

Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

Summary report

Prepared by





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

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

socialcare.wales

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

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

wecare.wales



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Meeting our challenge

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

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

Two additional resources to support care employers and the sector:

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

Main report

Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

Main report

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

Main report

Social care and child care: attraction, recruitment and retention

A guide for employers

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

Summary report

Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care

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A resource for social care employers to personalise job-seeking

User personas toolkit

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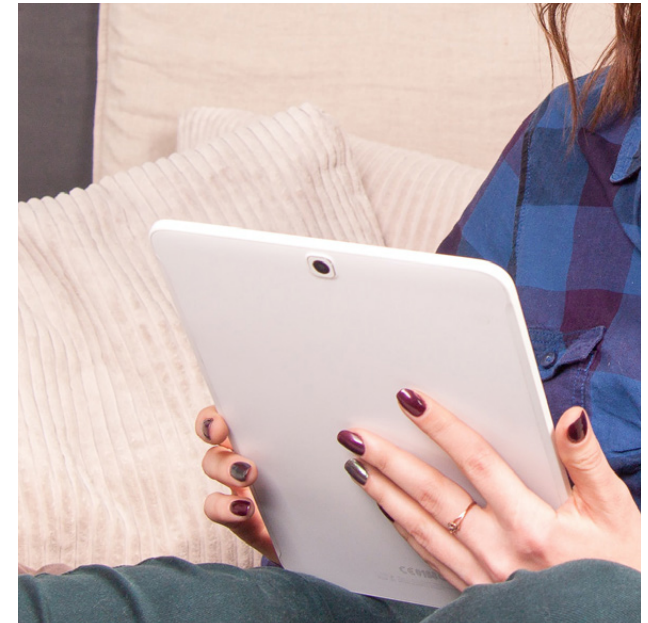
Introduction

This report provides information on job-seeking behaviours in the Welsh social 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, before setting out potential implications for care employers and Social Care Wales.

What challenges is the social care sector in Wales experiencing in relation to attraction and recruitment of their workforce?

The social care sector in Wales experiences challenges in attraction including a negative public perception, the view that care workers are undervalued, limited career progression, low pay, difficult conditions and a lack of diversity. Together, these factors reduce the appeal of applying for a job in care. Recruitment challenges include a decrease in available workforce following a post-Brexit decline in migrant workers seeking entry-level positions and competition from other sectors such as retail and hospitality who offer more additional benefits on top of typical terms of employment.



Job-seeking in the policy context

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

Social Care Wales supports workforce development and aims to boost attraction through WeCare Wales. Recent closures of Jobcentres 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.

What's in this report?

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?

To answer these questions, we explore why people work in care, why people are put off working in care, wider job-seeking behaviours, employer engagement with jobseekers, and bespoke solutions and recommendations for engaging jobseekers in care. User personas that present examples of job-seeking are in the appendix.

Job-seeking behaviours in social care

This 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.
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Why do people work in care?

Factors that motivate jobseekers to seek out opportunities in the care sector include:

- **Personal desires to care** – Some people are more inclined to care and support others and may be attracted to a sector that allows them to do this daily.
- **Personal desires to be in suitable employment (in terms of pay or working patterns)** – For jobseekers with other commitments, part-time and flexible options with on-the-job training are often desirable.
- **Lack of alternative opportunities** – The care sector may be more attractive to jobseekers who have limited alternative opportunities.

Why do people choose not to work in care?

People are less likely to want to work in care because of:

- **Low pay and difficult conditions** – wages in social care are low compared to work with similar or even lower entry requirements and responsibilities.
- **Lack of understanding about the roles** – negative public perception, assumptions that work is unskilled, and unclear job titles create confusion.
- **Changing entry requirements** – barriers to entering the social care sector are becoming increasingly complex.
- **Lack of diversity in the sector** – not all applicants can see themselves in the current workforce.
- **Career progression opportunities** – few opportunities for people to advance beyond a senior care worker position but a range of opportunities at lower levels.

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?

Jobseekers' perceptions of work are influenced by both internal (personal) factors and external (societal) factors. Motivations in job-seeking behaviour are influenced by both. The theory of planned behaviour explains how people are more likely to engage in job seeking behaviours if they have a positive attitude towards it, believe they have control over it, and think that others find it socially acceptable. Further, enjoying work and finding work meaningful make people more likely to stay in a job.

Key elements that make work meaningful for jobseekers include career progression opportunities, ability to leave work at work, pay and incentives, flexibility of roles, ability for work to support other desires, and stimulating work and social connections.

How do jobseekers find work?

Jobseekers utilise a range of social media platforms, job-seeking organisations, and personal networks to find work. Effective social media marketing and expansion of the regional WeCare Ambassador programme and Regional Care Career Connectors will be a powerful tool to improve the effectiveness of recruitment in the social care.

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 in creating a relationship between the job-seeking community and employers. This includes responding to negative feedback.

Job advertisements

Employers engage with jobseekers through a range of advertising methods. However, job adverts are often phrased in terms of what the employer wants rather than what the employee will get. Job adverts in social care typically place more emphasis on listing responsibilities than job adverts in the retail and hospitality sector, which focus more on the benefits available to the employee.

Responding to negativity

Public perception is important to organisations when seeking to attract and retain workers. When dealing with responses to job posts on social media, employers use different approaches. Direct responses maintain a present and trusted relationship but must be carefully phrased to avoid facilitating further negativity. Other approaches include directing people to private and formal complaints processes, removing negativity from public view.

Forms of engagement

Employers engage with jobseekers in a variety of ways including through online platforms, in person engagement events, job fayres and job advertisements. Technology developments are enabling new engagement methods, such as using virtual reality to offer jobseekers an opportunity to immerse themselves in the role before they apply. This increases understanding of the role and its value, potentially improving recruitment outcomes.

Recommendations

This section sets out recommendations to support jobseekers – for Social Care Wales, for employers, and for the Welsh Government.

Recommendations for care employers

Employers should consider more responsive, creative recruitment strategies.

- 1 Meet jobseekers where they are and win trust (by using the same spaces in which jobseekers are already present, such as social media and online forums).
 - 2 Increase online engagement with jobseekers.
 - 3 Maintain in-person engagement with jobseekers.
 - 4 Master the art of job descriptions with bespoke adverts that include transferrable skills.
 - 5 Maintain/grow relationships with third sector organisations, skills providers, job clubs, local employment agencies, Regional Connectors and Care Ambassadors.
 - 6 Build status, value and punctuality into the job application process.
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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.
 - 2 Adopt human-centred design: transfer personalised care practices to personalised –job-seeking support.
 - 3 Scale up ambassadors and regional connectors to create further positive impacts.
 - 4 Maintain and grow relationships with third sector organisations, skills providers, job clubs and local employment agencies.
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The need for system change

The social care sector, government and education sector must work together across four priority areas if long-lasting, transformative change is to be achieved.

- 1 Clear and strong messaging that supports social care as a national priority
 - 2 Invest in innovation to promote care.
 - 3 Support public sector mutuals (employee-owned or controlled structures).
 - 4 Create new approaches to training.
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Conclusion

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

Across social care, 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, through to Social Care Wales and the 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.

Prepared by



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