Local Authorities are facing numerous recruitment challenges across various professional roles including Environmental Health Officers.

The Environmental Health establishment for EHO, FSO and Technical Officer posts has been declining over the last decade on average by 17.8 FTE per year. This year's survey indicates there are vacancies for 83.8 FTE, though only funding for 74.6 FTE. In addition to the current funded vacancies, it is likely 13.2% of the current officers in these posts will retire by the 2031/32 work year. A review of historical information held by SOCOEHS indicates the large number of EHO's who passed their professional exams in the early to mid-1990's are liable to reach their state pension age between 2032-2037. This will exacerbate to potential decline in the number of officers in post over the next decade.

These age groups are likely to contain many of the people currently involved in managing Environmental Health services across Scotland. If these posts are filled as people retire then there will be opportunities for promotion over the next decade. However, it needs to be recognised vacant posts are an easy option for efficiency savings and there is the potential for posts to be deleted from establishments due to retirements.

It is therefore important that members develop a workforce plan which will ensure their council has a sufficient number of qualified officers to deliver statutory services, in the coming years. Including career development and succession planning.

Realistically, a successful workforce plan will need to adopt a medium-term approach and incorporate employee career development. This type of approach has been evident in the final years of the degree course at UWS. This method of career development will continue to be available through the alternative pathway route at REHIS and by the anticipated introduction of a REHIS accredited M Sc course at Abertay University. This will provide a career pathway for EHO's, alongside the existing FSO pathway. REHIS recently circulated the entry details for the M Sc and members could build these requirements into recruitment plans for posts, to enable the potential for future career development.



Members who have been using a 'grow your own' approach to providing suitably qualified officers have recommended discussing workforce career development plans with HR and finance colleagues. This will help to ensure the funding for the fully qualified officer remains in place and the salary difference whilst an officer is progressing towards becoming professionally qualified can be used to fund the career development.

With almost 75 FTE vacant and funded posts on the national establishment, SOCOEHS would encourage members to use the flexibility available for career development and to start planning now to fill current and future vacancies. It is essential to start planning now to train officers who can be in posts to partially offset the level of retirements which are expected over the next 10 years.

With 27.3% less officers in post in 2025 compared to 2016, members will also need to be mindful of the impact demanding workloads can bring to officers. Whilst the career development approach being proposed may not bring immediate pressure relief, it should enable a greater distribution of workloads in teams on a gradual basis.

Actions

The issue of sustaining and developing a qualified workforce in Environmental Health has been progressed by SOCOEHS over the last decade, reflecting an aging workforce profile, declining numbers in post and increasing demands on the service, from an expanding regulatory burden.

SOCOEHS continues to work with REHIS to support graduates and promote career opportunities within Environmental Health. We are on the cusp of a new academic route into Environmental Health and SOCOEHS will work closely with REHIS to support the ability to provide qualified EHO's and FSO's in Scotland.

SOCOEHS will continue to raise awareness of the resourcing pressures facing Environmental Health. SOCOEHS will highlight the likely retirement of a substantial number in the current workforce over the next ten years.

SOCOEHS will lobby for financial assistance to support the delivery of Environmental Health in Scotland and the training of the future workforce.

SOCOEHS continues to encourage members to be flexible when recruiting and advocates a 'grow your own' approach. The current shortage of qualified EHO's means we need to consider alternative routes into the profession.

SOCOEHS has supported the development of the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) in Regulatory Services and this apprenticeship commenced during the academic year 2024/25. The MA will provide an entry level qualification into Environmental Health and could be used as a stepping stone for future learning and career development.

SOCOEHS realises members will continue to face resourcing and financial pressures in the coming years and would suggest members undertake a prioritisation exercise to identify the specific activities which must be delivered and those which could be reduced to reflect resources. This exercise could be linked to carrying out a resource calculation for the service and the guide issued in 2023 could assist with this task.



SOCOEHS established a group to further consider the data from the 2024 all designations survey and the group will consider any bearing the 2025 resource survey has on the findings of that survey. Particularly the pattern emerging indicating a substantial number of officers currently in post are likely to retire by 20237.

Recommendations

SOCOEHS encourages all members to fill vacancies on their establishment and adopt a career development approach to provide sufficient qualified officers to delivery services.

Members should promote COSLA's 'No New Burdens' principle when involved in any discussions where a new demand is made on Environmental Health.

