



Social care:

a guide to attracting and retaining a thriving workforce



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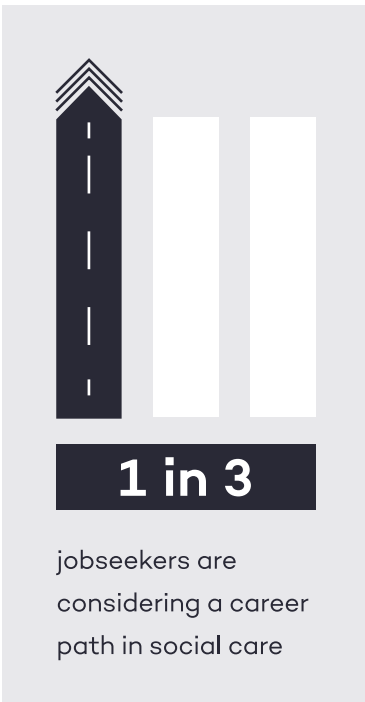
Summary

With an estimated workforce of **1.52 million**¹, the adult social care sector makes up a significant section of the UK labour market. It will need to rapidly expand over the years ahead to keep up with growing demand. The number of adult social care jobs is expected to increase by **32%** by 2035² to meet the needs of the UK population, which has a growing demographic of adults living to 85 and over, as well as an increasing number of people with learning disabilities which require service provision, meaning that employers will need to increase their workforces with skilled care workers.³

While the pandemic highlighted the crucial role of adult social care, adult social care workers have also been exposed to acute risks and pressures.

Pre-pandemic, the sector had already faced a number of long-standing challenges that limit candidate attraction. Pay in the sector is low overall and there are limited opportunities for development and progression.⁴ High levels of financial insecurity among staff are also prevalent.⁵ These challenges have contributed to perceptions of care workers as low status⁶ and low skilled.

Yet, findings from our survey show that more than half (**53%**) of jobseekers from outside the sector now have a more positive view of social care since the onset of the pandemic. This demonstrates an opportunity created by the increased attention the pandemic has placed on social care to tap into increasingly positive public perceptions of social care work and increase recruitment. In fact, almost a third (**31%**) of jobseekers are considering a career in care.



However, our findings also point to a workforce continuing to face substantial challenges, not least terms and conditions that leave too many workers feeling disaffected. Over a third (37%) of care workers that we surveyed are looking for a new role in the sector, with the main drivers being: pay (52%), not feeling valued (45%) and a lack of career progression opportunities (31%).

To address these challenges, employers should focus on offering secure work, based on decent pay with good terms and conditions. Viable routes for progression should also be established, so that the sector represents an attractive option for young people looking to build a career. Alongside this, ensuring adult social care workers feel valued will boost job satisfaction and retention.

This guide is structured around the challenges within the different career pathways that adult social care workers can take (from entering the sector to building and progressing within their careers). Each section offers recommendations as to how employers and government can create long-term solutions for a thriving workforce.

■ Approach

This report is based on output from a mixed-methods approach, including: an evidence review, semi-structured interviews with policy stakeholders and employers; and two surveys. The carers survey was conducted with adult social care workers within Totaljobs' candidate database. The candidate survey was undertaken with workers in Totaljobs' candidate pool, based either in other sectors or not in employment at the time of the survey being undertaken.





Recruitment

There have been longstanding attraction and recruitment challenges for the sector, and staff turnover is high⁷, with many vacancies going unfilled. This suggests standard approaches to recruitment are not successfully identifying people who will be a good fit for a long-term career in care.

