



# Thought Leadership

How do disability organisations  
recruit, retain and develop  
the right workforce?



## How do social care providers recruit, retain and develop the right workforce?

The social care sector will need to fill around 400,000 jobs by 2035. How can disability care providers create a competitive edge in local labour markets, and how can they transform the sector into a career of choice?

The jobs target, based on research from Skills for Care's National Minimum Data Set for Social Care<sup>1</sup>, was among the issues discussed at a debate organised by the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG). VODG members collectively employ over 85,000 staff and workforce is among the top three priorities for the group. Employment-related issues are crucial because providers must recruit, retain and develop staff at a time when the sector faces significant risks; the future of social care relies in large part on organisations tackling the workforce challenge.

<sup>1</sup> Skills for Care. *National Minimum Data Set for Social Care*. Available: [www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/](http://www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/)



## The workforce challenge and financial uncertainty

Adult social care budgets have fallen by £4.6 billion over the last five years – a drop of 31%, according to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services<sup>2</sup>. The Chancellor also confirmed no additional money for social care in the Budget, despite calls from local councils, providers and the NHS to invest in the sector. In addition, the Centre for Disability Studies<sup>3</sup> estimates that between 37,000 and 52,000 more adults with learning disabilities will require support over the next 10 years, a growth of between 26% and 37%. We also know that need amongst older people, including those living with dementia and other long-term conditions, are set to increase significantly<sup>4</sup>.

VODG has concerns that fragility in the care market, as described in a recent LaingBuisson white paper<sup>5</sup> on stabilising the sector, could lead to providers closing services. If community support shrinks in this way, the NHS will be under increased pressure, with more people admitted to hospital.

VODG's recent event, which involved more than 100 chief executives and senior directors of voluntary sector disability organisations from across England, aimed to identify workable solutions and improve cross-sector communication and collaboration.

Summarising the difficult backdrop before the debate began, one chief executive described “the context of diminishing financial resources and complex social issues” Another urged: “If we want to think differently about how services are delivered then we have to bring the workforce with us”.

<sup>2</sup> Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. Budget survey. Available: [www.adass.org.uk/uploadedFiles/adass\\_content/policy\\_networks/resources/Key\\_documents/ADASS%20Budget%20Survey%202015%20Report%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.adass.org.uk/uploadedFiles/adass_content/policy_networks/resources/Key_documents/ADASS%20Budget%20Survey%202015%20Report%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Disability Studies (2012) *Estimating the need for social care services for adults with disabilities in England 2012-2030*. Lancaster: University of Lancaster

<sup>4</sup> ONS (2016) *Estimates of the very old*. Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/bulletins/>

<sup>5</sup> LaingBuisson (2015) *Stabilising the care home sector and preparing for implementation of part two of the Care Act in 2020*. [https://www.laingbuisson.co.uk/Portals/1/MarketReports/Documents/LaingBuisson\\_WhitePaper\\_Stabilising\\_the\\_care\\_home\\_sector.pdf?ver=2015-12-14-150354-417](https://www.laingbuisson.co.uk/Portals/1/MarketReports/Documents/LaingBuisson_WhitePaper_Stabilising_the_care_home_sector.pdf?ver=2015-12-14-150354-417)



## Minimum wage, national living wage and collaboration

Discussion began with a focus on how to prevent the sector becoming minimum wage and, with the national living wage (NLW) introduced in April, how providers remain competitive as employers.

In principle, the NLW offers the opportunity for workforce investment. But without proper funding, it could add further financial pressure on providers and adversely affect services. According to a VODG rapid review involving 20 organisations, in 2016-17 employers will need an additional £6.2 million to meet their collective pay bill as a result of the NLW. By 2020-21 this additional cost will have risen to at least £58.3 million. (See Box 1.)

### Box 1. Implications of the National Living Wage

The new National Living Wage (NLW) is £7.20 per hour for those aged 25 and over. This will rise to over £9 per hour by 2020.

