

FULL REPORT

The View from Here

People's experiences of working in social services: A qualitative analysis

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In early 2015, Iriss conducted research designed to understand the experiences of frontline practitioners in delivering care and support. The exercise adopted a different approach to gathering practitioner views by inviting people to sign up to record their experiences over one week using a qualitative 'diary method'.

This research comes at an extremely challenging time for the care sector and its workforce in Scotland. There continue to be concerns regarding the future of job quality in social care. This is at a time when the sector needs to develop the workforce in order to take on ever more challenging and complex client groups that require more personalised services. It was within this challenging context that participants were asked to give their views and insights into a number of crucial areas concerning work and employment in social care.

74 people submitted responses. The voluntary, public and private sector were almost equally represented in the data set. This report represents an analysis of the prompt cards and time sheets issued to frontline practitioners regarding these themes. A number of key findings are summarised below.

Key findings

Relationships: What made care workers feel valued at work?

- Interpersonal relationships were seen as central to feeling valued in work.
- Private sector respondents were more likely to highlight how good relationships with people they support were key to feeling valued.
- Public and voluntary sector respondents were more likely to cite good relationships with managers and peers through team work and support and supervision, (as well as relationships with users) as essential to feeling valued at work.

"I feel valued at work when I get positive feedback from my colleagues and supervisors. After every shift my team leader makes a point - thanking each member of staff for their hard work. All of the co-ordinators also make a point of thanking staff and highlighting good practice."

Support and supervision

- Across all sectors experiences of supervision were mixed, but with the majority reporting largely positive responses.
- The importance of good supervision influenced other aspects of other parts of

participants' working lives, such as opportunities for relevant training, as well as constructive and supportive relationships with line managers.

- Successful supervision was based on friendly and supportive supervisors, who demonstrated listening skills, were experienced and understood the pressures of working in the field. Consistent and regular formal contact with supervisors, and a focus on learning and sharing practice during supervision, rather than on performance indicators were valued.
- A minority raised concerns about the quality/appropriateness of supervision. Resource pressures often pushed out formal supervision, undermining the accessibility of managers and leading to irregular sporadic and fragmented coverage. Line management skills in supervision were a key reason for shortfalls in quality of provision.

“My experiences with support and supervision, up until now have been a success. I feel that the office staff and managers have been ‘out in the field’ providing care, so they can mostly relate to any queries or issues I may have...”

“I am happy with supervision in my current workplace, however when I did outreach previously I would regularly go without supervision and would at times not see my line manager for weeks. This can be challenging as there is no opportunity to talk to anyone.”

Learning and development

- Participants indicated how they had benefitted from good training and development from their employers over their careers. The statutory requirements for training under Scottish Vocational Qualifications were a strong impetus for training.
- In recent times the scope for learning and development had been affected by budget and time constraints. This meant for many only mandatory training was available, leading to levels of dissatisfaction.
- Continued passion and dedication to their work meant many participants were taking initiatives on their own to keep their personal learning about their job up to standard. These approaches to learning involved discussions and sharing knowledge and expertise with line managers, other workers and people supported by services.
- Web-based information from statutory and other sources such as newsletters were also seen as useful learning resources.

“I have the opportunity to raise training requirements and interests at supervision – however, the reality of having to take a chunk of time out of working on a daily basis with clients makes me hesitant about training.”

“A lot of my learning comes from other team members – either through general discussion or observing them/their work. My colleagues are great at sharing their experiences and letting me look at reports they have written if I am doing something new.”

Work-life balance

- The vast majority of employees worked more hours than what they are contracted for. The most common reason for undertaking additional hours was staff shortages.
- Workers complained of frequent unscheduled changes to rotas and shifts making it difficult to plan everyday events.
- Workers also reported taking work home with them and difficulties in taking breaks or cutting them short. Work-related pressure made it difficult for workers to engage in family activities or personal relationships outside work.
- Some workers reported negative wellbeing impacts, including sleep deprivation, stress and a loss of enjoyment in the job as a result of these pressures.
- Some workers had the benefit of organisational flexi-time policies or a good relationship with their line manager to help them cope with pressures of work-life balance. These options were generally more often reported by workers in the public and voluntary sectors.
- “Work-life balance can fall out of kilter especially when there are staffing issues and I feel obliged to cover extra shifts – this can start to feel stressful.”

Pay and conditions

- The majority of respondents were dissatisfied with their pay and conditions package. Dissatisfaction was most pronounced in the private and voluntary sectors. There was some evidence of in-work poverty from a small minority of respondents.
- Relatively few respondents, mainly from the public sector, were satisfied with their pay and conditions package. Participants cited opportunities to develop new skills, promotion and a strong vocational orientation as reasons for their satisfaction.
- Workers felt under-valued for what they perceived to be complex and demanding tasks undertaken over unsocial and fragmented hours. There was a perception that governments and society in general did not value care work. Zero hour contracts were seen to further undervalue care work.
- Participants expressed concerns about the impact on service quality as people left the sector, or feared the poor wages and conditions would erode goodwill among staff.

“A carer’s wage isn’t great. Society values money more than people...”

Challenges of working in social care

- Austerity and scarce resources in public services represented a major challenge to workers and their ability to effectively achieve their outcomes for users.
- Work intensification (having to do more with the same or less resources) was the most significant impact of austerity measures across the three sectors. Short staffing and increased workloads hindered learning, the amount of time spent with users, and led to diminishing perceptions of job security and well-being among staff.
- Poor inter-personal relations with line managers, colleagues and some people who are supported by services were seen as potential barriers to progress in achieving outcomes. Common concerns related to risk aversion and a lack of flexibility among some managers.
- There was a view that poor communications between staff and senior management along with other government agencies such as those responsible for housing or health contributed to challenges in achieving outcomes.

“To do my best for the service user I need a full complement of staff...”

Opportunities of working in social care

- Many respondents reported that personal relationships with line managers and colleagues were helpful to them achieving their goals.
- Participants reported how teamwork and trust among workers, as well as approachable managers and supportive supervision was key to successful outcomes. Praise for line managers and their contribution was particularly common among public and voluntary sectors workers.
- Training and good communications were seen as helpful in achieving successful outcomes in social care.
- The ability to exercise independence in decision-making in some aspects of work and participate in shaping services was seen as a key factor in achieving outcomes. This perception was particularly present among voluntary sector workers.

“I get a great deal of self-satisfaction knowing I have supported someone – helped them access the local community, meet friends, even wash their hair, put their bins out – knowing that I help make that person’s life a little easier and that helps them to feel good.”

Future aspirations - Where would you like to be in 5-10 years?

- Across all sectors, the majority of respondents expressed a desire to stay in care work over the next five years. Some expressed a hope for a better pay settlement during that period.

- Public sector workers were more optimistic about being able to secure a 'traditional' career path of gaining qualifications and experience and moving onto management roles.
- Career aspirations were seen to be limited by lack of opportunities in the more remote, rural areas. Some of those seeking further promotion did so with the caveat that they would still want direct contact with people supported by services and have the ability to help them in their lives.
- A minority of respondents expressed a desire to leave the sector due to excessive workloads, stress and low pay.

"I used to want it as a career. Now I am not sure as there is not much financial reward for so many hours and it's a struggle..."

"I aspire to have career in care - in 5 to 10 years I would like to be working with children and moving up the ladder in a service."

