Northern Ireland
Social
Care
Council

Evidence review - what works in recruitment and retention of social care workers?

May 2023

Introduction

Issues around recruitment and retention in social care are well documented in academic literature. Research has examined the factors that contribute to retention issues, to understand why people leave social care work. The evidence highlights that job satisfaction in social care is often attributed to intrinsic rewards obtained from helping people, rather than material rewards. Dissatisfaction tends to relate more to the employer than the job itself. Issues prevail around poor terms and conditions, and the challenges of undertaking work that is physically and emotionally demanding with little rewards. This is compounded by the perception and status of social care, with care work often devalued by society.

Recruitment and retention factors are multifactorial, interrelated, and cumulative. The interplay between these factors is complex and there is no singular solution to respond to retention challenges in social care. Although there are studies that explore attributes of good retention, there is a lack of research that evaluates effectiveness of retention strategies, so the impact of whether something works or not is not well tested. However, the existing evidence base does highlight some strategies of 'good practice' that are promising in their efforts to aid retention, but these need to take account of local and specific contexts, as to whom they will work for.

There is a need to focus on retention as a distinct construct that differs from turnover; the causes for each do not necessarily mirror each other because the reasons why people stay are not necessarily the same reasons why people leave. One study explored factors that affect retention and found that two groups of factors (financial resources & leadership/management practices) are 'strongly implicated' in turnover, while the other (intrinsic rewards) are more strongly associated with retention. That is, those who leave the sector are more likely to refer to poor pay and work conditions as reasons for leaving, while those who stay strongly attribute this to emotional rewards, moral reasoning, and a sense of achievement from doing altruistic work. Addressing issues around why people leave, may help to identify actions that can improve workplace conditions and staff morale.

Social care employs different cohorts of staff from school leavers to those around retirement age. We need to recognise that social care staff are not a homogenous group. Individuals value different things about social care work and their jobs, and staff turnover varies according to seniority and experience. This means that different strategies will work for different groups of staff due to personal preferences and variables. Individual factors (age, gender, qualification level and length of experience, parenting) and organisations factors (workload, rewards, supervision, dealing with challenging behaviour) intersect, overlap, and affect each other, and are influenced by systems level factors (employment conditions, policy, and legislation) to affect staff turnover. For example, literature indicates that the 'millennial generation' want a job that is meaningful and purposeful, they respond to attractive job adverts and value employers who are inclusive of staff in their communication by providing feedback and keeping staff informed.

It is important to recognise and understand this diversity in the context of attracting, recruiting, and retaining staff. Recruitment and retention solutions need to respond to this diversity, rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to workforce planning. Retention activities need to be tailored for different staff in different contexts. Adopting more than one initiative at a time can cause a 'multiplier effect'. Some international evidence also suggests that innovations at the organisational level (rather than the individual worker level) may help with retention.

The research evidence draws from the richness of the variety of roles, service user groups, type of service provision (e.g., support services, domiciliary care, care home sector) and countries. As such, the examples provided in this report reflect variations, but are equally context specific. For readers, some aspects of good retention practice could be relevant for all employers, yet other examples may not be relevant or achievable. However, the aim of this resource is to illustrate a range of initiatives that may be used to address staff turnover and aid retention.

A report by Skills for Care examined the 'secrets of success' amongst social care providers with turnover of 10% or less. They found that strategies to improve recruitment and retention do not necessarily have to cost organisations more money. Good practices positively impacted future employees as well as those currently employed in organisations. Some of the solutions illustrated will require funding, but not all require additional finances. Some initiatives can reduce wasted spending on recruitment costs. Investing in retention strategies may be enabled from savings made by a reduction in repeated rounds of recruitment and induction training (i.e., doing things that help to keep staff reduces the need for recruiting replacement staff).

Recruitment

Values Based Recruitment means recruiting for retention and is well documented in the literature. However, there is a lack of research that defines what the right values are, or how the right people are recruited to social care. In addition to values, it is important to consider attributes that make a good social care worker, such as reliability, communication skills, positive attitude, and a willingness to learn. It can also be useful to 'test' applicants for stress and setting expectations.

Strategies for recruitment:

- Have a good understanding of the local context and community from which you are recruiting. It helps to be proactive and strategic rather than reactive.

- Use different recruitment strategies to target different groups of people.

The recruitment process:

- Make sure websites are up-to-date, attractive, and easy to use.

- Consider branding and language used to describe social care work.

- Provide case studies of different social care roles in promotional materials.

- Review and update job descriptions regularly (every 12 months) to ensure they continue to promote the values of the organisation, are jargon free, clear about expectations, do not include irrelevant information, and do not discriminate against certain groups

- Get staff involved in the recruitment process. Ask them to write or review the job description.

