Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

Main report

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.

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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:

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
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	

Two additional resources to support care employers and the sector:

Social care and child care: attraction, recruitment and retention A guide for employers	A resource for social care employers to personalise job-seeking User personas toolkit

Executive summary

This report provides information on job-seeking behaviours in the care sector and beyond.

The information is drawn from existing literature on the topic, insights from care providers, and an exercise that reviewed online platforms. Potential implications and recommendations for care employers and Social Care Wales are discussed, as is the need for wider system change.

This report responds to two overarching questions:

1. How do people working in social care find jobs?

2. How do people with the skills and/or experience to work in social care find jobs that aren't in social care?

The research shows that people work in care for a range of reasons:

- Many have a desire to care, and some providers expressed the view that some people are 'naturally caring' – though this concept is challenged in the literature.

- Desire for suitable employment including part-time and flexible work and on-the-job training, which care is likely to offer.

- A lack of alternative opportunities, particularly in rural areas, encourages people to seek jobs in care.

However, people are put off by jobs in care due to:

- Low pay and difficult conditions.

- A lack of understanding about what care involves.

- Changing entry requirements.

- A lack of diversity in the sector.

- Limited career progression.

A review of wider job-seeking behaviour identified that:

- External factors such as pay, conditions, and more recently the impact of COVID-19, Brexit and the rising costs of living can impact job-seeking behaviour.

- Exploring how to make work meaningful could be a useful tool in sharpening the personal motivations to enter care.

- Social media is increasingly important for jobseekers, particularly younger people.

- Networks – including offline networks – play a vital role in shaping job-seeking behaviour, by signposting opportunities and recommending roles.

Employers engage with jobseekers in various ways:

- Many are focussed on what jobs mean for them, and are less clear about what roles could mean for applicants.

- Other organisations have taken creative approaches including proactively engaging with negative comments online, or using new digital systems for recruitment.

Creating bespoke solutions is important to engaging jobseekers in care:

- User personas are an effective tool for facilitating empathy, as they situate job-seeking challenges in personal circumstances and characteristics.

- Five user personas were created to support this report in communicating characteristics and external factors influencing jobseekers in Wales.

Based on this analysis, five recommendations for care employers, four for Social Care Wales, and an additional four areas where system change is needed were identified. These include:

- Social Care Wales must continue its promotional activities building awareness and attractiveness and adopting human-centred approaches, such as bespoke job-seeking messaging and user personas. It should look at expanding the regional WeCare Ambassador programme and Regional Care Career Connectors.

- Care employers must meet jobseekers where they are, balance on- and offline engagement, and master the art of job descriptions. They should build links with network organisations, and adapt their processes to make applying for jobs a rewarding and fulfilling process.

- More broadly, there is a need for clear messaging about the value of care, and the need for new approaches to teaching those who wish to enter the workforce.

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Introduction

Introduction

Understanding job-seeking behaviours in social care and other sectors is important in addressing significant challenges faced by the Welsh social care sector in attracting and recruiting employees.

A series of labour market and demographic shifts influence the social care workforce in Wales:

- **The employment rate in Wales is good, yet the social care sector is under-staffed:** the employment rate in Wales was 74.1%, which is the highest it has been since June 2020 (Welsh Government, 2022a). However, in 2021, there were around 5,581 vacancies in social care across Wales, and this is expected to have risen since then (Social Care Wales, 2021).

- **There is a growing population of individuals with care and support needs:** the Welsh population is ageing, with predictions suggesting that one in four will be aged over 65 by 2050 (Senedd Research 2021), and needs are becoming more complex (Sion and Trickey, 2020).

- **Future projections estimate high demand for staff:** it is estimated that at least 20,000 additional social care employees will be required by 2030 (WeCare Wales, 2022).

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic and post-Brexit immigration rules have changed the perceptions and practicalities of care recruitment. On the one hand, COVID-19 highlighted the vital importance of the sector, with workers recognised as frontline staff taking care of individuals when family members were unable to do so.

On the other hand, the public became aware of the risky and difficult nature of the work – care workers were at disproportionate risk of death in the early months (Siddique, 2020) and suffered from mental health challenges across the duration of the pandemic (Nyashanu et al., 2022).

There is some evidence that the pandemic and the widespread disruption to the job market did slightly improve the recruitment situation for social care, but this is unlikely to be a long-term development. The experience of the pandemic, particularly social distancing, furlough schemes and increases in homeworking, have led to lasting shifts in the ways that people understand and value work (Bottery, 2020).

Just as demand for care has risen, labour supply has reduced. This is important when considering the ability of sectors such as retail and hospitality to improve terms and conditions rapidly, when compared with the ability of the social care sector. Not only is the social care sector faced with a diminishing recruitment pool but competing sectors have been able to adapt to recent recruitment pressures more efficiently.

Resolving issues with workforce supply, which also involves retaining the existing workforce, is critical to ensuring that the care system can continue to meet demand and fulfil its role of providing support and safeguarding services for individuals who receive care and their families.

Understanding jobseekers' behaviours, perceptions, and needs is therefore critical to addressing attraction and recruitment challenges in the Welsh social care sector.

Methodology

This report is based on a review and analysis of pre-existing data, guided by two overarching research questions:

1. How do people working in social care find jobs?

2. How do people with the skills and/or experience to work in social care find jobs that aren't in social care?

Additional research questions include:

- How is job-seeking supported in public policy?

- What are the job-seeking behaviours beyond social care?

- How do employers currently engage with jobseekers?

- How can jobseekers be supported in social care sector in Wales?

Evidence is drawn from the following three sources:

1. Academic and non-academic (policies, press-releases, news articles, and more) literature relating to job-seeking behaviour across and beyond the care sector.

2. Online spaces where jobseekers discuss their goals and experiences such as forums on job search websites, Glassdoor, Mumsnet, The Student Room, Facebook pages, and more. This involved reading posts and forums, but did not include online engagement with users or platforms.

3. Data collected as part of Urban Foresight's other work with Social Care Wales, examining recruitment and attraction issues. This data includes interview notes from 52 providers and 13 in supporting roles.

It builds on two additional reports carried out by Urban Foresight for Social Care Wales:

1. *Understanding attraction and recruitment in the social care and child care sector in Wales and the role of WeCare Wales*: this report examines attraction and recruitment challenges and opportunities in the social care, social work and early years and childcare (EYCC) sector. This reports the wider findings from stakeholder engagement with providers, employers, and those working in a supporting role across the sector.

2. *Understanding attraction and recruitment in early years and childcare in Wales and the role of WeCare Wales*: this report focusses on EYCC, recognising that although part of the wider sector, EYCC faces a series of additional and at times different challenges to social care and social work.

User personas included in this report are intended to translate research findings into accessible examples of jobseekers in Wales, and how they are either supported or prevented from entering the social care sector. Stakeholders across Wales could use these personas as a guide to creating bespoke narratives that fit the needs of their industry.

Findings from this research are intended to support Social Care Wales in its engagement with jobseekers and in addressing challenges in attraction and recruitment in social care and child care in Wales. Specific recommendations are also provided for care employers.

2

Job seeking in public policy

Job seeking in public policy

Social care is an essential public service that receives significant political attention. The policy review shows there is a clear drive to move to a high-skilled, high-wage economy in Wales.

In this section, policies about social care and workforce development in Wales are discussed in relation to their implications on the social care sector and for jobseekers.

Takeaway messages

1   The social care sector in Wales is receiving new attention and commitments at the policy level, but there is a potential disconnect between investments made to the sector and investment made in the Welsh economy. This is because care is not considered high-value employment.

2   The sector is shaped by a recent reduction in migrant workers and the rise of integrated health and social care services.

3   Social Care Wales supports workforce development and aims to boost attraction through WeCare Wales.

4   Recent closures of Jobcentres and threaten support that is available to jobseekers across Wales. There is some political pressure for more aspects of work-related policy to be devolved. There are also existing organisations and programmes that are dedicated to supporting individuals and groups entering or re-entering the workforce.

Social care policy context

Although policymakers broadly recognise the social care sector's recruitment needs, the longer-term context is a battle for attention, funding and consistency, especially compared to NHS services. For example, in the past two decades, social care spending has fallen in Wales and the rest of the UK (Clark, 2022).

However, there is evidence that this trend is beginning to change, and the sector is now receiving new attention and political commitments. There is political motivation to address the challenges posed by the UK's ageing population, while COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis have further added to rising visibility of and demand for care services.

This section examines the wider policy context in which social care sits. It explores policies relating to migrant workers and the rise of integrated care services, as well as specific policies and developments intended to support and grow the social care workforce.

Reductions in migrant workers

The social care sector in Wales and the UK has historically relied on migrant workers to fill labour shortages.

The Freedom of Movement (FoM) Act which distinguished between European Economic Area (EEA) and non-EEA born migrant workers existed between 2012 and 2020. Under this system, EEA migrants could seek work in social care without restriction, but migrants from outside the EEA could not come to the UK with the purpose of working in occupations that were ineligible for the Tier 2 visa (UK Government, 2022). This meant that between 2012 and 2020, non-EEA migrants were not able to travel to the UK with the express purpose of working in social care, even though they could do so to work in nursing, which is an eligible occupation.

The UK's exit from the European Union (EU) in January 2020 resulted in the end of FoM and the introduction of a new Skilled Worker Route (SW) in December 2020. The subset of this policy relevant to health and social care is the Health and Care Worker Visa (H&CW visa). Under this route, applicants must be sponsored by an eligible employer, speak English to a required level and possess certain qualifications. The new system is skewed towards allowing high-skilled workers into the UK. Low-skilled workers are limited via a minimum salary threshold of £20,480 and the lack of a general, low-skill or temporary work entry route (UK Government, 2022).

This directly impacts the care sector, encouraging employers to invest in their local workforce, retain employees and only sponsor the visas of high-skilled workers. A range of unsponsored schemes also provide migrant labour to the social care sector. The Youth Mobility Scheme (YMS) is available to those aged 18 to 30 who want to live in the UK for up to two years without a job and enables migrants to work in social care. Care employers face competition for jobseekers from the retail and hospitality sector (UK Government, 2022).

Generally, there are a high volume of vacancies in social care, which creates a jobseeker's market and empowers those seeking employment with further job choice.

Rise of integrated health and social care services

Across the UK, and other countries, there has been a rise of integrated health and social care services. Wales has been ahead of this shift since the Social Services and Well-being Act in 2014, which established regional partnership boards with a specific focus on combining services, care and support services to better meet the needs of the Welsh population (National Assembly for Wales, 2014).

Leadership in integrated health and social care services represents a broader political investment, which is supported financially through the Integrated Care Fund (ICF). ICF was a programme funded by the Welsh Government 2014-2022. The Fund distributed financial resource to support five priority groups: older people with complex needs and long-term conditions, people with learning disabilities, children with complex needs, carers, and children on the edge of care (Welsh Government, 2022).

This could change the dynamic between health and care – potentially reducing competition, as health and social care services continue to be integrated in Wales. However, wider challenges and perceptions of the care sector may hold this progression back.