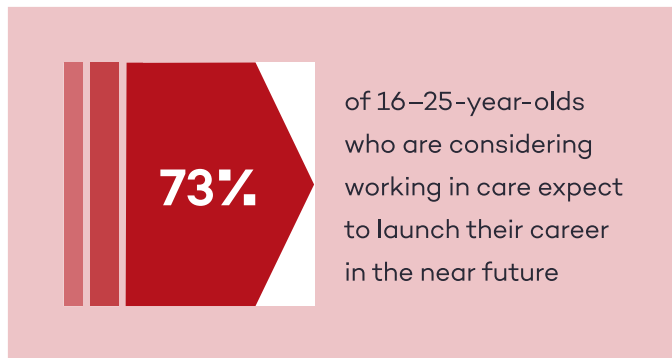
The introduction of the new immigration system will end access to a talent pool that has been essential for the sector over a number of years. Previous Work Foundation research found that, if the new immigration system had been in place for the three years prior to December 2020, up to **11,000 workers** from the European Union who arrived in the UK and worked in health and social care would likely not have met the criteria needed for entry.⁸ While a Health and Care visa has been designed to enable continued recruitment of migrant workers for essential roles, this will not apply to care roles.

The new immigration system will likely affect different parts of the care sector in different ways. Previously, EU workers were able to temporarily come to the UK as live-in carers, based in customers' homes for only three or six months a year. A care provider interviewed for this guide estimated **10%** of their live-in carers were from the EU, going up **20-30%** in different parts of the UK, and they were uncertain how they would fill the gap given the immigration requirements.

Negative perceptions of care work have also been an attraction and recruitment challenge. However, there are positive indications that attitudes towards work in care are improving, particularly among younger candidates, and providers and sector bodies should seize this opportunity to invest in attracting this demographic to the sector.

Improving attitudes towards care work will provide an opportunity to boost recruitment

When asked about their perceptions of social care work in the context of the pandemic, more than half (**53%**) of candidate survey respondents indicated their views had become more positive. And, among the **31%** of respondents that had indicated they have considered working in social care, young people (16–25) were particularly keen to do so, with **73%** stating that 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 respondents between the ages of 55–64.



Misperceptions are limiting recruitment opportunities

These findings are encouraging, considering the impact that poor perceptions of work in adult social care has historically had on recruitment into the sector. These negative perceptions stem in part from the low pay available to adult social care workers, and the notion that the work is low skilled by association. Better pay available for NHS roles also serves to relegate the status of work in adult care, as highlighted by policy stakeholder interviewees.

It's often in the shadow of the NHS – there's an inability to share the most positive aspects of it and break into that public debate.

Policy stakeholder interview

While a number of national recruitment campaigns have been developed by the Government, there is a need for more practical opportunities to increase direct exposure to social care work. As long as it is safe to enter care homes (and other care settings), young people should be provided with opportunities to see first-hand what adult social care work is like, and to discuss this directly with recipients of care or with social care workers, to gain an accurate appreciation of the nature of care work.

Research has shown that placements undertaken by young people on health and social care courses helped to increase awareness of what roles in social care entail.⁹ The Prince's Trust provide a scheme which provides young people with the opportunity to access work experience in the social care sector – 'Get into'. Employers, or groups of employers, in local areas, should consider participating in the scheme, which can help shape a recruitment pipeline of young workers.

Recommendation

Care providers should create work experience opportunities to develop a pipeline of talent for the sector. This should involve close collaboration between sector bodies, colleges, schools and local authorities, and should align with national campaigns too, such as that run by DHSC – 'Care for others. Make a difference'.

Drive recruitment through raised awareness of entry requirements

Nearly half of respondents in the candidate survey indicated that they would not work in social care because they felt they didn't have the required qualifications.

In fact, entry level care roles generally do not require specific qualifications, with training and support provided on the job to build the expertise needed. In England, the Care Certificate provides a baseline of key skills, knowledge and behaviours utilised in entry-level training for new starters. This introductory training should then be built upon by adult care workers with the support of their employer, as they develop their experience and skills, potentially including specialisms that can be acquired through qualifications and training.

This survey result suggests that misperceptions about routes into care could be presenting a barrier to attraction and recruitment of new candidates. To address this, more effective outreach and engagement is needed, emphasising that values and motivation are more important prerequisites for working in the social care sector, rather than specific qualifications.



Lack of understanding is a real challenge. Because if people don't understand [care work], they don't understand the opportunities and the breadth of roles that are available to them.

