'We're all in this together' Supplementary learning paper 1: Recruitment

The first in a series of short papers where we examine themes emerging from our report 'We're all in this together'-The impact of Covid-19 on the future of social care: a view from the workforce'

In August 2020, ARC Scotland published the report, "We're all in this together" The impact of Covid-19 on the future of social care in Scotland: a view from the workforce. This was based on our analysis of survey responses from 623 social care frontline staff and managers, primarily based across the 9 local authority areas in which ARC facilitate provider forums.

The key findings from our report were:

Supported people are perceived by social care staff to be better able to cope and more resilient than many would have thought.

Supported people are perceived to prefer support that is constructed around their needs and preferences, and provided in a relaxed, non-pressurised way.

Social care staff are motivated, resilient, adaptable and proud of the way their work changes people's lives, but feel undervalued professionally.

There is now an opportunity to use learning from the 'lockdown experience' to re-appraise the way the social care workforce functions, in particular how to make use of more flexible, autonomous, and creative ways of working.

Introduction

Recruiting staff has historically been a major challenge for most social care organisations. Surprisingly, during the early stages of the 2020 lockdown period many social care providers reported improvements in their ability to appoint new staff. However at time of writing (November 2020) social care providers are once again experiencing challenges in filling staff vacancies.

This short paper explores the factors that led to improvements in recruitment over the pandemic; the challenges experienced by providers and potential solutions as identified by the provider workforce. We conclude with an offer of recommendations for change to be adopted within:

- Social care provider organisations
- Local authority areas
- National bodies

This paper sets out learning from social care professionals who are directly involved in recruitment and are members of the nine local Provider Forums facilitated by ARC Scotland.

What has helped recruitment over this period?

Higher response rate All Forums noticed more people seeking employment, with higher levels of interest in job adverts. Many providers said they have more workers than in previous years, with one suggesting their workforce may have doubled. More recently there has been a significant drop in the quality of applications received.

People applying from different sectors Including people who were furloughed. Many new workers came from hospitality, but also from retail, manufacturing, trade, teaching and law. A couple of Forums noted an increase in younger applicants. Increased interest may be due to higher unemployment, and a view that social care may offer greater job security.

Changing perceptions of the sector Social care has had a raised public profile through the pandemic. Despite publicly highlighted deficiencies (e.g. access to personal protective equipment) care work is more highly valued than ever. Positive stories in the media and initiatives like "clap for carers" may have attracted people. Most working in care feel pride in what they do and some people have returned to the sector.

SSSC and Care Inspectorate have been more "relaxed" about registration requirements There was perceived to be a tacit agreement to prioritise getting people 'on the ground', with an easing of 'red tape' associated with recruitment.

Use of Information and Communications Technology The pandemic has forced us to make better use of Information and communications technology. Provider Forums have seen particular advantages for recruitment in interviews, training, and PVGs.

Online PVG process All Forums welcomed this significant change. The process is now 5 times faster, taking 2 days - week, compared with the previous 3 - 8 weeks.

Using Video Conferencing technology for interviewing With no need to travel, there has been higher attendance of candidates. Interviewers based elsewhere in Scotland have been able to participate, and interviewing has become more efficient. Despite this being a new experience for most, it is common for interviewers to observe that candidates seem more relaxed in their home environment.

More training delivered online Access to virtual and e-learning in induction and during the vetting process has meant workers are ready to start sooner. E.g. having completed a 'Moving and Handling' module online, new workers then learn from experienced staff in practice.

Information and Communication Technology has been used more broadly throughout the entire recruitment process, with examples such as holding 'recruitment evenings' using Zoom and doing virtual service visits.

Involving supported people in recruitment

Everyone is getting better at using Information and Communication Technology, including some supported people. However, many are digitally excluded and many providers have found it challenging to involve the people they support virtually in recruitment.

What has helped?

