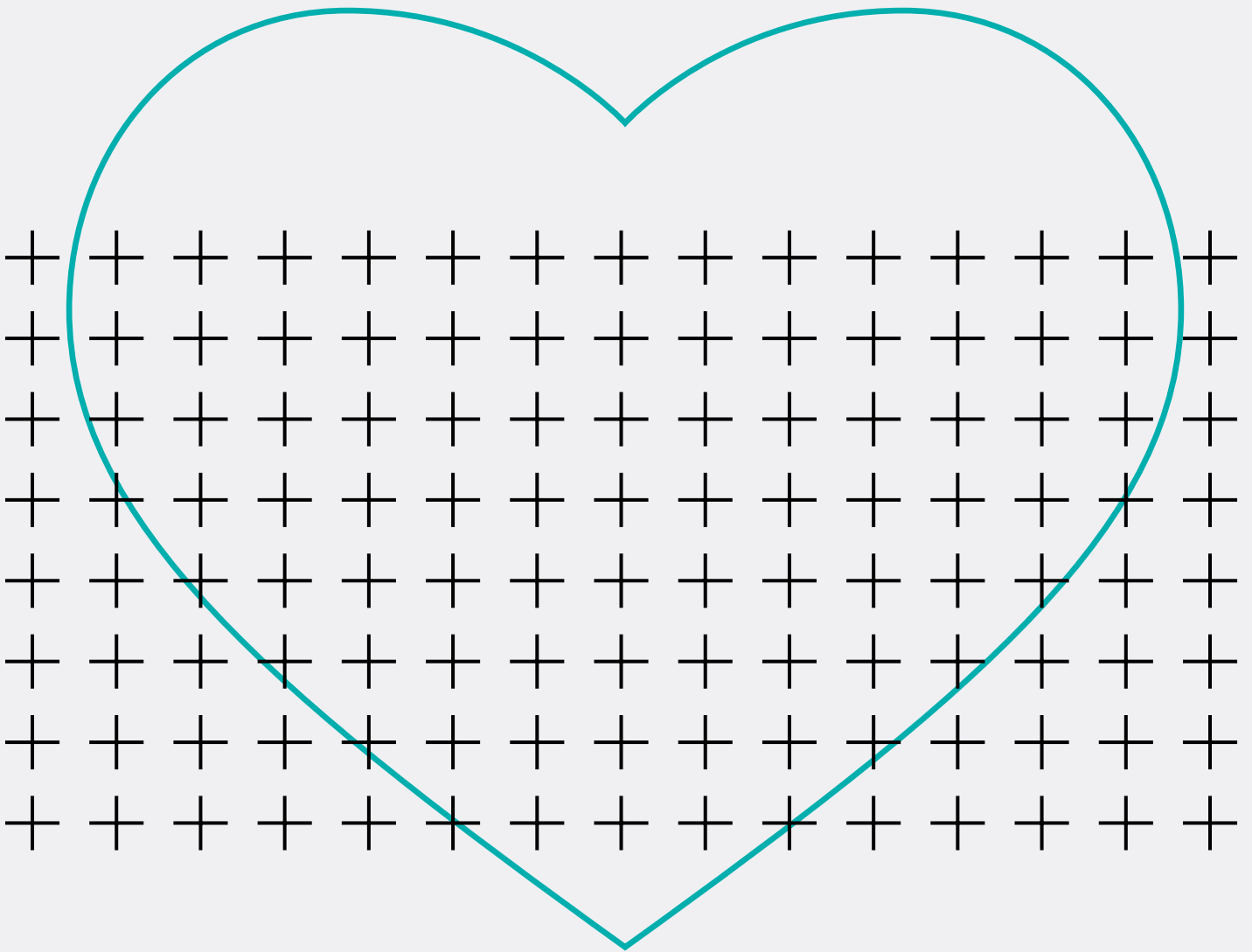


# The Open University: The path forward for social care in England





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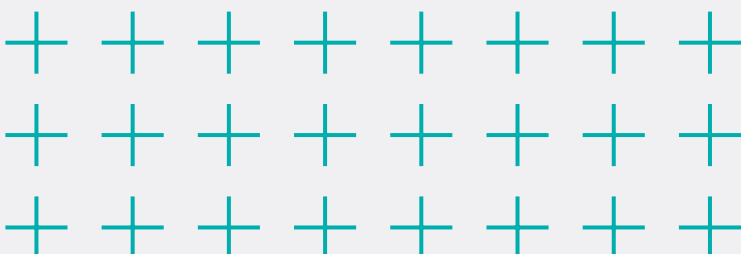
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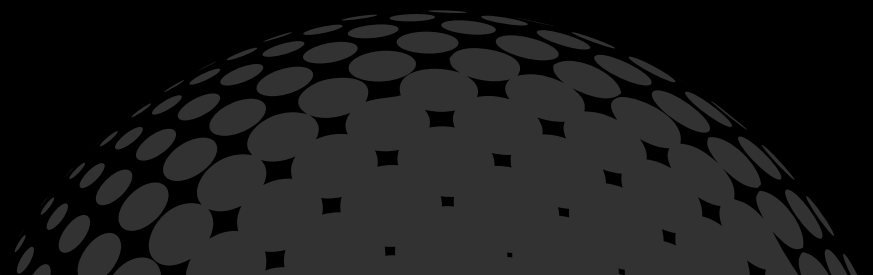


# Introduction.

**As coronavirus spread through the UK in spring 2020, adult social care was hit particularly hard.**

While NHS staff were celebrated from the onset of the pandemic, the heavy toll of the virus within care homes drew a rare focus onto overstretched workers risking their lives in social care settings – in many cases for little more than the national

minimum wage. Amid fears the sector would be unable to cope with the additional strain of COVID-19, the government introduced emergency legislation so-called ‘easements’ of duties under the Care Act 2014 to assess, develop and





review care plans, carry out financial assessments and meet needs – though these have been sparingly used to date.

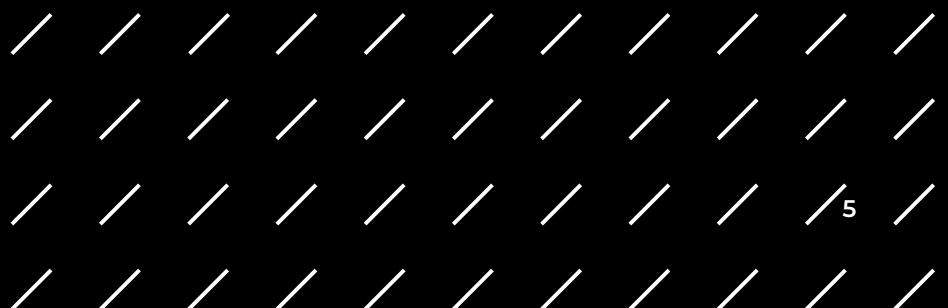
While the crisis brought fresh focus of an overburdened system and of the vital roles that people working in social care perform, workforce challenges across the broader sector, including within adult social work teams, are longstanding.

This new report from The Open University examines the issues confronting adult social care (including workforce professionalisation) and makes recommendations to resolve

them. It does so through a review of available literature from around the UK, examining the circumstances and approaches of the four nations. We also survey 500 English leaders and managers – based in every region and working for public, voluntary and private-sector organisations delivering social care services, and within local authority social work teams – in order to gauge individuals' experiences, hopes and fears.

As COVID-19 exerts new stresses on the wider operating environment, accelerating ongoing trends and rapidly

reshaping how some teams work, we look at whether and how employers' needs are changing. With the UK's post-Brexit transition period out of European Union structures concluding as 2021 arrives, we also consider how the changing landscape around immigration might affect workforce skills and capacity. Finally, we consider a range of potential paths forward that employers and educational providers, in partnership with public-sector funders and commissioners, could take to help adult social care build back strongly from a period of unprecedented turbulence and uncertainty.



# Forewords.



**Public services have been at the frontline of the response to coronavirus, and it's no secret that the severity of the pandemic has tested the preparedness and resilience of adult social care.**

Despite often being seen as 'second-fiddle' to the NHS in terms of public planning and financing, the response of social care and social work to the challenges of the pandemic have been widely heralded. There has been praise for the professionalism with which staff have carried out duties in extremely difficult circumstances, in which many have contended with anxieties relating to inadequate personal protective equipment with many simultaneously losing colleagues and family to the virus. Some workers have found their duties changing and expanding because of practice evolving in response to protocols, or lack of national guidance. And many have had to stay away from friends and family, in an effort to protect loved ones from potential infection.

But while social care workers have been able to successfully respond to the challenges of the pandemic, the onset of the virus's second and potentially third waves has prompted widespread warnings about the exhaustion many staff are feeling, and the risk of increasing levels of burnout when attrition is already high.

Indeed, while the crisis brought fresh scrutiny on the sector, workforce challenges across the broader sector are longstanding. Long-term budget cuts, under investment

compared to the NHS, and inappropriate commissioning processes, have resulted in a sector facing unprecedented pressure at a time when its purpose is increasingly valued by people with lived experiences of relying on its services and carers. As a result, many tens of thousands of posts lie vacant, while some areas of social care contend with an annual turnover of staff in excess of **40%**.

This report looks at the challenges that adult social care services are facing and considers closely how the sector can work to attract and retain staff in increasingly difficult circumstances. We look at the skills required for the workforce today, the potential impact of Brexit, and how providers can protect against knowledge gaps and attrition.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether the coronavirus pandemic will eventually act as a catalyst for the major changes the sector desperately needs, or indeed whether the proposed Green Paper on long term funding will be published within this Parliamentary term. 2020 has been an unprecedented year, which has undoubtedly brought into sharp focus the issues and challenges faced by the sector and offers us all a chance to respond. And, as this report shows, the onus is on us all - educators, governments, private companies and individuals - to protect and boost this crucial sector.

**Professor Samantha Baron**

**Head of School for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care**

**The Open University**



**This report is a timely overview of the current state of social care, and in particular a welcome statement on the long-term and current factors that are impacting the social care workforce.**

Within a mixed economy of care, a coalescence of decades of under investment, outdated service commissioning models and roles and the current pandemic, brings sharp focus on the need for social care reform.

The findings lucidly draw attention to what this means for social care providers; the questions we ask, the things we see as important, what challenges us and where we see opportunities for transformation.

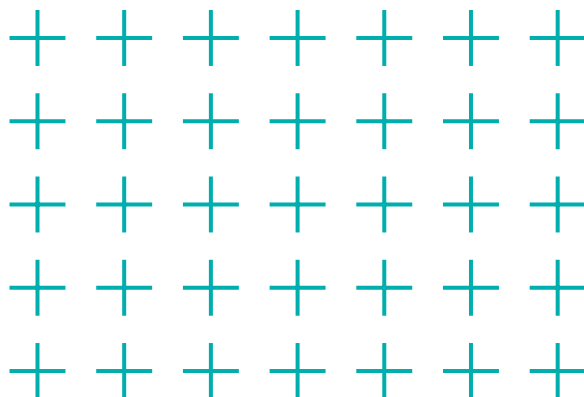
As CEO of the Registered Care Providers' Association, I recognise much within these research findings. They reflect what social care providers tell me every day. The anxiety over recruitment, the need for an adaptable and flexible workforce, the challenge in meeting the real cost of care. One significant challenge highlighted in these findings and one that offers great opportunity, is the need for learning and development to enable the workforce to adapt and change.