Policy stakeholder interview



Top reasons jobseekers wouldn't consider working in social care

47%

I don't have the qualifications

38%

I wouldn't enjoy the role

38%

The pay is too low

27%

Working hours are unpredictable

25%

Employers don't value care workers

N=2213

Increasing wage levels across the sector will be key to boost the number of candidates applying for roles

The social care sector has been defined as a low-paying industry by the Low Pay Commission.¹⁰ Care workers are paid on average less than cleaners, shop assistants and health care assistants in the NHS.¹¹ Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings shows that the median weekly pay for care workers and home carers was £327 in 2020. This compares with a median income of £479 for all employees in the UK.¹²

Our analysis found that low pay within the sector is dissuading candidates from care work, with 38% of respondents selecting this as a reason they wouldn't apply for a role within the sector.

Adopt values-based recruitment to attract workers more likely to remain in the sector

Our research identified values-based recruitment as a crucial mechanism to attract staff who perform well and deliver a high standard of care. Survey results also show that pride in the value of social care is a key driver in attracting people into the sector.

Top factors attracting people to work in social care

73%

Knowing the job makes a difference

72%

Gaining satisfaction from caring for others

63%

Being proud to work in the sector

N=997

Key stakeholders, including the Department of Health and Social Care, in partnership with Skills for Care, as well as regulatory bodies for adult social care across the devolved nations, are promoting and encouraging the use of values-based recruitment, which is an approach that seeks to appoint staff based on their personal values and behaviours, such as empathy and patience, rather than experience or more traditional methods of recruitment. In values-based recruitment, interviews should be diverse and incorporate the 'people-facing' elements of social care work so that employers can gauge how interviewees would deal with typical situations they could encounter working in care.

There are a number of resources which help providers to apply this form of recruitment. For example, Skills for Care produced a toolkit¹³ to support providers in applying a values-based recruitment approach. An evaluation of this resource found that it provided an improvement on other approaches used for recruitment, and staff recruited through approaches based on values perform better than employees recruited through traditional measures.¹⁴

Recommendation

Care providers should recruit candidates to entry level roles based on the values they hold rather than their skills or experience. This values-based approach could include scenario-based questions, or group assessment days. Care worker interviews should incorporate the 'people-facing' elements of social care work.



Retention

Unfilled vacancies in social care stand at 122,000.¹⁵ High turnover and regular use of agency and temporary workers are increasing staff costs for many providers, and are negatively impacting continuity of care. Co-production is essential to modern care and support, with those individuals receiving care at the centre of decisions about the support they receive. Our research found that this approach hinges on building longstanding relationships between individuals using a service and care workers. Previous Totaljobs research found that **60%** of care workers report that the relationships they form with their clients positively influenced their decision to remain in the sector.¹⁶

Our analysis found that feeling valued by their employer, having comprehensive support through onboarding, and robust worker wellbeing support can better the retention of care workers.