- New recruits who do not know what the job entails can leave quite quickly. Being upfront about what the job entails saves organisation and applicants time and promotes a good match between employers and new recruits. As far as possible, give applicants a sense of what the job entails before they start. This helps to facilitate a smoother entry into social care work.

- Provide information that gives applicants some understanding of the job role, what they are expected to do and what a typical day can look like. Telling interviewees that the job is challenging is insufficient. Provide examples of real-life scenarios that illustrates the challenges, to enable applicants to consider if social care is the right role for them. While it may affect recruitment in the short-term, it prevents investment

in employees who are not suited to SC and will potentially leave anyway.

- Address misperceptions about requirements for entry into social care. Consider advertising that qualifications are not necessary for entry level social care jobs, and training and development will be provided in house. However, bear in mind that recruitment that focuses on minimal or no qualifications and/or prior experience, can negatively impact the effectiveness of the campaign. It can create assumptions that social care work is easy, unskilled, or low status. It can be off-putting or attract the wrong type of people.

- Think about advertising and marketing of your organisation and avail of different avenues for dissemination such as local press, job centre or recruitment agencies, internal advert, notice in window, community noticeboards (community groups, local shops, churches), adverts in schools and colleges, internet including job websites and social media, leaflet drops, recruitment open days, recruitment agencies, radio, and word of mouth. Promote social care work in different places and at events such as fairs or sporting events.

- Consider using social media to recruit, and conduct informal interviews via phone, to screen out those who have not read the job advert correctly and/or do not meet the criteria.

- Word of mouth is also helpful. Make use of staff connections to recruit new staff whom they think would be suited to SC. Implement an employee referral scheme, and reward staff if they assist with a successful recruitment This can be promoted via a 'finder's fee'. One study reported giving staff £500 for successful introductions that led to recruitment. However, for this to be successful the organisation needs to have a reputation as a good employer.

Pre-employment events:

- Consider pre-employment initiatives to recruit workers. In one study, employers experiencing difficulties with recruitment and retention found that pre-employment training helped to filter out unsuitable or uninterested candidates, saved time and resources, helped build care skills, confidence, and readiness for interviews, and most reported that it helped with recruitment.

- Offer 'taster shifts' to potential recruits enabling them to find out if social care is for them.

- Consider hosting an open day or evening to recruit staff from the local area. Interested applicants can meet service users, find out about the role, and consider if it is suitable for them. It also provides opportunities for organisations to sell themselves as a good place to work.

- Undertake outreach in local community emphasising that values and motivation are more important than requirements to come with specific qualifications.

- Organise or participate in a local or national recruitment campaign.

Selling your organisation:

Think about recruitment through a retention lens. While you advertise for the type of person you are looking for, it is also important to think about what a prospective employee is looking from your organisation:

- How do you promote social care work and sell your organisation?
- Do you have a reputation as a good employer?
- Think about why people might want to work for you. What do you offer them?
- What is attractive about your company that would make someone want to stay?
- Identify challenges and needs of different groups of workers. What do young people want? Those with families? Older workers?
- How does your offer compare to others in the sector and non-social care employers?

- Pay above the minimum/living wage. This can help to address the perception of social care as low-pay low-value work.

- Promote and advertise any other benefits provided by employer

Diversify job offers:

- Develop flexible opportunities that are reflective of people's stage of life, lifestyles, and commitments (e.g., family friendly work practices).

- Diversify social care roles so that people can have a 'portfolio career' that provide flexible work opportunities. Develop 'on demand' roles, for example a rapid response service if a service user has a fall.

Wider systemic initiatives:

- There is broad agreement that campaigns are essential to redress negative views and low status afforded to social care. It is important to capitalise and build on the positive public awareness of social care that occurred during the pandemic.

- Work with educational providers to inform curriculum (training needs of SCW) and provide volunteering or work experience opportunities. This can help to inform perceptions about social care, and potentially bring more young people into social care.

- Work with schools and colleges to provide work experience opportunities.

- The Prince's Trust 'Get Into' scheme provides avenues for recruitment of young people. Research indicates that placements / work experience for young people helps them to understand the social care role.

- Work with other employers in the area to undertake a systems approach to recruitment. Competition with the NHS is problematic for independent sector who invest in recruiting and training staff only to lose them to the statutory sector. Addressing issues and competition between providers (to provide a fairer system) could help to reduce turnover.

- Get involved in schemes such as the 'I Care Ambassador' programme, 'Every Day is Different' campaign, pre-employment schemes and apprenticeships. A promising new scheme, is the 'Care Friends' refer-a-friend app.

- Arrange or participate in social care awards.

- Encourage the media to write about social care work.

- Recruit from outside the UK.

Retention

Employers need to focus on retention as much as they do on recruitment. For organisations that are affected by staff shortages, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a greater need for recruitment activity. Yet failing to address retention issues compounds the need to repeatedly recruit and train new staff.