Members are encouraged to raise the capacity issues facing their service and the wider Environmental Health profession at all pertinent forums.

Members are encouraged to continue to provide the annual resource data, to enable SOC OEHS to have informed discussions with Scottish Government, COSLA, SOLACE and national regulators on Environmental Health resources.

SOCOEHS maintains the risk register for Environmental Health detailing the risks presented from failing to resource the profession.

SOCOEHS will repeat the 'all designations' survey to gather data on any changes in the total establishment in the short to medium term.



Appendix 1 2025 EHO/FSO/TO Resource Stats

The following tables present the 2025 in a variety of formats and compared to different time frames.

Trend over the last decade:

Age band	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
21-34	110	77	73	68	62	62	57.4	57	62.5	62.0
35-49	408	363	329	309	298	256	258.2	267	234.9	219.3
50-54	162	160	169	168	161	164	161.7	149	129.7	130.8
55-59	128	128	132	142	140	118	136.3	151	150.4	133.1
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Vacant on establishment	26	37	32	40	61	78	72.7	103.75	71.3	83.8
TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT	890	821	795	789	784	762	762	821	741.65	711.65



Recent trend by designations:

Age Band	21-34	35-49	50-54	55-59	60+	VACANT	IN POST	TOTAL EST.
EHO 2022	35.2	154.7	94.9	72.9	27.7	55.2	385.4	440.6
EHO 2023	25.6	156.5	80.3	78.6	39.55	68	380.55	448.55
EHO 2024	29.7	142.8	76	81.7	44.55	50.8	378.35	429.15
EHO 2025	27	141.4	80.4	83.8	45.35	47.7	377.95	425.65
FSO 2022	0	20.6	19	11.4	6.4	7.9	57.4	65.3
FSO 2023	1	15	15	18	7.5	4.45	56.5	60.95
FSO 2024	2	16.9	13.9	15.4	13.1	5.7	61.3	67
FSO 2025	4	18.9	12.9	15	10	13.3	60.8	74.1
TECH 2022	20.8	81.4	47.9	50.6	40.2	21.4	242.3	263.7
TECH 2023	29.8	95.1	49.2	60.6	47.2	25	281.9	306.9
TECH 2024	30.8	75.2	39.8	53.3	31.6	14.8	230.7	245.5
Tech 2025	31	59	37.5	34.3	27.3	22.8	194.1	211.9
TOTAL 2022	57.4	258.2	161.7	136.3	75.7	72.7	689.3	762
TOTAL 2023	57	267	149	151	93.25	103.75	717.55	821.3
TOTAL	62.5	234.9	129.7	150.4	89.25	71.3	670.35	741.65

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2024								
TOTAL	62	219.3	130.8	133.1	82.65	83.8	627.85	711.65
2025								

Recent Trends Totals:

Age Band/Year	21-34	35-49	50-54	55-59	60+	vacant	In post	In post plus vacant
2022	57.4	258.2	161.7	136.3	75.7	72.7	689.3	762
2023	57	267	149	151	93.25	103.75	717.55	821.3
2024	62.5	234.9	129.7	150.4	89.25	71.3	670.35	741.65
2025	62	219.3	130.8	133.1	82.65	83.8	627.85	711.65

Expanded 60+ age group and Funded/Frozen Vacancy:

Year	60 to 63	64 to 66	67 plus	Vacancy	Vacancy (frozen)
2024	70.4	15.75	3.1	55.3	16
2025	63.85	14.9	3.9	74.6	9.2



Appendix 2 REHIS Update on entry requirements for the MSc course at Abertay

REHIS are currently in the final stages of completing the accreditation for MSc in Environmental Health at Abertay University and anticipate this process will be completed by the end of August 2025.

Once accreditation is confirmed, the programme will be listed on the Abertay University website and open for applications. The first intake of students is planned for January 2026. In terms of candidate eligibility, the following is what has been agreed with Abertay:

Candidates require at least a lower second class (2:2) honours degree or equivalent qualifications in areas related to environmental sciences or food sciences or biological sciences or chemical sciences.

Applicants with non-standard qualifications will be considered on an individual basis, determined by prior study, work experience, professional qualifications, and references where appropriate. In relation to the section indicating that candidates may be considered on an individual basis, applicants should apply directly to Abertay University. The University will then review each case and consult with REHIS as appropriate.