This is necessary to respond to changes in the way services are commissioned by the state and purchased by individuals. The pandemic has increased this pace of change and providers tell me the social care world will never be the same again.

Over the next five years, one element of a strategy to help social care providers in managing change will be new and creative training and education pathways to make it more compelling for people to choose social care as a career. This may include an alignment of England with other UK countries in the regulation of the workforce. It should certainly include a change in the way we talk about social care within our professional education sector and indeed society. This would involve co-production between educators, workforce and people with lived experience, in the development and delivery of training and education in human services.

## **Simon Blackburn**

**Chief Executive Officer  
Registered Care Providers' Association**









# Executive summary.

The Open University's exclusive survey of 500 leaders and managers across England's adult social care sector, including 125 from social work teams, suggests the coronavirus pandemic has had some impact on recruitment, increasing the supply of applicants as the wider job market becomes more competitive.

But the ongoing financial uncertainty the sector faces, which COVID-19 has prolonged for at least another year, leaves many fearful of their ability to source the right staff and to keep posts in their organisations filled as the pandemic begins to subside.



## We found:

### Most organisations believe they have enough staff – for now.

→ Across the social care sector, **76%** of respondents said they were sufficiently staffed, with a third (**34%**) saying they had too many staff for their current workload.

→ This was despite COVID-19 having increased workloads and depleted staff through sickness and self-isolation – with majorities of respondents from key sub-sectors agreeing that

their supply of potential recruits has improved during a difficult period in which jobseekers in general have fewer options available to them.

# 76%

believe they are sufficiently staffed.



## Despite optimism about numbers, concerns about skills shortages persist.

- Nearly half (**44%**) of all respondents said they had only the bare minimum of skills to operate, or lacked vital skills to run their operations successfully.
- This deficit was most pronounced within third-sector care providers (**57%**) and least within those

delivering private-sector residential care (**32%**).

# 44%

of all respondents said they had only the bare minimum of skills to operate.

## COVID-19 has changed working practices, making flexibility a priority, but has not shifted longer-term perceptions of where skills gaps lie.

- Two-thirds (**67%**) of respondents said the coronavirus pandemic had changed the way their organisation has to operate, with an identical proportion (**67%**) saying that it had changed the type of skills required.

# 67%

of respondents said COVID-19 has changed the way they operate.

- Almost six in 10 (**59%**) respondents agreed that the huge, unforeseen, shake-up caused by COVID-19 provided a catalyst for development in adult social care - which might invoke more efficient and effective ways of working.
- Despite this, when asked about skills gaps within their organisations, respondents mostly gave similar responses when comparing the long-term context and the new operating environment brought about by the pandemic. Asked about their current

circumstances, large minorities of respondents cited digital (**36%**), leadership (**33%**), technical – where employees require a specialised skill to complete a specific task – (**31%**) and managerial (**30%**) skills as key areas of concern.

- Half of respondents (**51%**) listed attracting candidates with ready-made skills who can fill gaps quickly as a recruitment priority.
- A similar proportion (**46%**) said they were looking for recruits who are capable of adapting to future challenges.

## Most managers are worried about social care's enduring challenges squeezing their future access to the staff they need.

→ Constraint of the social care workforce at a structural level because of a lack of progression pathways, which have been hampered across many social care employers by constraints on training as well as flat pay structures post-national living wage, was a key concern for **58%** of respondents when asked about their fears over the next 12 months.

→ Nearly as many were worried about being unable to hang onto staff as the pandemic recedes over the coming year (**56%**), about skills gaps continuing to affect their workforce (**54%**), and about being able to replenish teams with the right people (**51%**).

→ With post-Brexit immigration rules set to cut off routes for many non-UK applicants into jobs, a similar proportion of respondents (**54%**) were worried the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) will make it harder for them to source the skilled employees necessary to sustain their organisation.

# 54%

were worried the UK's exit from the EU will make it harder for them to source skilled employees.



The path forward for social care in England

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Open University called upon the sector expertise of freelance journalist Alex Turner to help shape the planning and execution of this report. Alex worked closely with Professor Samantha Baron, the OU's Head of School – Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, to bring together the research, analysis and recommendations featured throughout this piece of work.



## Many leaders believe sustainable funding and structured career development are needed to maintain and rebuild the sector.

- Asked about what big-picture changes would be most beneficial for the social care workforce, a significant minority of respondents (**42%**) highlighted the availability of defined career development – including recognised qualifications.
- A slightly smaller proportion (**34%**) cited the increased availability of pathways, such as those provided by the recently created degree apprenticeships, between

social care and qualified social work roles.

- Unsurprisingly, many respondents (**40%**) noted the importance of a sustainable funding settlement for social care from central government, without which most experts agree the sector's systemic problems will remain unresolved.
- A similar number (**39%**) said they believed that more constructive relationships

between public, private and third-sector organisations would benefit the future of the sector.

# 42%

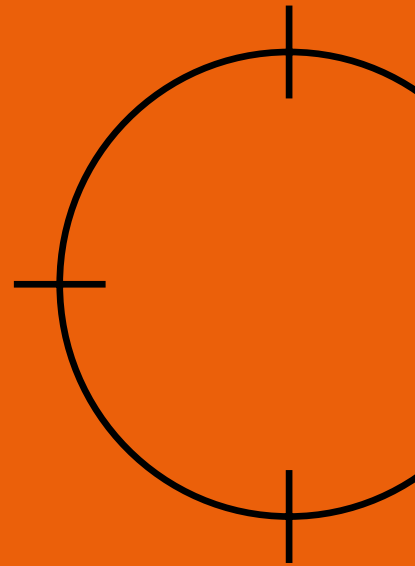
said a defined career would be beneficial for the social care workforce.



The path forward for social care in England



# A sector under stress.



**Adult social care has been estimated as providing employment for more than 1 in 20 of the UK's working population.**

A 2018 report put the number of jobs in the four UK nations across the sprawling and fragmented sector, which provides help and support to a complex range of individuals, including older people, and those with physical or learning disabilities or other needs, as high as 2.6 million<sup>1</sup>.

The unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic have drawn recent focus towards social care – both in relation to the second-fiddle role it plays to the NHS in terms

of public appreciation, and regarding the overstretched conditions within which dedicated staff work – and, this year, risk their lives. Social care is not usually so prominent in the media as it has been of late, particularly during the spring when the crisis being caused by COVID-19 within the UK's care homes became apparent. Yet its challenges – with more than 120,000 jobs sitting vacant in England alone<sup>2</sup> – have long been spelled out in government reports and academic studies.

<sup>1</sup> Skills for Care and Development (2018) The Economic Value of the Adult Social Care sector – UK

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Development Committee (2020) Social care: funding and workforce

# Turnover and vacancies in social care.

**In October, Skills for Care, the strategic body for workforce development in adult social care in England, put the turnover rate of directly employed staff across the sector during 2019-20 at 30.4%<sup>3</sup>.**

That rate has for the most part increased steadily over the past few years – by just over 10 percentage points since 2012-13.

While the other UK nations do not compile their workforce data in exactly comparable ways, similar pictures have been observed elsewhere. In Scotland for example, turnover has been estimated at more than **20%**, with a 2015 study finding rates of up to **30%** in some areas<sup>4</sup>.

The rate at which staff leave jobs is not consistent across the sector. For reasons explored further below, jobs with private and voluntary-sector providers – who are commissioned by public authorities to deliver the vast majority of direct UK residential and domiciliary (at-home) care services – have traditionally,

though not uniformly, seen the highest levels of turnover. Skills for Care's recent report found that in England, staff in the independent sector turned over at a rate of almost **34%** during 2019-20. That compares with **13%** among employees working directly for local authorities, who have historically enjoyed more favourable terms and conditions<sup>5</sup>.

Across care worker roles, which provide adult social care's backbone and have some of the highest turnover, a committed core of longer-term staff is augmented by a more transient workforce that often includes younger people. Some studies have warned about risks for the sector arising as the more experienced staff leave, taking skills with them<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2019) The Implications of National and Local Labour Markets for the Social Care Workforce: Final Report

<sup>5</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Social Services Council (2017) Workforce skills report 2016-17

<sup>7</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>8</sup> COSLA and NHS Scotland (2019) An Integrated Health and Social Care Workforce Plan for Scotland

<sup>9</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England



Registered nurses perform another key role that experiences both steep turnover – of around **40%** in England – and a general shortage of applicants, despite rising rates of pay, with NHS jobs typically offering more attractive long-term options. Skills for Care reported vacancy rates among nurses in England as being above **12%** in 2019-20, for example<sup>7</sup>, while reports from north of the border over the past few years have also noted high levels of nursing vacancies among social care employers<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile

social workers, who deliver crucial services safeguarding people, planning their care and upholding their rights, are also in short supply in many areas, with more than **8%** of roles vacant in England during 2019-20<sup>9</sup>.

Levels of vacancy across the adult social care sector have been one factor in the diversity of the workforce, which has attracted many people from outside the UK – sometimes as a result of recruitment drives specifically aimed at meeting the needs of particular

communities. The ethnic diversity of staff has been seen as a strong positive attribute – which, as we explore later in this report, may be constrained by post-Brexit immigration rules. Below senior leadership level, however, both social care and social work have long struggled to attract men, who typically make up less than **20%** of teams. The lingering stigmatisation of caring roles as ‘women’s work’ means that shifting this gender split is likely to remain a tough challenge.



“

**Both social care and social work have long struggled to attract men, who typically make up less than 20% of teams.**



# Financial squeeze.

**Many of adult social care's recruitment and retention difficulties are inextricably linked to the structural financial pressures the sector faces.**

Across the UK, developing a funding model that is sustainable and fair to citizens – something that, a year ago, Boris Johnson became the latest English prime minister to promise progress on – has been a longstanding unsolved puzzle. Whilst the November Spending Review heralded yet further grants for the sector, the conundrum continues to

become harder as the UK's population ages, with many more people living longer with complex and chronic needs. The aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008-9 also saw brutal cuts inflicted during the last decade on the budgets of authorities delivering and commissioning adult social care services, further widening gaps between demand and expenditure.

In many parts of the UK, downward pressure has been exerted on commissioning budgets to the extent that independent-sector providers frequently hand back contracts with public bodies, which they say cannot be delivered at the rates on offer. Research suggests many are at risk of insolvency<sup>10</sup>. Among those staying in the market, the tight operating environment keeps wages low, with typical earnings as of 2016 being estimated as **48%** (England)<sup>11</sup>, **55%** (Northern Ireland)<sup>12</sup>, **56%** (Scotland)<sup>13</sup>, and **58%** (Wales) of national averages<sup>14</sup>. While most staff turnover takes place within the adult social care sector, there have been frequent reports of providers experiencing localised exodus of employees, especially younger ones, when opportunities in other sectors – notably retail – emerge that pay

similarly for work seen as less demanding.