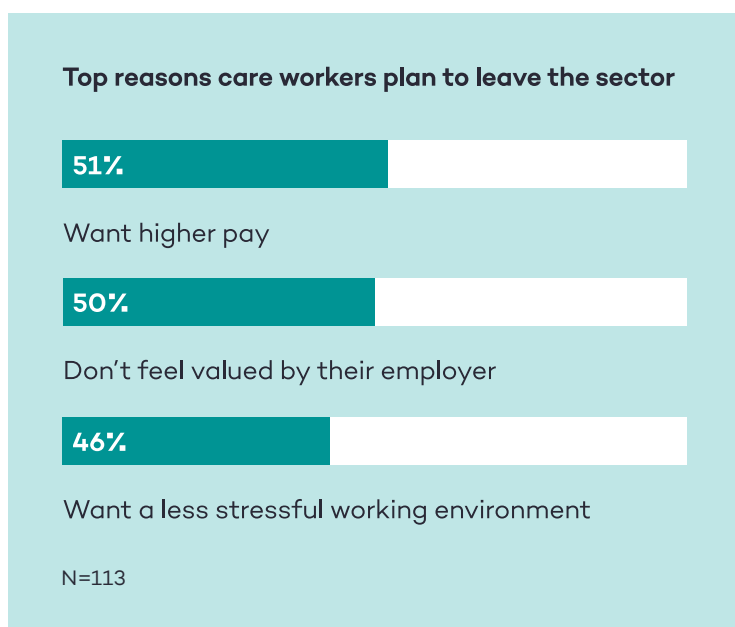
Totaljobs



Ensuring staff feel valued can reduce the number of workers who leave the sector

Two thirds (**66%**) of care workers who leave their jobs remain in the sector.¹⁷ According to our research, the most common motivator for the **37%** of care staff who are currently looking for a new role in the sector is wanting higher pay (**52%**), closely followed by not feeling valued enough (**45%**) and a lack of progression (**31%**).

For the **14%** of care staff who are actively looking for roles outside of the social care sector, key drivers are similar, as shown in the figure below.



For those who have already left the sector, not feeling valued is the most prominent issue driving their exit, with almost a quarter (**23%**) citing this, followed by not having enough time to provide quality care (**14%**) and no longer enjoying their role in social care (**13%**). With this, respondents who disagreed with the statement 'my employer values the work I do' were almost 1.5 more times more likely to be planning to leave their role compared to other respondents.

Nurturing a culture where staff feel valued is essential for job satisfaction, performance and retention. While providing a satisfactory pay package and opportunities for progression will be important in the long run, it's day-to-day recognition, strong relationships between management and carers and appreciation for high quality work that can make all the difference in how employees engage with and relate to their employer.

Providing staff with this type of recognition can also help guard against an 'us and them' dynamic between managers and social care staff in the workplace, which is unhelpful for the delivery of care work and will not foster a culture in which staff feel genuinely valued.

Other practical steps can contribute to staff feeling valued and supported, such as ensuring that shift patterns are provided with sufficient notice, which was highlighted among the open-ended survey questions as job aspects that social care workers would like to see changed, along with working unsociable hours and difficulties in taking annual leave.

There are a range of 'fringe benefits' that employers should also explore, which have been shown to be effective at improving the quality of work for low earners. These include: recognition awards, vouchers, bonuses and gym subsidy/membership.¹⁸

Recommendation

Care providers should consult with their workforce to understand the rewards and benefits they would value most, and use this insight to develop a package of benefits that reflects staff preferences.

Improved onboarding periods can help reduce staff turnover

Our research found that a thorough and supportive staff onboarding process is an important step to ensuring good levels of workforce retention, particularly where a new starter is entering the sector.

The care sector has been continuing to recruit during the pandemic while other sectors, such as retail and hospitality, were shut down. Totaljobs analysis of 15,248 candidates shows that, between 2019-2021, **56%** of those moving into social care roles did so from a different sector, such as customer service, retail, catering and sales, which together accounted for **26%** of new entrants into the sector. One employer we interviewed stated that workers from other sectors with customer service or customer facing experience transitioned into care well. But for all workers who've transitioned from other sectors during the pandemic, there is a greater need to provide thorough and supportive onboarding.

A range of steps can be included in the onboarding process, to ensure appropriate support and supervision is in place, including:

- Buddying or mentoring schemes
- Supervision and support until all induction training is complete
- Shadowing
- Training around specific health conditions and for additional core skills as appropriate

Ensuring that staff undertake the Care Certificate in England is also important, particularly for workers new to social care, and it should form part of the onboarding process.

While some new entrants will plan to move back to their previous occupation and sector after social restrictions end, there is an opportunity to retain those workers who are a good match for care work by making them feel valued and understanding how care work could meet their long-term career needs.



Have we got the right systems in place, good mentoring? If you support someone well in the early phases, they're more likely to stay.

Policy stakeholder interview

The adult social care workforce needs support against the pressures of Covid-19

The care sector has faced acute pressures through the Covid-19 pandemic. These challenges include the heightened risk of infection, the risk of needing to self-isolate without the guarantee of sick pay, and increased frequency of deaths of residents. **41%** of care workers we surveyed had experienced an increased workload during the pandemic.

