

Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales

Summary report

Prepared by





Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Social Care Wales is responsible for regulating and developing the social care workforce in Wales, as well as setting priorities for research, supporting innovation and gathering data. It is funded by the Welsh Government and was established in 2017.

socialcare.wales

Gofalwn | **WeCare**
.cymru | **.wales**

WeCare Wales aims to raise awareness and understanding of social care, early years and childcare and attract more people with the right skills and values to work in caring roles with children and adults. It is part of Social Care Wales and has been running since 2019.

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Meeting our challenge

This report is part of a wider research programme to generate insights into how workforce challenges in the social care and child care sector can be addressed. It consists of five reports and two additional resources. This document is highlighted.

Five reports on attraction, recruitment, and job-seeking in the social care and child care sector:

Two additional resources to support care employers and the sector:

Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales

Main report

Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

Main report

Understanding attraction and recruitment in early years and childcare in Wales and the role of WeCare Wales

Main report

Social care and child care: attraction, recruitment and retention

A guide for employers

Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales

Summary report

Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

Summary report

A resource for social care employers to personalise job-seeking

User personas toolkit

Executive summary

Social care and child care workers fulfil a critical role in society. However, longstanding challenges in attraction and recruitment in the sector have worsened in recent years, and the sector is now undergoing a workforce crisis¹.

To help address the challenges in attraction and recruitment, WeCare Wales was launched in 2019. It aims to raise the profile of the sector and make the sector more attractive to jobseekers through running local and national campaigns, developing online resources, advertising vacancies and providing support to jobseekers and employers².

Social Care Wales commissioned Urban Foresight to conduct research that explores the current attraction and recruitment crisis and understands the impact of WeCare Wales. This summary report presents recommendations and findings from qualitative research with stakeholders from the sector and a series of desk-based reviews.

WeCare Wales has been successful in supporting the sector to attract workers. Employers and providers have also been active in developing and implementing their own solutions.

There is, however, more that can be done. A series of ten recommendations for WeCare Wales, and by extension Social Care Wales are proposed alongside four recommendations for employers and providers.

For the purposes of this report, “**social care and child care**” will be used to refer to the entire sector. This should be taken to include the three sub-sectors: social care, social work, and early years and childcare.

| Recommendations for WeCare Wales | Priority | Recommendations for employers and providers | Priority |
|--|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| Expand advertising and campaigning activities. | Immediate | Get involved in local and national discussions about the sector. | Immediate |
| Develop more resources for the website. | Immediate | Seek out local and national funding. | Medium-term |
| Extend the introduction to courses and GIS. | Immediate | Explore the use of digital technology. | Long-term |
| Develop a clearer identity. | Immediate | Collaborate with other providers and settings. | Long-term |
| Support the sector to professionalise from within. | Medium-term | | |
| Engage and support the local system. | Medium-term | | |
| Improve use of the job portal. | Medium-term | | |
| Focus on small and medium providers and settings. | Medium-term | | |
| Facilitate better provider networks and relations. | Long-term | | |
| Support the sector understand the importance of diversity, equality and inclusion. | Long-term | | |

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Introduction and context

The social care and child care sector is vital to society. Workers support and safeguard vulnerable people, empower individuals who access care and support to live independently, and improve standards of childhood development.

Despite this, the work is generally low-paid and emotionally and physically challenging. Most roles are hourly paid, with irregular hours. Negative public perceptions further add to these challenges, while COVID-19, Brexit, and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis in the UK cause further barriers.