The introduction of the National Living Wage in 2016 has had some impact in terms of raising the wage floor for care workers. But it has also had less beneficial knock-on effects, with employers – citing their budgets – flattening their wage hierarchies, meaning experienced staff in many cases earn just pennies more per hour than novice colleagues<sup>15</sup>. Research in 2020 found almost three-quarters of frontline care workers in England still earned below the 'real living wage' – an amount that will enable families to afford basics such as a car and an annual holiday<sup>16</sup>. The lack of reward discourages employees from developing themselves to attain more responsible senior roles, adding to disincentives such as employers failing to

invest in training, or making staff undertake it in their own time.

These factors have been cited as one reason why registered manager positions, which are seen as onerous and stressful, are some of the toughest for care providers to fill<sup>17</sup> – and further fuel turnover among employees who see limited opportunities to progress.

Whilst The Open University works with employers to ensure that staff are given the opportunities to grow, in something of a vicious cycle, this broader churn of staff also means employers' training spend tends to be disproportionately focused on inductions – a trend exacerbated by a lack of structured, transferable standards that individuals can carry between >



<sup>10</sup> Quarter of UK home care operators face going bust [www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-54987407](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-54987407)

<sup>11</sup> Skills for Care and Development (2018) The Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector – England

<sup>12</sup> Skills for Care and Development (2018) The Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector – Northern Ireland

<sup>13</sup> Skills for Care and Development (2018) The Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector – Scotland

<sup>14</sup> Skills for Care and Development (2018) The Economic Value of the Adult Social Care Sector – Wales

<sup>15</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>16</sup> Three-quarters of care workers in England were paid less than the real Living Wage on the eve of the pandemic [www.livingwage.org.uk/news/news-three-quarters-care-workers-paid-less-real-living-wage](http://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/news-three-quarters-care-workers-paid-less-real-living-wage)

<sup>17</sup> LaingBuisson (2020) Homecare and Supported Living UK Market Report – Third Edition

> employers. As we examine later in this report, the combination of all these factors has been fuelling a number of skills gaps within the care sector, amid a broader context in which workers are being expected to perform more specialised and advanced tasks. A workforce that is unevenly skilled and to greater and lesser degrees transient creates the risk of problems with the quality and continuity of care offered to people receiving services.

Social workers – the majority of whom are employed by public authorities – do not face comparable issues around low pay or job precarity. Nonetheless, they have been working within the same landscape of austerity and have endured a real-terms drop in pay of around **20%** since 2009-10, unions say<sup>18</sup>, as well as facing tightening constraints on the support they are able to offer people. In common with many roles across the economy, social workers have had to contend with the ‘intensification’ of their duties<sup>19</sup>, meaning they are expected to do more work in less time – inevitably leading to higher levels of stress.

Local authorities also compete with one another around financial and other incentives, with many heavily reliant on agency social workers, who can leave at short notice. These factors again potentially affect service users’ continuity of care and risk heaping extra pressure on the social workers who remain in post, fuelling the profession’s notorious burnout rate.



<sup>18</sup> Real social worker pay would be 22.5% down in a decade if ‘woeful’ offer were implemented, say unions [www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/02/07/social-worker-pay-22-5-decade-following-woeful-pay-offer-say-unions/](http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/02/07/social-worker-pay-22-5-decade-following-woeful-pay-offer-say-unions/)

<sup>19</sup> Social Care Workforce Research Unit (2018) Recruitment and retention in adult social care services



# 42%

of respondents to The Open University's research said that creating defined career development pathways, including universally recognised qualifications, would be beneficial for the future of the adult social care sector.

# 34%


of respondents called for more defined progression opportunities between social care and adult social work roles.

# Post-Brexit fears.



<sup>20</sup> LaingBuisson (2019) Care Homes for Older People UK Market Report – Thirtieth Edition

<sup>21</sup> Migration Advisory Committee (2020) A Points-Based System and Salary Thresholds for Immigration



The UK's exit from the European Union has since 2016, cast a fresh shadow over adult social care's operating environment. With many employers across all areas of the sector already experiencing high turnover, carrying hard-to-fill vacancies and recruiting staff from overseas, there is understandable fear that things will become even tougher as we move through 2021 and beyond.

It has been projected that the direct impact of non-UK EU nationals leaving the workforce is likely to be limited. Even so, studies have noted that years of uncertainty around Brexit have led to a fall in the value of sterling and therefore remittances that non-UK EU nationals can send home, acting as a disincentive for

people to stay working in the UK<sup>20</sup>.

There have though been repeated warnings as to the likelihood of post-Brexit immigration proposals increasing the pressures faced by adult social care, by restricting employers' access to non-UK workers. In January 2020, a report by independent government migration advisors said the measures – which introduce a points-based system for migrants based on being offered jobs earning at least £25,600, and deemed to meet a minimum skill level – could shrink the workforce by **2.9%**<sup>21</sup>. It added that fears over Brexit should not distract from the central influences of inadequate funding and low pay for workers on the sector's challenges.



Since then, criticism of the plans has grown across the sector. The condition on non-UK workers' minimum earnings will exclude all care workers – whose roles also do not meet the required skill level – and all but a tiny minority of more senior staff. The government rejected advice to designate senior care workers a 'shortage occupation', which would

have reduced the minimum earnings threshold for non-UK workers offered those jobs to £20,480, meaning most would qualify. Employers will, however, be able to recruit social workers and nurses from abroad under the new regime, both of which are already designated shortage occupations.

# 54%

of respondents to The Open University's survey said they are concerned about the impact of Brexit on their organisation's ability to source employees with the right attributes to sustain their organisation.



“

**It has been projected that the direct impact of non-UK EU nationals leaving the workforce is likely to be limited.**



# The impact of the pandemic.

<sup>22</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>23</sup> Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (2020) ADASS Autumn Survey 2020

<sup>24</sup> Office for National Statistics (2020) Labour market overview, UK: December 2020

<sup>25</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2020) Workforce burnout and resilience in the NHS and social care – written evidence submitted by United Kingdom Homecare Association

<sup>26</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence (2017) Building the future social care workforce: a scoping study into workforce readiness, recruitment and progression in the social care sector

**As mentioned previously, the past few months have drawn renewed attention to the challenges adult social care faces, as well as to the commitment of its workforce.**

But it remains to be seen whether the coronavirus pandemic will eventually act as a catalyst for the major changes the sector desperately needs.

There has been widespread praise for the professionalism with which staff have gone about their work in extremely difficult circumstances, in which many





# 59%

said that COVID-19 has provided the sector with a catalyst to examine how it works and to develop more efficient and effective ways of working in future.

# 56%

of respondents to The Open University's survey said they were worried about their ability to retain staff once the coronavirus pandemic begins to subside.

have contended with anxieties relating to inadequate personal protective equipment and some have lost colleagues to COVID-19. Some workers have found their duties changing and expanding because of practice evolving in response to protocols aimed at minimising infection risks.

Preliminary data collected by Skills for Care has shown that in England, staff turnover did not increase between March and August 2020. The sector-wide vacancy rate also fell to **7%**, from a pre-Covid figure of **8.6%**, with new starters also trending slightly younger than usual – perhaps reflecting the bleak overall state of the employment market<sup>22</sup>.

But with the onset of the virus's second wave, warnings have been sounded about the exhaustion many workers are feeling, and the risk of increasing

levels of burnout when attrition is already high. A survey of 100 councils across England by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services found sharp increases in requests for help from people being discharged from hospital, fleeing from domestic abuse, or losing regular support from unpaid, overburdened carers<sup>23</sup>.

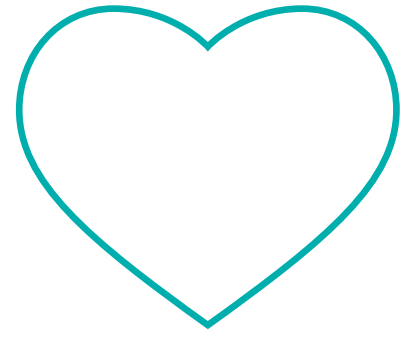
Data for the UK released in December 2020 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed there were 819,000 fewer employees on firms' payrolls in November than there had been at the start of the coronavirus outbreak, with redundancies reaching record levels between August and October<sup>24</sup>. Social care providers have acknowledged they may continue to be able to tap into an increased pool of applicants as a result of the prolonged economic slowdown the UK faces.

But they have pushed back on any suggestion that the situation offers easy solutions to adult social care's recruitment and retention challenges, given the lack of evidence as to whether candidates possess the right qualities to perform social care roles<sup>25</sup>. Previous studies have noted that low public awareness of the sector – and the lack of esteem it is afforded – mean that downturns are likely to fuel increases in speculative applications from people who have little idea of what jobs involve<sup>26</sup>. If large numbers of seasoned staff leave the workforce because of fatigue induced by the pandemic, finding long-term replacements will be no easy task.





# Workforce development and social care reform in the four UK nations.



## Northern Ireland

→ The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), established in 2001, registers and regulates workers across the sector, including setting standards of conduct and practice, and supporting the learning and development of the workforce. Northern Ireland was the first of the four nations to introduce compulsory registration; while it is a prerequisite for individuals carrying out social care roles, it is based on place of work rather than on qualification. Everyone entering the social care workforce must, though, complete an NISCC-approved induction module within six months

of starting work, as must those changing roles or employers<sup>27</sup>.

→ Northern Ireland completed the registration of its workforce by 2018. An evaluation of the impact of registration and professional standards, carried out in 2019, found almost three-quarters **73%** of employers believed their introduction had helped drive service improvements. Additionally two-thirds of workers said that professional standards gave them more confidence in their work<sup>28</sup>. Introducing mandatory qualifications for social care staff remains a long-term ambition.

→ Northern Ireland is nominally the only one of the four nations with a fully integrated structure in charge of health and social care. But progress towards levelling the playing field between the two sectors, and updating legislation governing social care, has been hindered by the collapse of political power-sharing within the country's devolved government for three years from 2017<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Dr Lydia Hayes, Dr Eleanor Johnson, Alison Tarrant (2019) Professionalisation at work in adult social care: report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

<sup>28</sup> Department of Health (2019) Measuring the impact of workforce registration and professional standards on the quality of social care services in Northern Ireland

## England

→ Uniquely among the four nations of the UK, England has no professional body with responsibility for registering the wider social care workforce. Within adult social care, the exceptions are nurses, occupational therapists and social workers, who register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Health and Care Professions Council and Social Work England respectively.

→ Mandatory registration, which would help to forge a common identity among workers as well as ensuring compliance with standards, is seen as a move that could improve the social care's reputation and pave the way for structured development. But there are concerns over the costs of implementing such a scheme across England's vast and complicated sector<sup>30</sup>, and that a requirement to register could put off some potential recruits.

→ It has been estimated that **90%** of social care workers in England have undergone some form of induction<sup>31</sup>, with **69%** of starters since 2015 engaging with the Care Certificate, a 12-week programme aimed at standardising introductory training in adult social care<sup>32</sup>. The Care Certificate is not though a legal requirement, nor is it accredited as a qualification in its own right, and there has been criticism

of the consistency of its application – and therefore its transferability – across the sector. At least half of social care employees in England are thought to have no occupationally relevant qualification.

→ In 2018, Skills for Care signed off on new social work degree apprenticeships, funded by a levy on employers, which are now offered by The Open University and other higher education institutions. These are intended to enable social care support staff to progress into social work positions and are seen by many local authorities as an appealing way to 'home-grow' staff.