New attention and commitments to workforce development

A series of policies are aimed at addressing longstanding challenges with the variability of care, including the creation of new structures. Social Care Wales acts to support and regulate the social care sector in Wales. It covers a range of functions including workforce registration and regulation, research and innovation, and providing information to the public.

Included in the organisation's remit is workforce development in terms of assisting employees to develop their knowledge and skills to enable high quality care and continuous improvement in the sector (Social Care Wales, 2023).

In 2019, Social Care Wales launched WeCare Wales in response to the workforce challenges facing the sector. The purpose of WeCare Wales is to raise the sector's profile, show its value, attract jobseekers, and provide support to both jobseekers and employers. It offers a range of programmes and resources including:

- Running campaigns across multiple media channels including TV, radio, and social media to showcase real experiences of workers in their various roles.

- Providing resources on the website to help jobseekers understand what working in care is like, and the different roles and workplaces available.

- Running a free job portal to help employers advertise their roles, and jobseekers to find suitable vacancies.

- Conducting outreach work with educational institutions and job centres, using its network of WeCare Ambassadors and Regional Care Career Connectors.

- Providing free online training to help those considering a career in care to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in the sector.

- Supporting jobseekers in preparing CVs, application forms and in performing in interviews.

- Providing a range of other resources and guidance on apprenticeships and other routes into care.

Overall, WeCare Wales seeks to ensure that a career in care is considered by jobseekers, and support those who are interested in the sector to enter into a role.

Workforce and employment policy context

There is a strong push to improve the Welsh economy through investing in high-skilled, high-pay industries and employment opportunities. Given social care is not considered high-value employment, there is a potential disconnect between social care and economic policy goals.

The Welsh economy historically lags behind the UK as a whole (NOMIS, 2023a) and there is clear political ambition on the national, regional and local level to stimulate economic development. There are two key and interconnected elements to this – attracting high-value industries and upskilling the workforce. Across these commitments is a desire to develop the digital economy, infrastructure and skills. Key documents include:

- *Employability Plan (Welsh Government, 2018b)* – Sets out a vision to make Wales 'a full employment, high tech, high wage economy' that prepares 'people for a changing world of work'. Although some attention is paid to the foundational economy, the main aim in this area is to retain employment opportunities rather than grow them.

- *Prosperity for all: Economic action plan (Welsh Government, 2017)* – Outlines three thematic priority sectors including tradable services, high value manufacturing, and enablers.

- *Smarter working: a remote working strategy for Wales (Welsh Government 2022)* – Sets out the goal to achieve 30% of the Welsh workforce working at or near to home by 2026.

There are smaller funding streams dedicated to the 'foundational economy', which social care is part of, including small funds dedicated to care recruitment, and the creation of an advisory group on place-based interventions in labour markets.

Overall, however, the emphasis on creating high-value, high-skill and technologically enabled aspects of the economy sits uneasily with the needs of care. This is made more acute by the challenges of keeping care up to date with the recent move towards home-based and remote working, which is only possible in some social work roles. Additionally, although technology holds great potential for the sector, the uptake of innovations such as assistive technology faces many barriers including awareness, understanding, and cost (Howard et al, 2020).

Job-seeking context

Policies around work are shared by the UK and Welsh Governments. Key recent developments include the Department for Work and Pensions listing nine Jobcentre sites to close (Bloom and Blackledge, 2022), and renewed pressure for devolving more aspects of work support. Jobcentres have previously represented an asset to social care providers given their knowledge of the local community and extensive local connections that assist in reaching and hiring potential jobseekers through word-of-mouth.

There are still several important organisations, policies and programmes in place to support individuals and groups in entering and remaining in the employment market, as shown in Table 4 in appendix II.

Current labour force dynamics

Across Wales, 45.5% of the workforce are in professional or managerial roles (Nomis, 2023). This is compared to 16.1% of the workforce who occupy entry-level roles covering care, leisure, sales, customer services and other service-based occupations.

The qualification level in Wales is lower than the UK national average, with 8.3% of the Welsh population having no qualifications in comparison to 6.8% in the UK (Nomis, 2023). These qualification levels contribute to an unemployment rate of 3.5% and economic inactivity among 24.9% of the population as of January 2023 (Nomis, 2023). The key reasons for economic inactivity include being a student (24.7%) and long-term sickness (34%).

Table 1 summarises the key trends in employment figures alongside how they relate to jobseeker opportunities. This highlights how employment and jobseeker trends have shifted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Attempts to reach and hire jobseekers must therefore adapt with these trends.

Table 1: Key trends in employment figures related to jobseeker opportunities

Labour force trend	Jobseeker opportunity
Men are more economically active than women. In Wales, 81.2% of men are classified as economically active compared to 69% of women (Nomis, 2023).	Encouraging women into the workplace.
Male unemployment rates have risen since the COVID-19 pandemic (Nomis, 2023).	Encouraging recently unemployed males back into the workplace.
In a comparison of UK employment figures between January – March 2020 and November 2020 to January 2021, employment numbers had decreased by the largest amount for 18–24-year-olds with a decrease of 250,000 in total number of employed. However, employment levels in those aged 65+ also decreased by 112,000, which is proportional to the decrease for 16–17-year-olds (Powell et al. 2022).	Target groups at either end of the age spectrum.
6.4% of 16–18-year-olds were classified as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) in 2021 (UK Government, 2022).	Provide pathways for groups classified as NEET to enter work.

Section summary

The social care workforce must expand in the coming years to keep pace with increasing demand, and meet shortfalls caused by the loss of migrant workers as a result of Brexit and post-COVID-19 changes. There are a range of policies to try and support a well-staffed care sector, but the overall emphasis in economic policy is for high-wage and high-tech sectors. Several organisations exist to support particular groups into care, which can be translated across to programmes that support jobseekers through targeted and personalised approaches.

3

Job-seeking behaviours in social care

Job-seeking behaviours in social care

The section discusses why people do and don't want to work in social care.

Takeaway messages

1   A desire to care is important for many but is not the only factor that encourages jobseekers to join the sector.

2   Many people join the care sector for part-time and flexible-working patterns, a lack of alternative opportunities, or economic gain.

3   Negative aspects associated with the work can also dissuade jobseekers who are otherwise attracted to the sector. These include low pay and difficult conditions, lack of understanding or misunderstanding about the sector, changing entry requirements, lack of diversity in the sector, and limited career progression.

This section draws on the literature review, the review of online platforms and findings from the provider engagement to understand why people do and do not choose to work in the care sector. Additional detail about the challenges employers face in finding people who are attracted to the care sector is available in the *Understanding Attraction and Recruitment* report.

Why do people work in care?

The literature brings attention to factors that motivate jobseekers to seek out opportunities in the care sector. These are:

• Personal desires to care

• Personal desires to be in suitable employment (in terms of pay or working patterns)

• Lack of alternative opportunities

The literature further demonstrates that while some people have a clear personal desire to enter the care sector, others do not and make their way or are pushed into the sector due to economic considerations relating to pay and working conditions.

A desire to care

Some people seem more inclined to caring and supporting others and may be attracted to a sector that allows them to do this on a daily basis.

"I always knew I wanted a job helping people, and always knew I wanted to work with the really vulnerable in society." – Mumsnet

It is important to note that much of the literature argues that people are not inherently born with a disposition to care or otherwise. It explains that certain groups of people – predominantly women, particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds – may be socially conditioned to care, while other groups – men – are not (Elson, 2017; King-Dejardin, 2019). It suggests that as social beings, all humans are born to care: our species would not survive without providing care and support to others, particularly the young (Philip et al, 2010).

"Some people really want to enter the sector – it's attractive to all ages – schoolgirls and women in their 50s." – Care employer

During the provider engagement, some respondents expressed beliefs that not all people are 'born to care' or are naturally caring. However, this is harmful to wider efforts to attract more diverse jobseekers to the sector. An understanding that everyone has the capacity to provide care is preferable.

Individual circumstances and personality can also create the conditions in which an individual views themselves as someone who provides care and support. For example, people who have provided or received care informally (i.e., to family members) may become motivated to join the sector. Here, people may be motivated to 'give back' to the care system or their local community, and/or recognise that they can find paid employment doing something they are good at (McDermid et al., 2012; Rees Centre 2012). Employers reported that new parents are generally a reliable source of applicants, for example.

In other cases, people may have desires to give back to their community that are not rooted in their own experiences of receiving or providing care. Such people may also be more inclined to engage in volunteering. The idea that care work can be a 'labour of love' or a 'higher calling' rests on the idea that care workers predominantly enter the system for compassionate reasons (Kasdovasilis 2022). This idea can also be used to justify low pay.

Desire for suitable employment

Many roles within the care sector are part-time and/or rely on workers to be flexible in terms of the hours. There are particular demands for workers in early morning and evening periods, as well as over weekends and nights. For jobseekers with other commitments (i.e., childcare, other work, or studies), part-time and flexible options are often desirable.

"How flexible is care work? I am looking for a new job having left my job in a school." – Mumsnet

"Some people really like the flexibility, and it makes it more attractive to them, but doesn't work for others." – Care employer

Career progression opportunities can both attract and dissuade jobseekers from the sector. In terms of desire for suitable employment, for many, a position in social care which enables on the job progression will help to facilitate a healthy work life balance, removing any requirements for out of hours training which may be required in similar roles.

Lack of alternative opportunities

The care sector may also be more attractive to jobseekers who have limited alternative opportunities. It may be the case that:

- There are few other employment opportunities in their area that they are eligible or able to join.

- Jobseekers are unable to commit to less flexible shift patterns in other sectors, i.e., factory work, or other public services.

- There are other opportunities, but these are understood as less preferable to care work or to unemployment.

- There are few educational opportunities and people are funnelled into care careers from a younger age.

- Younger jobseekers sacrifice apprenticeship opportunities to find better paid work in social care.

In some rural areas, providers noted that the lack of alternative opportunities meant they had fewer challenges in attracting and recruiting workers. However, in the Welsh context, it seems that the availability of better alternative options dissuades jobseekers from entering the sector.

"It seems that more of the better paying jobs with more flexibility and better training options tend to be in different sectors." – Mumsnet

Economic gain

In some countries, migrant workers enter the sector for the economic opportunities it can lead to (Connell, 2014; Hollup, 2012; Walton-Roberts, 2010). For example, among Philippine-trained nurses, research shows there is a large desire to move overseas in any care setting. Many registered nurses happily accept lower-paid and lower-skilled positions in the social care sector in order to support their families and communities in the Philippines (Thompson, 2019). This can explain why social care is often more attractive to migrant workers in Wales, and those seeking to enter the country from overseas.

There was no evidence that people seek out the role for economic gain, although it should be noted that dedicated spaces used by migrant workers and aspiring migrants were not included in the review of online platforms or during provider engagement.

Why do people choose not to work in care?

A variety of reasons why people may not be attracted to the care sector were identified in the literature review:

- Social care is undervalued as a sector and public perceptions of the work may be negative, while pay is typically low (Conradson, 2003; Milligan et al., 2007; Philip et al., 2010; Raghuram, 2012; Yeates, 2011).