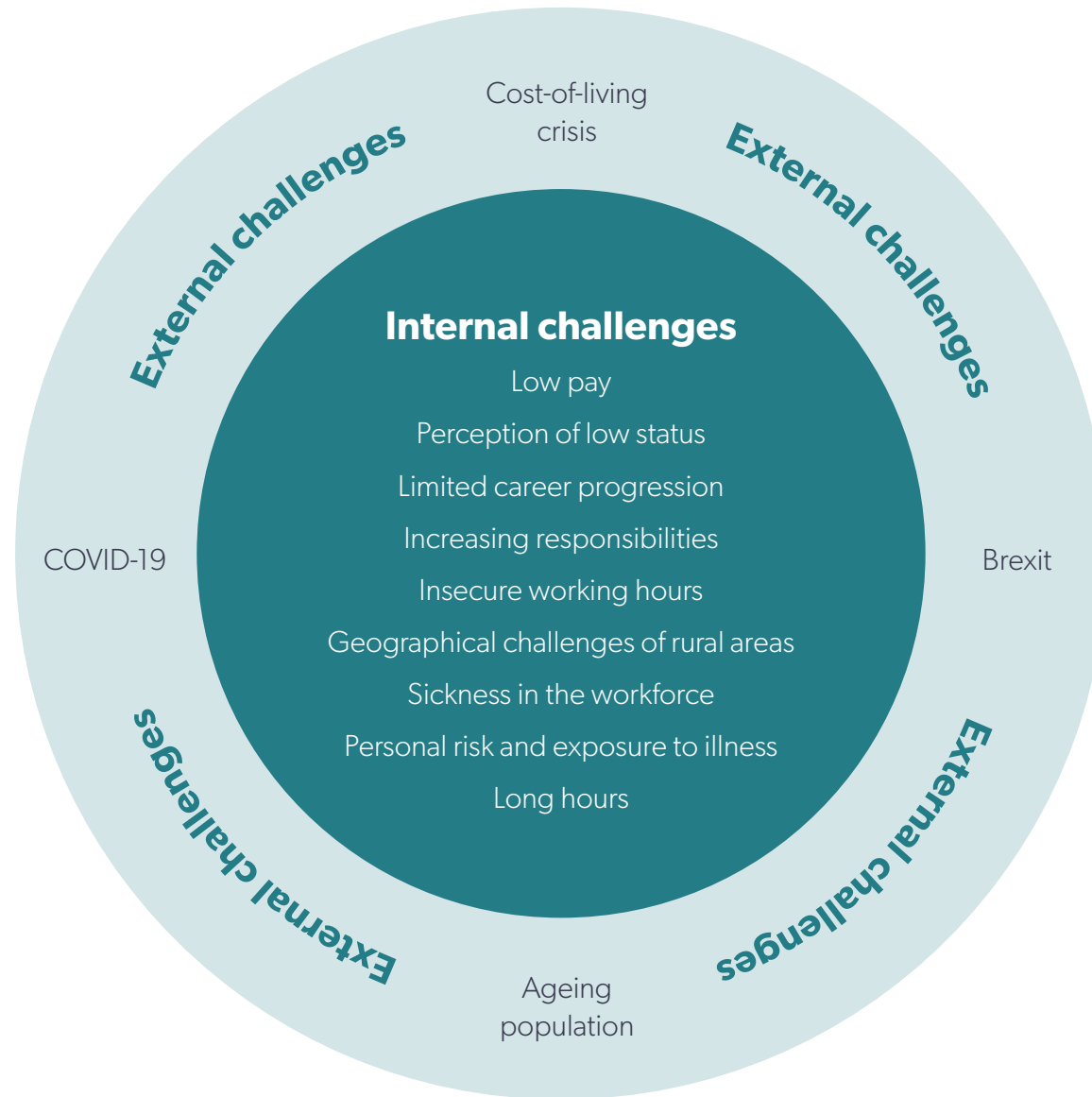
The sector is currently in a crisis in terms of attracting and recruiting its workforce. This threatens the ability of the sector to provide high quality care, particularly as care demands across Wales are growing.

Methods and approach

To understand the current challenges, the role of WeCare Wales, and potential strategies to address the crisis, Urban Foresight conducted desk-based reviews of peer reviewed and grey literature and policy documents as well as qualitative engagement with stakeholders in the sector.

This included online interviews and/or discussions at online forums with 52 social care and child care providers and employers and a further 13 individuals representing 5 services involved in supporting roles in the sector.

Internal and external challenges affecting attraction and recruitment of social care and child care workers in Wales



Learning from other recruitment campaigns

Other sectors and care systems, both in the UK and internationally, experience similar issues in terms of attracting and recruiting staff. A range of innovative approaches have been used to overcome this challenge.

Changing the system

Professional and well-paid workforce

In Finland, the early years sector is well respected. All instructors in early years are considered as professionals³, and their salary and training qualifications reflect this⁴. As a result, it is an attractive career option with high levels of job satisfaction⁵.

Reform the system

Scotland has proposed to create a National Care Service. Services would move under national operation and a set of care boards would be responsible for purchasing services. This creates a more consistent approach to care services and employment in the sector.

Taking a long-term approach

Germany funds its social care system through a long-term care social insurance scheme. This relies on a ring-fenced tax and ensures that the funding system is stable, reducing unnecessary competition between providers⁶.