→ A planned green paper for wider social care reform, promised in 2017, has been long delayed. In autumn 2020, the House of Commons health and social care select committee said that establishing a clear career path for staff, with substantial training opportunities, must be a priority. MPs added that this should be about improving the professional recognition of social care staff, rather than simply providing a route via which they could access better paying roles within the NHS<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Nuffield Trust (2019) Change or collapse: Lessons from the drive to reform health and social care in Northern Ireland

<sup>30</sup> What does the social care workforce look like across the four countries? [www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/what-does-the-social-care-workforce-look-like-across-the-four-countries#key-points](http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/what-does-the-social-care-workforce-look-like-across-the-four-countries#key-points)

<sup>31</sup> Dr Lydia Hayes, Dr Eleanor Johnson, Alison Tarrant (2019) Professionalisation at work in adult social care: report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

<sup>32</sup> Skills for Care (2020) The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England

<sup>33</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2020) Social care: funding and workforce



## Wales

- Social Care Wales, founded in 2017, is responsible for regulation, workforce development and service improvement relating to Welsh social care providers. Diverging from Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Regulation and Inspection of the Social Care Act (Wales) (2016), under which the body was established, creates a legal definition of a social care worker that is based on the work they carry out rather than the setting in which they do so<sup>34</sup>.
- Care workers who are required to register must also complete an induction process that is standardised

- across health and social care services. Social Care Wales' register is also designed to enable access for workers to additional training and development resources.
- The workforce is still in the process of becoming registered, with domiciliary care workers being required to join from 2020 and residential care workers only from 2022, meaning the benefits of the scheme are yet to be assessed. Some concerns have been voiced that forcing existing workers to meet new standards could lead to some leaving their jobs<sup>35</sup>.

- In 2018, the Welsh Government published a plan setting out its aspirations for a “seamless” approach to health and social care<sup>36</sup>. This called for an increase in resources devoted to supporting workforce development, with a focus both on skills and employee wellbeing.

<sup>34</sup> What does the social care workforce look like across the four countries? [www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/what-does-the-social-care-workforce-look-like-across-the-four-countries#key-points](http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/news-item/what-does-the-social-care-workforce-look-like-across-the-four-countries#key-points)

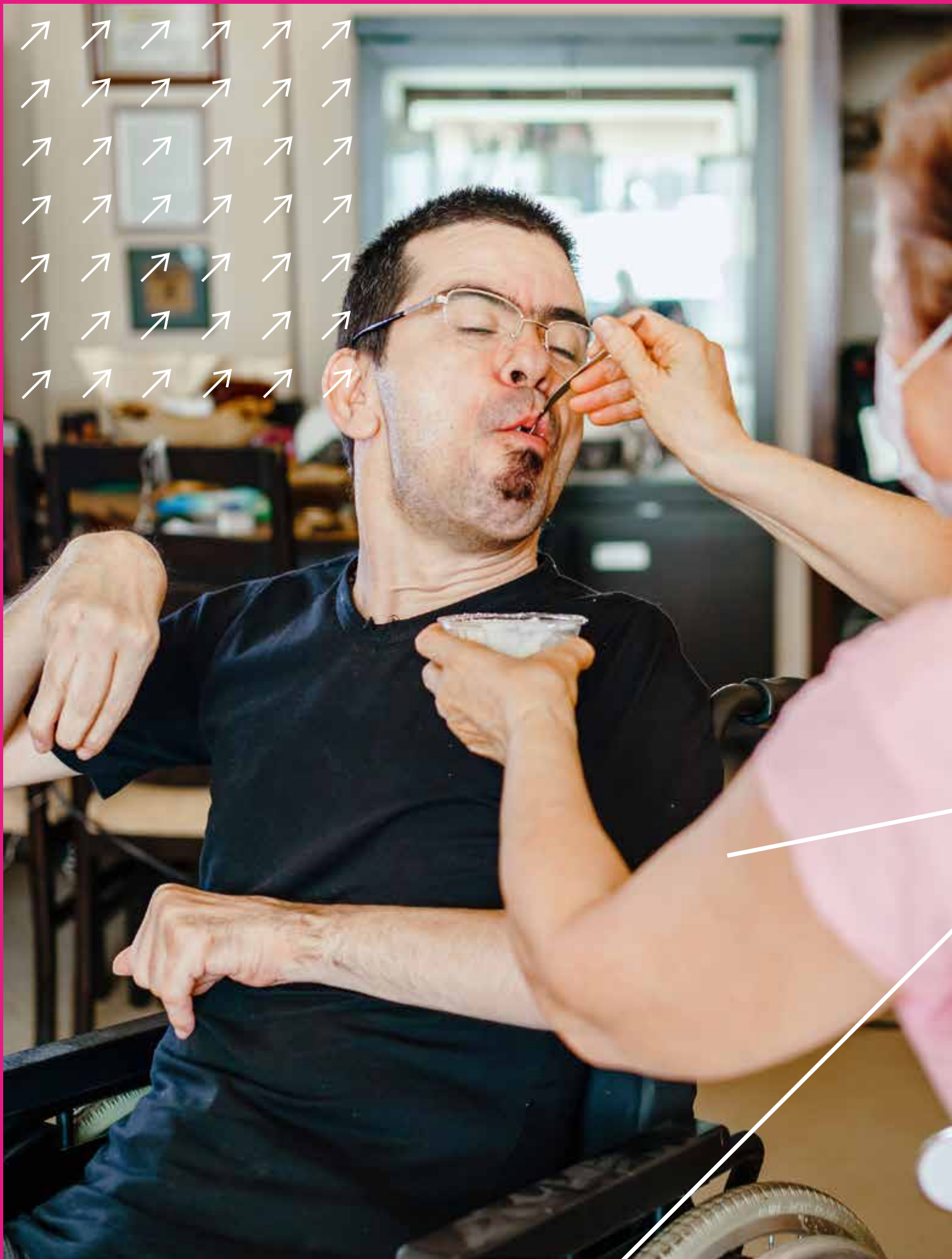
## Scotland

- Like Northern Ireland, Scotland has implemented a compulsory, place-based system of registration, aimed at fostering a strong professional identity and building skills across the sector. In most cases employees must complete their registration within six months of entering the workforce. There is no standardised national induction programme, although employers are expected to provide good-quality introductory training.
- Registered workers are expected to undertake relevant learning to maintain and build their skills, and are required to attain the appropriate qualification for their role within five years of registration. Most qualifications required for registration are Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) assessing individuals' ability to deliver their role, with apprenticeships being one means via which training is provided.
- In 2019, Scotland set in motion an ambitious programme of social care reform, focused on co-produced services and a human rights-based approach. It references the importance of workers feeling respected, valued and empowered. An independent review, which is due to report in early 2021, is also investigating how a national approach to social care can be developed – including whether a national care service is a feasible option.



<sup>35</sup> Dr Lydia Hayes, Dr Eleanor Johnson, Alison Tarrant (2019) Professionalisation at work in adult social care: report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

<sup>36</sup> Welsh Government (2018) A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care







# Assessing skills gaps in social care.

While the four nations are pursuing different paths, at different speeds, in relation to adult social care, employers see recruiting and retaining applicants with the right attributes as one of their most significant challenges, both now and in the future.

The nature and extent of skills gaps within the adult social care workforce, and of skills shortages among potential recruits not yet in the sector, has been the subject of debate. The historic lack of consistent, recognised frameworks for development mean skill levels among the workforce cannot not simply be mapped onto qualifications held by individuals. Indeed, some reports have stressed the need to recognise existing, undisclosed skills held by people working within adult social care that may be unrecognised and under-used<sup>37</sup>.

Additionally, moves by employers towards recruitment based on applicants' values speak to the crucial importance of inherent care and empathy, rather than capabilities that can be set out by ticking boxes, to being good at caring roles.

Taking into account both pre-coronavirus assessments of the workforce, and the changes within the sector that the pandemic has accelerated, available literature highlights a number of key areas in which employers are likely to have needs as they look to the future.

<sup>37</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Care (2019) Elevation, Registration & Standardisation: The Professionalisation of Social Care Workers

# 01

## CORE TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Studies have highlighted the need within social care for what have been described as core, transferable employability skills<sup>38</sup>, which some have said are not always as prevalent as they should be.

These include competencies in literacy and numeracy, language and communication, record-keeping, problem-solving, and

team and partnership working – many of which are vital to workers being able to thrive in stressful environments, and to build positive relationships with others.

A key 2019 report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care into the professionalisation of staff, which took a UK-wide perspective,

argued that “**the basic skills needs of the care workforce must be addressed with sensitivity and urgency**”. Doing so, it said, was necessary to support training requirements set out in regulations and to overcome a significant potential barrier to successful registration of staff<sup>39</sup>.

# 02

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

<sup>38</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence (2017) Building the future social care workforce: a scoping study into workforce readiness, recruitment and progression in the social care sector

<sup>39</sup> Dr Lydia Hayes, Dr Eleanor Johnson, Alison Tarrant (2019) Professionalisation at work in adult social care: report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

<sup>40</sup> COSLA and NHS Scotland (2019) An Integrated Health and Social Care Workforce Plan for Scotland

<sup>41</sup> Care Quality Commission (2020) The state of health care and adult social care in England 2019/20

**As discussed in the previous section, the constraints on social care pay and development opportunities, especially within independent-sector organisations, have tended to discourage individuals from pursuing more responsible – and stressful – roles. Registered managers are consistently one of the hardest-to-fill positions.**

Reports by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) have highlighted shortages among the workforce of a range of leadership skills, including motivating others, conflict

management and assertiveness. This deficit is being tackled via Project Lift, an integrated scheme that aims to develop future leaders across health and social care<sup>40</sup>. In England meanwhile, there have been calls to adopt a transferable leadership development model in the adult social care sector. The annual State of Care report by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) emphasised the importance of effective leadership, noting its impact on staff wellbeing during the heightened pressure brought by the pandemic<sup>41</sup>.



# 03

## CLINICAL AND CONDITION-SPECIFIC SKILLS

**Given the demographic changes in the UK which has led to an ageing population, it is clear that care workers need a better understanding of specific medical conditions.**

Almost a decade ago, the Transforming Your Care review in Northern Ireland noted the importance of workers being better-trained around

conditions common among older service users, such as dementia and strokes<sup>42</sup>.

That perspective has since been echoed in numerous other reports. Concerns have been aired that the skills of care staff are not keeping pace with the complex needs of ageing citizens – especially within domiciliary care, where

<sup>42</sup> Department of Health (2011) Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland

<sup>43</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence (2017) Building the future social care workforce: a scoping study into workforce readiness, recruitment and progression in the social care sector

tightening eligibility criteria mean the average service user's needs have grown more acute<sup>43</sup>. Besides supporting people with cognitive and sensory impairments, workers may need to be able to manage medication regimes, assist with catheters and stomas, and deliver end-of-life care.





# 04

## PERSON-CENTRED CARE

**Moves towards the personalisation of care across the UK nations have meant a shift – and a step up – in terms of what is expected from people working in adult social care.**

Rather than simply performing tasks based on an assessment of need, workers at all levels are expected to be adept at shaping services around people they support, enabling them to live more independently and to help themselves.