- There is a lack of diversity in the sector and a lack of public awareness and understanding about what jobs involve may dissuade people from seeking opportunities.

- Career progression opportunities can both attract and dissuade jobseekers from the sector, as can a lack of clarity and consistency when it comes to job titles, descriptions, or application processes.

Low pay and difficult conditions

Across the world, pay in social care settings is typically low compared to work with similar or even lower entry requirements and responsibilities (Thompson and McKay 2020). The work involved in social care can also be emotionally and physically draining, involving significant responsibility over the lives of others (Jones et al., 2021).

"I used to be (a carer) in a care home and was treated like dirt. Low pay and terrible hours and conditions." – Mumsnet

Among the social care workforce in Wales, 56% earn below the Real Living Wage of £9.50 per hour (Senedd Research, 2021). However, there are signs of improvement due to the establishment of the Social Care Fair Work Forum,

in 2022. The Forum focuses on bringing together government, employers and unions to work in social partnership to look at how the definition of fair work should be applied for social care workers in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023b).

In its first year, these members worked together to propose the Real Living Wage across social care in Wales. This resulted in £43m of funding to local authorities during to introduce Real Living Wage in Wales for social care workers (Welsh Government, 2023b).

"It's low pay and hard physical work." – Mumsnet

Pay also does not reflect the social value and responsibility of the role, nor the costs involved in this work such as transportation and training. In most contexts, social care has few career progression opportunities, particularly compared with allied sectors such as health and education (Moriarty et al., 2018).

This can dissuade otherwise motivated applicants from joining the sector. Although there have been recent moves in the Welsh social care sector to provide more career progression opportunities, these are currently limited (Senedd Research, 2021).

"The pay is low, staff feel undervalued by Welsh Government." – Care employer

The responsibilities involved in care work are expanding, and place workers at increased risk – for example, when administering medication. Additionally, roles often have insecure working arrangements due to the prevalence of short-term and zero hours contracts (Welsh Government, 2020).

"People want a salary rather than hourly contracts, so they have a regular monthly income." – Care employer

The nature of the workforce interacts with low pay and poor conditions. Sectors dominated by women, as social care is, tend to be low paid (Lutz, 2018). Similarly, social care workers are also disproportionately from ethnic minority backgrounds, migrant workers and from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

These groups do not have a large bargaining power and are traditionally undervalued. In nearly all cases in the UK, for example, sectors that are marked by migrant workers tend to have lower pay and poorer working conditions than comparable sectors.

Further, assumptions that workers do not expect high pay for the work as they derive personal benefits have been used to justify continuing low pay. There are also fears that increasing pay will attract the 'wrong' type of people to the sector – i.e., those that are driven by financial rather than caring motivations.

Lack of understanding or misunderstanding about the roles

Negative media stories concerning poor quality services or bringing attention to the poor working conditions and recruitment and retention crisis can present an image of a sector in crisis, again dissuading people from seeking out work in the sector.

Much of the care that happens in any given place is informal and unpaid, conducted by family members and social networks, leading to assumptions that the work is unskilled and/or not a societal need (McDowell, 2009). Further, much formal care work happens in private spaces (such as people's homes), making the work largely invisible from wider society (Connell and Walton-Roberts, 2016; Kasdovasilis et al., 2022).

There are also different titles for the same role in social care which is not helpful for the general public and people applying for jobs. There is also a lack of consistency in application processes, applications are often quite arduous, and there is confusion about the required qualifications.

"My daughter wanted to do a placement in a special needs school but has been told this isn't an option and it has to be a care home which was not mentioned before she started! This is the level 3 extended diploma so equivalent to 3 A levels." – Mumsnet

In general, providers believe the lack of public awareness and misconceptions about the sector dissuade people from joining.

"There's no clear perception of what the job is and what it contains." – Care employer

Changing entry requirements

Barriers to entering the social care sector, whether perceived or real, are becoming increasingly complex. Changing entry requirements such as a requirement for qualifications to remain registered is generally a response to quality concerns and is assumed to be closely related with increasing professionalisation (Byrne, 2016).

Current and perceived requirements to have and maintain professional qualifications can also disincentivise jobseekers from engaging with the social care sector.

"You will need a degree to become a social worker which will take a few years. If you struggled at school and are not very academic, would you be able to cope with that?" – Mumsnet

Other potential barriers to entry include a requirement for care workers to be registered with Social Care Wales. This can cause time and financial pressure for potential candidates.

"Care staff having to register with Social Care Wales is adding to the pressure. It's mandatory and it costs £35." – Care employer

Despite these barriers, social care is still relatively more accessible to enter than health care. The sector in Wales supports a philosophy of 'entry first,' where it is possible to join the sector in some capacity before engaging in relevant qualifications and trainings to progress. Thus, the changing entry requirements might cause some confusion around who needs to be qualified and how strenuous the process is.

Lack of diversity in the sector

Where workforces are not diverse and potential applicants do not see a place for themselves within the workforce, they may be dissuaded from joining the sector despite having other motivations to join (Van Hoye et. al., 2015). There is a strong association between women and the care sector in Wales. It is possible this dissuades jobseekers who are men.

"It's women's work. Social care is seen as women's work." – Mumsnet

Care providers report that most applicants are women. Although some providers have taken steps to try and engage other groups, it is usually noted that this is difficult.

"Men are not interested in working part-time." – Care employer

Career progression opportunities

Although there are more career options now than before, the options are limited and there are few opportunities for people to advance beyond a senior care worker position (Moriarty et al., 2018).

Exploring the view of career progression in social care in absolute and relative terms enables further investigation into the reasons behind jobseeker perceptions.

Generally, when viewed in absolute terms, the limited progression opportunities in social care are skewed towards people in the early stages of their careers or those looking to transition from another sector. However, after a short while in the sector, around 4-5 years, staff tend to look for alternative work, feeling as if they have exhausted the minimal career progression opportunities (Moriarty et al., 2018).

A relative view of work in social care produces inconsistencies with the absolute view. Research in the literature references a generally better salary and progression structure available in the NHS (Moriarty et al., 2018)

In other sectors such as hospitality or retail, jobs can have a vast range of forms and functions. Subsequently, positions in this sector can contain a higher volume of intermediary positions. These positions are often accessed via direct and tailored career progression frameworks and can be appealing to those in the early stages of their career.

Generally, there exists a lack of understanding about how to access the sector. Jobseekers are unaware of the different routes that they can take to become a care worker. This leads to general misconceptions around available career progression opportunities in social care.

"Is an apprenticeship an option?" – Mumsnet

The review of online platforms reveals general uncertainty around available routes into the sector and that there is an awareness that some local authorities may fund degrees for social work in exchange for work as a family support worker.

Care providers recognise that there are moves towards career progression, but without the associated increased in pay. They recognise that career progression pathways within the care sector need to be further developed.

"Career progression is not there especially in terms of pay." – Care employer

However, career progression is not always a linear process. Social care provides opportunities to develop a diverse range of competencies and gain a range of qualifications, if desired.

This enables a varied and diverse career, wherein progression may be better articulated as the development of experience in a range of roles. Progression opportunities within social care are articulated best by viewing the career structure on a horizontal scale, as a spectrum, rather than focusing on conventional linear career progression structures.

Section summary

It is important to understand the diversity of motivations people have for entering care to understand how to best engage jobseekers.

Low pay and poor conditions are the primary reason jobseekers choose not to work in the care sector. This is particularly the case where they have alternative employment options that seem preferable. Other reasons that dissuade jobseekers from joining the sector include: lack of understanding about what the role involves, changing entry requirements, limited career progression, and a lack of diversity. In the following section, evidence concerning job-seeking behaviours beyond social care is provided to understand how issues the sector faces have been addressed elsewhere.

4

Job-seeking behaviours beyond social care

Job-seeking behaviours beyond social care

Research shows there are several factors that influence job-seeking behaviour.

Takeaway messages

1 To understand job-seeking behaviour, we need to understand what motivates an individual and how external or structural forces can affect individuals.

2 The work of WeCare Wales to improve wider societal perceptions of social care work is key in making the sector more attractive for jobseekers.

3 Understanding what makes work enjoyable is important, such as finding meaning in day-to-day tasks, interactions with others, feeling valued by their organisation and feeling overall satisfaction with their job.

4 Social media and online networks are key resources for engaging with jobseekers, especially younger people interested in care or similar sectors. An individual's type of social network also influences the job-seeking process.

5 There is a link between job-seeking and welfare policies that could be explored further in Wales.

What matters to jobseekers?

Literature covering job-seeking behaviours can be separated into three broad categories:

- High-level models of job-seeking behaviour

- The value of work

- The impact of external factors

There are two important definitions to understand that are used across the literature.

- Intrinsic factors – internal or personal factors that relate to how an individual sees the world and to their personal circumstances (such as level of wealth).

- Extrinsic factors – things that are external to an individual, such as working conditions in a sector or societal inequality.

The theory of planned behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour explains how people's attitudes, beliefs, and intentions shape their behaviour. It suggests that people are more likely to engage in job-seeking behaviours such as applying for jobs, networking, or attending job fairs if they have a positive attitude towards it, they believe that they have control over it, and if they think that others around them think it is socially acceptable.

Therefore, jobseekers who have a positive attitude towards job-seeking, who believe that they have the skills and resources to find a job in social care, and who feel that their efforts will be supported by others, are more likely to seek out roles in social care than those who do not have these beliefs.

This demonstrates the risks associated with a lack of autonomy or control over someone's role. Although social care workers generally have high levels of responsibility, they tend to have very little control as to which tasks they complete and when.

Importantly, this shows that the work of WeCare Wales to improve wider societal perceptions of social care work is key. This should make the sector more attractive for jobseekers.

Theories concerning the meaning of work

One of the key elements in job satisfaction and job-seeking behaviour is the ability to find meaning and fulfilment in work. Theories concerning the meaning of work again highlight the importance of personal beliefs.

Here, there is a distinction to be made between work that is meaningful and work that is meaningless.

Bailey (2016) breaks down meaningful work into several elements. Each individual has a set of intrinsic needs and values that contribute to making their work meaningful to them, which then influences the needs of that worker.

For some, meaning comes from having a job that provides sufficient resources or from having a job which fits around and accommodates their wider responsibilities. This could be childcare or personal circumstances. These factors can increase or decrease levels of job satisfaction and encourage individuals to either seek or maintain work.

Others find fulfilment in doing a good job. This could be through completion of a task or performing a task to the best of their ability.

In contrast, a range of factors can disincentivise job-seeking behaviour and reduce meaning and fulfilment in work for employees, making work meaningless. Bailey (2016) highlighted the top cause of this as being a strict system of reward and punishment, an established sets of rules, close monitoring of employees and low levels of autonomy.

What this shows is that while meaning is something individuals find for themselves, meaningless work is something that organisations and leaders can actively cause. This suggests that to better engage jobseekers and make the work seem more attractive, there is scope for providers and the wider sector to address the meaningless aspects of work.