Investing capital into the sector

New York City has invested a large amount of capital to raise the pay level for teachers and create a clear pathway for training and certification⁷. This has allowed the city to successfully grow the workforce to respond to increases in demand for prekindergarten seats⁸.

Re-thinking recruitment campaigns

Showcasing the value of the work

The Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust 'Remarkable People, Extraordinary Place' campaign showed the value of the work and positive impacts it creates to increase the attractiveness of the sector⁹.

Diversifying the recruitment pool

The British Army launched the 'This is Belonging' campaign to show that the sector welcomes a diverse range of individuals¹⁰. This widened the applicant pool and challenged stereotypes about the role¹¹.

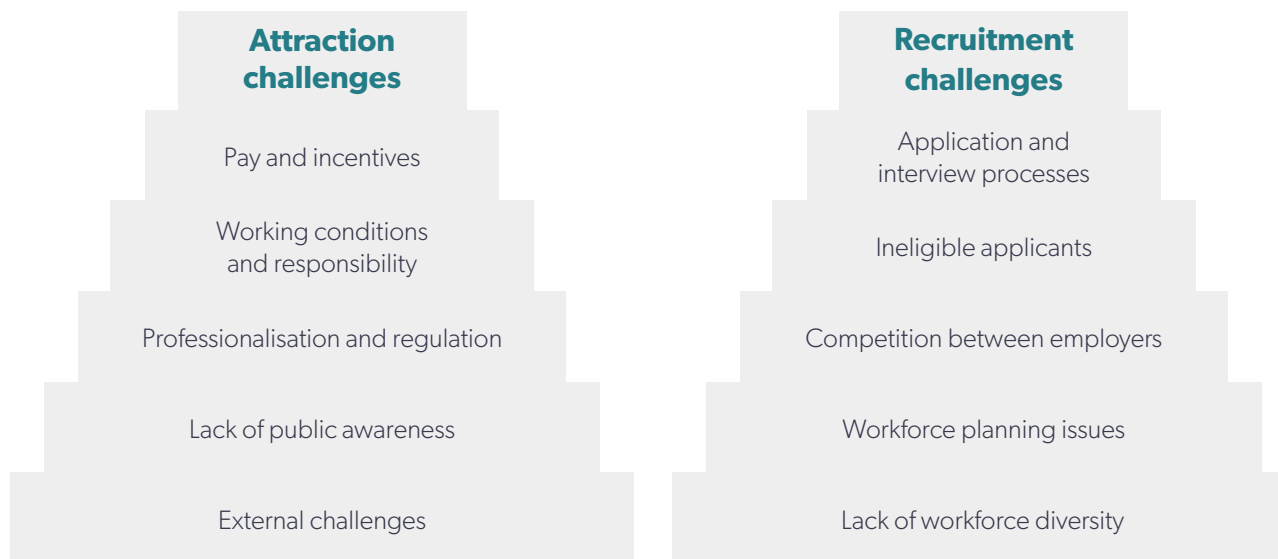
Improving and emphasising the benefits

McDonald's has produced a strong offer for applicants through its Archways to Opportunity programme¹². This allows employees to upskill and progress their careers¹³.

Taking a creative approach

The Swedish Army raised its profile among jobseekers by taking a creative, values-based approach to recruitment using a social experiment¹⁴ live streamed on social media¹⁵.

Current attraction and recruitment challenges in Wales



“People want to care, and love to care. But the fact is now, [social] care is becoming more of a profession in terms of making sure things are filled out correctly, and not all carers have the right amount of detail or grammar. So little time for calls too. Doesn’t leave much time for thinking... It’s caused more of a hindrance [to recruitment] than anything.”

The crisis is further impacting retention

- New and existing workers leave.
- Staff wellbeing and quality of care may be negatively affected.

Attraction

Attracting people to the sector is the first step in addressing the recruitment crisis. While some jobseekers are attracted to the sector, mainly due to individuals' desire to work in a role that can 'make a difference' and the flexibility of the role, for the most part, the sector is perceived as unattractive to jobseekers.

Pay and incentives

- Pay is the largest issue raised by stakeholders.
- The level of pay is low and does not correspond to the responsibilities of the role.
- Workers often pay-to-work when facing costs associated with transport and registration.
- Roles in less demanding sectors that are higher paid are more competitive.

Working conditions and responsibilities

- Working conditions and responsibilities involved in the role do not match the pay level.
- Roles are becoming increasingly complex covering aspects such as medication administration.
- Roles have higher level of responsibility than comparable sectors like retail and the visitor economy.