Changes related to personalisation do not simply

affect the manner in which workers deliver care to the individuals they work with. In Wales, for example, care staff are expected to understand reablement approaches to the provision of services and to understand how these approaches are delivered in practice<sup>44</sup>. Studies have also noted that in residential settings, there is an increasing requirement on care workers having the skills to help people they live with remain active and partake in exercise<sup>45</sup>.

# 05

## DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY

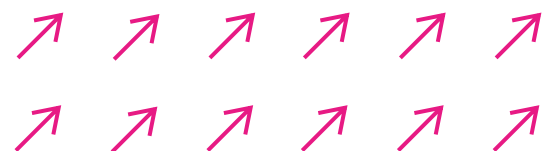
**The technological demands placed on social care staff go well beyond being able to perform basic administrative IT tasks – although these remain crucial and some reports have raised concerns around the consistency of workers' capabilities.**

The expansion of domiciliary care inevitably means more workers operating remotely and autonomously, and relying to a greater extent on mobile technology than peers in

residential settings, where paper record-keeping has been more common. Meanwhile assistive technology is increasingly prevalent across many care contexts, presenting staff with a growing array of devices and apps they need to be comfortable using.

One of the main stories of the pandemic is of course the way in which it has accelerated shifts towards virtual means of interaction, with social care being no exception. There has

been deserved praise for how individuals and organisations have managed this adaptation during highly stressful circumstances<sup>46</sup>. Yet studies have also highlighted issues around variable digital literacy within the workforce – at all levels – and the need for investment to help employees and employers alike navigate operational changes and ensure service users' voices are heard, even if they are not seen face-to-face<sup>47</sup>.

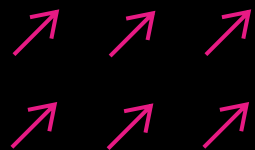


# 36%

of respondents to The Open University's survey cited digital capabilities when asked about skills gaps within their organisation.

# 33%

of respondents mentioned senior leadership skills, including around decision-making, with...



# 30%

describing the need for operational management abilities such as team-leading.

# 31%

said their employer faced a skills gap around technical and operational skills, such as those relating to being able to perform specialised tasks – something that is increasingly expected of social care staff.

<sup>44</sup> Dr Lydia Hayes, Dr Eleanor Johnson, Alison Tarrant (2019) Professionalisation at work in adult social care: report to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

<sup>45</sup> Scottish Social Services Council (2017) Workforce skills report 2016-17

<sup>46</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence (2020) Beyond COVID: New thinking on the future of adult social care

<sup>47</sup> Institute of Public Care (2020) The Impact of Technology in Adult Social Care Provider Services

# 28%

of survey respondents described a need for more caring and person-centred skills within their organisation.



# Survey analysis and discussion.

The Open University's survey canvassed opinion from 500 leaders and managers in England, clustered within four key employment groupings: private residential care homes, third-sector organisations delivering a range of functions, local authority adult social work teams and other public-sector social care services.

Despite the diverse range of roles and work settings represented by our survey group, their answers provided broad consensus as to the challenges faced by their sector. Here we

look in more detail at the data respondents provided around recruitment and retention, skills, their hopes and fears for the next 12 months and their views on the future of adult social care.







# Recruitment and retention.

# 6%

of respondents described  
their organisation as  
being understaffed.

Across the sector there were some consistent – and, on the face of it, positive – perspectives around staffing levels as of November 2020. Just **6%** of respondents described their organisation as being understaffed, with private care homes reporting the lowest levels, at **3%**, compared with **7-8%** among participants working in all other sub-sectors.

The report did uncover some geographical discrepancies when it comes to staffing, with employers in Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West suffering more acutely than the national average, with **17%** and **15%** reporting shortages respectively.



Just over three-quarters (**76%**) said they either had too many staff for their current workload or were well-enough staffed that a few absences would not cause issues. Correlating with the drop in demand for residential settings seen during the pandemic – which has accelerated trends towards care in the home – managers working within private care homes were by some distance the most likely to report a glut of workers, with **48%** saying they were excessively staffed for their November 2020 workload. That was nearly double the proportion (**25%**) among voluntary-sector providers, and just above (**31%**) across all public-sector employers. Nonetheless, more than **70%** of survey participants from the voluntary and public sectors said they had at least sufficient staff for their current needs.

The responses came despite almost two-thirds (**64%**) of providers from across the spectrum agreeing that coronavirus had increased need for their services. Meanwhile a similar proportion (**65%**) said it had affected their workforce by causing absences, with **21%** strongly agreeing that it had significantly impacted staffing capacity. It's worth noting that the survey did not explore in more depth whether these service pressures were ongoing or had spiked earlier in the year before subsiding.

straightforward to explain, given the longer-term recruitment and retention context discussed in previous sections of this report. However, a majority of people (**63%**) who answered the survey concurred that the pandemic, which has triggered a sharp economic downturn with increasing numbers of people looking for work, has increased their volume of applicants. This was broadly consistent across all the social care sub-sectors surveyed, with slightly more public-sector respondents (**66%**) saying they now had more potential recruits.

This does correlate with reports from some local authorities early in the pandemic that social workers were more likely than usual to be seeking the security of staff contracts rather than taking jobs through agencies. Nonetheless, the apparent optimism of these findings from an employer point of view should be treated with caution given the unprecedented circumstances in which the survey was conducted, the lack of accompanying qualitative data and the potential for things to change in the coming months.



**63%**

**concluded that the pandemic (triggering a sharp economic downturn) has increased their volume of applicants.**



# Skills.

**While there may now be more people considering social care jobs than there were prior to 2020, pessimism persists in many parts of the sector as to the ability of workers to do jobs well.**

In contrast to the clear majorities of leaders and managers who expressed confidence in their staffing numbers, only slightly above half of survey respondents (**56%**) said they had sufficient workforce skills and experience to operate efficiently and effectively. As with staffing, the North West appears most deprived in terms of access to skills, with over half

(**55%**) of employers saying their workforce only had the bare minimum of skills necessary to operate, or lacked vital skills necessary for their organisation to function effectively.

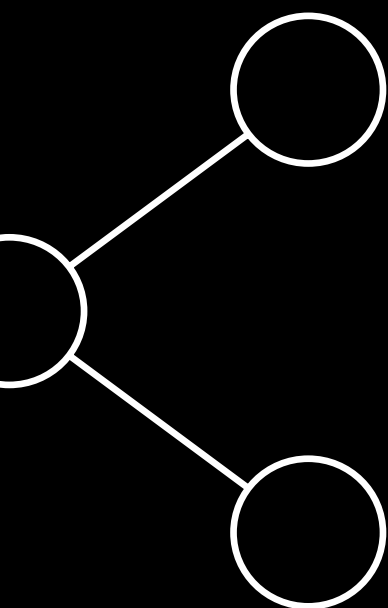
That proportion was boosted by the **68%** of individuals working for private residential care organisations who confirmed their skills capacity was adequate. By comparison, almost half of voluntary-sector managers (**47%**) said they were operating with the bare minimum of necessary skills, with **10%** saying they lacked skills crucial to being able to operate effectively. Worryingly, that latter figure was marginally higher among local authority social work and other public-sector social care teams, where **12%** and **11%** of respondents respectively said they were short of vital skills.

Asked to consider skills gaps in terms of the long-term context and the current pandemic operating environment, respondents gave largely similar answers – despite **67%** saying that coronavirus had altered how they operate, and an identical proportion saying it had changed the skills required by their organisation.



Across all providers, the proportion of those citing digital skills as a gap rose only slightly – from **33%** to **36%** – between pre- and post-Covid perspectives, underscoring how important such skills are but also perhaps demonstrating that employers have adapted well to more virtual modes of service delivery.

Potentially reflecting the acute stresses of the past few months, the proportion of respondents who said senior leadership skills were in short supply within their organisation rose five percentage points – to **33%** – between the long-term and pandemic viewpoints. Need was seen to





escalate particularly sharply among residential care (from **28%** to **38%**) and social work (from **21%** to **29%**) teams, when asked to consider leadership skills gaps before and after Covid, perhaps reflecting acute stresses the virus placed on respondents' organisations. Operations-level management skills on the other hand, though also an important shortage area, remained static – at **30%** of respondents – between the two vantage points.

Technical skills, which as discussed earlier have been playing an increasing part in

many social care roles, were identified as a deficit by a similar proportion (**31%**) of respondents, which again did not shift from the pre-Covid environment. Meanwhile the proportion of people answering the survey who mentioned shortages in the human, caring abilities needed to work well with service users and their families dropped very slightly from **30%** to **28%** – not a statistically significant movement for such a crucial capability gap.

Only a small majority of survey respondents...

**(56%)**

...said they had sufficient workforce skills and experience to operate efficiently and effectively.

Almost half of voluntary-sector managers...

**(47%)**

...said they were operating with the bare minimum of necessary skills, with...

**10%**

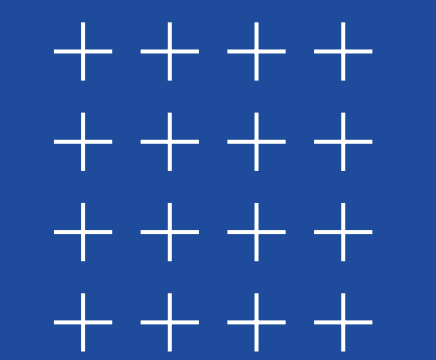
...revealing they lacked skills crucial to being able to operate effectively.

The importance of digital skills rose slightly - from...

**30%**

to **36%**

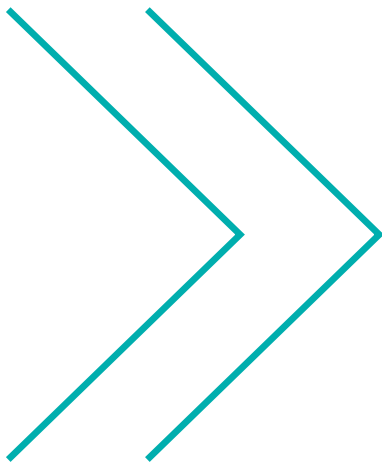
...between pre- and post-Covid perspectives - perhaps suggesting that employers have adapted well to more virtual modes of service delivery







# The year ahead.



**In the midst of continued uncertainty, with the pandemic ongoing and the government's recent spending review again deferring long-term social care funding decisions, respondents unsurprisingly said they would be looking for recruits with ready-made skills, who can fill gaps quickly – and will require less training investment – over the next 12 months.**

# 46%

said that employing individuals who can adapt to future challenges would be a pressing concern over the year ahead.

Just over half (**51%**) of leaders and managers identified taking on such candidates as a priority, with little differentiation between the various sector areas. Understandably, a similar proportion (**46%**) said that employing individuals who can adapt to future challenges would be a pressing concern over the year ahead.

Asked about other key recruitment considerations for 2021, almost four in 10 (**38%**) of respondents said they would be seeking to attract staff from the local area.

Meanwhile **40%** said increasing candidate diversity would be a priority for them – a proportion that rose to almost half (**48%**) among respondents from local authority social work teams.