Building a meaningful ecosystem is a crucial part of supporting the recruitment and retention of potential workers and is discussed across the literature.

The key characteristics of a meaningful ecosystem are based on what employees perceive to be valuable – finding meaning in day-to-day tasks, interactions with others, feeling valued by their organisation and feeling overall satisfaction with their job.

Moves towards professionalisation and increasing regulation, however, are likely to have made social care work meaningless for many who don't place personal value on developing formal qualifications.

Table 2: What makes social care work meaningful?

Meaningful work	Meaningless work
• Career progression opportunities	• Transactional management
• Ability to leave work at work	• Low levels of autonomy in the role
• Pay and incentives	• Meaningless tasks, i.e., administrative tasks
• Flexibility of role	• Meaningless organisations
• Ability for work to support other desires (i.e., artistic endeavours)	• Requirement to pursue professional qualifications
• Mentally stimulating work	• Increased regulation of day-to-day processes
• Social connections	• Social isolation and the inability of an individual to further their professional network

External and structural factors

Alongside these intrinsic factors, there are a range of external or structural factors that impact job-seeking behaviour. The most obvious structural factor is the composition of the potential and actual workforce:

- Gender, ethnicity and educational attainment are significant factors in structuring the workforce (Pedulla & Pager, 2019).

- Societal inequality of opportunity and outcomes affecting these groups will have a significant impact on their job-seeking behaviour (Pedulla & Pager, 2019).

- The role of training and career progression which, more broadly, has been a long-standing issue for recruitment (Niati et al. 2021).

As discussed, job-seeking behaviour differs between genders. Further, those with low educational attainment are more likely to seek work in the social care sector due to a general perception of low barriers to entry. However, mandates for formal qualifications may disincentivise these individuals from applying. As discussed in the Understanding Attraction and Recruitment report, this was a barrier many employers encountered.

More broadly, societal inequalities influence jobseekers' perceptions of the workplace. Upbringing and other environmental factors can also contribute to preferences in job-seeking behaviour.

Absolute and relative conditions

The resources which create value in work for the individual can include pay. Ball and Chernova (2008) explain the two ways in which pay can be conceptualised by jobseekers.

Relative conditions refer to the value of work relative to other existing opportunities, whereas absolute conditions refer to an individual viewing their current form of employment irrespective of wider opportunities. Relative conditions are likely to influence the job-seeking behaviours of an individual to a greater extent than absolute conditions.

The relative view provides an individual with a realistically achievable goal and the view of having the power to change their own conditions. The absolute view reduces the value of work and removes job-seeking desires beyond the scope of current employment.

The role of COVID-19 on job-seeking motivations

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the jobs market, particularly on low wage positions. As a result of COVID-19, a large proportion of the workforce has remained out of work – particularly individuals over 50 and those between the ages of 16 and 24.

Key reasons outlined in the literature for this lack of employment include a lack of available retraining, limiting the ability and desire of workers to transition into other sectors (Parliamentary Office for Science & Technology, 2021).

The reliance on retraining and returning to the workforce is particularly strong in non-graduate jobseekers (Henehan, 2020). This relationship is strongest for workers returning to the same sector or industry they previously left.

When considering the development of working practices, COVID-19 has facilitated new forms of hybrid and online working which are less transferable to the care sector. This reduces the appeal of this work, particularly to younger, more mobile demographics, when other employers such as banks offer entry-level positions which allow home working.

Factors such as an increased work-life balance are discussed by Yang et al. (2021) as being key driving factors for the sustained increase in home working following COVID-19. Considering the long working hours involved in care and frequent lack of paid travel time, similar level positions in other industries which enable home working have become very attractive to jobseekers.

Increases in wages paid by the hospitality and retail sector have also discouraged jobseekers from applying for a position in the care sector. Historically, social care workers had been paid a premium against sectors in direct competition, but the introduction of the National Living Wage to sit above the National Minimum Wage compressed the distribution of pay across and within sectors. Care workers have effectively become disincentivised to accept promotions to internal roles which include more responsibility but lower compensation than comparable roles in the retail or hospitality sectors (GOV.UK, 2022).

This has clear implications for the care sector in Wales. There is an opportunity to engage those who remain out of work following COVID-19. There are opportunities to explore new and emerging technologies as a result of COVID-19 and their potential application to the care sector. However, societal understandings of work have changed, which may make social care less attractive due to the infeasibility of home working for most positions.

How do jobseekers find work?

The means through which people find work are addressed throughout this section. There are a range of additional factors influencing job-seeking behaviours, reinforcing key themes in the literature including:

- Perceptions of work and how this is influenced by social networks, both online and in person.

- The importance of ambassadors and role models.

- Relationships between job-seeking and welfare.

Social media and job-seeking

Evidence from the literature shows that the extent and form of social media use are key factors influencing job-seeking behaviours, particularly among young people.

Mowbray & Hall (2020) discuss job-seeking behaviours relating to social media use in 16–24-year-olds in Scotland. This research reveals that investigation into the powers of social media for job searching is an emerging area but that, in general, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the most popular platforms used by job seekers.

Student forums such as The Student Room are also popular networks among younger people with other social networks such as Mumsnet being used to discuss job-seeking and to seek advice on how to go about finding employment.

"I feel so clueless about how to get a job nowadays?!" – Mumsnet

"It's been about 20 years since I looked for a job in general… I feel utterly pathetic and clueless…" – Mumsnet

Overall, frequent social media job searching is linked with a higher number of interview invitations, but young people are most likely to utilise social media in the job search process once advised to do so by a professional. For this demographic, professional advice is most likely to take the form of advisors within educational institutions, but findings from the review of online platforms found social media to be a key source of information for jobseekers.

Almost all social media platforms (such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook) are used for job advertisement purposes by recruiters. Social media is now considered a primary source of attraction for employers. This can be through posts detailing available jobs, links to external webpages or through interactive content which encourages further engagement with the account and facilitates the sharing of information about job vacancies.

Research into social media use is an emerging area but there are potential gains to be had from developing a further knowledge base around this form of job-seeking behaviour.

Social media influencers

There are many benefits to using and employing ambassadors to represent organisations. Relevant individuals with large personal followings can be employed to represent an organisation, improve public perception and further engage with active or potential jobseekers.

"Social media competitions always bring attention." – Care employer

In healthcare, for example, one key individual who has risen to prominence as a youth mental health ambassador following public exposure on reality television is Dr Alex George (Instagram @dralexgeorge). His positive work and public outreach via social media has led to his appointment by the UK Government as a Youth Mental Health Ambassador (Heatworld, 2021).

Developing a network of social care ambassadors could ensure that social media is used to generate positive change around the social care sector, particularly but not only for young people. It could positively influence people's opinions of social care and generate real change in social care recruitment networks and success.

The role of networks

The literature demonstrates the role of people's individual networks in influencing job-seeking behaviours. Building on the role of social media, offline and more informal social networks are often a key influence on jobseekers.

People will often consult with individuals they may already know in lines of employment they are seeking or engage with more informal personal networks to learn about potential job opportunities (Patulny et al., 2019).

The concepts of bridging and bonding networks are also explored in relation to job-seeking. Bridging networks are new relationships made between people, but they are weakly tied or loosely associated. Bonding networks are existing relationships that are strong and provide emotional support.

Bridging networks place a disproportionate focus on finding entry-level jobs while bonding networks lead to more meaningful job attainment. The extent to which personal networks are used varies by age group and is most prevalent among older individuals.

In a study of the Scottish labour market, findings revealed that those who had returned to employment upon becoming unemployed had a higher proportion of contacts with higher prestige jobs and, subsequently, their job-seeking behaviours mostly relied on interpersonal networks (Gayen et al., 2019)

However, increased social engagement is also dependant on popularity or values within an individual's culture or immediate social network.

Job-seeking and welfare

The relationship between the benefit system and job-seeking is critical to supporting jobseekers into any workforce, and especially into social care. The House of Commons Committee report published in 2022 identified there was an 87.7% increase in people on Universal Credit in Wales in March 2021 compared to February 2020. This provides only a snapshot of the impact that COVID-19 had on the Welsh workforce (UK Parliament, 2022).

The report also highlights evidence regarding a lack of awareness about available benefits to the wider public. So, while there are various benefits and support programmes, including those to support jobseekers in Wales, the wider public may be unaware of these.

This is especially important to understanding job-seeking pipelines. Literature from the Netherlands suggests that long-term welfare recipients are well supported with job-seeking resources, such as advisory services and dedicated jobcentres that were signposted from the welfare system. The extent to which this applies to the UK should be further explored (Varekamp et al, 2015).

Section summary

In the above section, key themes in job-seeking were explored relating to wider job-seeking behaviours. Each theme has implications for recruitment and job retention in the social care sector. Key points of relevance when considering job-seeking behaviours relating to social care include:

- The motivations behind job-seeking in the social care sector.

- How the sector can facilitate healthy and productive work environments.

- Which conditions can be improved to encourage more applications to social care positions.

- Methods of capitalising on a changing jobs market following COVID-19.

- Investigating how social media can be used to improve the job-seeking process.

- The role of social media influencing in attracting social care workers.

- How ambassadors can be used to promote a positive image of the social care sector.

- The extent to which personal networks are relied upon for recruitment into social care.

The following section explores how employers engage with jobseekers.

5

How do employers engage with jobseekers?

How do employers engage with jobseekers?

How employers engage with jobseekers influences jobseekers' opinions of and approaches to available work.

Takeaway messages

1   Job advertisements are the primary source of interaction between jobseekers and employers. The types of job advertisements vary by sector.

2   Social media, online engagement, and technology developments in the health and social care sectors create novel processes for recruitment. These processes have the potential to be more streamlined, and bespoke to personal preferences and circumstances.

3   Engaging with jobseekers directly is important to creating a relationship between the job-seeking community and employers. This includes responding to negative feedback.

Advertising posts

In general, job adverts are often phrased as what the employer wants rather than what the employee will get. The processes involved in curating job advertisements differ dramatically by sector, with jobs in social care placing increased emphasis on listing responsibilities, whereas job listings in the hospitality and retail sector typically focus more on the benefits available to the employee. This can disincentivise jobseekers from applying to the social care sector or can cause existing social care workers to transition to other sectors.

Across the retail sector, entry level jobs with no required qualifications offer starting salaries of around £11 per hour. They also list benefits such as:

- Discount cards for the employee and immediate family members, with heightened discounts on or around pay day.

- Free food and hot drinks provided in store.

- Generous holiday entitlement – based on hours worked.

- Maternity and paternity leave.

- Employer matched pension contributions.

- Opportunities to purchase shares in the business at a discount and purchase options including salary sacrifice.

- Wellbeing support.

- Cycle to work scheme access.

- Further discounts on gym memberships, restaurants, holidays and retail vouchers.

In contrast, positions in the social care sector requiring no qualifications offer a starting salary of around £10 per hour and list benefits such as:

- Bike to work scheme.

- Discounts at leisure facilities.

- Death in service benefit.

- Health scheme access.

- On-site parking.

- Access to the Blue Light Card concession scheme.

- Frequent pay reviews.