Issues with professionalisation and regulation

- Professionalisation and regulation of the sector has brought in mandatory qualifications, training and registration.
- Qualifications are becoming more academic and the minimum requirements are difficult to understand, which increases barriers to entry into the sector.
- Pay has not risen in line with professionalisation.

Lack of public awareness

- There is a lack of awareness of what the sector is and what roles involve.
- Negative media attention and a lack of teaching in schools add to this issue.

External challenges

- The cost-of-living crisis means that pay is increasingly important in job-seeking behaviour.
- Brexit has reduced the availability of migrant workers.
- COVID-19 has lowered perceptions of the sector, and reduced staff retention due to burn-out.
- Complications in the benefits systems place restrictions on the hours individuals are willing to work.
- Increasing wages in other sectors such as retail are out-competing the sector.

Recruitment

Despite challenges in attraction, many providers and settings have reported that they often encounter individuals who are enthusiastic about the potential of joining the sector. However, a series of “obstacles” in the recruitment phase dissuade potential applicants from ultimately securing a role in social care and child care.

Application and interview processes

- Application forms are long, difficult to complete and vary between employers.
- Some applicants struggle to attend interviews between 9am to 5pm.
- Pre-work training is lengthy and rarely reimbursed.

Ineligible applicants

- Increases in the numbers of applicants who are ineligible (qualifications or visas), unsuitable or uninterested.
- EYCC settings encounter applicants who are attracted to the sector, but do not have the required qualifications.
- People claiming Job Seeker’s Allowance are applying without the intention of entering the sector.

Competition between employers

- Between different employers within the sector
- Between care and allied roles e.g., the NHS versus social care, or education versus EYCC.

Workforce planning issues

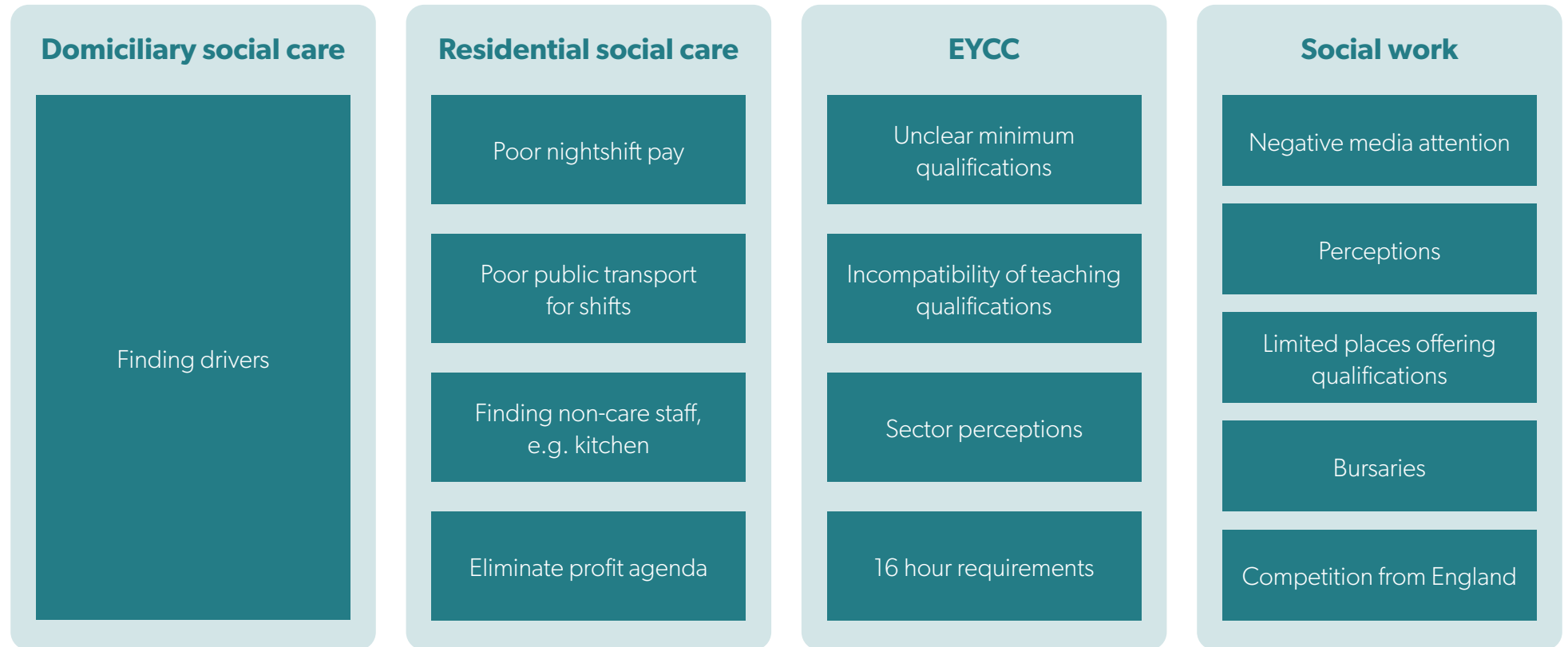
- Attracting the right combination of skills, experience, qualifications and availability is challenging.
- The requirement for qualifications has created additional shortages – for example, quotas for Level 2 staff in EYCC.
- Fluctuations in demand for care services is a challenge.
- Domiciliary providers are unlikely to be able to offer full-time positions.