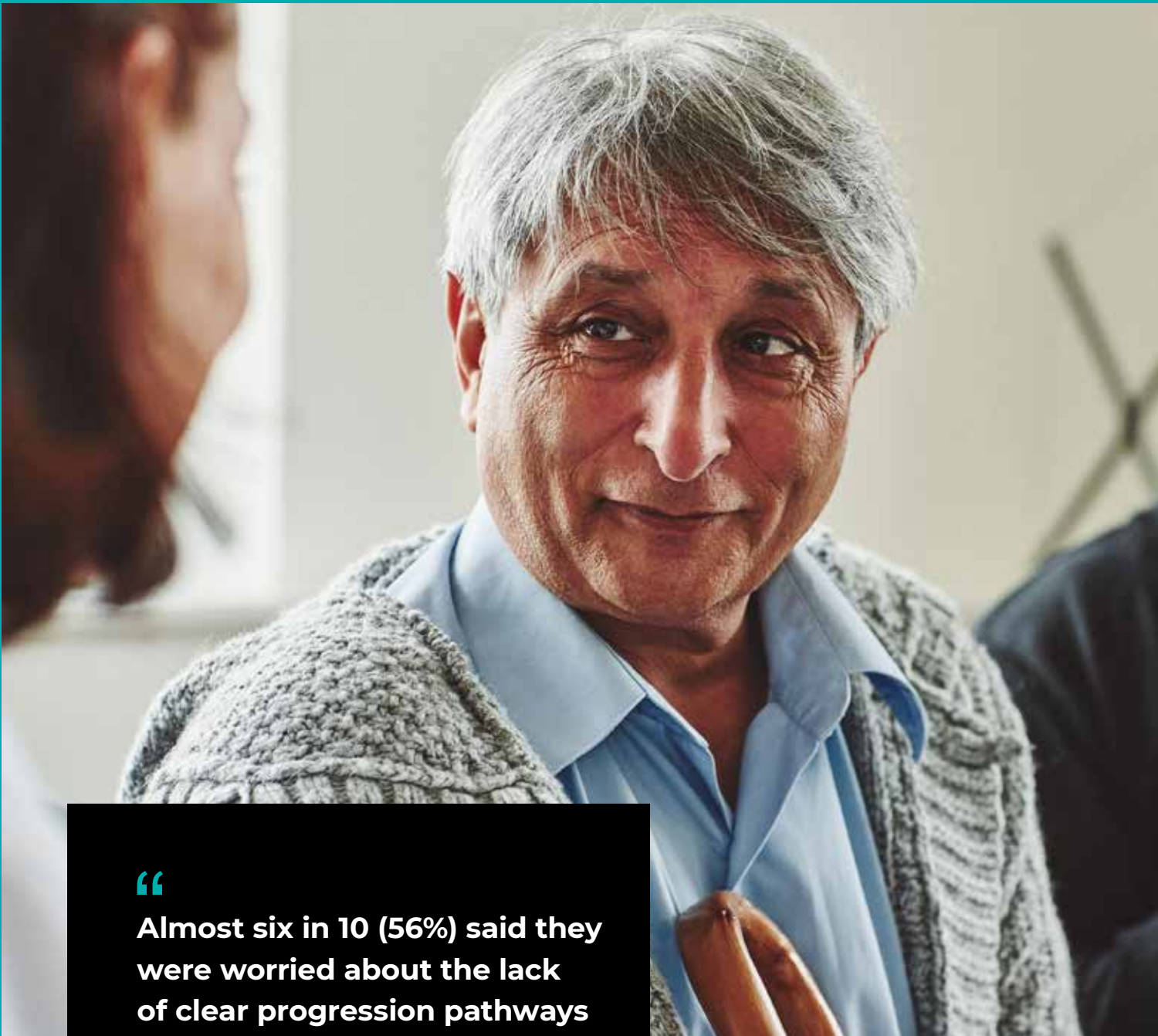
Yet it's clear that concerns over finding and keeping candidates of sufficient quality are at the front of most managers' minds. Weighing the next 12 months, almost six in 10 (**56%**) said they were worried about the lack of clear progression pathways putting people off the social care sector. Comparable proportions were concerned about being unable to retain good staff as the pandemic recedes over the coming year (**56%**), about skills

gaps continuing to affect their workforce (54%), and about replenishing teams with the right people (51%).

Linking to most of those potential challenges, a majority (54%) of respondents said they were concerned about the impact of Brexit on their organisation's ability to recruit

the talent it needs. Yorkshire and The Humber (63%), somewhat surprisingly, was the region most fearful of the impact that the UK's departure from the EU will have on their organisation. Still, offering a glimmer of light within the current turbulent conditions, a slightly larger proportion (59%) said they felt COVID-19

had provided the sector with a catalyst to reflect on how it operates and to develop more efficient and effective ways of working as the pandemic begins to recede. It will be interesting to see whether and how these latter two perspectives translate into tangible change over the coming months and years.



“

**Almost six in 10 (56%) said they were worried about the lack of clear progression pathways putting people off the social care sector.**







# Building for the future.

**With an eye on the bigger picture and the long-term future of adult social care, our survey results gave clear signs of where leaders and managers feel progress needs to be made.**

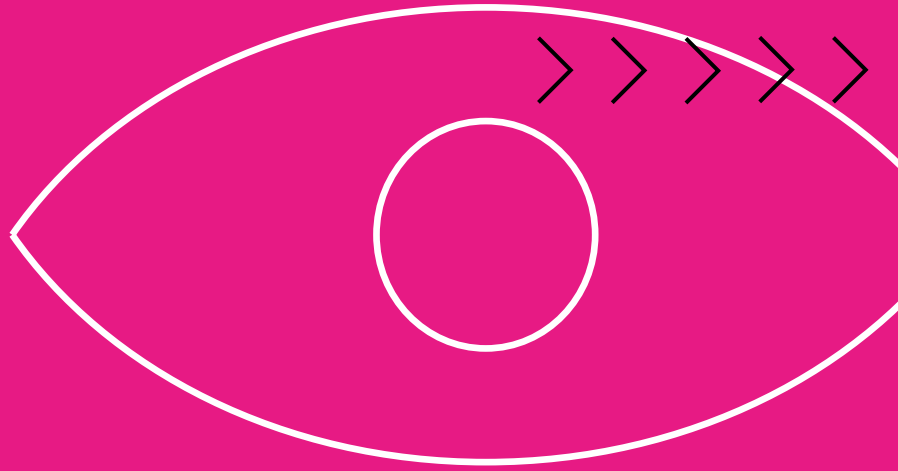
Four in 10 (**40%**) of respondents cited the importance of a sustainable funding settlement, something that most experts believe will be the necessary first building block to achieving structural change around pay and conditions, including the availability of professional development. While it's a surprise this figure was not higher, given the sector's fundamental need for adequate financing, it can perhaps be partly explained by the presence of some relatively junior managers within the survey sample, who are more distant from funding decisions – although not from their impacts.

A similar large minority (**42%**) said they believe defined career development and training pathways for staff, including universally recognised qualifications, can deliver future benefits to the sector. Almost as many respondents (**35%**) specifically signalled approval towards providing more defined progression opportunities into social work from other adult social care roles – such as those enabled by the recent creation of degree apprenticeships.

More than four in 10 (**43%**) of third-sector representatives said such options would be beneficial for the future, compared with **35%** of those working in private residential care, **31%** in social work teams and **29%** within public-sector social care. With social work education having become increasingly fragmented in the last decade as government-backed fast-track providers entered the market, it will be intriguing to track the impact of degree apprenticeships – which some councils see as offering a promising qualification route for experienced local social care staff.

Elsewhere, four in 10 (**39%**) of people answering the survey also said they believed that building more constructive relationships between public-, private- and voluntary-sector organisations would be important for the future of adult social care. Finally, a slightly smaller proportion (**31%**) mentioned closer integration of health and social care teams – something that has, to date, proceeded unevenly around the UK – would deliver benefits to the sector in the years ahead.

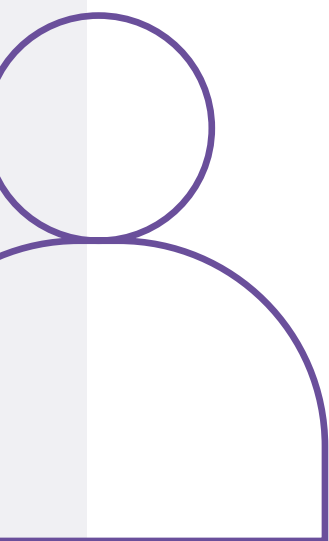
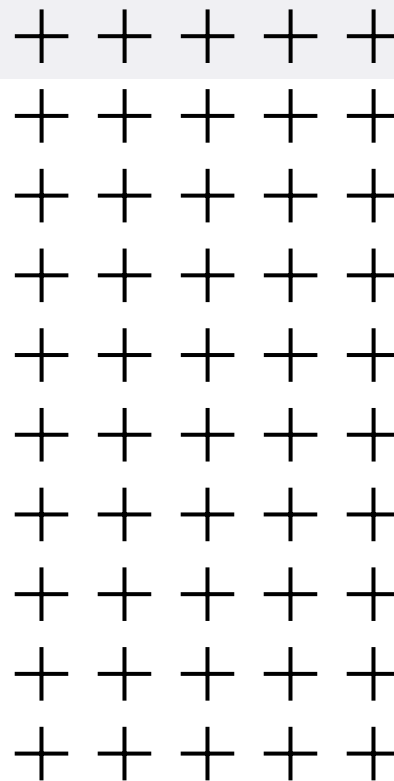




# The OU's four recommendations.

There will be no quick fixes for the enduring challenges faced by the wider adult social care and social work sector. Nonetheless, the perspectives gathered from leaders and managers in the sector emphasise the importance of taking action in a number of key areas.

# 1. Promote social care to a new audience.



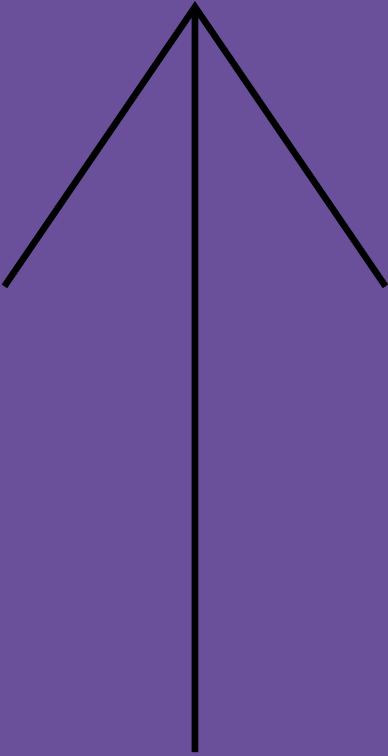
**The ongoing pandemic, which may be burning out staff, and Brexit, which is cutting off entry routes for recruits, present immediate and huge extra challenges for the sector, but also potential opportunities.**

The dedication and professionalism shown by the workforce during coronavirus has given social care a higher profile than usual. Meanwhile the prolonged downturn the UK is likely to face may well mean there are more people in the market for jobs, many of whom may not previously have considered the sector.

Among participants in our survey, just over half (**54%**) fretted about the impact of the UK's exit from the EU while a

similar proportion said they are concerned about being able to replenish their workforces as they look to the coming year. Promoting locally and nationally the values and increasing levels of skill needed to perform social care jobs well could help ensure potential applicants, especially younger people, view it as a positive option rather than – as a majority of our survey respondents fear – a stopgap.