Further, positions in the care sector provide a list of responsibilities for employees which is typically absent from job listings in the retail or hospitality sector. These responsibilities include:

- Delivering care and support to vulnerable people in a skilled and professional manner.

- Being a Key Worker to clients, coordinating and updating clients care plans.

- Being the line of communication as appropriate with families, friends and the relatives of clients.

- Administering or supervising the administration of medication.

- Participating, helping and assisting in all household tasks as required.

- Empowering all clients to make their own personal choices in relation to their support and personal development.

- Ensuring that all day-to-day activities and planned client holidays are achieved.

- Ensuring that clients receive options of good quality nutritional meals of their choice each day.

Social care is often framed around these responsibilities, which could disincentivise jobseekers from pursuing careers in care.

Careful framing of job advertisements is required. They could market the increased responsibilities of care workers as opportunities for further professional development, compared to other sectors.

This will enable a move away from the transactional nature of job advertisements and into a mutually beneficial relationship between the jobseekers and the employer.

Responding to negativity

Public perception is important to organisations when seeking to attract and retain workers. Managing this on social media is a difficult task. However, engaging with social media can help to reaching a younger demographic.

Given the importance of social media to job-seeking practices, the review of online platforms aimed to examine how employers engage with and respond to negative comments. These comments related to online job listings and general discussions of practice online.

Upon receipt of negative comments on social media, direct responses maintain a present and trusted relationship between a care employer or provider and their online community. Responses to comments should show an understanding of the negative experiences and issues within their internal processes but must be carefully phrased to avoid facilitating further negativity.

Forms of engagement

There are existing opportunities around exploring new methods of engaging with jobseekers through emerging technologies and novel marketing processes. In the social care sector, the application of technology has focussed largely on the use of mobile health technologies, which facilitate access for vulnerable individuals and create new methods of engagement for care workers (Shah et al. 2020).

Recent developments across the healthcare sector have seen the exploration of novel processes for recruitment. In 2020, UK Government funding through the TechForce19 platform led to new methods of filtering for digital recruitment looking to connect people with job and volunteering opportunities (GOV.UK, 2020).

The company SureCert, in Northern Ireland, received funding for work involving solutions that could locate, background check and deploy large numbers of volunteers to support vulnerable people in communities across Scotland and Northern Ireland. This process streamlined recruitment, which created trust during the pandemic when rapid recruitment into the workforce to fill resourcing gaps was a key priority (SureCert, 2020).

Technologies such as augmented and virtual reality are already being trialled in care settings, but using the same tech to increase the level of immersion offered to jobseekers attending events such as job fayres may improve the success of recruitment into the social care sector (Doeing, 2021).

Offering virtual reality experiences so that jobseekers can experience care work first-hand could facilitate increased interest and understanding of the value of care work (Claydon, 2021).

Section summary

Throughout the above section, employers' engagement with jobseekers was investigated using findings from desk-based research. How employers advertise jobs impacts on recruitment, the public perception of a sector and employee satisfaction and retention. Key areas of employer engagement with jobseekers include:

- The way that job advertisements place different levels of emphasis on benefits and responsibilities depending on sector.

- The way in which employers respond to negativity online.

- The way employers utilise different methods of engagement to connect with jobseekers.
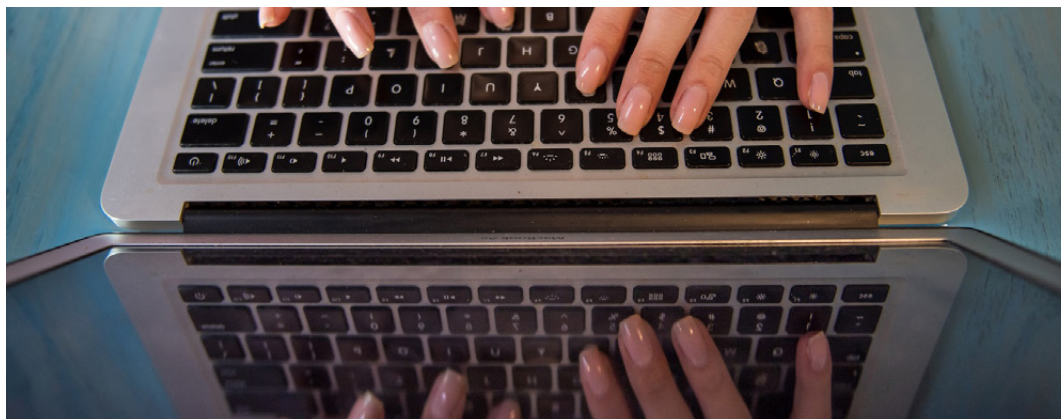
Online engagement examples

Pobl Group and Home Group Facebook engagement

Facebook is a popular platform used throughout Wales, and in the social care sector. In a review of online platforms, several examples of online engagement were identified between social care employers and their Facebook communities.

Pobl Group is a social care provider and Home Group is a housing and maintenance services provider, both operating throughout Wales. Both have received negative feedback from their Facebook communities via comments or reviews on their Facebook posts.

In 2023, members of the Pobl Group's Facebook community expressed frustrations in the comments section on one of their Facebook posts. One user stated that they resorted to Facebook commenting because of an inefficiency in Pobl Group's formal complaint processes. In another instance, several users commented on a job advertisement post regarding low levels of pay for social care workers. Pobl Group did not respond to the comments.

Home Group also faced negative comments and reviews on their Facebook platform. As a result, the organisation sought to respond directly to negativity and signpost users to private communication channels. Many comments were left unanswered on posts with large volumes of feedback (Home Group, 2020).

These two examples represent contrasting approaches to engaging with online communities. Pobl Group chose not to respond to negativity, and Home Group chose to respond directly where they could. Employers will need to consider which approach is right for their organisation, but responding directly to negative comments and reviews is a well-known approach to creating a positive relationship with online communities. Social media management and strategies, with specific thought on how jobseekers are digesting public information, are needed. Employers should also view these comments as formalised complaints that they can respond to and use to improve their services.

6

User personas

User personas

Five user personas were created to demonstrate how varying characteristics and external factors influence jobseekers entering the workforce in Wales.

What are user personas?

User personas are narrative depictions of characters who represent the breadth of target audiences that a product or service need to make an impact or impression on. They are drawn from the methodology called 'design thinking', which is a series of tools and practices that bring a human-centred approach to complex systems and problems.

Design thinking is one of the most effective ways of addressing human, technological and strategic innovation needs, evolving from an exploration of theory and practice. Other examples of design thinking include creating user journey maps and writing scenarios.

User personas are now commonly used in public health campaigns and are gaining popularity in formal academic research when designing interventions and reforming health and social care services, for example.

How are user personas used in health and social care?

Example 1: User personas for vaccination uptake

In a 2021 analysis, four user personas were generated based on the results of a mixed-methods study on decision-making around HPV vaccinations for children among a diverse group of parents. They were given titles to reflect their demographics, characteristics, personal goals and belief systems: (1) Informed Altruist, (2) Real Talker, (3) Information Gatherer, and (4) Supporter. The purpose of the personas was to develop impactful social media messaging that would address varying preferences and needs of parents for health information related to the HPV vaccine (Massey et al. 2021). The user personas made it possible to communicate these preferences and needs to a wider range of audiences. The information included was accessible, easy to digest, and allowed individuals to resonate with specific characters.

Example 2: User personas for eHealth service design

A 2022 study used a three-step approach to creating user personas to demonstrate patient needs for interacting with an eHealth (electronic health) service. It first relied on data collected from electronic patient records (EPRs), was then updated with qualitative data collected during interviews and questionnaires, and finally refined based on log data (ten Klooster et al, 2022). The user personas were used to ensure that the eHealth service was designed to support individuals with varying needs. The three-step approach reflects the need to not only focus on clinical and medical information but to understand an individual's circumstances, behaviours, preferences, lived experiences, and built environment which could alter their decision-making or experiences with health and social care services.

User personas in job-seeking

Successfully used in business and public services, user personas can also be applied to address the challenges of job-seeking. In the process of job-seeking, an individual's perceptions and behaviours are shaped by a variety of personal and external factors. The systems in which they are 'seeking' and how jobs are designed will play a key role in whether or not they decide to pursue a job in social care.

The findings from the literature and policy review reveal a specific need for social care employers to use human-centred approaches while supporting jobseekers. This means understanding an individual's lived experiences, preferences, and reasons that either support or prevent them from entering the social care workforce.

Creating user personas is a practical way to design appropriate positioning and messaging. They can be used to inform the creation of job advertisements, the restructuring of shift patterns, new marketing strategies to make the workforce more inclusive, and more.

User personas are also an effective tool for facilitating empathy, as they situate job-seeking challenges into personal circumstances and characteristics. Five user personas were created to support this report in communicating characteristics and external factors influencing jobseekers in Wales.

They can be used in the future by Social Care Wales or employers to reflect on the findings of this report, or act as a guide for creating new user personas that are bespoke to specific social care services.

Meet the jobseekers

Based on the findings of this report, two factors are instrumental in understanding jobseekers' behaviours and experiences while searching for jobs in care or other sectors: their age and their responsibility level.

The five user personas represent individuals with varying ages and personal responsibility levels as their key characteristics. These blend with demographic and circumstantial characteristics that impact the job-seeking process. For example, being a widow or obtaining refugee status in Wales.

