

Recruiting people to roles in adult social care, and retaining them, feels harder than ever before... What can we do?

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Recruiting people to roles in adult social care, and retaining them, feels harder than ever before... What can we do?

An Ask IMPACT guide



IMPACT

Improving Adult Care Together

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Jon Glasby
IMPACT Director

Welcome to our first Ask IMPACT guide. Working with the University of Birmingham's Knowledge and Evidence Service, we're producing practical guides, based on existing evidence, in response to challenges or dilemmas the sector is facing.

Our first guide responds to a query on recruitment and retention - it feels harder than ever before, so what can we do? Some of the findings in this guide may not feel new. However, it might still be helpful that we're all struggling with the same things, and that there may not be a 'magic answer' - just small things that we can try to do to make a small difference.

What are some of the issues?

Adult social care faces significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff – particularly in direct care roles. Some of the issues are:

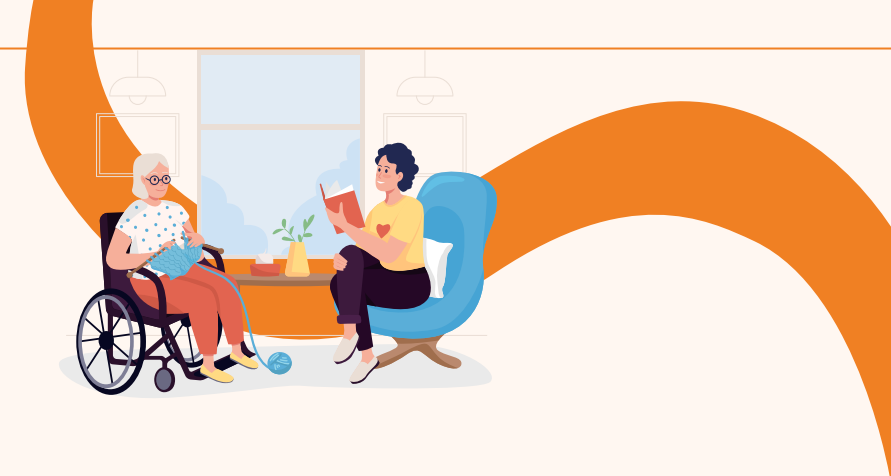
- Low pay (both for the nature and complexity of the work, and in comparison to other sectors)
- Limited/varying opportunities for training and career progression
- Difficult working conditions (for example, fluctuating hours and shifts, often arranged at short notice with consequences for work-life balance; zero hours contracts; issues of safety and lone working)

Many believe that these challenges stem from the lack of value society places on caring relationships, and from highly gendered notions of who 'should' provide care. Others point to the way the sector is organised, with services often commissioned on a 'time and task' basis (i.e with a short amount of time to do a list of things). Many of these are longstanding issues and it remains to be seen what will happen in light of the current cost of living crisis.

These are significant barriers and challenges, but evidence from research, from people's lived experience and from the practical knowledge of people working in adult social care suggests a number of things that might help a little bit - even if there isn't 'an answer' to these issues.



The image of social care



“The talk about crisis all the time makes people feel that they can't do anything to make it better, so people do nothing except become more scared of the future... We need people to feel HOPE about the future of social care so it gives us some energy to work together. We need the public to know how important social care is, what social care does and how it helps people live good lives in their communities. We need the public to understand that we ALL need social care to be funded and work well”

Social Care Future, Easy Read update, 2019

It can be difficult to recruit more people to work in adult social care when all the talk is of problems, challenges and vacancies.

We shouldn't pretend that there aren't issues - but IMPACT believes that good care isn't just about 'services', it's about having a life. Perhaps we could do better if we talked about how care helps people to lead ordinary lives and how fulfilling it can be to work in adult social care.

The Institute of Health and Social Care Management's (IHSCM) A People Plan For Social Care, 2021, found a number of example of organisations running campaigns to highlight the benefits and positives of social care:

- We Care Wales
- Scottish Care's Day in the Life of a Home Carer video
- Skills for Care's 'I Care Ambassadors'
- The Department for Health and Social Care's Every Day is Different campaign

The use of social media in campaigns has also proved useful in recruiting specific and new groups, to join the sector.



I Care...Ambassadors

Bringing a career in care to life


I Care...Ambassadors are enthusiastic care workers who promote and change perceptions of social care, helping people decide if a career in care is for them.