Recommendations for policy, practice and future research

Recommendations for policy

- Key stakeholders should continue to promote a 'national conversation' with regard to social care work, and whether and by how much it is or should be valued and rewarded in society. This should involve continued consultation between the social partners (employers, unions, government (central and local) officials around appropriate pay levels in social care and the means to achieve it.
- Further effort is required to build cross-sectoral cooperation between government, employers and unions regarding the best way to phase-in the new National Living Wage, and aspire to the 'real' Living Wage.

Recommendations for practice

- Drawing from data revealed in this project, there is a need to promote the business case for addressing issues of work-life balance within social care providers. This should highlight the negative implications for worker health and performance from the lack of work-life balance and intensified workloads. This should be targeted at levels of government and provider organisations.
- There is a need to invest adequate resources in social care so as to ensure the consistency of supervision across the three sectors. There would be value in a move towards a commitment of resourcing an agreed guaranteed supervisory frequency, depending on care setting for every social care worker.
- Key stakeholders should investigate what lessons can be drawn from informal approaches to learning and development to be transferred to facilitate formal, organisational programmes. There is a need to ensure that informal workplace learning contributes towards overall progress on employee learning, qualification

and training across the sector.

- Using the results of this study, key stakeholders should promote the social care sector as a good place to work because of its close, supportive team-based working relationships.

Recommendations for future research

- There is a need to investigate career paths across public, private and voluntary providers to understand any differences and barriers to progression. Consideration for the potential of location-specific projects (such as those promoting retention in remote rural communities) to complement national strategy is required.
- Further research is needed into commissioning practices and how these influence staffing levels at the frontline and with line management roles. Particular focus should be on whether there is adequate support for front-line staff following austerity driven restructuring of management roles.

INTRODUCTION

This research comes at an extremely challenging time for the care sector and its workforce in Scotland and the wider UK. There continue to be concerns regarding the future of job quality in social care across private, public and voluntary sector providers during an era of austerity in public expenditure. As the employment offer in social care becomes more precarious and services are subjected to continuing cuts, there are emerging concerns relating to the extent to which worker morale can be maintained.

Pay in social care has been squeezed more than other low paying sectors during the recent recession. In addition, there are worries that levels of training/supervision are not being sustained. This is at a time when the sector needs to develop the workforce needed to take on ever more challenging and complex client groups that require more personalised services. In addition, workers face demands to cooperate across professional boundaries with health practitioners. Poor pay and conditions further occur alongside greater insecurity in employment terms and conditions through the growth of zero hour contracts among workers in the sector. A series of factors is also leading to work intensification potentially undermining work - life balance among care workers. These include emerging recruitment and retention problems, cuts in services and staff numbers and continual demands for providers and workers to do more with less.

It was within this challenging context that participants were asked to give their views and insights into a number of crucial areas concerning work and employment in social care.

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

This project required frontline care workers /practitioners from private, public and voluntary sector providers in Scotland to share their experiences over one week using a qualitative, 'cultural probe' or 'diary method'. This method involves intensive self-reflection and aims to capture research participants' experiences, observations, attitudes and true feelings. In this method participants registered events and made regular records of their daily activities and experiences as they occurred. This approach to gathering practitioners' views was adopted in order to maximise their participation. The innovative qualitative method used required participants to:

- Complete a diary each day
- Record the activities they undertook at specified time periods
- Take photographs as appropriate
- Respond to a series of prompts
- Retrospectively consider how they spent their time

120 practitioners signed up to participate in this data gathering exercise. Of this group, 74 people submitted their responses in the specified time period. Participants from voluntary, public and private sectors were almost equally represented in the data set. The exercise generated a wealth of rich data. The research team at the Department of Human Resource Management in Strathclyde University undertook the analysis - specifically the 'prompt card' and timesheet elements of the submissions.

The series of prompts that participants were asked to respond to focused on the following topics:

- *Relationships* - what makes workers feel valued at work?
- *Support and supervision* - describing worker experiences of support and supervision
- *Learning and development* - how do they keep informed, and learn at work?
- *Work-life balance* - gain insights into the work-life balance of staff, and what, if anything would they like to change?
- *Pay and conditions* - how do current levels of pay and conditions affect how employees think and feel about their work?
- *Challenges and opportunities* - what helps people do their best at work? What gets in the way of them doing their best at work?
- *Future aspirations* - do employees aspire to have a career in care and where do they see themselves in 5-10 years?

The timesheets gave an overview of how many hours people worked in the week, the distance travelled, and a summary statement of how the week was for them and how many people they worked with that week.

Each participant was given an Iriss pack that included a work diary, the time sheet for the week and eight prompt cards related to eight topics. Timesheet and prompt card elements of the submission from all 74 participants were transcribed over a period of two months starting 1 July 2015. Utmost care was taken while transcribing to ensure the greatest level of accuracy possible in representing participants' original words/content. There were 28 participants from voluntary sector and 16 and 28 from private and public sectors respectively. Two participants who completed their time sheets and prompt cards did not provide any information about themselves. Most of the participants provided daily written accounts of their experiences at work, captured at regular intervals in their own natural environment. They (with few exceptions) noted their activities in a precise manner in the time sheets and followed a uniform pattern of entering their daily activities. They also provided reflection on those activities wherever possible.

In terms of the profile of respondents, 79 per cent were female, with an average age of 39.6 years. In terms of contractual hours, the majority were on permanent contracts, with the exception of eight who were on zero hour contracts and a further thirteen who were on part-time hours. The remainder were on full-time hours, with an average length of service of 5.7 years.

FINDINGS

Relationships: What made care workers feel valued at work?

KEY FINDINGS

- Interpersonal relationships were seen as central to feeling valued at work.
- Private sector respondents were more likely to highlight how good relationships with people supported by services were key to feeling valued.
- Public and voluntary sector respondents were more likely to cite good relationships with managers and peers through team work and support and supervision, (as well as relationships with users) as essential to feeling valued at work.

Our first batch of findings address the key issue of how to create a sense among social care workers that their work is valued. It was notable that despite being asked explicitly about being ‘valued at work’, many respondents chose to reflect on the importance of their relationships at work. For example, a number chose relationships with people who access support as a key source of a sense of personal value. Rather than (or sometimes as well as) referring to how feedback, rewards or relationships delivered a sense of value, some respondents typically focused on users’ expressions of satisfaction (‘getting a thank you’ was often mentioned).

Knowing that the persons I support are happy and I feel I have a good working relationship with them.

—PARTICIPANT 27, PRIVATE SECTOR

This emphasis on responses from people accessing support as a (dominant) source of feeling valued was particularly common among respondents working for private sector organisations, whereas respondents in both the public and third sectors were much more likely to speak of these issues alongside a number of other themes, namely:

- Feeling ‘listened to’ – that senior staff and managers acknowledged and responded to concerns raised about services and users;
- The value of positive feedback from senior staff and managers;
- Feedback and support from fellow team members.

As noted above, respondents working in the public and third sectors were more likely to make the link between line manager and peer encouragement and feeling valued in the workplace:

Getting positive feedback from managers, colleagues and service users make me feel valued as it let me know I am doing my job well and making a difference.

—PARTICIPANT 23, PUBLIC SECTOR

A public sector employee similarly noted the value of ‘feedback from my line manager’ either verbally following ‘a good job’ or through more formal superior appraisal note (Participant 15, Public Sector). A voluntary sector respondent pointed to the value of knowing that managers’ were aware of the achievements of staff.

Managers know the people who do a good job – knowing that I know and they know I am doing a good job helps me feel valued.

—PARTICIPANT 11, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

This does not mean that these sentiments were not visible among private sector respondents, rather, they were just not as common.

I feel valued at work when I get positive feedback from my colleagues and supervisors. After every shift my team leader makes a point – thanking each member of staff for their hard work. All of the co-ordinators also make a point of thanking staff and highlighting good practice.