Job satisfaction

The literature also highlights the intrinsic rewards (that make up for the lack of other types of rewards) that is often characteristic of the social care sector. Social care work is relationship based and requires good communication skills, empathy, and compassion. Having emotional investment in work with service users has been highlighted as a core reason to stay, with workers citing social care work as a vocational calling or passion. This is rationalized against poor conditions, because it is a job worth doing and provides a sense of enjoyment that can override other more negative factors. Social care staff who like what they do, often mention the sense of being rewarded by 'making a difference', a sense of achievement that adds a sense of purpose to their work.

Intrinsic rewards from relationships with others (for those who remain) are not the only motivator, and by itself may be insufficient to retain the workforce. One study found that these altruistic motivators were key to retention, however this only circumvented low wages when respondents had alternative sources of household income (e.g., where they have partners who are earning a good salary). The sector cannot rely on vocational motivators to keep staff, nor should it; otherwise, it is exploiting a predominantly female low-status workforce and reinforcing gender inequalities.

Other challenges can impact the experience in the workplace such as lack of resources and labour-intensive work, which is emotionally and physically demanding. These problems can make workers feel dissatisfied, compounded by a lack of control over their working environment (an important determinant of job satisfaction) which contribute to high turnover and retention problems. Stressful and pressurised working conditions, a poor organisational culture, high turnover and staff shortages, lack of career opportunities and low pay can leave staff looking for work elsewhere. Leavers who remain in the sector may move from employer to employer in search of more favourable conditions and rewards. In the context of staff shortages, good working environments become more critical.

Organisations need to understand the personal motivation of their staff and what gives them job satisfaction Research indicates that high levels of job satisfaction and related commitment to the employer predict higher rates of retention and these findings concur with employment relations research that differentiates factors of good and bad employment. Looking after staff is important to retention. It can have 'mutually reinforcing beneficial effects' for

staff and service users (and organisations), impacting not only staff turnover, but quality of services as well.

In addition to having job security and good terms and conditions, staff also need to feel valued and safe at work. Staff value a sense of belonging and collegiality, having positive relationships with service users, colleagues, and managers. A good working environment and culture helps staff to feel appreciated, recognised and rewarded for their work. Staff can benefit from opportunities for self-development that enables them to advance their skills and avail of career progression opportunities.

Reflective questions about staff satisfaction:

- What are your staff most happy about their work?
- What are they most dissatisfied about?
- What do you do to address issues for workers?
- Is the work culture one that is task-oriented? Does the work culture enable staff to invest in relationship aspect of care work?
- In what ways does the culture and work practices of the organisation promote wellbeing and belonging for staff?
- How does your organisation reward loyalty or recognise good/ excellence performance?
- What incentivises staff to stay with you?
- Would you say you are a good employer that looks after staff? Do you know if your employees would agree?

There are further ideas that can contribute to staff satisfaction in subsequent sections of this guide.

Working environment, culture & practices

The design of work content is related to staff wellbeing and job satisfaction. This refers to how and which tasks are assigned to staff, and how much time staff spend with residents, a positive factor for retention reported in two studies. It includes how tasks are organised, the nature of the job, the pace of work, job content and degrees of choice. Autonomy and empowerment to decide how and when to undertake tasks is important to work-related wellbeing. The degree to which staff can decide how to use their skills is also associated with intention to leave. Having variety in the role and opportunities to apply skills are measures of quality within the role and aid retention.

Fairness and equality are also important, where the allocation of less desirable tasks are shared fairly across the team irrespective of hierarchy. Staff shortages contribute to a stressful working environment when existing staff are expected to cover additional tasks. This can result in a reluctance to go the extra mile amongst a tired and overstretched workforce. Staff who undertake tasks (that may be physically demanding) in tightly specified time

slots, report they feel rushed, more stressed and have lower job satisfaction. It affects staff wellbeing and productivity as high volume, pace of work, and expectations of workload can lead to staff feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Unpredictable working time and having to do extra hours can be a reason to quit. One study with providers said they found it easy to get existing staff to do extra hours, but the research did not say was whether this could be a reason for high turnover.

Strategies for good work practices:

- Ensure adequate time is given to allow staff to undertake their job well.

- Talk to staff to identify and find ways to address high-stress factors.

- Consider aspects of the job that staff do not enjoy and why, asking them for ideas about ways to address this.

- Have strategies to prevent staff shortages. This helps to ensure existing staff are protected from pressurized and excessive workloads and reduces stress or feeling overwhelmed about having to do more tasks with less time.

- Demonstrate how you value your staff by giving them tasks and responsibilities that are commensurate with their skills and requests.

- If something goes wrong (such as a procedure not followed correctly), it is important to review what happened. Staff should be supported to learn from mistakes with a 'no blame' culture. Making changes to prevent further incidents may also require adaptations to a system, policy, or work practice to enable staff to do their jobs more effectively or safely.