23%  increase in people interested in a career in care after hearing from an ambassador

361  ambassadors delivered activities in the last two years

Make a difference, every day


Looking for a meaningful career where you'll be able to make a real difference to people's lives every single day? Whether you're new to care or you've got years of experience, we're the number one place to find a job in social care.



What's it like working in care

There are a wide variety of adult social care roles – you could choose to do anything from supporting someone in a care home with their day-to-day activities, to helping someone with a disability make a home their own. Through support, understanding and teamwork, you'll be making a real difference to people's everyday lives. Hear from care workers as they share their own experiences.

[Read their stories](#)



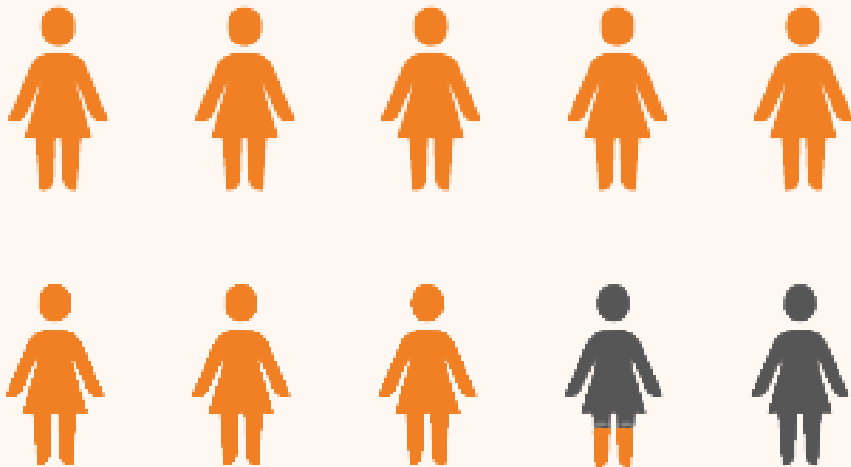
Targetting particular groups

"There needs to be a huge push to educate young people and market 'a career out of care'. Working in care should be a career that young people see as a huge opportunity for learning, personal growth and development and promotion"

Scottish Care's The Four Rs – The Open Doors of Recruitment and Retention in Social Care, 2019

Much of the adult social care work force is female - 82% of all jobs are taken up by women - and the average age of the workforce across England is 44 years old, with an ageing trend becoming more evident ([NIHR's Promoting the health of women working in homecare, 2021](#)). A number of people have called for the sector to focus on recruiting younger people, through working with schools or by educating young people on what it's like to work in social care, and more efforts could be made to recruit men to be care workers.

Since the pandemic, research indicates that younger people are looking more favourably at a career in care. Of respondents who said they have considered working in social care, 73% of younger people said they were somewhat or very likely to pursue a career in social care in the near future, compared with 58% of those aged between 45-54 and 53% of those between the ages of 55-64 ([Work Foundation's Guide to Attracting and Retaining a Thriving Workforce, 2021](#)).



82% of all jobs in adult social care are taken up by women

Incentives, conditions, training

“One anonymous respondent gives incremental pay uplifts for those completing NVQs, medicines training and taking on ‘champions’ roles. They pay structured bonuses and provide lots of rewards for initiative inputs around service improvement”

The IHSCM’s A People Plan For Social Care, 2021

While it's hard to tackle pay at a local level, there are examples of where other incentives have been offered to staff:

- providing gym facilities
- having return to work processes
- healthcare schemes
- monetary contributions
- flexible working and paying attention to work life balance



Research points to the importance of training and development – both in terms of equipping people to do a good job and continue learning, but also in terms of making people feel valued. Examples identified by the IHSCM's A People Plan For Social Care, 2021, for instance, include courses which are paid for, but also some free courses.

Even where the training provided is designed to meet a particular need in terms of service development, it can have a knock-on effect on people’s sense of self – for example, some technology-based projects which have given people additional technological skills found that this also helped the workers concerned to feel more confident, better able to progress and as if they had greater credibility with others.

Staff wellbeing and welfare



“Working in care can be hugely rewarding, but it’s also well recognised that it has the potential to be emotionally demanding. We know that supporting the wellbeing and resilience of our staff is vitally important to ensuring we offer a great service”

Catherine Robertson, Registered Manager, Skills for Care’s Greater Resilience, Better Care, 2020

There is a legal requirement for employers to be responsible for the health, safety and welfare of all of their employees, but employers can go beyond their statutory duties. We often say that ‘staff are our greatest asset’, but could we do more to prove to people that we really mean this when we say it?