Importantly, the user personas are not intended to represent all people in a group, but rather, individuals that sit somewhere on the following age-responsibility level matrix, below:
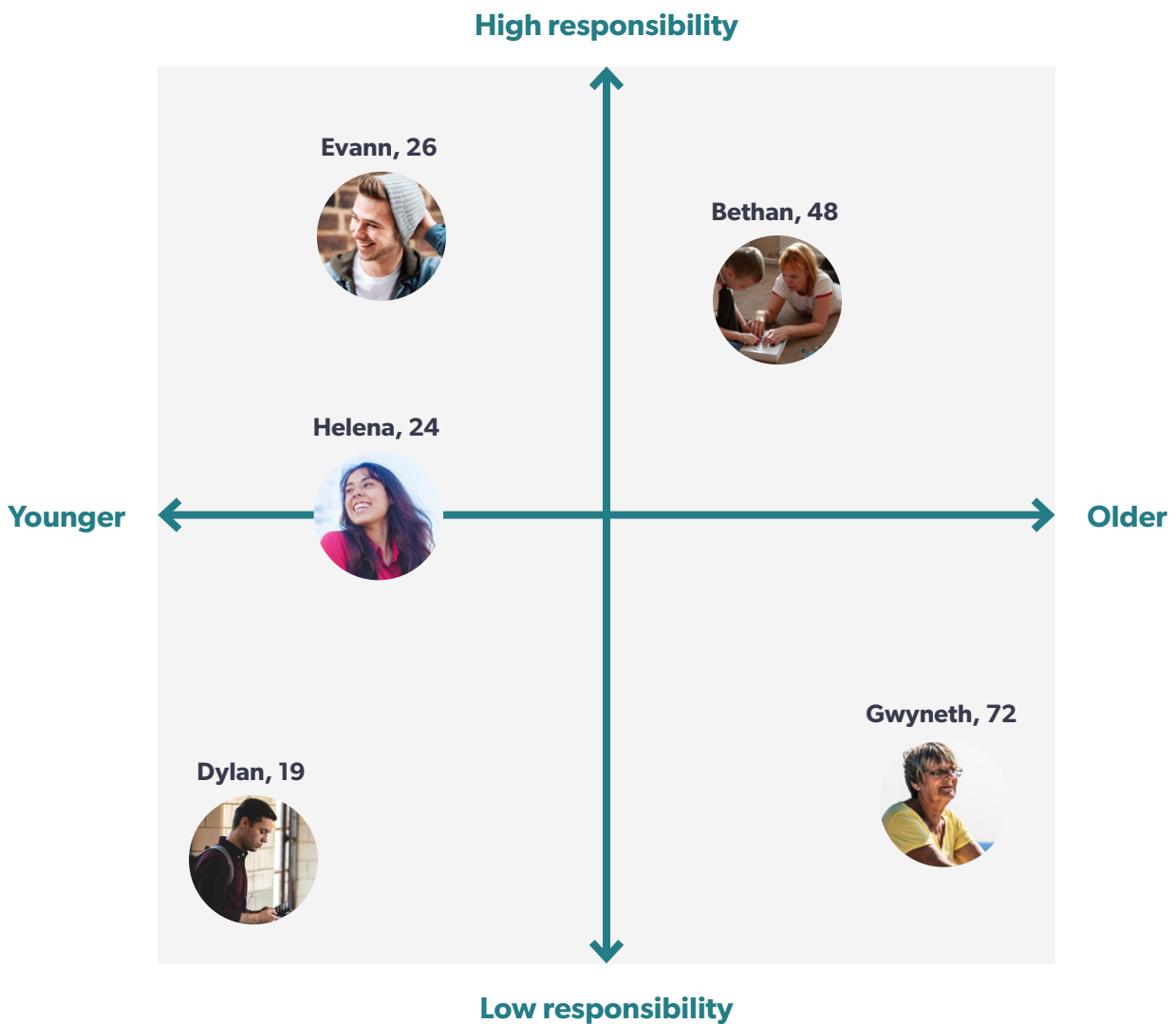
User personas

Meet Dylan:

Young male student with low responsibility, driven by flexible work to support his career in healthcare

Summary characteristics:

- **Circumstances:** Student, low responsibility level, limited free time and flexibility but able to sacrifice social activities.

- **Intrinsic motivations:** Medium-term desire to succeed in his course, medium-term desire to maintain his sport training and socialise with his friends, long-term desire to be a healthcare professional.

- **What makes work meaningful:** Making money to pay for his living costs, making additional money to support his interests, using his time effectively by finding part-time employment that supports his long-term motivations.

- **What makes work meaningless:** Not making enough money to cover his living costs, work that interrupts his lecturers or coursework, work that requires him to drop too many of his other interests such as missing out on sport training and social activities.

- **Access to job-seeking resources:** University career advice and planning services, social media, platforms such as The Student Room, word of mouth opportunities from his friends that work on campus.

- **Supporting the jobseeker to social care:** Providing visibility to job openings within the social care sector that are flexible and suitable for students, making it easy for people to access this information so they don't go for the easiest or perhaps word of mouth option.

Dylan:

Young male student with low responsibility, driven by flexible work to support his career in healthcare
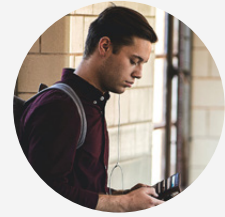
Dylan's story:

Dylan is a 19-year old undergraduate student at Aberystwyth University. He grew up loving sport. After recovering from a long-term injury he was inspired by the care he received to study physiotherapy. He is driven to make a difference in people's lives by providing hands-on healthcare services. As a second year student, he lives in student accommodation with his friends and has a very busy schedule, between balancing his coursework, sport, and social activities. He is primarily responsible for himself, with no dependents, and supported financially by his parents, with his first and second year accommodation paid for in advance, and a monthly allowance for food and social activities.

However, Dylan's younger sister is entering her first year at university and his parents asked him to cover his living costs for his final year. He is increasingly stressed about securing a source of income for the summer months and final year. He has long-term career aspirations to become a healthcare professional and wants to overlap his interests with part-time employment. Many of his friends work in the food and beverage industry at shops and pubs around campus, and offered to put in a good word for him with their managers.

Dylan decided to ask for advice from his favourite lecturer about employment options in the healthcare sector that wouldn't interrupt his studies and social activities. His lecturer highlighted key skills that support physiotherapy such as practising person-centred care and engaging with patients or vulnerable communities. Dylan took this information to the career advice and planning services offered at the university. They recommended that he look into becoming a domiciliary care worker, meaning he would provide personal care to people in their own homes. Domiciliary care is often dependent on a patient's needs and he found several advertisements for evening and overnight domiciliary care workers.

Dylan is excited about domiciliary care but remains hesitant due to lack of time to complete training and qualifications. He is thinking about taking a friend up on their offer to work in a pub, where he can also make sure he doesn't miss out on socialising during his final year at university.

User personas

Meet Bethan:

Middle-age female with high responsibility, driven by contributing to her family and spending time with her young children


Summary characteristics:

- **Circumstances:** Mother of two children, high responsibility level, lives in Llangefni, North Wales.

- **Intrinsic motivations:** Medium-term desire to better her families' circumstances, medium-term desire to make sure that work doesn't take too much time away from her children.

- **What makes work meaningful:** Making money to contribute to her family, doing work that feels within her comfort zone.

- **What makes work meaningless:** Work that's inflexible and limits her ability to be present for her children and requires her to learn new technical skills.

- **Access to job-seeking resources:** Word of mouth from parental and wider social networks, schools and nurseries, specific social media platforms such as Facebook and Mumsnet.

- **Supporting the jobseeker to social care:** Ensuring that day care webpages are up to date and attractive and that negative reviews are addressed and assessed for improvement, monitoring social media platforms and job boards for informal care work that can be translated into formal care.

Bethan:

Middle-age female with high responsibility, driven by contributing to her family and spending time with her young children
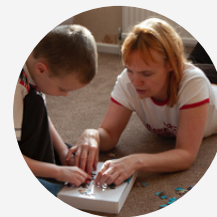
Bethan's story:

Bethan is a 48-year-old woman with two young children, ages 8 and 13. She is a full-time mother and responsible for caring for her children – school and activity runs, meal prep, and overall parental duties. Her partner is the primary breadwinner for the family, working as an engineer. He is often on site-visits throughout Wales and across the UK. The cost-of-living crisis in the UK has caused extra strain on the family's finances.

Bethan is looking for a part-time job that is flexible to her children's school hours, and allows her to be home in the evenings when her husband is traveling for work. Bethan does not have specific career aspirations, but is looking for work that is within her comfort-zone. As the primary care-giver for her children, she views care as an approachable option for employment. She started looking online for day care centres within her town, which is a relatively rural area. The day care closest to her children's school received negative reviews on online. She found several day care centres with great reviews a couple of towns over, but is unsure if she can fit the commute into her schedule.

Bethan decided to post on social media platforms like Facebook and Mumsnet to ask if anyone within her town had informal early years job openings. She received several replies from schools, nurseries, and parents about nannying and babysitting positions that pay relatively well with no training needed.

Although Bethan was excited about working in day care, she decided to take a job as a part-time nanny. If the day care centre in her town had better reviews, she would have applied there for a job. She told several of her friends about other job openings that she found on Facebook and Mumsnet. If she had better information around opportunities to become a self-employed childminder, she may have pursued this route, despite concerns around having to navigate insurance.

User personas

Meet Gwyneth:

Older age female with low responsibility, driven by returning to the workforce and helping others

Summary characteristics:

- **Circumstances:** Retired widow, low responsibility level, looking to re-enter the workforce and socialise with her local community.

- **Intrinsic motivations:** Medium-term desire to re-engage with society after a year of grief, long-term desire to create new connections with her local community and meet new people.

- **What makes work meaningful:** Getting out of her house, socialising, making a difference in people's lives, and taking a job that offers a dynamic experience.

- **What makes work meaningless:** Taking a job that doesn't bring her a sense of joy or happiness, taking a job where she is inside for the entire day, taking a job where she is further isolated from her local community.

- **Access to job-seeking resources:** Newspaper advertisements and word of mouth, Gwyneth isn't aware of online job boards or social media platforms.

- **Supporting the jobseeker to social care:** Ensuring that employers are combatting negative perceptions of care homes and that job advertisements describe the full extent to what care workers do.

Gwyneth:

Older age female with low responsibility, driven by returning to the workforce and helping others

Gwyneth's story:

Gywneth is a 72-year old retired female living in Barry. She has three grown children that live with their nuclear families throughout Wales and visit her often. Sadly, Gywneth's wife passed away a year ago at the early age of 70 from a heart attack. The past year has been very challenging for Gywneth, as she has been grieving and adjusting to a new understanding of what her life looks like. Gywneth has always been a very active and adventurous person that loves getting out of her house for the full day and socialising with her community.

She previously worked as a travel agent and would go on trips throughout Europe to promote her companies' travel packages. Recently one of Gywneth's children suggested that she look into going back into the workforce, even part-time, to get her out of the house and enjoying life again. Without any dependents and her mortgage fully paid off, she has low responsibilities. She also has a very open and flexible schedule. Gywneth started looking for options for re-joining the workforce at her age. She explored local advertisements in the newspaper, walked about Barry and asked around for job openings at the tourist shops and vendors, but she didn't find a dynamic option that would give her different types of working days.

While meeting a friend for a coffee she learned that they had recently starting working in a residential home for adults with mental and physical disabilities. As a care worker in this programme, they were able to socialise with the residents of the home, take them to community activities and events throughout Barry and the wider area, and work with them directly to improve their quality of life. The thought of supporting an individual in this capacity, while interacting with new people and activities excited Gwyneth.

Despite her previous negative perceptions of the care sector, she decided to apply for a job as a residential care worker. She takes her residents to their jobs, exercise classes, bowling leagues, community events, and more and feels much less isolated surrounded by a wider network of carers that she has met through her new job. Gwyneth found the registration process difficult and was grateful for the support of her employer in getting her through this.

User personas

Meet Evann:
Young male with high responsibility, driven by creating a better life for himself

Summary characteristics:

- **Circumstances:** Experiencing homelessness, high responsibility level, well-connected to third sector organisations.

- **Intrinsic motivations:** Medium-term desire to make money, medium-term desire to gain stability, medium-term desire to enter the workforce, long-term desire for a degree or qualifications, long-term desire to have a career.

- **What makes work meaningful:** Making money, supporting himself, creating a better life for himself in the future, finding a career that he is passionate about and can progress in.

- **What makes work meaningless:** Not making enough money to cover his living costs, jobs that are part-time or that provide limited career progression in a field that Evann is passionate about, jobs where there is a barrier to entry due to stigma of homelessness.