—PARTICIPANT 40, PRIVATE SECTOR

Peer support and team work were particularly highlighted as factors that made participants feel valued, although again, these responses were rather more common among public and voluntary sector employees. For example, one voluntary sector respondent listed the value of supportive cultures in making employees feel valued in her organisation:

Great management team – very supportive of staff; staff team who are focused on supporting service users; good company overall – supporting senior management; encouraged by management to be the best I can be – always praised/ thanked for my input.

—PARTICIPANT 33, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A voluntary sector employee clearly gained considerable benefits from an open and supportive relationship with peers, listing factors that made her feel valued including:

When fellow colleagues and especially managers commend my good practice, again, giving specific example so it’s not tokenistic but personal; feeling comfortable to be open and honest with colleagues; feeling supported when supports are hard, long and exhausting – acknowledgement that it was hard – validation that it’s okay to feel burnt out sometimes.

—PARTICIPANT 52, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Many respondents felt valued when peers listened to, and supported them to respond to the needs of those they support.

Being listened to when issues arise to be dealt with.

—PARTICIPANT 16, PRIVATE SECTOR

Respondents consistently raised the value of strong, supportive and effective teamwork as a source of feeling valued and coping with work pressures. One public sector employee summed up the range of benefits that strong team relationships could deliver in terms of feeling valued:

Receiving good feedback from colleagues and being aware that my thoughts are valued by them; being included in decision making and having some of my views being actioned; being trusted to carry out pieces of work/tasks; being able to be part of fun activities and being accepted by all involved; belonging...

—PARTICIPANT 73, PUBLIC SECTOR

Another public sector employee suggested that she gained a sense of value from ‘colleagues who are positive and proactive and pull together’ (Participant 15, Public Sector).

The value of trust and mutual respect within effective teams was raised by a number of respondents. One respondent emphasised the value of trust and collaboration within work teams:

Although I don't have a degree in social work, I am still listened to and valued by my colleagues for my input. We are a real team and share our experiences, fears, thoughts to help one another. We never feel scared to admit we don't know and we like to learn together.

—PARTICIPANT 5, PUBLIC SECTOR

A third sector respondent similarly emphasised the importance of team support:

We are a small team and there is no bitching - everything gets brought to the table if there is problem. So I feel valued.

—PARTICIPANT 24, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

These findings reiterate familiar themes regarding the value of building strong teams offering mutual support among care workers. Positive feedback from senior staff and managers was also important. But it is important to note that for many respondents, their relationship with people they support was crucial to feeling valued in the workplace.

Support and supervision

KEY FINDINGS

- Across all sectors experiences of supervision were mixed, but the majority reported largely positive responses.
- The importance of good supervision influenced other aspects of participants' working lives, such as opportunities for relevant training, as well as constructive and supportive relationships with line managers.
- Successful supervision was based on friendly and supportive supervisors, who demonstrated listening skills, were experienced, and understood the pressures of working in the field. Consistent and regular formal contact with supervisors and a focus on learning and sharing practice during supervision, rather than on performance indicators, were valued.
- A minority raised concerns about the quality/appropriateness of supervision. Resource pressures often pushed out formal supervision undermining the accessibility of managers and leading to irregular sporadic and fragmented coverage. Line management skills in supervision were a key reason for shortfalls in quality of provision.

Across all sectors, respondents' experiences of supervision were mixed, but with the majority reporting largely positive responses. A substantial minority, nevertheless, raised concerns about the quality and appropriateness of supervision. Employees identified a number of key factors at the root of good practice in supervision.

Constructive support from 'listening' supervisors

A number of respondents across sectors characterised a supervision regime that was both regular and constructive:

We are responsible for minuting all discussion and action points and have supervision regularly usually every 4-6 weeks. My line manager is in a different office but still advocates an open door policy - I never feel I can't phone her if I need advice/guidance but try to be mindful that I don't overload her either...

—PARTICIPANT, 15, PUBLIC SECTOR

In addition to this open door approach, employees valued line management's own continued knowledge of front-line work and their ability to empathise with their role.

My experiences with support and supervision, up until now have been a success. I feel that the office staff and managers have been 'out in the field' providing care, so they can mostly relate to any queries or issues I may have. I am supervised once a month, and it is a very thorough discussion/questionnaire with supervisor which covers most, if not all aspects of my job. I

find this a great way to be able to open up about any concerns I may have.

—PARTICIPANT 4, PRIVATE SECTOR

As well as its formal learning and development role, effective supervision was also an important source of emotional support for some respondents – there was again an emphasis on the value of listening skills among supervisors, and being listened to.

The senior I currently work under though is fantastic. He is very person-centred both with the service users and staff. I receive individual six-weekly supervision sessions which last about 1 and 1.5 hours each time. This is a great opportunity to reflect on my practice as well as seek advice and guidance in relation to any or all work related issues. It also gives me a chance to vent if I need to. In my current job role I would say I feel very supported which is so important to me as my work environment can often be very physically and mentally draining.

—PARTICIPANT 46, PUBLIC SECTOR

My experiences with supervision have been positive. I always feel supported and listened to – I can always request supervision and bring forward if I need support or want to discuss my concerns.

—PARTICIPANT 49, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Accessible and regular contact with supervisors

Another factor influencing positive employee experiences was regularity of supervision. Analysis of the data appeared to suggest that 4, 6 or 8 weeks was the frequency that was most suited to respondents' needs. Other respondents reporting positive experiences of supervision highlighted both the attitudes of senior staff (with openness and friendliness valued) and their accessibility to respond to queries.

There is a great deal of support from the Team Leader, seniors and manager and full access to them and also good and cordial rapport. And anytime I am on shift there is always a senior to call to phone if I need help which is always a big help and also gives you confidence.

—PARTICIPANT 12, PRIVATE SECTOR

Problems were clearly apparent in the provision of supervision across the three sectors, based on a number of common problems outlined below.

Evidence of irregular and sporadic supervision

The accessibility of supervisory support and advice was seen as important by many respondents, but some reported weaknesses in such provision beyond initial training.

Phone calls to the office are often not returned unless 'they' class it as important.

—PARTICIPANT 29, PRIVATE SECTOR

A public sector employee compared current, very positive, experiences of supervision with a previous post where her line manager had been inaccessible – something that clearly impacted on her quality of working life.

I get supervision regularly – probably once a month – it is a great opportunity to discuss any issue – personal or professional and to address any problem or difficulties. It is also usually receiving feedback on my practice which is good – often we are on the go so much it is difficult to squeeze in time to talk to manager. I am happy with supervision in my current workplace, however when I did outreach previously I would regularly go without supervision and would at times not see my line manager for weeks. This can be challenging as there is no opportunity to talk to anyone and I often felt like although I was supporting sometimes up to 15 people a day – no one was there to support me.

—PARTICIPANT 21, PUBLIC SECTOR

A voluntary sector respondent noted how, following initial training, opportunities to access support and supervision had become much less frequent.

Support and supervision was good during my probationary period. I had a work-book/portfolio to work through and regular meetings. It has been much less structured since then. The organisation aims to have it every 6-8 weeks however this has not really happened. I do feel however that I am able to have support (informally) if required (for the most part). When I initiate contact (although recently due to supervisor's workloads, a bit less so).

—PARTICIPANT 2, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A number of public sector respondents reported long gaps in supervision (such as three months) due to staff shortages, absence, and/or turnover. One respondent working in a rural community raised concerns regarding the impact of resource limitations on the regularity of staff meetings and opportunities for supervision.