Difficulties in recruiting workers from diverse backgrounds

- The majority of the care workforce are white women, this group is most likely to apply to vacancies.
- Employers face barriers in building a diverse workforce, and some employers are reluctant to consider diversity when recruiting.
- Stereotypes about the sector and within communities make hiring men or international workers difficult.

Sub-sectoral challenges

Some challenges do not affect the sector evenly. There are sub-sectoral differences that are important to understand.







The role and value of WeCare Wales

WeCare Wales brings significant value for the sector. Its activities do well to engage and inform jobseekers and are perceived as vital to address attraction and recruitment challenges. However, awareness within the sector is low.

Positives

-  WeCare Wales is viewed as a positive force for the sector overall. EYCC employers are particularly positive about it. This part of the sector has traditionally been marginalised and appreciates the involvement and attention given to them by WeCare Wales.
-  The Introduction to Social Care course has been popular. It raises awareness of the sector and prepares potential applicants for the type of work involved.
-  Some of the campaign videos produced by WeCare Wales that show a typical day or moment in care have had a large reach, with the 'We Care Will You?' video having over 330,000 views on YouTube.
-  WeCare Wales facilitates an extensive programme of outreach and engagement activities such as Regional Connectors, school engagement, jobseeker engagement, stakeholder toolkits, and Care Ambassadors. This raises awareness of the sector and challenges negative perceptions.

Negatives

-  There is a lack of clarity on the scope of WeCare Wales's work and a lack of understanding of how it relates to Social Care Wales.
-  The programme has not yet engaged the entire sector, with many providers (including prominent national ones) being unaware of its existence or remit.
-  Social work providers feel that the social work message can be lost in WeCare Wales's activities.
-  There is an uneven pattern of engagement geographically in Wales, with providers in Mid and North Wales having a lower awareness of and engagement with WeCare Wales.

Recommendations

Drawing on findings from desk-based reviews and qualitative research with stakeholders, ten recommendations aimed at WeCare Wales and four aimed at social care and child care employers are proposed.