There was concern expressed among the employer interviewees regarding the pressures that Covid-19 had placed on the adult social care workforce, including how the pandemic had resulted in staff needing to take on more medicalised tasks. After living with the pandemic for over a year and the pressures it has placed on day to day working life, care workers might only now be able to action a desire to leave the industry.

Positive mental health support can aid retention

Care work can be physically and emotionally challenging, which can affect workers' wellbeing and mental health. Our analysis found these challenges have become more acute through the pandemic: **48%** of respondents to the carers' survey reported they had experienced good or very good mental health over the two weeks before completing the survey, in comparison with **60%** in early 2020. There is a danger that the additional pressures of the pandemic could jeopardise retention of care workers.

Providers need to be proactive in supporting and protecting the wellbeing of their workforce to improve retention. This could also bring wider organisational benefits – for example, there is evidence of a link between worker wellbeing and the quality of care.¹⁹

The additional pressures that adult social care workers have been exposed to throughout the pandemic should factor into organisational strategies to support mental health. Providers should develop employee wellbeing surveys that ask staff about the types of support that would benefit them. Results should also inform personalised training for managers, to allow them to build knowledge about a broad base of tools they can draw on to support staff at risk of poor mental health, and discover which approaches are suitable according to the issue and the individual concerned. DHSC should support these efforts through consultation with both sector bodies and unions, to develop wellbeing guidance for providers.

For providers who find that a growing number of their workforce is experiencing mental health challenges, it is vital to proactively ensure that sufficient support is available. There are a number of resources²⁰ to help support the mental health of care workers, which should be distributed and drawn upon by employers.

Good practice from outside of the sector can also be considered, such as support set out by the mental health charity, Mind, for emergency services staff and volunteers. Considering the types of trauma workers can be exposed to, interventions and support to increase resilience and develop peer support have been developed and tested by Mind.²¹

A number of other steps can also be taken such as those mentioned by carers in our survey. When asked how employers are helping care workers feel supported in their roles, workers described the following employer practice that helped them deal with the stresses of their workplace:

- Implementing meetings every morning after night duty
- Regular phone conversations for managers to check in on staff
- Managers adopting 'open door' policies

These types of practical steps can help to provide emotional and wellbeing support for social care workers.

Recommendation

Providers should conduct a workforce wellbeing survey and use this to shape both a wellbeing strategy and organisational strategy on mental health support and staff training.



Progression

A lack of funding and resources, limited differences in pay between entry level and more senior staff, and a lack of standardised and portable training and qualifications for care workers* are all limiting opportunities for progression in the adult social care sector. Our research found that the pandemic has further limited some workers' access to training, with **33%** saying so. This is notable, because workers who lack progression opportunities are more likely to be looking to leave social care.

Increasing opportunities for progression encourages workers to stay

Workers who feel that they have limited or no opportunities for career progression are more likely to look for a new role elsewhere; workers who agreed with the statement 'I don't feel I can progress in my career' are over 2.5 times more likely to be looking to leave social care altogether. With this, **43%** of workers looking to leave the sector said a lack of opportunities for career progression was a key motivation. Other research has shown that offering training that goes beyond induction and standard skills and is more applicable to workers' specific roles can positively impact retention.²²

*It should be acknowledged that Scotland and Northern Ireland operate a qualification-based register for social care in which registrants are obligated to undergo certain training.