There are lots of examples of this in toolkits produced by sector skills councils, listed on page nine of this report, to help adult social care managers to reduce work-related stress and improve wellbeing.

There are also practical recommendations by organisations such as the IHSCM’s (2021) and the Work Foundation’s 2021 guide to attracting and retaining a thriving workforce, around appointing mental health first aiders or guaranteeing birthdays off with paid leave. Other examples include:

- Making welfare calls to staff
- Sending out thank you cards as a means of providing feedback
- Undertaking group supervision
- Providing mental health support for staff
- Implementing meetings every morning after night duty
- Managers adopting ‘open door’ policies

These may be difficult to do in pressured circumstances, or feel simple, but the evidence suggests that many people are trying to do what they can to make others feel more valued and supported, hoping that this will also make people more likely to stay.

Values-based recruitment

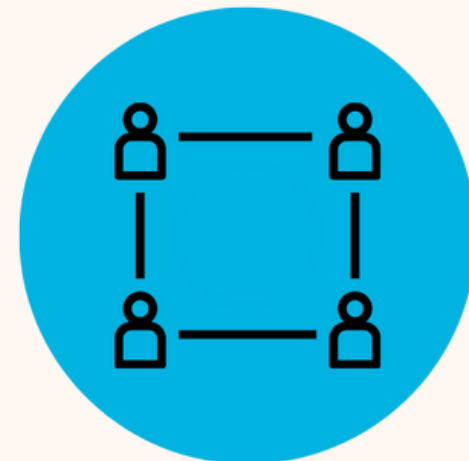
“And the good news is that the experiences they shared showed that the things that make a difference, such as an emphasis on recruiting for values and behaviours and a strong emphasis on developing a positive workplace culture, that recognises, supports and celebrates the strengths of their workforce, often cost very little to implement”

Recruitment and retention in adult social care, Skills for Care, 2017

There is growing evidence to suggest that, for some roles and in some settings, recruiting staff with the right values and behaviours might be more important than recruiting on the basis of specific qualifications or previous experience. Skills for Care, for example, has conducted a number of evaluations of a values-based recruitment toolkit (VBRT), suggesting that these ways of working might lead to lower recruitment costs, positive return on investment, lower staff turnover and better staff performance.

However, values-based recruitment cannot just be bolted on to previous ways of working. Rather than just having people with a particular set of interpersonal skills and values in post, it might be feeling part of a values-based organisation and feeling a sense of teamwork that encourages people to stay.

Less is known of values-based recruitment, compared to some other areas, and so IMPACT is running one of its Networks on this topic.



Conclusion

Recruiting and retaining staff is difficult in adult social care as a result of a series of factors, largely beyond the control of individual employers and of the sector itself. However, the evidence to date suggests that there are relatively small steps that can be taken which might help to improve recruitment and retention - even if lots of challenges remain.

Have you considered any of these approaches, or used them and seen positive change? Tell us:
impactcentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Where to find out more

There are very helpful and practical resources available from the 'skills councils' which cover each of the four nations (as well as from '[Skills for Care and Development](#)', which is an alliance of organisations from England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland and Wales which focuses on workforce issues):

- [Skills for Care](#)
- [Northern Ireland Social Care Council](#)
- [Social Care Wales](#)
- [Scottish Social Services Council](#)

For results of a survey of people who receive direct payments and employ personal assistants, see [TLAP's The Forgotten Workforce](#).

About this guide

Ask IMPACT materials are designed to be trusted, accessible and practical. They are based on reviewing evidence – including research, lived experience and practice knowledge – that is captured on academic databases and on the websites of adult social care policy and practice organisations.

The HSMC Knowledge & Evidence Service (KES) is a specialist information service providing a range of research, communications and information literacy skills services to the health and social care community.

The evidence search conducted covered material published between January 2017 and July 2022.

To find out more about KES, or about the searches behind this guide, you can contact them at:
hsmc-kes@contacts.bham.ac.uk

About IMPACT

IMPACT is Improving Adult Care Together, the UK centre for implementing evidence in adult social care. Working across the four nations and with co-production at its heart, IMPACT draws on insights from research, lived experience and practice knowledge to make a difference to front-line services and to people's lives.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Health Foundation, it is being led by Professor Jon Glasby at the University of Birmingham, with a Leadership Team of 13 other academics, people using social care services, and policy and practice partners – along with a broader consortium of key stakeholders from across the sector and across the four nations of the UK.



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Improving Adult Care Together



Economic and Social Research Council



The Health Foundation