I feel very strongly that by reducing our team meetings to 1 hour every 2 months it has greatly reduced our opportunity to receive much more support and supervision. I believe this has a knock on effect on the standard of care we provide (which is good but could be better).

—PARTICIPANT 56, PUBLIC SECTOR

Another public sector employee noted that formal supervision had been infrequent due to staffing shortages.

Other respondents concurred, blaming a lack of resources that had rendered attempts at supervision 'sporadic' and 'ineffectual' (Participant 22, Voluntary Sector) or 'too often superficial – often over too quickly and sometimes cancelled' (Participant 48, Voluntary Sector). Another respondent concurred that resource pressures often pushed out formal supervision, adding that the accessibility of senior staff and managers for informal discussion was important in mitigating these pressures.

Support and supervision is ongoing. I do like more formal/protected time to be able to go over difficulties. Although this happens fairly regularly it could be improved on. It is always the first thing to be cancelled if anything occurs no matter how minor or easily something else could be to change. It is just as well that line management are so approachable or it could be a serious issue.

—PARTICIPANT 44, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The impact of resource constraints were echoed by another public sector employee who felt that lessons from supervision were not always implemented due to work pressures.

I think I am supported well in my current place of work... I feel I can bring up concerns during supervision and I am given advice and ways of progressing. I find I am often stressed and do not always remember everything we have discussed I should do. I need to be more organised and focussed. It is difficult in a care home to not get caught up in practicalities (hygiene, cleaning) and for some other things to get left behind e.g. fun and creativity.

—PARTICIPANT 32, PUBLIC SECTOR

For some respondents, irregular contact for supervision due to resource constraints had raised concerns about the extent to which they were supported in their work.

My experience of supervision is bad – my team leader is bogged down with so much – do not really see her but is always on the phone.

—PARTICIPANT 53, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The issue of resource constraints further impacted on the value respondents placed on their supervision sessions. One public sector employee raised concerns as to the value of supervising staff to meet KPIs that were often unattainable due to resource limitations.

At times it feels pointless as my outcomes are rarely met.

—PARTICIPANT 7, PUBLIC SECTOR

Supervisor skills

Some interviewees reported very mixed experiences of supervision, to some extent reflecting the skills of line managers. One respondent commended the regular supervision contact that was available, but felt that more could be done to draw out learning points for future practice (suggesting that the managers and senior staff involved, while making themselves accessible, would benefit from development in delivering effective learning through supervision).

I do get regular supervision monthly... In supervision I don't feel there is a lot of learning. I discuss my cases and what I plan to do; however, there is none or very little discussion around how to approach different scenarios for example. I feel that I am just expected to get on with it...

—PARTICIPANT 30, PUBLIC SECTOR

The need for further development work on delivering effective supervision is one theme that might be seen as arising from the research. One respondent raised concerns both over the quality of supervision and the turnover of supervisory staff in her organisation.

In my initial start at service I was looking forward to supervision to put forward my ideas and goals and how I could progress... I soon learnt that my supervisor was negative and I felt I could not say what I really wanted to. My next supervisor was great but she also was not able to put things forward due to her quieter nature. The supervisor I had for a year before was great and helped put forward positive ideas – sadly she is on maternity leave. I no longer feel supervision is worthwhile – it is just an exercise to fill in paper-work so the KPIs look good at the end of the year...

—PARTICIPANT 25, PRIVATE SECTOR

A few other respondents shared this view, and raised doubts as to how well informed senior staff were to conduct supervision.

Supervision is a piece of paper i.e. like a question and answer session...I know more about my customers than the supervision.

—PARTICIPANT 70, PRIVATE SECTOR

The lack of management skills in supervision could have alarming consequences for employee morale and sense of feeling valued at work.

Any supervision I have received has been solely negative and I have felt worse afterwards and unappreciated.

—PARTICIPANT 9, PUBLIC SECTOR

'Filling the gaps' through informal support

Voluntary sector respondents were more likely to focus on the informal aspects of peer review and support, which could provide an important complement to formal supervision.

We have weekly team meetings and receive a lot of support from peers. Our manager is always available to talk things over in person, by phone or e-mail and this is often more useful than formal supervision. I often contact the colleagues I have the closest relationship with by phone if I need feedback on an issue. We have formal supervision and this is an opportunity to talk about clients and other work related issues. It has a required format but there is flexibility to move beyond this if necessary.

—PARTICIPANT 43, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A small number of respondents made the specific point that informal peer support served a different function from the formal supervision provided by senior staff or line managers. Others felt that such informal support filled a gap when over-worked line managers were unable to spend time on supervision. For example, one respondent made a distinction between the emotional support provided by fellow team members and the more formal processes of supervision.

I get the best support from my team. There's always someone available to offer practical or emotional support and we value and respect each other. While I do have regular supervision I find this focuses so much on the particulars of case work that, while often helpful, it doesn't always feel all that supportive, more like a task that has to be completed. While my senior and manager can offer moral support in meetings, they are detached from the frontline.

—PARTICIPANT, 69, PUBLIC SECTOR

Another voluntary sector respondent noted that informal peer support had become all the more important given an increasing sense of distance between staff and managers at her organisation.

My colleagues – we support each other – we praise each other and talk through difficult situations... You have to find your own work sometimes though; management and the larger organisation seem to be turning into machines; not very person-centred.

—PARTICIPANT 55, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Learning and development

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants indicated how they had benefitted from good training and development from their employers over their careers. The statutory requirements for training under Scottish Vocational Qualifications were a strong impetus for training.
- In recent times the scope for learning and development had been affected by budget and time constraints. This meant for many only mandatory training was available, leading to levels of dissatisfaction.
- Continued passion and dedication to their work, meant many participants were taking initiatives on their own to keep their personal learning about their job up to standard. These approaches to learning involved discussions and sharing knowledge and expertise with line managers, other workers and people who access support.
- Web-based information from statutory and other sources such as newsletters were also seen as useful learning resources.

Participants were asked about how they learn and keep themselves informed at work. Experiences among respondents greatly overlap across the three sectors (private, public and voluntary) and do not reveal any significant differences.

Quite a number of participants conveyed their organisations' positive approach to workplace learning through their comments and entries. They reported that their organisation offers various relevant training programmes and 'refresher training' that they find useful and valuable and helps them to remain in sync with the expectations of the organisation.

Our company offers refresher training every year, along with additional courses that we can also attend to overall be able to offer a higher quality of care.

—PARTICIPANT 4, PRIVATE SECTOR

There are numerous in-house and external training courses and learning opportunities within my work...

—PARTICIPANT 9, PUBLIC SECTOR

I attend regular training ... I can request to go on training that is not core training - if the course would help me learn/develop or benefit the service user then I can attend this training.

—PARTICIPANT 61, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Participants were encouraged to gain qualifications beyond the level of their current position and several individuals have reported making progress to attain vocational qualifications. Compliance with statutory requirements can be a

significant driver for training. Participants mentioned using their own personal time and money to study for their NVQ or SVQ qualifications. Discussion of training needs with managers during appraisals and supervisions has also been reported.

I have the opportunity to raise training requirements and interests at supervision – however, the reality of having to take a chunk of time out of working on a daily basis with clients makes me hesitant about training.

—PARTICIPANT 63, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The impact of budget cuts

Participant entries and comments indicate that to a great extent the scope for learning and development has been affected by budget cuts. Learning is encouraged by organisations as long as there are minimal cost implications for the organisation. Many participants communicated their dissatisfaction with these changes.