Increasing pay differentials supports progression

The introduction of the National Living Wage (NLW) established a minimum income level in the sector, but also decreased the differences in pay between less experienced and more senior roles. Skills for Care found that workers with more than five years of experience earned around **1% more** on average than those who've worked for less than a year.²³ This can discourage workers from seeking career progression.²⁴

The issues with how the sector is funded are widely seen as a hindrance to improving the commissioning process and thereby workers' pay, and there is a clear need for a long-term strategy and funding settlement for social care. Despite growth in demand, there is a minimum projected funding shortfall of **£6.1bn** by 2030.²⁵ For more than a decade, successive Governments have set out commitments to reform and improve the sector with different proposals to drive a longer term more sustainable funding plan, but to date substantive reforms have not materialised.²⁶ The current Government have made clear their ambitions to "fix the crisis in social care once and for all"²⁷ and voiced the urgent need to address these challenges, stating in their manifesto, "We will commit to urgently seek a cross-party consensus in order to bring forward the necessary proposal and legislation for long-term reform".²⁸

Stakeholders interviewed for this project repeatedly highlighted insufficient funding as the core barrier to improving worker pay and terms and conditions, and to funding training. Our research has found that a sustainable funding strategy will be essential to driving effective workforce planning in adult social care across the UK.



Recommendation

The UK Government should deliver on its commitment to produce a long-term strategy and deliver wider reform for the social care sector. Reforms should enable care providers to take responsibility for workers' progression by offering financial incentives for taking on greater responsibility and more senior roles, based on merit and expertise gained through training and development.

Enhancing funding for training aids progression and development

While training is key to progression and development, the lack of funding and limited resources can constrain the training opportunities available to workers. Our interviews with policy stakeholders revealed that paid time off to undertake training is not always available to staff, and other research shows that where qualifications are required as in Scotland, workers may need to cover the costs of training themselves.²⁹ The recent LSE-Lancet Commission on the future of the NHS argues a coordinated effort to create workforce strategies is needed across the UK's nations for both healthcare and care to support the full needs of the workforce in the future.³⁰

Offering standardised, specialised and portable training benefits workers

Workers looking to progress within their careers to new and more senior roles would also benefit from specialised training and management and leadership training and qualifications. A Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework* could support providers to recognise the training and qualifications care workers receive.

Access to training that helps workers become more specialised and knowledgeable about specific areas and care needs can not only help care workers provide better quality care but also potentially develop and progress. Workers who completed our carers' survey wanted specialised training in the following areas:

Specific caring areas:

- ADHD
- Autism
- Dementia
- Personality disorders
- Self-harm
- Special needs

Specific skills:

- Communicating with clients with Dementia and Alzheimer's
- Dealing with challenging behaviour
- Practical manual handling
- Training specific to daily role



Recommendation

Social care sector bodies and regulators should coordinate with central Government and national governments to create a sector-wide, long-term strategy for workforce development that builds funding for training into contracts and helps establish a CPD Framework.

*CPD as defined by CPD UK "is the term used to describe the learning activities professionals engage in to develop and enhance their abilities" and can include a variety of activities from various education providers, such as workshops, events, e-learning, formal training and conferences. For further information, see <https://cpduk.co.uk/explained>



Conclusion

There is an opportunity for the adult social care sector to drive increased recruitment and improve public perception of careers in care, following the increased attention placed on its workforce throughout the pandemic. Younger people in particular are now more likely to consider social care as a viable career, perhaps in part due to the pandemic leading to reduced recruitment opportunities across many other industries. Effective outreach to demonstrate to young people what working in the sector entails is essential moving forward. For young people who join the social care workforce, it is vital they are provided with engaging, effective and supportive onboarding and induction during the early stages of their role, to set them up for a long-term career.

However, in order for adult social care work to truly turn a corner with regard to public perception, the Government must improve funding to the sector and work with employers to address the persistent low pay within the sector, which currently acts as a barrier to recruitment, and is limiting retention of committed and talented care workers. Government reforms should be ambitious in tackling this, driving a sustainable shift in commissioning processes and facilitating development of a CPD Framework to ensure that care work is appropriately rewarded at all levels.

Viable opportunities for career development should also be more systematically integrated into workforce development pathways. Our research identified a number of challenges to recruitment, retention and progression in the adult social care workforce. But we also unearthed good practice across these areas. While a number of employers will undoubtedly be engaged across lots of progressive practice, the recommendations set out below for both employers and government would, taken in sum, help to catalyse a step-change for the sector.