# 2. Implement structured development.

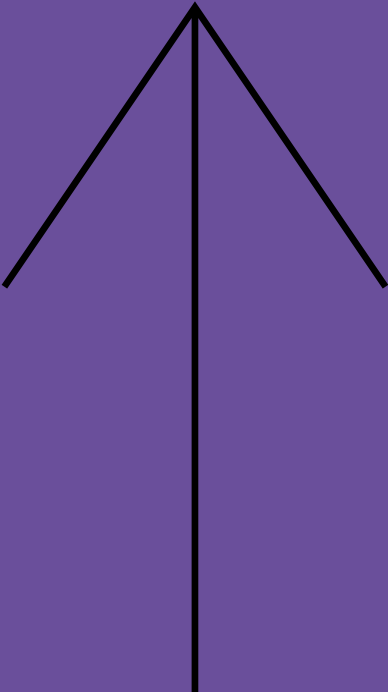


**For years, studies have warned that the lack of worthwhile progression options for staff acts as a disincentive for many to remain within the sector.**

More recently, senior figures have rightly cautioned that the probable increase in applicant volume over the short- to medium-term is no guarantee that recruits will come fully equipped with the skills needed to succeed.

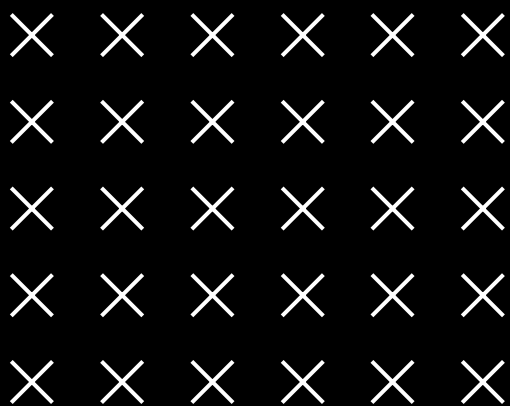
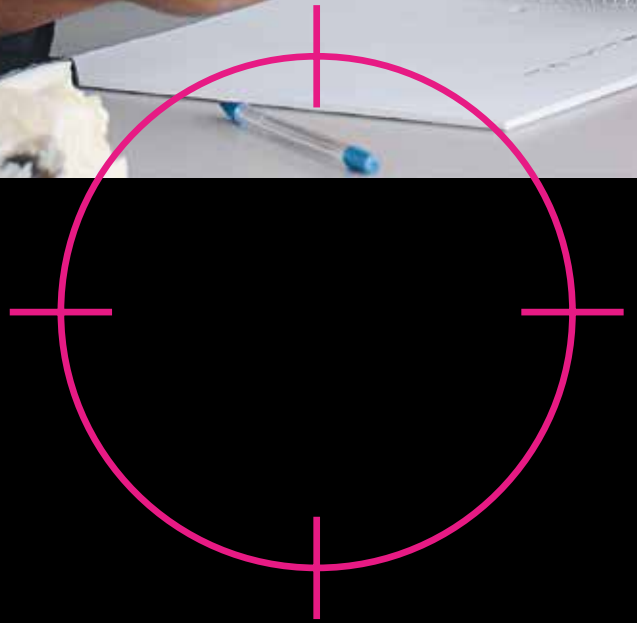
Our survey results amplify these concerns. Almost six out of 10 (**58%**) of leaders and managers told the OU they were worried about the lack of progression pathways putting people off, while almost as many (**54%**) fear losing good staff over the next year. Meanwhile a large minority (**41%**) cited defined career development and training pathways, including universally recognised qualifications, as something that can benefit the sector.

Learning from the devolved nations, reform should proceed with the goal of registering social care workers and creating a nationally recognised career framework for England, which is also flexible enough to meet workforce requirements in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Promotion of adult social care's benefits needs to be underpinned by robust and transferable development pathways – including into social work roles – if existing workers are to be retained and high-quality new recruits brought and kept onboard as the pandemic subsides.





### 3. Target skills gaps.



The challenges around recruitment and retention faced by social care and social work employers have been well documented.



Interlinked issues relating to skills gaps are discussed less often – yet, the Open University’s research shows, they are just as much on the minds of employers.

Almost half (**44%**) of respondents said their workforce had only the bare minimum of skills necessary to operate, or lacked vital skills necessary for their organisation to function effectively. An even greater proportion (**54%**) worried that skills shortages across the sector would have a negative impact on their workforce over the coming year.

The impact of COVID-19 does not appear to have radically altered the areas in which employers perceive deficits, but

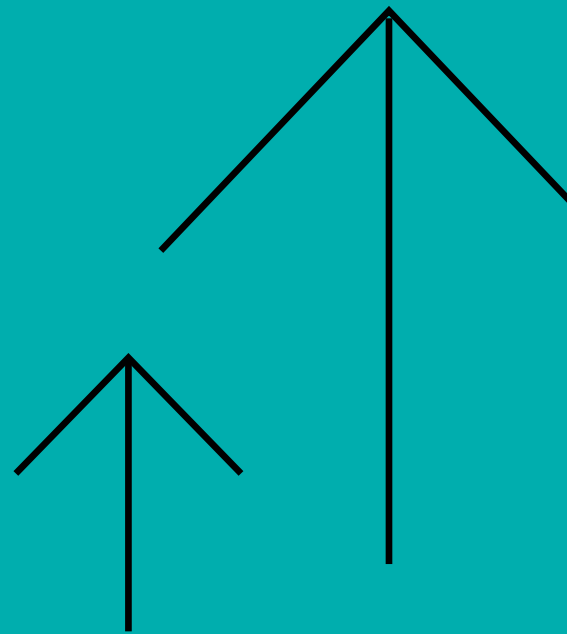
has sharpened their focus on a number of capabilities. This year’s acute stresses have underscored the crucial importance of effective leadership, without which organisations will struggle to carry staff through tough times. Deficits around caring skills and operational management capabilities demonstrate how vital it is to be bringing people with the right values into social care, and offering them means and incentives to progress. As with all employment sectors, meanwhile, the rapid shifts toward virtual interaction – including between service users and their families – enforced by the pandemic have made digital literacy indispensable.

As our survey highlights, employers put such skills at a premium even before the coronavirus outbreak, which has accelerated the social care landscape’s evolution. The continuing shift towards caring for people in their homes will only increase the need for workers to be comfortable with technology and with working autonomously, as well as having skills to meet needs associated with specific health conditions – and to support people’s human rights and enable them to live their lives as independently as possible.





## 4. Sustainably fund the sector.



### Resolving the longstanding workforce challenges faced by social care is made far more difficult by the sector's financial shortfalls.

In the months leading up to this report being published, there have been renewed warnings about independent-sector providers' financial stability and – relatedly – about councils' continuing ability to commission services at rates that will enable the national living wage to be paid. Just **2%** of respondents to the Association of Directors of Adult Services' autumn survey said they were confident of having funding next year to meet all their statutory duties – and the recent spending review, delivered in cut-down form due to the pandemic, did not significantly move the needle for most.

These are not the conditions in which change can readily be enacted. The skills gaps identified by the Open University's research stem in part from a context in which many

staff are not remunerated in line with their abilities or experience, must undertake training on their own time and may not be paid for their time spent travelling between jobs. All of these are factors that contribute towards the low public esteem in which social care roles have been held, especially in comparison with NHS posts.

As **39%** of our survey respondents pointed out, part of the solution lies in more constructive relationships between the public bodies that commission many services and the independent-sector organisations that deliver them. But those partnerships need more fertile soil in which to grow – which can only be provided in the form of a sustainable long-term funding settlement for the wider adult social care sector.

# Delivering across the nations.

## ENGLAND

### Allison Pemberton (Head of Learning & Development at Voyage Care)



Voyage Care is England's largest provider of specialist support within social care for adults with learning disabilities and complex needs.

They employ over 11,000 people, with around 9,000 full time members of staff, supporting 3,450+ adults and children. Services range from residential care homes and supported living to providing support in people's own homes and the community.

Voyage Care work with The Open University (OU) to complement its own internal training programmes.

Allison Pemberton, Head of Learning and Development,

Voyage Care, explained:

**“Operating across the country, one of the key factors is the geographical spread that can be covered by opting to work with a digital training provider like the OU, particularly when it comes to providing specialist training and higher-level qualifications, such as the Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship. That ability to access training across the country is really important.”**

In addition to management training, Voyage Care have taken advantage of the OU's specialist education. Employees new to the sector have been able to enrol on the Health and Social Care

Certificate, giving them a strong grounding in social care to help them drive their careers forward.

Recipients of training say that learning opportunities give them a wider understanding, skills and knowledge, which they can apply directly to their day job.

This flexibility and ability to apply learning straight away has had a positive impact on retention, with Voyage Care enjoying relatively low turnover for the sector, as a result of their training initiatives.

Allison said: "Staff feel invested in and repay this with their loyalty. In addition to this, it also allows talented employees to have multiple careers within the organisation, move to different areas and pursue their passions whilst remaining in the social

care workforce, which has proven so vital in supporting the nation throughout COVID-19."

In the wake of the pandemic, Voyage Care have come to further value the benefits of online learning, having adopted digital training almost entirely over the last year, apart from critical learning (for example essential clinical training). The user-friendly online delivery has been a key priority.

Allison added: "Alongside the partnership with the OU, a development team is constantly working on redesigning the training platform, having adapted to the new ways of working, and the ability to quickly meet further changes on the horizon."



## SCOTLAND

### Anthony Mackie (Service Manager at Glasgow City Council) & Michelle Currie (Senior Learning & Development Officer at Glasgow City Council)

Glasgow City Council (GCC) and The Open University collaborate to bring top quality training to social care staff, which contributes to a long-standing promise of skills development and flexible learning demonstrated far beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership is one of six HSCPs within the Greater Glasgow & Clyde Health Board. The partnership comprises 12,000 employees working across various service areas including social work, mental health, dentistry, pharmacy, home care and more.

Tony Mackie heads up the Learning & Development team which comprises 72 staff based

at two training centres; included within the Team is Michelle Currie who also acts as an associate lecturer with The Open University.

GCC has a longstanding relationship with the OU in Scotland, going back 20 years, with the current collaborative teaching arrangement going into its seventh year of delivery. Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care is delivered once a year to GCC staff. The module enables staff to meet the Scottish Social Services Council registration requirements for care managers in selected settings. For Tony, working with the OU came down to the breadth and depth of quality course content.



The path forward for social care in England



**“Working with The Open University allows us to develop our staff via a wide range of qualifications. The quality of the course content, and its availability at affordable costs, meant there was almost no contest when it came to choose the university as our learning partner.”**

When COVID-19 took hold, GCC needed to quickly adapt how they delivered training to avoid any disruption to their learners’ progress. Across the board, the main challenge that needed to be addressed was the transfer of face to face, practical training, to an online method of delivery which was in-line with new lockdown regulations.