Good relationships at work

Positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, including the absence of conflict, is associated with resilience and retention. Good teamwork (including reciprocity and effective communication) and rewarding social exchanges can support retention. The literature indicates that social care workers value good social connections, with some expressing that colleagues/employers were like a 'second family'. This can help to reduce turnover, particularly as having supportive colleagues can help to offset the challenges of stressful working conditions. Support from management and colleagues is also key to job satisfaction and retention.

Strategies for good working relationships:

- Have a clear and fair policy and process for addressing staff conflicts.

- Consider aspects of the work culture that contribute to good working relationships.

- Ask staff about their experiences of relationships at work.

- Identify how staff are enabled to support each other.

- Consider use of team-building events or social activities for staff.

Respect, value, and reward staff

Social care workers are aware of the poor public perception of care work. They want to be respected for the work they do. They want their roles to be acknowledged and valued as an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of service users. It is important for employers to provide recognition for hard work and dedication to service users and the organisation. A culture of gratitude to staff can assist with retention and promote positive social exchanges at work. This can be acknowledgement of workers' commitment and achievements at work, compliments and praise for job well done, even for trivial things, with formal and informal recognition from management. One example highlighted the use of the 'warm and fuzzy wall', with certificates given to staff each month, with the recipient being celebrated by work colleagues and management.

Strategies to reward & value staff:

- Regularly thank staff. It costs nothing and can contribute to a sense of good wellbeing at work.

- Explore ways to demonstrate appreciate and recognition, rewarding good practice, dedication and loyalty to service users, colleagues, and the organisation. Ask staff for ideas about the types of rewards they would enjoy.

- Celebrate their successes. Rewarding good practice and achievements can provide an enjoyable experience for workers.

- Examples of employee award schemes highlighted in the literature include a monthly £50 retail voucher for 'employee of the month' used as a positive recognition tool. An email is sent to all staff advising of the recipient and the good work they have done. Other examples include taking staff out for Christmas dinner, small gifts, vouchers.

- Incentives can include employer supports with qualifications, Investor in People awards, shopping discounts with local businesses, free parking, free meals, gym memberships, social activities, option to buy or sell annual leave entitlement, childcare vouchers, wheels 2 work schemes, health cash plans.

- Celebrate personal occasions and milestones- e.g., birthdays, anniversaries of years with the employer, achieving qualifications with a cake, award ceremony etc.

- Be proactive in responding to (and challenging) encounters that are dismissive, undermining, or derogatory about social care work/workers.

Good terms and conditions

Challenges associated with poor terms and conditions are well as factors that affects retention. Social care has 'an increasingly frustrated' workforce, illustrated by high staff turnover and vacancies. Prospective employees are attracted to jobs based on their terms and conditions, and social care can often 'falls short' on renumeration. Comparisons are made with other employers, and with other sectors (such as hospitality and retail) where roles have less responsibility and risk for the same (or more) wages.

A survey of the top social care providers for retention report that paying above the minimum wage helps to retain staff, reinforced by NMDS-SC which illustrated that higher paid workers were less likely to leave (Skills for Care, 2016). Higher wages also help to address the stigma that social care is low status work. Salaries needs to be commensurate with qualifications/training and responsibilities of the role. Paying higher wages places employers in a stronger position than their competitors but ensuring pay parity with other employers may go some way to retaining staff.

Research indicates that staff turnover rates are higher for staff on zero hours contract. Unless staff want to avail of them, they do not help with workforce stability. Zero-hour contracts makes staff vulnerable to loss of work and pay if service users go into hospital, a home or pass away. Often the rewards are insufficient to progress from entry-level jobs to more senior roles. Progression in terms of seniority and responsibilities should also be matched with financial incentives. The range of salary scale needs to be wide enough for advancement

HMRC guidance outlines the circumstances which may put people below the national minimum wage. This includes time not paid to undertake work-related travel, (such as moving between service users' homes in domiciliary care services), undertake training, pay for items connected with work, and extra time worked at the start/end of a shift.

Strategies for terms and conditions:

- Offer secure work, with good pay, terms, and conditions (including occupational sick pay and pensions), with feasible progression routes. It helps to attract prospective employees and reduce turnover if current staff are less likely to leave.

- Keep the use of agency staff and zero hours contracts to a minimum.

- Enhance pay and incentives for hard to recruit sectors/geographical areas such as rural areas.

- Ensure staff not out of pocket to commence work (e.g., costs for Access NI checks, uniform costs. Pay staff for all time spent at work or on work-related activities.

- Pay staff for the time they are travelling between work locations. Ensure those who use their own vehicles for company business are appropriately reimbursed for relevant expenses (fuel costs and maintenance costs). Consider providing transport for drivers, particularly in rural areas.