Our organisation used to have a good training framework which has disappeared – thanks to cuts – only mandatory training is provided and even parts of that are to be done in your own time. Ideas of bringing in external funding get blocked for no apparent reason...

—PARTICIPANT 34, PUBLIC SECTOR

We have had some very good training opportunities over the 6 years I have been in [area of operation] but in the last couple of years this has been drastically cut back in order to save money. We are now expected to do much of the essential training online in own time which I have mixed feelings about. I do not feel that we are offered enough training on basic personal care – you seem to be expected to pick that up as you go along.

—PARTICIPANT 56, PUBLIC SECTOR

Resource constraints were felt in another way as quite a few participants reported lack of time to attend training programmes due to their workload.

Was booked in for fuel poverty awareness training but had to cancel due to workload. Finding it hard to get training as it is difficult to find time away from your case load.

—PARTICIPANT 65, ANONYMOUS

Self-directed and independent learning

Due to increased competition for funding and constrained spending within social care sector organisations, there are fewer opportunities available to acquire formal

training beyond the mandatory ones. Many participants feel passionately about their job and there are many examples of participants dedicated to working in the care area who have spent much of their working life in the sector and/or intend to spend many more years in the sector. So a great majority of participants reported taking initiatives on their own to keep them informed and learn more about their work. This could include taking college courses, or more team based initiatives through the workplace.

We have as a team organised our own team development days. Our seniors had said they would arrange one but never had the time.

—PARTICIPANT 58, PUBLIC SECTOR

We often set up meetings with each other to discuss common clients and interests such as group planning and activities. This allows us to harness each other's knowledge and abilities and use each other's experience to the full.

—PARTICIPANT 37, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Participants also mentioned reading policies and procedures regularly, keeping themselves updated on National Care Standards and SSSC's code of practice, reading files of people they support and arranging information sessions by peer team members etc. A vast majority of participants reported 'relying' on the Internet to research topics and issues related to their area of care. 'Researching online' and referring to self - help resource sites and other websites for information was widely reported. Other ways of acquiring information and knowledge about work such as 'team meetings', 'subscribing to newsletters' and 'networking' with various agencies and third sector organisations, was also commonly reported by participants.

Almost all participants communicated in one way or the other that they value 'inputs' and 'constructive criticism' from their colleagues. They reported learning a lot from their 'colleagues' and 'team members' through sharing information, knowledge and expertise within the team and also by observing the good practices of other colleagues or by shadowing or working alongside an experienced worker. This is indicative of teams collectively developing shared knowledge gained through their experiences of handling situations at work. 'Peer support' was identified by almost all participants as an important aspect of learning at work.

A lot of my learning comes from other team members - either through general discussion or observing them/their work. My colleagues are great at sharing their experiences and letting me look at reports they have written if I am doing something new.

—PARTICIPANT 69, PUBLIC SECTOR

I think you are always learning each moment of each day – learn from each other in the team, learn from the persons supported, learn from oneself during reflection ... listening to new ideas or approaches from team members.

–PARTICIPANT 25, PRIVATE SECTOR

I learn from talking to and listening to different colleagues and managers. I ask lots of questions to make sure I am doing the right thing.

–PARTICIPANT 52, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The majority of the participants feel and perceive that everyday contact with people they are supporting gives them an opportunity to learn. Various situations they face in the course of their day to day work and engaging in “self – reflection” at the end of the working day has also been cited as sources of learning by quite a number of participants.

I keep informed by reading service user files and reports ...I listen to the service user.

–PARTICIPANT 18, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Everyday contact with service users gives me the opportunity to learn and have more information about them in the process of chatting and interacting with them.

–PARTICIPANT 12, PRIVATE SECTOR

Work-life Balance

KEY FINDINGS

- The vast majority of employees worked more hours than what they are contracted for. The most common reason for undertaking additional hours was staff shortages.
- Workers complained of frequent unscheduled changes to rotas and shifts making it difficult to plan everyday events.
- Workers also reported taking work home with them and difficulties in taking breaks or cutting them short. Work-related pressure made it difficult for workers to engage in family activities or personal relationships outside work.
- Some workers reported negative wellbeing impacts, including sleep deprivation, stress and a loss of enjoyment in the job as a result of these pressures.
- Some workers had the benefit of organisational flexi-time policies or a good relationship with their line manager to help them cope with pressures of work-life balance. These options were generally more often reported by workers in the public and voluntary sectors.

Employees were asked to report the 'usual number of hours' they worked per week in their main paid job. Analysis of data reveals a vast majority of care providers work more hours than what they are contracted for. The high volume of additional hours had an impact on the personal lives of workers. Several employees reported having worked more than 45 hours a week and working 12 hour shifts. 'Staff shortages' has been cited as the most common reason for working extra hours. The following reflections provide ample evidence:

I work too much!! Particularly just now, as I am covering sickness, work in my own project and two other projects. I have lost my social life since starting in the company! Making more of a conscious effort to go out with friends when I am free - but always so tired...

—PARTICIPANT 33, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

And:

My work-life balance at the moment is certainly not equal. I work most, if not every day - covering holidays and sickness and have a short time at night to spend with family and friends.

—PARTICIPANT 4, PRIVATE SECTOR

Furthermore, several respondents indicated that the culture of the sector made them feel obliged to put in these additional hours.

Work-life balance can fall out of kilter especially when there are staffing issues [shortages] and I feel obliged to cover extra shifts - this can start to feel stressful.

—PARTICIPANT 2, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Unsocial working hours

Participants not only reported working extra shifts to provide emergency cover but also regularly working unsocial hours, doing 'back-to back shifts' and night shifts or 'sleepovers' and working on weekends, all of which requires them to stay away from home for longer time. Work-life balance issues were found to be more pronounced in cases where participants reported unsocial hours.

Getting a bit fed up of shift work now - feel I am constantly tired and unable to live my own life...

—PARTICIPANT 33, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Work-life balance can be challenging as I do shift work which includes sleepover shifts (being at work for 24 hours). My rota can be tiring as I only get one weekend off a month and work 6/7 days between days off.

—PARTICIPANT 23, PUBLIC SECTOR

Demanding and changing rotas

Working on an imposed rota subject to frequent changes seems to be a common practice in the sector. Employees expressed dissatisfaction with their work rota, which makes it difficult to plan things in advance. The following testimonials provide evidence:

It can be very difficult to plan anything like outings, night outs, doctor's appointments as our rotas are given to us weekly. This would probably be the main thing that I would change to help improve my work-life balance... in general it's hard to plan anything in advance as you do not know what your shifts will be.

—PARTICIPANT 75, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

I would like my rota on a 4 weekly basis rather than 3 or 4 days before the working week starts - this also makes self-directed support difficult as I can't plan anything and also not fair for personal reasons.

—PARTICIPANT 57, PRIVATE SECTOR

My work-life balance is non-existent at the moment due to being on shifts so much with an unreal rota that has no rhyme or reason for any of us.

—PARTICIPANT 25, PRIVATE SECTOR

Taking work home

Being in the care-giving sector requires employees to work long hours and deal with difficult and complex issues. Some days on the job were likely to be fun and

positive but other days are tension-filled and stressful. As a result, many reported taking the worries and concerns from work back home regularly.

I do take problems from work home; I do lose sleep worrying about service users and situations at work ... I would like to work part time in the future.

—PARTICIPANT 55, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Recently I have spent most of my time at home thinking about work. I have spent every day this week staying on at least two hours later than I am supposed to finish.

—PARTICIPANT 70, PRIVATE SECTOR

If I could change anything it would be to leave work at work and not take my worries or concerns home.