Exploring the implications of this policy amongst a sample of 20 VODG members, we found that:

- Organisations face significant increase in staff costs - in 2016/17 the 20 organisations in our sample will be spending an additional £6.2 million. By 2020/21 the figure rises to £58.3 million.
- The increases in hourly rate required to manage the impact varies considerably. The average increase expected in 2016/17 is 2.5%. This rises to 14.4% by 2020/21.
- Pay differentials within the sector will be negatively affected. 11 out of 20 organisations will not be able to maintain current pay differentials.
- There are significant impacts on overall business costs when outsourced services, such as cleaning, are taken into account. Of 20 organisations, 14 report that such knock on effects of the NLW are highly significant or significant.
- Many organisations reported likely reductions in service and workforce development in order to meet the costs of the NLW if sufficient funding does not follow.



## Minimum wage, national living wage and collaboration

Not only is the NLW at odds with creating strong career structures that rely on pay differentials, but disability providers will compete with other low pay industries for talent. As the NLW only applies to people aged 25 and over, it also potentially undermines efforts to attract younger people to the sector. As one VODG member at the debate asked: "Is any provider really going to pay a 24-year-old 25p less per hour than a 25-year-old?"

One solution suggested at our event was for providers to collaborate in negotiations with commissioners: "Does it mean presenting a united front to commissioners saying that 'if you want VODG services then we will often pay above the national living wage?'" This led to a groundswell of opinion that, faced with external pressures from the NLW and cuts to social care budgets, organisations should join forces. "We need to get more money so why not share costs?", as one participant asked.

The sharing of back offices functions was a popular suggestion, especially among smaller providers. There was also agreement that providers might join forces to bid for work. One speaker questioned if there are "too many providers in the sector", as the debate acknowledged the fine line between avoiding duplication and further erosion of the care market.



## Commissioning and procurement

VODG members at the debate were highly critical of what they described as commissioning driven by price rather than quality and outcomes – a commissioning approach that, unfortunately, seemed to be a common experience.

Speakers highlighted ongoing concerns, as outlined in a previous VODG paper<sup>6</sup> on commissioning, that this results in less sharing of risks between commissioners and providers. As one participant asked rhetorically, “whatever happened to outcomes?” Others added “we need to move away from a focus on the hourly rate”.

Participants also distinguished between commissioning and procurement, as one contributor explained: “With commissioning, you can have a conversation because the commissioners know the problem, with procurement all you’re doing is driving costs and it’s nothing to do with outcomes... procurement is a business activity dealing with large scale purchasing”. Another speaker described how “aggressive procurement...hasn’t helped the sector because it’s driven down prices to unrealistic levels”.

<sup>6</sup> VODG (2016) *Together we can...deliver more effective commissioning and de-commissioning for people with learning disabilities and autism*. Available: <http://www.vodg.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/2016%20VODG%20Together%20we%20can.pdf>





## Stronger partnering with commissioners

These concerns led to discussions about how to reverse the trend. As one participant asked: "Do your services need to collapse in order for commissioners to recognise the real cost of quality service? More and more providers are refusing to bid as it [the service commissioners want providers to deliver for a low price] is untenable".

There was a strong sense that providers could unite in rejecting commissioners' unrealistic demands. "We need to work together to stop putting in bids that aren't realistically workable," said one speaker. "We need to move against the reckless procurement that encourages the race to the bottom."

One member of the debate said they are among a group of local providers refusing to accept contracts below a certain amount: "It's not the whole sector, but it's something". "Trying to achieve some kind of forceful voice is the way to go," agreed another speaker.





## Workforce recruitment and retention

Discussion moved onto workforce development, as speakers debated how to make the sector a career of choice. Before exploring solutions, one speaker suggested that a “problem of disconnect” may exist in social care: “Disconnect between the job description on paper and the reality of the job people go into, or between the mission and values of the organisation and the culture in teams or in the reality of frontline work...or between head office and field staff”. This, as VODG members heard, “holds us back mobilising the talent”.

Part of the answer here, it was agreed, lies in encouraging a greater focus on the core values of organisations and how work patterns and roles are agreed and defined. “We have to maximize the value, and work with the purpose that drives us,” said one. Another said: “Do we squeeze people in to shift patterns that don’t really work for them? Do our job descriptions focus on tasks instead of values?”