- Provide financial incentives for working unsocial hours such as night shifts, weekends, and bank holidays or overtime.

- Reward qualification attainment, experience, or length of service with pay increments.

Other examples from research on retention in social care highlighted other financial incentives (related to loyalty or performance) such as gain-sharing collective benefits:

- Explore provision of fringe benefits- recognition awards, vouchers and bonuses, gym subsidy/membership.

- Consult with staff to identify benefits and rewards they value the most, using this intelligence to develop package of benefits tailored to staff preferences, and where possible provide choices.

Flexibility and work/life balance

Flexible working can help to sustain motivation and reduce turnover. Having rosters that are flexible for individual workers, and not just for the business needs of the organisation, can result in reciprocal benefits for employers. Flexible working can enhance performance and satisfaction. If workers think the provision of flexible working is to support good work-life balance, they are more likely to be motivated and have more job satisfaction, causing staff to perform better at their work and 'go the extra mile'. Different shift patterns suit different groups of staff, so listening to their preferences and trying to meet their needs can also enhance loyalty to the organisation and reduce turnover.

Strategies for work/life balance:

- Give staff a say in shift patterns.

- Invite staff to make suggestions as to how to work rotas with fairness and equality. Management should take notice of preferred shifts yet promote fairness among the staff cohort.

- Ensure shift allocation is provided with adequate notice.

- Build in flexibility that while meeting the needs of the organisation, also enables staff to meet personal commitments alongside working in social care.

- Enable swaps (so long as shifts are covered) so flexibility is built into the culture of work patterns.

- Identify barriers for staff taking leave and ensure there is adequate provision of staff to enable staff to take their leave. This is important to ensuring a well-rested workforce that is enabled to take time away from work when they need to do so.

- Use an identified list of staff for extra and/or temporary cover, so you are not relying on existing staff to work extra hours.

- Be an agile and responsive employer. Identify how contracts work for staff in terms of managing a good work/life balance, particularly for staff at risk of leaving because work conflicts with personal commitments (e.g., unable to get childcare etc, partner working night shift etc). This may involve use of part-time working, job shares, changing work hours, term-time only contacts, career breaks etc., helping staff to have a good balance between work and homelife.

Staff wellbeing

The need to address the wellbeing of care workers in adult social care has been highlighted as a global challenge, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, which further highlighted issues of wellbeing for social care staff. Social care work is demanding work, physically and emotionally, at times compounded by staff shortages, lack of resources, and other work pressures. A positive workplace is one that ensures staff are well and fit for social care work. Therefore, it is important to look after the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of staff.

Strategies for staff wellbeing:

- Be proactive in protecting staff wellbeing. Ask staff about the types of support that would be helpful to address work-related stress.

- Provide information for staff about wellbeing e.g., mental health, who to talk to if they have either work or non-work-related problem. This requires visible and accessible management, or access to occupational health or other employee assistance programme.

- Undertake mental health and wellbeing survey of employees.

- Develop a wellbeing strategy to support staff.

- Some strategies adopted by employers include regular 'check ins' with staff e.g., meetings at end of shift, regular phone contact with staff, and accessible managers with an open-door policy.

- Be considerate about personal responsibilities and challenges, as this can affect staff performance.

- If several staff are experiencing ill health, consider help from outside the organisation.

- Identify possible types of vicarious trauma that staff can be exposed to through their work, e.g., impact of death of a service user, assault by service user.

- Consider good practices available from mental health charities such as help with crises, stress and resilience training, or peer support. One research study reported better retention rates when awareness of compassion fatigue and self-care strategies was increased amongst staff.

- Set up a 'care hub'- a space for staff to relax or study.

- Mental health first aiders.

- Healthcare benefits scheme (counselling, debt management, relationship, and legal advice)

- Promote wellbeing podcasts that staff can listen to while travelling between service users' homes, or any other time they choose.

- Undertake return to work conversations with staff who have been off sick.

- Conduct risk assessments for staff with disabilities, long term health conditions or are pregnant.

- Monitor staff wellbeing through supervision.

- Provide free eye checks for office staff.

Staff development and career progression

Supportive induction, staff development, and opportunities for career progression are crucial to staff retention. For new staff it is important to provide a full induction, with opportunities to shadow or buddy with colleagues. Supporting staff in the earlier phase makes them more likely to stay. Likewise for more experienced staff who feel they have no, or limited progression opportunities are more likely to leave social care. Offering development opportunities (beyond induction or basic skills), relevant to specific roles can positively impact retention. It is equally important to ensure that staff who do not wish to progress via undertaking qualifications or moving into more senior roles, also have access to training opportunities.

Strategies for staff development and career progression:

- Create a culture where staff can thrive and are encouraged to learn.