—PARTICIPANT 36, PUBLIC SECTOR

These results were confirmed from analysing the time sheet entries. Entries reported respondents taking work home, working on lunch breaks to accommodate extra work, working from home on off days and arranging activities for people who access support in personal time.

1:00 PM – Lunch – cut lunch by half an hour to check group materials are organised and to pick up client for group.

—PARTICIPANT 37, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

I was taking my work home with me as they say and I felt under a lot of pressure with no break ... I needed to have a personal life.

—PARTICIPANT 5, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Only 10 minutes lunch today although I will have to claim 30 minutes for lunch as it's the minimum.

—PARTICIPANT 65, ANONYMOUS

Impact on health and well-being

The shortage of staff and poor workload management led to a number of respondents feeling overwhelmed and overloaded by the pressures of the job role. The result was that these workers reported not just disruption to relationships with family and friends, but job exhaustion, loss of enjoyment, and increased stress. Such sleep deprivation and fatigue was commonly reported by the participants due to working long hours, which affected their motivation to work.

11:30 PM - To bed - realize I haven't had dinner but now too tired to eat and need to be up again at 5 am to do it all again - Hungry, sleepy and wonder why I do it!

—PARTICIPANT 29, PRIVATE SECTOR

At the weekend by the time I have got used to not being at work and cleared my head of thoughts about work it's pretty much time to get back.

—PARTICIPANT 43, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Sleep deprivation - or unforeseen circumstances seem to distract me...

—PARTICIPANT 60, PUBLIC SECTOR

Again, several entries made in the time sheets are reflective of 'tiredness getting in the way of performance'. Expressions such as 'I am not awake yet, ' This has been a long busy day and I am finding it hard to keep my eyes open' have been noted.

Coping with work-life imbalance

Many of the participants recognised the need to maintain work-life balance and make time for personal activities.

I would love to have a better work-life balance, to have more energy to do things after work and at weekends. My New Year's resolution has been to try and work on this and I have applied for condensed hours - working full time hours across 4 days.

—PARTICIPANT 14, PUBLIC SECTOR

In response, some participants reported taking initiatives on their own to create a better balance between the demands of the job and the healthy management (and enjoyment) of life outside work.

Finding time to keep myself well is not easy... I generally manage 15 minutes of Yoga in the morning although by the end of the week I am often exhausted and just use a guided meditation.

—PARTICIPANT 58, PUBLIC SECTOR

I notice I am stressed but have a good awareness, I use the gym to de-stress.

—PARTICIPANT 62, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Given many of the workers participating in this study felt their pay was low, it is doubtful that all those that needed the benefits of gym membership could actually afford to take advantage of it.

Participants often mentioned the need to have weekends off to recover from the physical and mental strain resulting out of providing care needs. Time sheet entries clearly reflected how eagerly people look forward to their weekends off. A small number of those who enjoy having regular weekends off or have a flexible working policy felt positive about their work and expressed content and satisfaction as it allowed them to get the required rest and take care of their personal and social lives.

I currently use the flexi working policy at my work which means I can pick my child up from school a couple of days per week and take her to school each morning. I feel that this works well and gives me quality time with my family..

—PARTICIPANT 41, PUBLIC SECTOR

My work-life balance is fine and I would not change it. We have flexible working so if something does come up at home we can usually take time out to deal with it.

—PARTICIPANT 64, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A few others who felt more in control of their work-life balance were those who reported that they could talk to their managers about the issue. Some reported that they would find it easy to take an hour or two off in a family emergency.

When pressures of caring for family at home increased I was able to speak to my line managers... support... was offered anytime.

—PARTICIPANT 44, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Comparison of data from voluntary, public and private sector participants with regard to their work-life balance experiences did not reveal significant differences. Some participants from the public and voluntary sector reported that their employers allowed them to opt for condensed hours or were offered the option of flexi work. They were also allowed time off to attend family emergencies but the use of these practices were not widely reported by the participants

Pay and conditions of employment

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of respondents were dissatisfied with their pay and conditions package. Dissatisfaction was most pronounced in the private and voluntary sectors. There was some evidence of in-work poverty from a small minority of respondents.
- Relatively few respondents, mainly from the public sector, were satisfied with their pay and conditions package. Participants cited opportunities to develop new skills, promotion and a strong vocational orientation as reasons for their satisfaction.
- Workers felt under-valued for what they perceived to be complex and demanding tasks undertaken over unsocial and fragmented hours. There was a perception that governments and society in general did not value care work. Zero hours contracts were seen to further under-value care work.
- Participants expressed concerns regarding the impact on service quality as people left the sector, or feared the poor wages and conditions would erode goodwill among staff.

There were 66 useable responses across the public (25), private (15) and voluntary (26) sectors to requests to comment on pay and conditions of employment. Just under a third of these respondents reported generally positive attitudes towards their pay and conditions, and of these, 55 per cent (11 respondents) were in the public sector. The public sector also had the largest proportion of workers expressing satisfaction with pay and condition (12 respondents). This compares with 6 respondents in the voluntary sector and only 2 respondents in the private sector.

Reasons for satisfaction

There were many reasons for satisfaction across the three sectors. A minority of workers were satisfied with what they perceived to be relatively generous pay and conditions packages.

Working for the council is great! Flexitime, holidays increase after 5 years! All good, no worries. Whatever I do in the future I would like to stay in the council.

—PARTICIPANT 5, PUBLIC SECTOR

One private sector worker expressed contentment at being paid the Scottish Living Wage.

Other respondents, however, had a more vocational orientation to their work:

The pay doesn't really make a difference to how I feel with my work it is my career. I now enjoy doing.

—PARTICIPANT 12, PRIVATE SECTOR

Similarly, in the voluntary sector another added:

I enjoy what I do and earn enough to 'pay the bills'. How much I get paid has never affected how I feel about the job.

—PARTICIPANT 13, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Several respondents added that their satisfaction was because they had recently been promoted, or as a result of acquiring new skills or qualifications. Several workers from the public sector suggested that their geographical location, i.e. working in the Islands could attract higher pay and bonus.

Negative perceptions of pay and conditions

The largest proportion of workers expressed negative views regarding their pay and conditions (31 respondents). The largest proportion of negative views were from the private sector (11 respondents). This was followed by the voluntary sector (11 respondents) and the public sector (9 respondents). In terms of the reasons for this dissatisfaction, there was a perception from a proportion of workers of feeling under-valued given the level of experience, skill and commitment they exhibited.

My pay does not reflect the experience I have or the commitment I make to my work – feel undervalued.

—PARTICIPANT 7, PUBLIC SECTOR

Here workers spoke of the multiple tasks and expectations on them ranging from 'receptionist, cleaner, hairdresser, clerical assistant, waitresses, removal men, activity co-ordinators' (Participant 9, Public Sector) to the huge responsibilities around 'medication, health care, mental health' (Participant 31, Public Sector). Several respondents noted that their pay levels were no better than supermarket workers. Other experienced staff expressed dismay at starting salaries within care work for new entrants, and indicated that they could not survive on similar levels. Their views were further corroborated by some respondents who were young and new to the care giving profession. A care worker who reported loving her job felt:

I feel like when you do get staff who are very good they might not always stick it as the pay is just above the living wage.

—PARTICIPANT 4, PRIVATE SECTOR

Care work was often undertaken over long, fragmented and unsocial hours. Respondents further reported how there was an expectancy that they performed tasks that are outside normal working time, or during formal breaks. There was also dissatisfaction over working during Christmas and New Year with no premium or bonus payments.