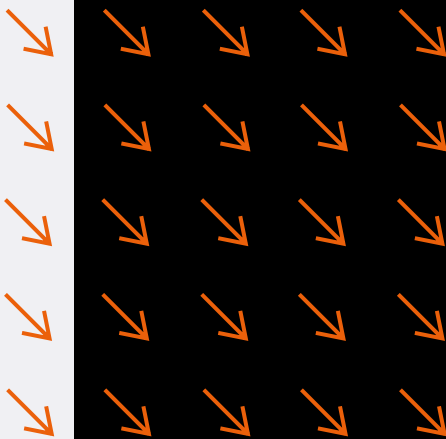
For over fifty years the OU has been a world leader in developing technology to increase access to education on a global scale. Perhaps more so than in any other year, the OU’s renowned digital model of learning has proved pivotal to help learning and training continue throughout the pandemic, with Michelle conducting tutor support sessions online during lockdown. The OU also remodelled its assessment strategy for students working in social care settings to increase flexibility and support during this period.

Whilst the last year has of course been incredibly tumultuous, lockdown and periods of social distancing have

also presented an unexpected opportunity to focus on some previously under-represented skills challenges.

**“The impact of the pandemic really forced us to focus on technical and digital skills more than ever before. The use of mobile devices, and the honing of the essential tech skills we need to use them, that came about as a result of the pandemic has actually been one of the more positive things we learned from the last year. Moving forward into an ever-more digital age, it’s essential we continue to work with training providers like the OU to ensure our staff have the requisite digital skill-sets to thrive in the future.”**

## WALES



### Claire Williams, (Practice Learning and Development Officer, Powys County Council), Rachel Vale (Continuing Health and Complex Care Practitioner) & Ann Barrington (Adult Disability Social Worker)

Powys is the largest county borough in Wales, representing just over a quarter of the country's entire land mass. However, without a traditional bricks and mortar university in the region, Powys County Council relies on a close working relationship with The Open University to provide their 132,000 constituents with access to top-level social care and support.

Looking after the needs of a large rural community isn't easy for any local authority. However, Claire Williams, Practice Learning and Development Officer, Powys County Council, is more than aware of the unique pressures she and her team are under.

**"We don't have a local university, and unfortunately there's very limited representation for social**

**work careers in our schools at present... what this means is that there are no immediately obvious ways for people to enter the profession and chart a clear path for their career development."**

That's where The Open University comes in. The OU provides students from all over Wales with access to higher and further education qualifications, without restricting them to one central campus. Students who are working towards their degrees in Social Work are able to study flexibly online, around their work and personal commitments. With both independent and sponsored routes available for social work qualifications at the OU, more students than ever can apply to join a growing cohort.

Rachel Vale, who recently completed her social work degree, is one of them:

**“It would have been impossible to work with anyone else other than the OU on this qualification. Juggling work, being a parent, and my own personal life with my placement and study would have made attending a physical university a nightmare. Instead, I’ve been able to work around my existing commitments, meaning I’ve now completed my degree without having to sacrifice my job.”**

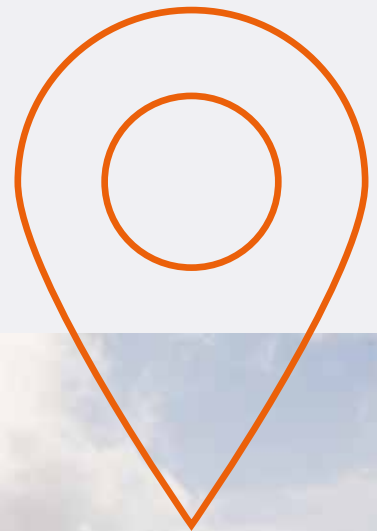
The flexibility the OU affords students came to the fore this year as the pandemic brought educational institutions of all ilks to a standstill. However, in Wales, The Open University was able to keep its students in placements throughout the pandemic, where it was safe to do so, something that another student, Ann Barrington, says was crucial to her completing the degree.

**“I have no doubt that if my placement was put on hold, I wouldn’t have gone on to complete the qualification... that loss of momentum would have been a huge blow. Thanks to the endless support of the OU tutors, we were encouraged to keep working throughout the Covid-19 crisis. They managed to keep us motivated in a way that didn’t burden us with pressure but was crucial to us qualifying as social workers.”**

The Powys team are aware of just how important providing development opportunities to employees in social care and social work is. Ann, for example, completed the Certificate of Higher Education in Social Care Practice (recommended by Social Care Wales for Social Services Practitioners) prior to applying to join the second year of the degree, sponsored by Powys County Council. What is more, retention is typically a lot

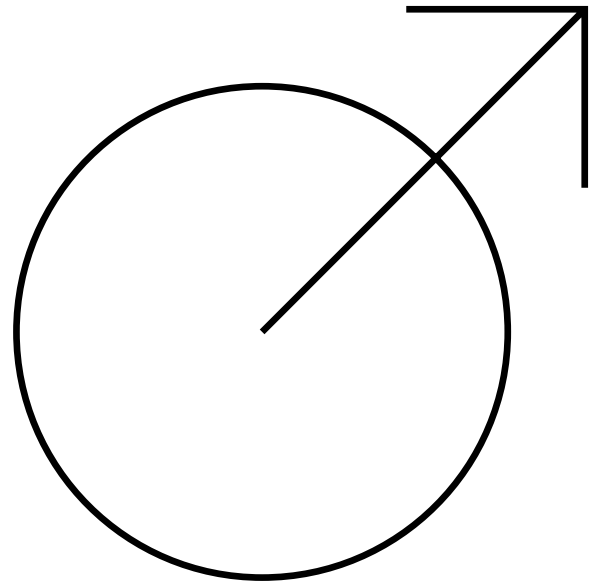
higher amongst staff who have studied with the OU. Managing to safeguard the development of their employees throughout the pandemic has been crucial to ensuring that the council’s teams haven’t been undermined by staff shortages in a year like no other.

**“During such testing times, it’s been so important to keep our staff engaged and inspired. Through the OU’s qualifications, we’ve been able to do just that, meaning that the quality of care available to our local community has not suffered. Whilst we owe a lot to the university, overcoming such challenges simply wouldn’t be possible without the remarkable strength and tenacity of our students, all of whom have been inspiringly resilient.”**









# Studying with The Open University.

The OU offers a variety of undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational qualifications for social care and social work professionals. There are also several apprenticeship routes available in England, enabling employers to access levy funding to develop new and existing staff through practice-based learning.

## APPRENTICESHIPS

- Social Worker Degree Apprenticeship

## LEVEL 3 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Developed for the Health and Social Care sector, it offers learners qualifications that can be tailored to their job role, demonstrating knowledge, competence and continuing professional development.

- Level 3 Diploma in Adult Care (England)

- Level 3 Diploma in Adult Care - for individuals working in the substance misuse sector



## POSTGRADUATE

### Postgraduate Diploma

- E85** Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work

Can be awarded as a discrete qualification, or as an embedded award within the MA in Social Work.

### Masters

- E80** MA in Social Work
- F55** MA in Childhood and Youth

Applicants require employer permission to undertake this work.

- F81** MA/MSc Open



## UNDERGRADUATE

### Certificates

**T39** Certificate of Higher Education in Social Care

**T03** Certificate of Higher Education in Social Care (Scotland)

**T34** Certificate of Higher Education in Social Care Practice (Wales)

**T23** Certificate of Higher Education in Adult Health and Social Care

**T24** Certificate of Higher Education in Children and Families

### Diplomas / Foundation Degrees

**W69** Diploma of Higher Education in Health and Social Care

**W31** Diploma of Higher Education in Social Care (Scotland)

**W09** Diploma of Higher Education in Counselling

**X09** Foundation Degree in Counselling

### Degrees

**R26** BA (Honours) Health and Social Care

**Q32** BA (Honours) Social Work (England)

**R61** BA (Honours) Social Work (Northern Ireland)

**Q41** BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland)

**Q50** BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland) (graduate entry)

**Q42** BA (Honours) Social Work (Wales)

**Q23** BA (Honours) Childhood and Youth Studies

**Q84** BSc (Honours) Psychology with Counselling

## NURSING

Social care nurses play a key role within the social care sector in supporting the wellbeing of individuals and communities. For those who wish to develop their career as a social care nurse, the OU offers Nursing Associate and Pre-registration Nursing degree and apprenticeship programmes. Applicants must however meet the entry criteria.

The roles range from specialist nursing for learning disabilities, young adults and older people in supported living, to community psychiatric nursing, or providing complex end-of-life care within care homes.

**For further information, visit**  
**[open.ac.uk/nursing](https://open.ac.uk/nursing)**



# Relevant OpenLearn courses.

OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University, is supporting students in their academic, skills and career and personal development endeavours, delivering quality assets openly available for teaching and learning.

Below are descriptions of some of our relevant, free to access OpenLearn courses for the social care and social work sectors:

# 01

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL WORK**

Introducing key ideas, values, the social work process and the skills needed for social work practice.

# 02

## **SOCIAL CARE IN THE COMMUNITY**

This course focuses on one important area of social care, home care for older people.

# 03

## **EVERYDAY MATHS**

for health, social care and education support 1

An introduction to Level 1 Functional Skills in maths with tips and techniques to help you communicate more effectively in everyday life as well as career prospects and further studies.

# 04

## **EVERYDAY ENGLISH**

for health, social care and education support 1

An introduction to Level 1 Functional Skills in English with tips and techniques to help you communicate more effectively in everyday life as well as career prospects and further studies.

# 05

## **EVERYDAY MATHS**

for health, social care and education support 2

Level 2 Functional Skills development for maths with tips and techniques to help with effective communication for everyday life as well as career prospects and further studies.

# 06

## **EVERYDAY ENGLISH**

for health, social care and education support 2

Level 2 Functional Skills development for English with tips and techniques to help with effective communication for everyday life as well as career prospects and further studies.

For more free OpenLearn resources for the social care and social work sector which have been utilised by many employers during the pandemic, visit: [open.edu/openlearn](https://open.edu/openlearn).

A photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair wearing a white top, looking towards another person whose back is to the camera. The person in the foreground is wearing a purple top. The background is a bright, indoor setting with vertical blinds.

## REPORT METHODOLOGY

*'The path forward for social care in England'* was developed by combining the expertise and experience of The Open University, and Alex Turner, with qualitative market research amongst a range of social care and social work providers across England.

A more detailed methodology for this report is available on The Open University's business website.



# About The Open University.

**For over 50 years, The Open University has led the way in innovative distance-learning.**

The Open University has a proven track record and rich heritage of providing workplace education solutions for employers across a range of sectors, including social care and social work.

Specialising in developing high-quality learning materials, based on rigorous research and industry insight, The Open University combines academic excellence with technological expertise to deliver flexible work-based learning, allowing students to further their education around their existing professional and personal commitments.

The OU offers a range of options to suit individual requirements including apprenticeships, short courses, certificates and diplomas and undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes. These options are all inherently flexible and adaptable, enabling consistent educational programmes to be delivered at scale, across

geographically dispersed workforces. Through minimising the time needed in the classroom, The Open University's blended delivery model is shaped around the needs of the employer and the role and responsibilities of the learner. This gives employees new skills and knowledge they can apply immediately to the workplace – increasing engagement and maximising return on investment.

This is why more than 2,400 employers, including the NHS, and over 160 local councils, regularly choose The Open University's learning solutions to develop their workforces.

Whether you're looking to develop new or current employees, contact The Open University today to find out how flexible learning can work for your organisation.

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