- Ask staff what they want and need from training, and the type of training that works best for them as individuals. This should be addressed at induction, through regular supervision, performance appraisals, staff development plans and in team exercises.

- Ensure that current training activity is stimulating and benefits staff, so that it is not a tick box exercise.

- Find out staff aspirations and appetite for career development and/or professional qualifications.

- Provide a career framework with development opportunities within the organisation.

- Qualification attainment should be rewarded with pay enhancement or promotion opportunities.

- Research indicates that working part-time can limit opportunities, so consider how staff can avail of staff development.

- Offer mentoring, coaching, buddying or other bespoke arrangements to provide staff with support they need to do their jobs well. In Italy, a network of Sicilian social enterprises providing inter-generational mentoring and support for workers. They are grouped according to job role and mentored by facilitators who have relevant work experience.

Inclusion: the voice of social care workers in decision making

Research indicates that staff are often not included in decision-making. Their views are not sought, so their contribution, whether to individual's care plans or organisational development, is often overlooked. Furthermore, care workers are less likely to be connected to organisations that provide professional representation and advocacy on behalf of their membership. Research highlights that relationships with managers is what matters most and can make staff feel involved and listened to. The opportunity for the voice of social care workers to be heard in an organisation is an important way to improve retention rates.

Strategies for including the voice of social care workers:

- Review how your organisation obtains and uses staff feedback. This could be about their roles, how things could work better, or indeed ideas for recruitment and retention. This could be undertaken through regular staff meetings, or if it is difficult to get staff together (such as in domiciliary care and for those on shift work), think about other ways to gain staff feedback e.g., anonymous surveys, supervision/mentoring sessions, online meetings for those off rota, team building event etc.

- Consider how social care workers can be involved in developing and reviewing care plans. Ask them if they think the care plan is working well for service users.

- Invite staff to make suggestions for service improvement and organisational development, to identify what is working well and areas for improvement. This can also help with retention, as it helps managers to understand the motivations of staff and identifying good or unhelpful practices/processes.

- Work together with staff to tackle retention issues. This helps to negate a 'them and us' culture (staff and management), providing for a culture of collaboration in working towards common goals.

Caring leadership

It has been said that staff do not leave their jobs, they leave their managers. Several research studies have indicated that there is a strong relationship between leadership and staff turnover. One study reported a strong relationship between intention to leave and supportive leadership, meaning that those who reported a higher intention to leave also reported lower ratings of their leadership. Another study found that job satisfaction increased significantly when ratings of leadership increased. Effective management and leadership practices can promote staff retention. Good managers go the extra mile, value their staff, and invest time and energy in doing things to keep their staff.

Positive attributes of leaders include being compassionate, positive, supportive, visible, inclusive, and responsive. Research indicates that high turnover of managers often leads to high turnover of other staff. Therefore, strategies to improve staff wellbeing, satisfaction, and willingness to stay with the organisation, must also include strategies that retain employees in management positions.

Strategies for caring leadership:

- Have a clearly defined organisational mission statement, ethos, and organisational values that are reflected in the culture for staff as well as service users.

- Ensure managers are supported so they can also support staff.

- Provide training to managers about healthy employer relationships that is based on mutual respect, trust, understanding and valuing staff.

- Leaders should be onsite, available, and approachable. They should be good role models, demonstrating the values of the organisation and good practice, mentoring staff by participating in 'hands-on' work.

- Effective and supportive supervision and leadership are crucial to retention.

- Include a discussion about job satisfaction and intent (to remain or leave in staff appraisal/supervision.

- Promote the use of 'conversational practice', daily conversations that engage staff, help to buffer from stresses of the job and promote openness in discussions.

- Strategies referenced under other themes in this guide also require caring leadership.

Workforce planning

It is acknowledged that some staff will leave due to personal factors, and this is beyond the control of employers. Likewise, some staff may leave because they are not suited to social care work. However, it is also well documented in research that job satisfaction is an important factor for retention; if staff are not happy in their current role, they will seek opportunities elsewhere.

Employers needs to keep abreast of staff turnover. Effective workforce planning requires an understanding of the determinants of retention and turnover, i.e., what makes people stay and what makes them leave. Organisations need to monitor retention rates and put in place actions/strategies to help retain good workers. Likewise understanding reasons for leaving means employers can explore ways help retain good staff. These are not mutually exclusive categories, but they cannot be assumed to be the same thing i.e., the reasons why people leave are not the flip side of why people stay.

While workforce planning is important for ensuring adequate staff provision, it can also demonstrate to existing staff that employers are committed to looking after their workforce. This contributes to a culture of care for staff, and helps to build reputation as a good employer

While the evidence base around 'what works' is not clear, we do know the risk factors for retention, so employers should look to identify how prevalent these are in their organisation and develop strategies to address these.