Recommendations

For Government

The Government should deliver on its commitment to produce a long-term strategy and deliver wider reform for the social care sector. Reforms should enable care providers to take responsibility for workers' progression by offering financial incentives for taking on greater responsibility and more senior roles, based on merit and expertise gained through training and development.

For sector bodies

The social care sector bodies and regulators should coordinate with central Government and national governments to create a sector-wide, long-term strategy for workforce development that builds funding for training into contracts and helps establish a Continuing Professional Development Framework.

For care providers

- Care providers should create work experience opportunities to develop a pipeline of talent for the sector. This should involve close collaboration between sector bodies, colleges, schools and local authorities, and should align with national campaigns too, such as DHSC's 'Care for others. Make a difference'.
- Care providers should recruit candidates to entry level roles based on the values they hold rather than their skills or experience. This values-based approach could include scenario-based questions, or group assessment days. Care worker interviews should incorporate the 'people-facing' elements of social care work.
- Providers should conduct a workforce wellbeing survey and use this to shape both a wellbeing strategy and organisational strategy on mental health support and staff training.
- Care providers should consult with their workforce to understand the rewards and benefits they would value most, and use this insight to develop a package of benefits that reflects staff preferences.

The Work Foundation is the leading think tank for improving work in the UK. We have been an authoritative, independent source of ideas and analysis on the labour market and the wider economy for over a hundred years.

As the pace of economic change continues to disrupt the ways we work and do business, our mission is to support everyone in the UK to access rewarding and high-quality work and enable businesses to realise the potential of their teams.

To do this, we engage directly with practitioners, businesses and workers, producing rigorous applied research that allows us to develop practical solutions and policy recommendations to tackle the challenges facing the world of work.

We are part of Lancaster University's Management School, and work with a range of partners and organisations across our research programmes.

About **Totaljobs**

Totaljobs offers employers of all shapes and sizes access to the Totaljobs network. With a mix of generalist and specialist job boards, crossing the breadth and depth of the UK workforce, the Totaljobs network consists of Totaljobs, CareerStructure, City Jobs, eMedCareers, Jobsite, Just Engineers and RetailChoice. These brands provide access to over 20 million searchable candidate profiles, and record over 5 million applications from qualified jobseekers every month.

With a head office in London and offices in Birmingham, Havant, Cardiff, Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham and Glasgow, Totaljobs Group also consists of Caterer.com, CatererGlobal, CWJobs and Milkround. Together these brands are the UK division of StepStone Group, one of the world's largest e-recruitment businesses.

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Methodology

This research utilised a mixed-methods approach. A rapid literature review was conducted during the initial stages of the project to gather key insights across both grey and academic literature.

Two surveys were also run. One was directed to adult social care workers among Totaljobs' candidate database. The survey asked about a range of questions including: working conditions, the impact of Covid-19 on their working lives, experience of training and their future plans to remain in the sector or leave - 1004 complete survey responses were received. The other survey, also sent to workers in Totaljobs' candidate pool, was aimed at workers outside of the adult social care sector. This survey asked questions across a range of issues including: the attractiveness of working in the social care industry in comparison to other sectors, their perception of what working in social care is like and the characteristics that are important for adult social care workers to hold - 3875 complete survey responses were received. All analysis in this report is based on completed responses, which allows us to compare findings across different demographic characteristics. Both surveys ran between February 25 2021 - March 25 2021.

Alongside these surveys, a series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a range of policy stakeholders from across the sector, exploring issues such as: the influence of both Covid-19 and Brexit on the adult social care sector, the key skills and aptitudes that the sector's workforce will need in the future and how training for adult social care workers can be increased. Interviews with adult social care providers were also undertaken, these discussions also explored the influence of Covid-19 and Brexit on the sector, as well as issues such as the key attributes that they look for within recruitment, as well as their approach to workforce development.

Additionally, the research drew on analysis of candidate data held across the Totaljobs Group (online profiles and CVs), in addition to external sources. This structured data is company centric with key highlights being workforce movement (company / discipline), tenure and education.

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