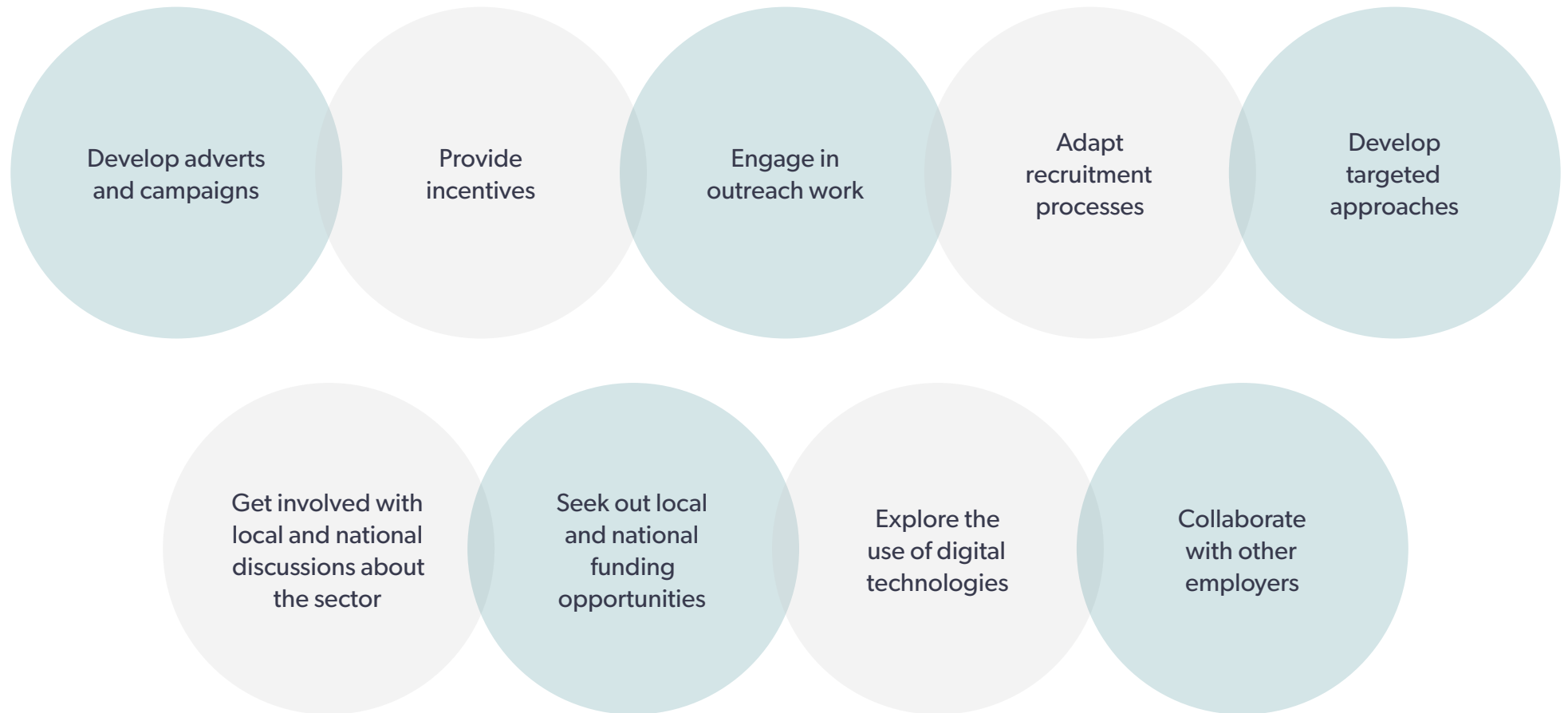
It is also recognised that wider system change is needed for meaningful change to happen. Six priority areas where system change is needed are also provided.

Recommendations for WeCare Wales

| Recommendations | | Priority |
|-------------------|---|-------------|
| Keep doing | Expand advertising and campaigning activities. | Immediate |
| Keep doing | Develop more resources for the website. | Immediate |
| Keep doing | Extend the 'Introduction to...' courses and Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS). | Immediate |
| Reconsider how to | Develop a clearer identity. | Immediate |
| Start doing | Support the sector to professionalise from within. | Medium-term |
| Keep doing | Engage and support the local system. | Medium-term |
| Reconsider how to | Improve use of the job portal. | Medium-term |
| Start doing | Focus on small and medium providers and settings. | Medium-term |
| Keep doing | Facilitate better provider networks and relations. | Long-term |
| Start doing | Support the sector to understand the importance of diversity, equality and inclusion. | Long-term |

Recommendations for employers and providers

There are a series of strategies employers can take to improve attraction and recruitment to their services.



What system changes are needed?

Small wins in attraction are possible – but to fundamentally improve recruitment and attraction, wider system reform is needed.

To do so, an aligned approach across the sector with all partners is required. Six priorities for system change are suggested.

System changes needed

- 1 A sector-wide approach to pay
 - 2 Longer-term capital investment into WeCare Wales
 - 3 Consideration of the needs of the sector in non-care policy directives
 - 4 A redesign of benefits systems
 - 5 A greater commitment to co-production of policies and approaches
 - 6 Multi-sector collaboration to develop a future supply of workers
-



Conclusion

The social care and child care sector is made up of highly engaged providers, employers and those in supporting roles. The sector is active in improving the image of the sector and working to attract people to it.

Providers and employers have implemented a range of strategies to alleviate their challenges in local spaces and appreciate the support of WeCare Wales from a national and regional level.

WeCare Wales is an important step to improve attraction, but without increased investment and political attention alongside active buy-in from the wider sector, the crisis is unlikely to improve.

While there are important steps Social Care Wales take can take via WeCare Wales and actions employers can do to improve their situation, wider systemic change is required.



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