Other issues regarding attendance and working time across the three sectors related to being paid only for time worked, and long travel to work distances.

Pay on paper looks good, but as I don't get paid for travel time I often find I am working a 14-15 hour day and only earning 6-8 hours of pay. We are supposed to get a 2 hour break but in reality with travelling on a good day its half an hour maximum. I don't have a car, I have to get buses everywhere and I resent it.

—PARTICIPANT 29, PRIVATE SECTOR

This situation was common among workers on zero hour contracts in the private sector. Another respondent reported they left the house at 6.30am and finished at 10.30pm, but only got paid for nine hours work.

...zero hour contracts diminish the value of social care work. People should receive remuneration commensurate with responsibility – and being 're-sponsible' for someone's health and wellbeing is surely essentially valuable.

—PARTICIPANT 63, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Such negative views of working conditions could be exacerbated by poor quality buildings/work environment or having no office base at all.

Respondents further identified how responsibility for poor pay was because government and society generally did not value care as a profession.

I feel undervalued by councils and government, taken for granted, invisible until something goes wrong.

—PARTICIPANT 32, PUBLIC SECTOR

And:

A carer's wage isn't great. Society values money more than people...

—PARTICIPANT 35, PRIVATE SECTOR

This is one I could rant and rave about for ages. Recent procurement and retendering has devalued the voluntary/social care provision. Impact on pay and conditions is always a threat. Feel angry and demotivated, we are an easy target – unfair.

—PARTICIPANT 44, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Those who expressed mixed opinions about pay and conditions pointed to other benefits such as good levels of sick pay, holidays and sometimes pensions. There was also some recognition by a few respondents of the compensating benefits of having a flexible employer who would allow time off for personal issues. In some cases these respondents reported that the overall reward package was good, but

were angry that they had not received any cost of living pay rise for between three to four years. Several respondents in this category also indicated that although they had done well to climb the pay scale and were relatively comfortably off, they were frustrated there were few opportunities for progression either in salary or career.

Evidence of in-work poverty

There was some evidence to suggest that a few respondents suffered in work poverty as they were struggling to make ends meet because of low salaries. Comments came from respondents across the three sectors.

I am often very skint – the wage is not good for the amount of responsibility we have.

–PARTICIPANT 31, PUBLIC SECTOR

I can't afford to provide my family with a decent life/standard of living on such a poor wage and so I am always looking out for a new job in the same sector (health and social care) but with an average wage.

–PARTICIPANT 53, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

And:

Need more money – struggle at the end of the month and I don't live expensively.

–PARTICIPANT 64, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

This was coupled with concern among some respondents (private sector) that they were not paid the living wage. Moreover, several reported how it could be difficult to pick up additional hours to boost their wages. In contrast, others reported that they had to work significantly more hours to make their income stretch to a decent level.

Impact on service quality

There were some concerns regarding the impact the above issues over pay and conditions were having on service quality. Several respondents reported how they were expected to draw from their income to support social events for the supported person, but their own precarious financial position and the meagre organisational resources were a considerable barrier to this.

It's hard to do activities with service users when we don't get much petty cash and our wages are pretty low – I had £3.75 for a five hour shift – parking was £2.00, lunch £6.50, and activity £3.00 – basically using an hour's wage to pay my way!

–PARTICIPANT 54, PRIVATE SECTOR

There was also evidence that the care sector will suffer in the future, as normally dedicated workers aspire to have a decent standard of living, which their current jobs cannot offer them.

I knew what the wages were when I applied for the job. However, the wages are not high enough to keep in the position long term despite how much I love the job.

—PARTICIPANT 40, PRIVATE SECTOR

And:

At the moment my salary is not important and does not affect the way I feel about my job. However, it might in the future when I am considering a family and moving to a larger house.

—PARTICIPANT 37, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Our pay and conditions make me feel frustrated when compared to corporate luxury that often does more harm than good. It makes me feel this is not a forever job for me.

—PARTICIPANT 50, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Others spoke of how low pay could have a corrosive impact on attitudes among workers:

If pay is unfairly low, then eventually this would erode the ethics and make someone resentful of the smallest task asked.

—PARTICIPANT, 11, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Despite the above, there was evidence of resilience among some workers in the face of poor pay and conditions. In the private sector, one worker typified this resilience by stating:

I work extremely long hours for not a lot of pay and often feel undervalued by the organisation - but saying that I am truly dedicated to this work and would and will always put the persons I support first and always will.

—PARTICIPANT 25, PRIVATE SECTOR

Challenges in social care work

KEY FINDINGS

- Austerity and scarce resources in public services represented a major challenge to workers and their ability to effectively achieve their outcomes for users.
- Work intensification (having to do more with the same or less resources) was the most significant impact of austerity measures across the three sectors. Short staffing and increased workloads hindered learning, the amount of time spent with users, and led to diminishing perceptions of job security and well-being among staff.
- Poor inter-personal relations with line managers, colleagues and some people who access support were seen as potential barriers to progress in achieving outcomes. Common concerns related to risk aversion and a lack of flexibility among some managers. There was a view that poor communications between staff and senior management along with other government agencies such as those responsible for housing or health contributed to challenges in achieving outcomes.

Our penultimate group of findings seek to capture workers' general perceptions of the key challenges associated with working in social care, as well as the opportunities open to them. First, workers revealed many challenges that stood in the way of their effectively undertaking their work. These are outlined below.

Austerity and stretched resources

A few respondents across the three sectors specifically cited funding cuts as a problem.

I guess council funding cutbacks can play a part in getting in the way of doing of our best.

—PARTICIPANT 56, PUBLIC SECTOR

Indeed, there were several respondents who felt anxious about their job security in the current climate and admitted this affected their performance.

When I do not feel secure in my job I am worried I could get fired. I lose confidence in my ability and feel belittled. I feel anxious.

—PARTICIPANT 52, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Several respondents also reported how their organisations now found it difficult to provide training, which added a further restriction on their ability to function at their best. This could involve workers having a lack of knowledge regarding how to deal with particular client conditions or their complex needs.

Participants feared cuts would have consequences for the quality of services they delivered. One individual, for example, indicated that stretched resources impacted on activities with users as their organisation (Voluntary Sector) could no longer contribute to the cost of meals for staff on social outings with people accessing support. The result was that some people who access support did without rather than eating by themselves.

More significantly, for quality of service, there was strong evidence of workers' experiencing an intensification of work (doing more or the same with less) across the three sectors, along with juggling multiple tasks and responsibilities.

The volume of work we are expected to be responsible for... it is unmanageable and unrealistic.

—PARTICIPANT 14, PUBLIC SECTOR

Additional tasks could be loaded onto what respondents felt was an already demanding workload. Others reported that the volume of clients or tasks they were expected to deal with made it difficult to focus and distracted them from effectively doing their job. This led to certain tasks being rushed or not completed to their satisfaction. Others indicated that the volume of work made it difficult to keep up to date with maintaining records and care plans.

There were also suggestions that the current climate impacted on staffing levels which again could be a significant hindrance to undertaking their work effectively.

To do my best for the service user I need a full complement of staff.

—PARTICIPANT 42, PUBLIC SECTOR

Participants also reported that cost savings had a detrimental impact on access to advice and leadership. An individual in the public sector, for example, reported how a recent restructuring of management removed two layers of experienced senior staff, which diminished the level of knowledge and support front-line staff could rely on. As a consequence, several participants reported feeling 'overwhelmed'.