- **Access to job-seeking resources:** Access to social media platforms and wider social networks, but without the access to consistent mobile phone data and a computer; well-connected and familiar with support organisations.

- **Supporting the jobseeker to social care:** Social Care Wales and employers should reach out to community and support organisations to ensure that connections from before the pandemic were not lost. Enable support for those that need a degree or qualifications but don't know where to start.

Evann:

Young male with high responsibility, driven by creating a better life for himself
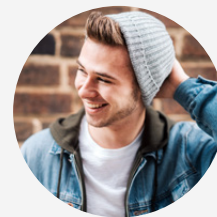
Evann's story:

Evann is a 26-year old male that has been experiencing homelessness for several years. He had been staying with extended family and friends in Swansea, where he grew up, but when the pandemic hit, he realised his options were limited. He has been using services available in Wales such as crisis support organisations, food banks, community centres, faith based organisations, and job centres, but until the last year hadn't been able to focus on long-term stability due to the pandemic. He felt that the pandemic provided an uncertain time for many people, and the resources of support organisations were limited, including those offering job advice and planning services.

Evann has high responsibility for himself, making sure that he has somewhere to sleep and enough money to feed himself. He also feels a lot of pressure and embarrassment about not having a degree or any qualifications. He's found that as the post-pandemic life has stabilised there is more time and resources available for him to consider job opportunities. He has a high level of commitment to training and is driven by creating a better life for himself. Through his lived experiences he has become familiar with organisations that give back to society. He enjoys working with people in these settings, but he doesn't want to work directly for a crisis support organisation that would expose him to the lived experiences that he has already overcome.

One of the community organisations that he visits is well-connected to the care sector, often hosting community culture hub activities with care homes and other volunteers. He asked the director of the community organisation to connect him directly with the care home manager. The manager offered to take Evann for a coffee and talk with him about the training and qualification process needed to enter the care sector. The manager offered to provide him with additional support in the modules and training because she saw that Evann possessed the compassion and empathy that she looks for in employees. The ability to support Evann in a personalised way in his job seeking journey has allowed him to enter the care workforce in an accessible and non-intimidating way.

User personas

Meet Helena:

Young female with medium responsibility, driven by career aspirations and finding her way in a new country

Summary characteristics:

- **Circumstances:** Young refugee, medium responsibility level with no dependents or financial responsibility, but would like to find a job to provide additional financial support to herself and her mother while she carries out her studies.

- **Intrinsic motivations:** Medium-term desire to integrate into a new country, find her footing and direction for her future, long-term desire to bring her previous experiences in biology and nursing aspirations to a career in the UK in the health or social cares sector.

- **What makes work meaningful:** Making a difference in people's lives, work that support career aspirations in the health and social care sector in the UK, feeling like she hasn't lost her previous life and goals in Venezuela.

- **What makes work meaningless:** Structural barriers to obtaining a degree or qualifications, work that is unrelated to her previous life and goals in Venezuela, work that takes away from her ability to focus on her education.

- **Access to job-seeking resources:** Social media platforms and networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and personal relationships built with carers at the vaccination clinics. Access to support services for asylum seekers and refugees, but barriers to signposting these services prevent Helena from knowing about them.

- **Supporting the jobseeker to social care:** Local outreach to support organisations for asylum seekers and refugees to promote job opportunities and career progression within the Welsh social care sector. Making connection with further education institutions to explain how qualifications and trainings are applicable to the social care sector.

Helena:

Young female with medium responsibility, driven by career aspirations and finding her way in a new country

Helena's story:

Helena is a 24-year old female refugee from Venezuela. A few years ago, just before the pandemic began, Helena sought asylum in the UK with her mother. After over a year as an asylum seeker and with placements throughout London, she was relocated to housing in Welshpool, where she and her mother now live. She has since received refugee status which means that she can start looking for employment.

She spent a lot of her time as an asylum seeker volunteering at vaccination clinics during the pandemic. In Venezuela, she was enrolled in university studying Biology, with aspirations to one day become a nurse. She was inspired by the amount of carers also volunteering at vaccination clinics during the pandemic as well as working their full or part-time jobs in care homes. She met many people during her volunteering experiences and remains close with them today. During her time as an asylum seeker, Helena was also starting to ask local colleges and universities what kinds of qualifications and coursework she needed to have obtained in order to enrol in further or higher education.

Unfortunately, she found out that her secondary qualifications in Venezuela did not meet the requirements and she would have to take UK GCSEs in order to enrol. Although this was very upsetting to Helena at first, the carers that she met through the vaccination clinics are supporting her in navigating the UK education system and have even suggested that she take the health and social care course at a local college, which focuses on a broad range of health, social care, speech and language therapy, psychology, midwifery, and occupational health concepts and skills. She is now seriously considering a career as a carer and is excited to learn more about the social care sector in Wales. When she signs up to her course, she will visit a local care home and plans to introduce herself to the care home manager to ask about any job openings that she can apply to support her while she studies. Luckily, her mother was able to find full-time employment and has told Helena to focus on her studies and finding a part-time job in the care sector. She therefore has medium responsibility to integrate herself in a new country, education and job market, but with free time to explore and apply to the right job opening in the care sector.

7

Supporting jobseekers in the Welsh social care sector

Supporting jobseekers in the Welsh social care sector

Addressing recruitment and retention in social care is a big challenge. This section sets out recommendations which are derived from the analysis above to support job seekers – for Social Care Wales, for employers, and for the Welsh Government.

This section is structured by the audience. Actions for employers can also be included in Social Care Wales's thinking on the sorts of activity and best practice it should encourage employers to adopt.

Recommendations for care employers

Employers should consider more responsive, creative recruitment strategies.

1. Meet jobseekers where they are

Jobseekers access a variety of places including social media sites and online forums where they ask others about what the particular roles involve. Often, these places are not typical job-seeking sites – they are centred on other forums or identities, such as The Student Room and Mumsnet. Employers could take advantage by engaging with jobseekers. This should respect the terms of these forums (which may require organisations to pay or note their presence) and fit the culture and tone of each individual site – but the opportunity is there to win profile and trust in the same online spaces as jobseekers.

2. Increase online engagement with jobseekers

Providers should take a holistic attitude to social media usage by their staff, which has many considerations outside the scope of this report around safeguarding and security. There is an opportunity, however, to show how workforces, particularly care ambassadors, take satisfaction from their work. This could be in the form of Q&As, posting organic and authentic content regularly, or hosting a live chat.

Further online engagement could consider more creative methods to introduce a range of age groups to care – such as doing virtual tours of facilities on social media or introducing gamification approaches to recruit-facing websites.

3. Maintain in-person engagement with jobseekers

Offline engagement remains important. Institutions such as schools, further and higher education, community centres, faith-based organisations and groups are an opportunity to promote specific job openings relevant to individuals in each organisation.

4. Master the art of job descriptions

Job descriptions can do more to explain why work may be meaningful. This should include benefits and associations which go beyond terms and conditions. It could include showing jobseekers what type of community they would be a part of, making clear the meaningful nature of helping people receive dignified care, or making it clear which transferrable skills they can take with them to other careers or throughout a career in care.

This can also be used to explain things people may not already know about the job or sector. Employment perks which are comparable to those available in retail, hospitality or similar sectors should be seen as a benchmark. Going further to include those associated with new, fast-growing sectors (intense team bonding days, wackier perks such as birthdays off, care home pets, free food and drink and access to high-quality leisure facilities) could communicate an open, dynamic culture.

5. Maintain and grow relationships with frequented job-seeking organisations, centres, Regional Connectors, Care Ambassadors, or resources

'Job-seeking organisations' is a catch-all term to mean third sector organisations, skills providers, job clubs, and local employment agencies which operate at a local scale to help people find work. Job-seeking organisations are a good route to recruits. Employers should build relationships with these organisations. Connecting with Care Ambassadors can assist in connecting young people or particular job-seeking groups with local care providers.

6. Build status, value and punctuality into the job application process

The job application process itself can communicate aspects of a job. Employers can adapt their processes to suggest a rewarding culture and career. In practice, this could include creating a 'refer a friend' scheme for current staff – so that new recruits are identified through word-of-mouth and direct recommendations from friends. Or it could mean ensuring that applicants understand they have done well to get an interview. Further value can be added by making applicants aware of expected timescales for response from employers to their applications, or from offering feedback even in the event of an unsuccessful application. Building value into the recruitment process could lead to greater levels of staff retention and lower turnover rates as staff feel more valued in the workplace.

Recommendations for Social Care Wales

Social Care Wales should continue with its efforts to improve the attractiveness and resilience of the sector.

1. Continue promotional activities to build awareness of the sector and make it attractive to jobseekers

The analysis in this report supports Social Care Wales's broad approach to raising the profile of the sector, supporting jobseekers and working with employers to address their needs. WeCare Wales meets a clear need, and continuing to run and grow this offer is key. More specific recommendations on the future development of WeCare Wales can be found in Urban Foresight's *Understanding Attraction and Recruitment* report.

2. Adopt human-centred design: transfer personalised care practices to personalised job-seeking support

Social Care Wales has developed a clear set of ideas about care and the values it should show – demonstrated in a range of materials, from policy guidance to employers, to guidance on Tone of Voice. The emphasis is on person-centred care and responding to individuals.

The ethos of designing services around people should also be a guiding principle for all activities supporting jobseekers. Any support should be designed around their needs, preferences and habits. This report suggests processes drawn from design thinking could be useful in doing so. In practice, this means actively engaging with the job-seeking community to understand their needs, considering appropriateness and language of all public-facing materials, and reflecting the motivations and skills of jobseekers in preparing any programme or support.

3. Scale up WeCare Ambassadors and regional connectors initiatives

The regional WeCare Ambassador programme and regional connectors help to raise awareness of the sector, create clarity on the roles and work involved, and show the valuable, rewarding nature of the job.

Expanding these programmes to reach more schools, colleges, universities, job centres and key community sites such as supermarkets would be useful in reaching a wider array of jobseekers. This is particularly important given that the DWP expects to shrink its job centre network in 2023.

4. Maintain and grow relationships with frequented job-seeking organisations, centres, or resources

Word-of-mouth is an effective way of reaching jobseekers, and recommendations from these job-seeking organisations are often taken seriously. They are embedded within local contexts, and also have useful insights into key job-seeking trends and any changes that are taking place through their day-to-day experiences.

Employers should build relationships with these organisations to reach jobseekers. In turn, Social Care Wales should build them into stakeholder plans and work with the sector.

The need for system change

The Welsh Government has a vital role in setting the overall context of a resilient staffing system – and could also lead on major projects to transform the reputation and profile of care.

1. Clear and strong messaging that supports social care as a national priority

Job-seeking takes place in a cultural, media and political context. It is important that actors take a role in shaping this context, and better highlighting the societal importance of social care.

Continuing the work of WeCare Wales is central here, but there is also scope for organisations such as local and national governments to maintain the message through wider communications, messaging and content.

Particular messages that matter include:

- Care being everyone's business, not the work of a particular group – showing that care is socially valued, and careers in care are open to everyone.

- Care being provided by a diverse group of people.