Reflective questions for workforce planning:

- What are the risk factors for staff leaving your organisation?
- Do you know when staff are thinking about leaving?
- What can you do to keep them?
- What are the levers for improvement in retention?
- Do you have a reputation as an employer of choice in your local community?
- Do you know what makes for a good employer?
- Do you know why some staff stay long term in SC employment and with certain employers?
- Do different groups of staff benefit from different retention activities?
- Investing in retention is important. How could you divert finances used in repeated recruitment, induction and training used on transient staff to be better used for retention?

Strategies for workforce planning:

- Measure and review staff satisfaction to identify organisational changes that could improve retention, by listening to staff experiences and recommendations.

- Check in with staff who have expressed an intention to leave.

- Conduct exit interviews to find out why staff are leaving.

Conclusion

Inherent across all themes is how people approach their work and interact with others at work, illustrating the interpersonal and human nature of social care and staff wellbeing. Recruitment and retention are the responsibility of the whole organisation, including management, human resources departments and frontline workers as well. A holistic approach to organisational development helps to include frontline staff in the design and delivery of services.

The most important things employers can address to help retain staff:

- Respect and value staff.
- Listen to staff and ensure good communication with them.
- Create a good working environment.
- Ensure they are well trained and paid (with benefits and incentives).
- Provide good working conditions that enable staff to flourish.
- Provide flexibility in working hours when it is needed.
- Support staff in their roles and personal lives.
- Reward success and celebrate achievements.

And finally…

- Challenge yourself, ask questions about **how** you do these things.

Appendix 1

Strategies for certain groups and contexts

- In Norway the 'Menn I helse' campaign offers an apprenticeship certificate enabling men to work in health and social care role.

- 'Recruit and Retain- Making it Work' is an EU project, with activities aimed at improving recruitment and retention in rural and remote areas.

- For international recruitment support newcomers to gain qualifications and experience (e.g., nurses from Vietnam coming to Germany), so they meet the host countries requirements. Newcomers were provided with additional training re. clinical skills and language.

- Creation of apprenticeships or encouraging young people to take a gap year and undertake social services work. One example of a volunteer centre with school leavers given volunteering placements- 'a type of social services year for personal development and orientation'.

- Youth Guarantee an EU initiatives that provided under 25s with opportunities for work, education, apprenticeships, or traineeships. These initiatives can be used to raise the profile of the social services sector.

- Examples from Italy and Finland where prior SUs were recruited as volunteers or workers (refugees, homeless people).

Image of social care

Examples from European counties highlight ways to promote the image of social care. In France the Federation de l'Entraide Protestante delivered an inter-generational exhibit which brought people together to exchange stories about social services work. Other providers are using social media to change the image of social services, delivered to wider public audience. Slezska Diakonie in the <u>Czech Republic uses video newsletter available to the public to</u> challenge stereotypes about using social services.

Some interviewees suggested that younger people were becoming more interested in working in the sector. This may be due to changing societal goals about social care work being more related to satisfaction than monetary gains. One intervention was a website that questioned people about what they wanted from employment and explore what they could give to a new field of work. People entered a job search page and were asked questions. Based on the profile generated they could be diverted to different section of the website where there are jobs available (if suitable to their profile). This gives people an opportunity to explore different areas of work that they may not have considered, such as working in the social services sector.

Case study of organisational development

Examples KVPS a Finnish organisation that provides services for people with learning disabilities focusses on organisational development as a way of transforming work practices. For example, the organisation focusses on improving staff welling-being, enhancing staff motivating by providing options for staff to use existing skills in different ways. Staff are encouraged to be creative and innovative developing activities and service provision. Shared organisational values (that have been coproduced with service users, and delivered via training, with an emphasis on human respect, reliability, renewal, and effectiveness underpinning this approach.

This promotes staff engagement and commitment, evidenced in annual staff survey. Staff benefit from opportunities to use their skills to develop the organisation, not just work with service users. Training is provided to management, so connections are made between the wellbeing of service users and the wellbeing of staff. This approach emphasises the responsibility of the employer to take care of its employees, so that people enjoy working there. They set up a new training and education department and staff are supporting to plan and design their own training, so they take ownership of their own development. A blended approach to training (online and traditional) is delivered to meet needs of range of staff.

Bibliography

Barrett, L, Robinson, E. (2018). *Understanding the current evidence base on workforce retention in Health and Social Care. A rapid evidence review for The Health Foundation.* Research Matters. Available at: http://research-matters.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Rapid-Evidence-Review-on-NHS-retention-Research-Matters-Sept-2018.pdf

Devi R, Goodman C, Dalkin S, Bate A, Wright J, Jones L, Spilsbury K. (2020). Attracting, recruiting and retaining nurses and care workers working in care homes: the need for a nuanced understanding informed by evidence and theory. *Age and Ageing* 50 pp.65-67.