- Dedicated worker to support people through the process
- Using VC for applicants and new workers to 'visit' the service and meet people they will be supporting
- Helping supported people use devices they need to participate in on-line recruitment
- Making sure all services have a good internet connection and access to technology
- Including a specific question from a supported person within the interview.
- Trialling the process with people before interview.
- Finding out what questions people have about specific roles and reflecting these at interview.

Charter for Involvement statement no.5: 'We want to be involved in choosing the people who support us'

The Charter for Involvement was written by members of the National Involvement Network. It says how people who use support services want to be involved: 'in the services we get; in the organisations that provide our services; in our wider communities'.

What else has helped?

- Offering incentives such as asking people to commit to hours over the month so that they can benefit from the company health plan etc.
- Encouraging relief workers to apply for full time/permanent posts.
- Offering greater flexibility e.g. enabling day service workers to move to residential services.
- Taking a more bespoke approach e.g. job adverts and interview questions relating to a specific person / service.
- Linking with other (often unexpected) sectors that may be considering redundancies.
- Reducing the number of people involved in interviewing.
- Developing new roles that didn't require specific training e.g. arts and crafts workers.
- Increasing pay.
- Receiving applications through Fair Start Scotland.
- Undertaking health-screening questions prior to interviews.
- Having a dedicated person to support candidates through the recruitment process.

What has been challenging over this period?

Difficulty attracting and retaining the right people Fear of COVID may deter people from applying for a care job and some roles require weekly testing. Whilst there are more people applying for posts, these may be people with less experience who may not want to stay in the sector when other opportunities become available.

Rates of pay There are particular concerns about retention in the third sector, which typically has lower rates of pay. It is difficult to attract people to management posts where pay differentials with support workers are low. There are also still problems recruiting in rural areas.

Workers from overseas Organisations that recruit from overseas are affected by travel restrictions and quarantine requirements and there is some concern about the impact of not having a visa waiver for overseas support staff in the future. The government's post-Brexit points-based immigration plan is a setback for the sector with support workers classified as 'low- skilled.'

There were mixed views about the SSSC recruitment portal, some providers found it to be of limited benefit.

Limitations of technology for interviewing people Most of the Forums expressed a sense that something was missing when you don't meet a candidate in person. Video conferencing was felt to be better than a phone interview, but the ability to connect with another person and observe how they interact with others is diminished.

Poor Internet connections and IT failures Some providers have experienced technical hitches, which have disrupted interviews. This is stressful for everyone involved and raises concerns about the fairness of the process if the technology doesn't work the same for everyone. Information and communications technology skills have not been a requirement for many social care roles and it is tough for those who must learn quickly, and not always willingly.

Organising an interview panel can be difficult, e.g. when managers want to be involved in interviews.

Added complexity in induction and training Induction is taking longer as meeting people and completing compulsory training is more complicated. In-person training has had to be in small groups. Observations and feedback for evaluation are not possible with online training. Some training needs to be in-person, such as CALM or Breakaway training, as it requires more space and fewer people. People can be inducted but cannot start in their role until they have undergone certain training such as Adult Support and Protection or Moving & Handling training.

References can be slow to process, often due to business closures or difficulty contacting the self-employed.

National Solutions

- Raise public profile of sector: Run an awareness campaign showing work in care is something to be proud of; share personal stories; and focus on the diverse nature of the work. Support public recognition of the social and economic value of social care.
- Attract new people to the sector: run another national recruitment campaign with a high profile; support young people to see social care as a good career choice with progression opportunities and personal satisfaction.
- Renumeration: - look to make this more attractive, and comparable across the third and statutory sectors. Apply the Fair Work Framework.
- Training & qualifications: - develop a transferable National Training Passport to be recognised across provider organisations. Develop national online training. Review qualification requirements for support workers to increase accessibility.
- Ongoing support from national bodies: - develop resources to be used nationwide, such as templates for risk assessment / enablement. Review the 'offer' from national bodies such as SSSC. Keep the PVG Scheme online with email applications. Make provision of full references a statutory requirement.