- Care being socially valued by politicians.

- Care being of economic importance and a crucial employment sector.

2. Invest in innovation to promote care

Technology and innovation investment has two purposes. It can address inefficiencies and transform care. It can also change perceptions, and communicate that care is a cutting-edge field. Funding, grants, living labs and academic-public-private collaborations are all good options for pursuing this approach.

Providers must be open to technology and innovation. But they also need support. Social Care Wales has an important role to play in providing advice and guidance, while the Welsh Government should continue to capitalise on opportunities for technological innovation created as a result of COVID-19. The Innovation Strategy for Wales published in February 2023 places an emphasis on cross-sector collaboration to encourage innovation in the health and social care sector across Wales and is a solid basis for continued investment into health and social care innovation (Welsh Government, 2023).

3. Support public sector mutuals

Staff perceptions interact with provider structures. Many care providers struggle to build a culture of front-line autonomy because they face pressures to meet quality or financial targets; often this is a more acute pressure in small family firms, or larger private equity-owned firms.

One technique to give staff more direct ownership of their work is to pilot public service mutuals. These are employee-owned or controlled, are non-profitmaking, and have a purpose dedicated to public services. This model can be useful both in improving retention, but also shifting wider perceptions of care organisations and the types of career available. Around 120 operate in England, and internationally there are well-known examples of radically decentralised, staff-led organisations such as Buurtzorg in the Netherland or KaiserPermanente in the USA.

As a first step, the Welsh Government could commission Social Care Wales, an appropriate academic partner, or the Employee Ownership Association, to scope a potential model for Wales.

4. Create new approaches to training

Other public services trying to improve their attractiveness have attempted to create new institutions to both address particular shortages and change perceptions of the service.

Examples include direct entry for graduates through programmes such as Teach First for teachers or Frontline for social workers, or institutions which provide dedicated research and training such as teaching hospitals or colleges. This can create a culture of excellence and faster on-the-job training, helping both existing staff and new recruits.

There have been proposals to create 'teaching care homes' to achieve a similar purpose. Five were set up in England in 2017, with an evaluation due this year. Wales could develop such an idea and extend the concept. This would require buy-in from government, education providers and Social Care Wales as a minimum.

8

Conclusion

Conclusion

This report highlights factors that are either supporting or preventing jobseekers from working in social care.

Across the social care sector, there are many opportunities to increase the attractiveness of jobs for jobseekers. Capitalising on these opportunities is crucial to keeping pace with increasing demand.

The number of available positions in social care are outnumbered by potential jobseekers, meaning that jobseekers can afford to be selective when seeking employment. Thus, positions in social care must appear as an attractive and worthwhile pursuit.

More generally, a changing jobs market following Brexit, COVID-19, and the cost-of-living crisis has left key gaps in recruitment that must be filled by placing emphasis on skills and training and engagement with local groups. There are several existing policies that support the effort to increase employment in care, but current policies are skewed towards supporting high-skill sectors. This leaves crucial gaps to be filled by organisations focussed on supporting jobseekers such as WeCare Wales.

Understanding why people work in social care and other sectors is key to supporting jobseekers. Using this understanding to shape job advertisements, improve marketing strategies and social media use will encourage a wider demographic to apply to work in social care.

This report aims to improve the understanding of job-seeking behaviours in social care and the recommendations intend to increase the appeal of social care for jobseekers. From care employers, educational institutions, Social Care Wales and Welsh Government, actors at all levels can contribute to improving employment conditions for social workers.

A focus on developing the sector, improving job benefits, and creating an inclusive and supportive environment will contribute to an overall increase in job satisfaction and successful recruitment in social care.

Strengths

- Desires to care.

- Flexible working patterns.

- Recognition from the Welsh Government of the critical role of care and workers.

- Political motivation to address issues in social care.

- A range of organisations and interventions to support jobseekers both specifically into social care, and more widely to find work.

Weaknesses

- Low pay.

- Poor conditions and long hours.

- Desire for routine working patterns.

- Lack of diversity in the sector.

- Closing of key sites for jobseekers such as job centres.

- Negative online comments that negatively influence perceptions of the sector and providers.

Opportunities

- Improving career progression.

- Increasing pay.

- Improving positive messaging, especially in job advertisements.

- Targeting economically inactive groups like students, the ageing population and parents.

- Increasing desire of the population for part-time and flexible work.

- Harnessing social media and influencers to promote the sector.

- Using networks (online, offline and informal) to reach jobseekers.

Threats

- Pay is increasing in other sectors.

- COVID-19 is changing working practices and preferences.

- The employment market is becoming increasingly competitive.

- There is more focus on high wage and high skill sectors from the Welsh Government.

- Brexit is reducing the available supply of workers.

- Rising cost of living.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix I: Method and approach

The evidence synthesis was conducted across three phases of research.

Phase 1: Data collection activities

Urban Foresight collected evidence on both job-seeking behaviour in social care and on job-seeking behaviour in settings with similar skills/ experience requirements to social care. This included:

- Peer reviewed and grey literature relating to job-seeking behaviour across the care sector.

- Peer reviewed and grey literature relating to job-seeking behaviour more broadly.

- Digital ethnography of online spaces where jobseekers discuss their goals and experience. This included: The Student Room, Mumsnet, Facebook pages, Career Wales website, Indeed, Glassdoor, Reed, Reddit, LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok and Snapchat, as well as a series of podcasts related to social care. This only involved reading posts/topics, no users or posts were engaged with.

- Review of primary data collected as part of Urban Foresight's ongoing work examining recruitment and attraction issues.

Phase 2: Data synthesis and analysis activities

Data was then synthesised and analysed using the following techniques:

- SWOT analysis to highlight what is working well and what could be improved in the future.

- Thematic analysis to understand the key themes across the evidence.

- Drawing on design thinking, specifically user personas, to break down jobseekers into different groups and bring attention to the different needs each group has, as well as their likely journeys into social care.

Phase 3: Developing recommendations

Recommendations were then developed based on the three types of analysis. These recommendations are aimed towards Social Care Wales and WeCare Wales and social care providers. Given the nature of the findings, additional recommendations are provided for the Welsh Government.

We have further designed the series of user personas so they can be easily shared on the WeCare Wales website, and/or to employers.

Appendix II: Policy and programme tables

Policies and programmes relevant to job-seeking are summarised in the tables below.

Table 3: Policies related to demographic trends in Wales and their relevance to the social care sector

Description	Relevance to social care
'Age friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society' (Welsh Government, 2021b)	
Outlines projected demographic changes and sets out how the needs of the population will be met. There are four aims: enhancing well-being, improving local services and environments, building and retaining people's own capability, and tackling age-related poverty.	The role of the health and care system is recognised as integral to achieving the vision of an age-friendly Wales, and the strategy emphasises that the current system will need to improve. The aim is to deliver more of these services closer to home. This will increase demand for domiciliary workers.
Programme for Government 2021 to 2026: Well-being Statement (Welsh Government 2021b)	
Linking to the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015', the statement sets out 10 well-being objectives and steps for delivery. The objectives will guide the Welsh Government towards making progress on Wales's seven long-term well-being goals.	One of the seven long-term well-being goals identified in this document is the need to protect, rebuild and further develop services for vulnerable people. This suggests that care provision will need to increase.
A Healthier Wales: Our plan for Health and Social Care (Welsh Government, 2022b)	
Outlines the aim to create a health and care system that is 'fit for the future', able to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities. Its Quadruple Aim approach addresses population health and wellbeing, better quality and more accessible health and social care services, higher value health and social care, and a more motivated and sustainable health and social care workforce.	The intention to elevate quality of provision, and the requirement to transform elements of the existing workforce is clearly outlined in this document.

Description	Relevance to social care
The Childcare Offer for Wales (Welsh Government, No Date, a)	
Eligible working parents can access 30 hours of childcare for three to four year-olds for up to 48 weeks of the year.	This increases the demand for childcare services, meaning that the workforce will need to further expand.
Flying Start (Welsh Government, 2022b)	
An entitlement for two and a half hours of childcare per day for five days per week for a total of 39 weeks and a minimum of a further five sessions during school holidays for children aged between zero to three years of age in certain postcode areas of Wales.	This increases the demand for childcare services and requires that the workforce grows to meet this additional need.

Table 4: Programmes supporting jobseekers in Wales

Name	Description
Careers Wales	Provides support to individuals in developing their career, finding and applying for jobs, and accessing apprenticeships, courses and training. It offers a range of online resources such as quizzes, job information, and a support finder to assist jobseekers (Careers Wales, No Date).
Adult Learning Wales	The national adult community learning organisation for Wales that promotes high quality, collaborative learning and skill development. Provides access to education across a range of levels (Adult Learning Wales, No Date).
Jobs in Wales	A dedicated jobsite for Wales that works to connect jobseekers and employers, and advertise vacancies across the public and private sector (Jobs In Wales, No Date).
Wales Employment and Skills Board	The board acts as an independent advisor to the Welsh Government on employment and skills (Wales Employment and Skills Board, No Date).
Working Wales	An organisation funded by the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund. Provides an advisory service to support jobseekers in finding employment (Working Wales, No Date).
Apprenticeship Schemes	Individuals aged over 16 who are not in full time education can apply for an apprenticeship in a range of sectors including tourism, health and care, engineering and the creative sectors (Working Wales, No Date, a).
The Young Person's Guarantee	Those aged under 25 are entitled to support to gain a place in education, training, finding a job or becoming self-employed. This includes job bulletins, help with CV and application writing, and business advice (Welsh Government, 2021a).

Name	Description
Jobs Growth Wales+	A training and development programme for those aged between 16-18 years old. This is included in the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee and is partly funded by the European Social Fund. Participants acquire skills, qualifications and experience tailored to their individual needs to assist in later employment (Business Wales, No Date).
Big Ideas Wales	Support for those aged under 25 who are seeking to start their own business. This includes advice from other entrepreneurs, online tools, learning modules, and networking opportunities (Business Wales, No Date, a).
The Out of Work Service	Offers free confidential employment support through a peer mentoring system for those aged between 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training, aged 25 and older who have been unemployed for over 12 months, and those recovering from substance misuse or mental ill-health issues.
ReAct+	Tailored solutions such as financial support and skills training are available to those aged 18 and over who are under formal notice of redundancy, or have been made redundant or unemployed in the last 12 months, and those aged between 18-24 who are not in education, employment or training. This helps individuals overcome barriers to finding employment (Working Wales, No Date, b).
Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE)	This covers the cost of childcare, and helps individuals get support in preparing to start work through an advisor system. It also offers skill development opportunities (Working Wales, No Date, c).
I Can Work	Health and social care professionals can refer individuals into the service, and self-referrals are also accepted. It aims to support those experiencing mental ill-health to find work through face-to-face meetings with an employment specialist (RCS Wales, No Date).
The Age at Work Programme	Run by Age Cymru and Business in the Community Cymru, this programme works to support older workers in remaining in and returning to work. It also promotes the benefits of recruiting, training and retaining individuals aged 50 and over to employers (Age Cymru, 2019).

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