Devins, D., Bickerstaffe, T., Mitchell, B. and Halliday, S. (2014). *Improving progression in low-paid, low skilled retail, catering and care jobs.* Available at: www.jrf.org.uk/publications/improvingprogression-low-paid-low-skilled-jobs

Edwards, D., Trigg, L., Carrier, J., Cooper, A., Csontos, J., Day, J., Gillen, E., Lewis, R. and Edwards, A. (2022). A rapid review of innovations for attraction, recruitment and retention of social care workers, and exploration of factors influencing turnover within the UK context. *Journal of Long-Term Care*, (2022), pp.205–221. DOI: http://doi.org/10.31389/jltc.130

Evans, S, Huxley, P, Munroe, M. (2006). International recruitment of social care workers and social workers; illustrations from the UK. *The Hong Kong Journal of Social Work* 40 1-2 pp.93-110.

Forth, J, Bryson, A. (2022). *Recruitment and retention in adult social care: Evidence from the annual population survey.* London: The Health Foundation, University of Kent, City University of London, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University College London. Available at: Forth & Bryson 2022.pdf

Hayes, L., Johnston, E., Tarrant, A. (2019). *Professionalisation at work in Social Care. Report to the All Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care.* July 2019. Available at: Professionalisation at work in adult social care (gmb.org.uk)

Hughes, J, Chester, H, Challis, D. (2009). *Recruitment and retention of a social care workforce for older people.* Discussion paper M193-2. University of Manchester, University of Kent: London School of Economics; Personal Social Services Research Unit. Available at: Microsoft Word - DP M193 2 single sided for pdf.doc (pssru.ac.uk)

Imison, C., Bohme, R. (2013) *NHS and social care workforce: meeting our needs now and in the future?* London: The Kings Fund. Available at: NHS and social care workforce | The King's Fund (kingsfund.org.uk)

Johnston, L., Malcolm, C., Rambabu, L., Hockely, J. and Shenkin, S. (2021). Practice Based Approaches to Supporting the Work Related Wellbeing of

Frontline Care Workers in Care Homes: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Long-Term Care*, (2021) pp.230–240. DOI: http://doi.org/10.31389/jltc.66

Lethbridge, J. (2017). *Recruitment and retention in social services: Unlocking the sector's job creation potential*. Brussels: Social Services Europe. Available at https://www.socialserviceseurope.eu/reports

McDonald, P, Thorpe, K, Irvine, S. (2018). Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education and care. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 60 (5) pp.647-668.

McKenzie, K, Metcalfe, D, Whelan, K and McNall, A. (2021). Improving recruitment and retention in learning disability services. *Nursing Times*, 117 (4). pp.26-29.

Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., & Harris, J. (2018). *Recruitment and retention in adult social care services*. Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London.

Nordregio (2021). *Recruitment and retention in the welfare sector: Nordic good practice*. Policy Brief 2021:1. Norway, Nordregio. Available at: Nordregio - Recruitment and retention in the welfare sector: Nordic best practice

Pitarella, E. (2020). *Care Worker Perceptions of Recruitment and Retention in Adult Social Care Settings.* A thesis submitted to the University of Gloucestershire in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Master of Science by Research in the School of Health and Social Care. Available at: Care Worker Perceptions of Recruitment and Retention in Adult Social Care Settings - Research Repository (glos.ac.uk)

Power, M, Burke, C. (2021). *Recruitment and retention in social care work in Ireland: A Social Care Ireland survey*. Dublin; Social Care Ireland. Available at: Recruitment-and-retention-report-SCI.pdf (socialcareireland.ie)

Randell, R. (2021). *Recruitment and retention of care workers: A rapid review. Report produced by the Workforce Observatory*. University of Bradford on behalf of West Yorkshire Integrated Care System. University of Bradford. Available at: Recruitment and retention of care workers: A rapid review (brad.ac.uk)

Rubery, J, Hebson, G, Grimshaw, D,Carroll, M, Smith, L, Marchington, L, Ugarte, S. (2011). *The recruitment and retention of a care workforce for older people*. Manchester; European Work and Employment Research Centre, University of Manchester.

Skills for Care (2017). *Recruitment and retention in adult social care: secrets of success Learning from employers what works well*. Leeds; Skills for Care. Available at: Recruitment and retention secrets of success report (skillsforcare.org.uk)

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2016). *Care workers: building the future social care workforce. Future of care*. Number 2. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence. Available at: Care workers: building the future social care workforce - SCIE

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2020). *Beyond COVID: New thinking on the future of adult social care*. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence. Available at: Beyond COVID-19: New thinking on the future of adult social care (scie.org.uk)

The Work Foundation & Totaljobs (2021). *Social care: a guide to attracting and retaining a thriving workforce*. Lancaster; The Work Foundation. Available at: Social care: a guide to attracting and retaining a thriving workforce | Lancaster University