Local Solutions

- Raise profile of support work locally: Share stories within schools about working in social care. Emphasise the variety of the work by publishing positive news stories in local papers.
- Attract new people to the sector: - Make use of social media for recruitment; run a collective TV advert locally promoting all support organisations; run an online recruitment fayre.
- Renumeration: - Negotiate higher rates with HSCPs for workers in rural areas to allow for mileage costs.
- Training and qualifications: - Providers develop a local Training Passport that travels across organisations with the worker.
- Sharing resources: - Develop a regional 'bank' of pooled staff - like an agency, but without the costs - to access workers with qualifications and skills where there is a surplus. Develop a local Employment Hub. Share information and learning regarding good recruitment practice through Provider Forums. Identify suitable (free) local venues for workforce interviews. Run shared induction sessions across organisations by video, e.g. 'What is Advocacy?'; create a forum to enable training Managers to connect and share learning; consider a local social care recruitment fayre.
- Ongoing support from local bodies: support contract monitoring and commissioning bodies to obtain a better understanding of recruitment issues.

What can you do within your organisation or Forum?

- Increase use of ICT: look at how to continue making use of VC during recruitment; get to grips with digital reach; continue to use e-learning; make more use of film for training and induction.
- Involve supported people in recruitment: invite people we support to provide interview questions and involve this group in all aspects of the interview process.
- Make roles attractive: look at how to offer an attractive career pathway; consider incentives; break up the roles so that all workers don't need to be registered.
- Support staff wellbeing: engage with the workforce, make sure their views are heard; explore peer support.
- Review use of buildings and offices.

Recommendations

Organisational

Recommendations for implementation within social care provider organisations.

Continue to develop the use of VC technology in recruitment and induction processes, and review its impact

This could include:

- Ensuring services have a good internet connection and access to technology
- Assessing the impact of digital recruitment on supported people's ability to be involved in the recruitment process. Improving support to people to be fully included.
- Adapting induction processes to identify what can be completed virtually, including increased use of film and on-line learning.

Adopt a personalised (rather than corporate) approach to recruitment and staff retention

- Tailoring job adverts and recruitment processes to the job and person requiring support.
- Applicants having a dedicated person to support them through the recruitment process, including use of IT.
- Take, as far as possible, a flexible approach to working hours and patterns, including home working.
- Supporting staff to have their voice heard and their holistic wellbeing needs considered.

Within social care, **pay and conditions** remains an enduring barrier to effective recruitment. This recommendation cuts across national / local / organisational boundaries, and needs to be considered by all invested in improving recruitment and retention of staff within the sector.

Improve pay and conditions
Provider organisations (and their representative bodies), local authorities and the Scottish Government should work together to fully implement the Fair Work Framework within Scotland's social care sector. This should go beyond payment of the living wage. Consideration should be given to:

- The increasing complexity of the needs of those who receive social care support
- Pay differentials between front-line and managerial staff that provides attractive career progression opportunities
- Exceeding the statutory minimum in terms of offering learning and development opportunities
- Provision of improved job security and regular working hours
- The impact of competitive commissioning in driving down pay and conditions in the voluntary and independent sectors.

Recommendations

Local

Recommendations for social care providers (from all sectors) working collaboratively in their local area.

Create a local network or forum (for example a Provider Forum) where learning, experiences and resources about recruitment can be shared, and collaborative action developed.

This could include:

- Developing 'virtual' recruitment events involving multiple social care organisations
- Coordinating collective engagement with local schools, colleges and employability agencies
- Coordinating local publicity on the value of social care to local communities, within both mainstream and social media.

National

Recommendations for Scottish Government and other national bodies.

Capitalise on improved public awareness to raise the national profile of working in social care.

This could include:

- a second national campaign focused on the job satisfaction and pride experienced by most social care staff, the relative job security offered in the sector, the diversity of the work and the positive impact on the lives of supported people.
- Targeted campaigns within sectors experiencing job losses due to lockdown, for example hospitality.

Simplify and streamline registration requirements for new social care staff.

This could include:
- retaining current changes to PVG to enable speedy online applications
- developing nationally recognised specialist training accreditation which travels with workers across organisations in the form of a 'passport'.