## Collaborative campaigning; shattering stereotypes

There was widespread backing for some kind of national marketing and recruitment campaign to create a better “brand” for social care and attract more people to it as a career. The Department of Health nationwide social care recruitment campaign<sup>7</sup> almost a decade ago, the Skills for Care I Care Ambassadors scheme<sup>8</sup> (aiming to raise the profile of care work), and the Charity Works graduate programme<sup>9</sup> for the voluntary sector, were discussed as a positive and welcome examples of what works. But the feeling was that a sector-owned, funded and led drive would be more powerful.

**Skills for Care** is the strategic leadership and workforce organisation for adult social care and offers a range of support on recruitment and retention issues.

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Recruitment-retention/Recruitment-and-retention.aspx>

Compared to the NHS, said one VODG member, “we don’t have that national profile... or we aren’t profiling ourselves strongly enough”. There were calls for providers to “collectively bust the myths and raise the profile of social care work” and “create a positive campaign and brand, with our unsung heroes”.

Recent television programmes have included a focus on disability. Last year, for example, Coronation Street introduced a young actor with Down’s syndrome. But are providers themselves doing enough, as one speaker asked, “to show the contribution people with disabilities make to our culture and communities?”.

While the idea of a sector-wide campaign was welcomed – one idea was a national social care day – some sounded notes of caution. One speaker stressed the need to fully involve people supported in plans to improve social care’s profile: “How can we generate a loud voice from the people who will use the services?” Another reminded participants that while a focus on innovation and career progression is vital, it is important to consider those on the very frontline: “We’re all working as innovative organisations, but are we great at promoting innovation at all levels, at support worker level for example, through good news stories?”

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health (2007) National social care recruitment campaign 2007. Available: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080814090418/dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH\\_064370](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080814090418/dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Dearcolleagueletters/DH_064370)

<sup>8</sup> Skills for Care (2016) I Care...Ambassadors. Available: <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Recruitment-retention/I-Care...Ambassadors/I-Care...Ambassadors.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Charity Works Available: <http://www.charity-works.co.uk/>



## Values-based, targeted recruitment

So how best to “sell” social care? Many felt that voluntary sector providers underplay their biggest strength – the core and founding principles of their organisations. As one member of the discussion said: “We have one of the most underdeveloped, unsung employer brands that other sectors and organisations would die for it’s so powerful that people work for us for free”. Several speakers proposed a stronger focus on “values-based recruitment, emphasising empathy and compassion” and the soft benefits offered by social care work.

Others agreed, with comments such as “we need to redefine care work to give it a better status”. A deliberate effort to distinguish social care from social work, as one VODG member suggested, would be a good step, while another called for “more diverse role descriptions” to more accurately reflect the broad range of work in and career development opportunities.

One speaker added: “We’ve got a lot to offer our staff and we should recognise the values-led nature of our organisations that mean there are some things beyond the money - and leverage those appropriately”.

Encouraging more graduate recruitment, entry-level opportunities, apprenticeships and internships were suggested by some. Reaching out to younger people – through social media campaigns, for example, or by using the workforce as ambassadors in schools and colleges – was a popular suggestion.



## Workforce – the way forward

Despite the escalating challenges posed by funding constraints and the rapidly changing social policy landscape, there was a strong sense that providers can still plan for a sustainable workforce and shatter some preconceptions about social care. The onus is on organisations to take more collaborative steps to influence decisions – among commissioners, for example – that affect the future development of the sector.

Tackling workforce issues, as one speaker concluded, involves the employer taking ownership of how staff perceive their roles, and this has a knock on impact on the wider understanding of social care: “We have a leadership role to help people see the value of the work they’re doing”.

**This VODG event was delivered in partnership with Skills for Care and Charity Works.**

**Skills for Care** helps create a better-led, more skilled and valued adult social care workforce. They provide practical tools and support to help adult social care organisations in England recruit, develop and lead their workforce, and work with related services to ensure dignity and respect are at the heart of service delivery.

**Charityworks** is the UK non-profit sector’s graduate programme, offering a unique opportunity for talented graduates to gain experience and build networks across the sector, at the same time as providing non-profit organisations with a cost effective and easy way of accessing talented people capable of having an immediate impact.





See [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk) for more details.



To find out more, please go to [www.charity-works.co.uk](http://www.charity-works.co.uk).

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