This sense of being 'overwhelmed' led to a number of respondents indicating that a serious hindrance to their capacity to do their job properly was down to sheer exhaustion, both physically and mentally. Several participants revealed that sleep deprivation or exhaustion affected their performance towards the end of a long day, or if they had been working up to 10 days in a row. Such conditions could lead to incidents of physical illness.

Analysis of the time sheets confirmed these findings. Respondents were asked to sum up their working week in one sentence. The majority of responses were

largely about the pace, volume and unpredictability of work and how busy they were. Workers could use phrases such as ‘emotionally draining’ (Participant 39, Public Sector). For several respondents, lone working exacerbated these conditions as they felt isolated.

At the same time, a proportion of workers, albeit a smaller one, acknowledged that they enjoyed the challenge of these conditions. In their responses to summing up the working week, they used phrases such as ‘exhausting and exhilarating’ (Participant 22, Voluntary Sector). Similarly, another commented:

Exhilarating, exhausting, emotional - wouldn't change it.

—PARTICIPANT 51, PUBLIC SECTOR

Others mentioned how despite the challenge of the intense work, they had a continued sense of achievement.

I achieved something I thought was impossible - brilliant!

—PARTICIPANT 57, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

‘Bureaucracy’

A substantial group of respondents (10) reported that their ability to work effectively was regularly challenged by bureaucracy and form filling. There was a perception among many respondents that the completion of paperwork was particularly onerous and distracted them from time they could spend with people who access support.

Paper - this has increased greatly over the years and can get in the way of the ‘person centred’ care approach.

—PARTICIPANT 39, PUBLIC SECTOR

Included in some of these challenges was a frustration that much of the required paper work was duplicated. Another issue was that excessive paperwork, regulation and procedure meant that it was difficult to change things quickly.

I sometimes get frustrated at the rigidity of the organisation. Social care moves so fast and there are times when organisational processes lag behind.

—PARTICIPANT 48, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Interpersonal and team relations

Some inter-personal relationships were seen as a hindrance for care workers. Poor relationships with line managers were cited as one of the key hindrances in this regard. In particular, respondents reported that the lack of positive feedback and

support could undermine their efforts to undertake their tasks to the best of their ability.

Positive feedback is rarely given and I feel that the manner in which my unit manager speaks to me/addresses issues makes me feel belittled and unwanted in my workplace.

—PARTICIPANT 9, PUBLIC SECTOR

Other issues related to perceptions that sometimes line managers could put staff under too much pressure by delegating work to them that they as senior members of staff should be responsible for. Another respondent had concerns regarding the knowledge and competence of their line manager in policies and processes. Others felt that their senior manager was sometimes ‘stuck in old ways of doing things’ which they felt hindered innovation.

Just as significant were concerns over the impact work relations with peers could have on respondents’ effectiveness. Care workers spoke of their frustration regarding largely negative attitudes from colleagues characterised by pessimism, not pulling their weight in the team and their unwillingness to change or engage with new ideas. There were reports of colleagues being risk averse, and so not implementing changes. Other manifestations of this problem included reports of an ‘us and them’ attitude among staff.

Finally, in a small number of cases, other respondents reported how they faced difficulties in supporting people who access support to engage with change and new ideas, which would test their patience. They found handling the moods of those they support difficult and challenging, especially if it involved abusive behaviour. There were also suggestions that violent or threatening behaviour was a cause of disruption to workers achieving the best outcomes for services.

Communication and joint working

The final major cause of disruption to respondents’ work related to poor communication. This included very practical day-to-day matters when colleagues fail to pass on incidents in the duty room diary or the communication book. A few respondents complained of their isolation from lone working. This isolation gave them less chance to interact with their colleagues, to share experiences and learn, but also, importantly, ‘let off steam’. Other areas of concern related to the cancellation of team briefings/meetings. Some workers also felt that there was a lack of feedback on performance, not helped by the cancellation of supervision meetings.

There were also issues raised regarding communicating with senior staff, related to either a lack of ability to reach them or the communication being essentially

one way. Additional issues could occur when shifts were changed with little notice or appointments were cancelled. Other participants pointed towards problems working and communicating across services, especially with health or housing.

Integration agenda has been challenging - lack of clear, consistent communication and getting partners to become involved.

—PARTICIPANT 6, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Opportunities in social care work

KEY FINDINGS

- Many respondents reported that personal relationships with line managers and colleagues were helpful to them achieving their goals.
- Participants reported how teamwork and trust among workers, as well as approachable managers and supportive supervision was key to successful outcomes. Praise for line managers and their contribution was particularly common among public and voluntary sectors workers.
- Training and good communications were seen as helpful in achieving successful outcomes in social care.
- The ability to exercise independence in decision-making in some aspects of work and participate in shaping services was seen as a key factor in achieving outcomes. This perception was particularly present among voluntary sector workers.

The research also captured workers' perceptions of the opportunities open to them in relation both to their own career development and to assist them in service delivery.

HR interventions - training, participation and communication

Employees cited several formal HR interventions as key aids to help them achieve their goals. Training was identified by some workers as important in leading to successful outcomes. Although this is only a small sample of workers across the three sectors, there appeared to be more support for the influence of training from voluntary sector workers compared to public and private responses.

I feel my training courses help me to do the best work I can.

—PARTICIPANT 18, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Another area which workers across the three sectors cited as helpful was a climate of workplace relations that allowed a degree of voice, participation and autonomy in work.

Being empowered to make decisions and be spontaneous makes me able to do my best.

—PARTICIPANT 28, PUBLIC SECTOR

Again, however, and with the caveat that this is a small sample, these benefits were more commonly cited in the voluntary than public and private sectors. This included a feeling among these voluntary sector respondents about the benefits of being allowed to input into the development of projects.

I feel I have the opportunity to use my initiative/judgement and that I am trusted to do so and do a good job, this encourages me to work at my best.

—PARTICIPANT 2, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

And:

Being employed by a third sector organisation gives us autonomy to develop new things. There is far less structured process going on.

—PARTICIPANT 6, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Finally, in this section, communication was seen as important across the three sectors, especially the keeping of accurate notes by colleagues when changing shifts, or just general updates on progress of those supported by services. Communication from management was seen as important in terms of clarifying tasks and responsibilities. Moreover, clear lines of communication with other agencies was also seen as crucial in progressing people.

Nature of job and achieving outcomes

The final cited factor that helped employees across all sectors to achieve their goals was the intrinsic value and satisfaction they gained from working in social care.

My own motivation and commitment. My values - I aspire to do the best I can to be supportive.

—PARTICIPANT 15, PUBLIC SECTOR

The love I have for the job has been a big help to do my best work.

—PARTICIPANT, 12, PRIVATE SECTOR

And:

I get a great deal of self-satisfaction knowing I have supported someone - helped them access the local community, meet friends, even wash their hair, put their bins out - knowing that I help make that person's life a little easier and that helps them to feel good.

—PARTICIPANT 53, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Across the three sectors workers recorded incidents, or a general approach which conveyed efforts to engage and include people supported by services in changing and improving their lives (something that was clearly valued by workers). Many of the principles were broadly in line with person-centred or personalised (self-directed support) approaches to delivering services.

Through Self-Directed Support it is about discussing how they will reach their outcomes and what needs to be put in place to achieve this. Empowering people to maintain as much independence and taking control in their own life.

—PARTICIPANT 41 PUBLIC SECTOR

Trying to get them to think more for self and make their dreams come true.

—PARTICIPANT 16, PRIVATE SECTOR

I treat every service user as an individual supporting them to achieve/reach their full potential no matter how small or simple the task/activity may seem or how much a challenge it may be...support them to be independent as they are able.

—PARTICIPANT 13, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

These outcomes-driven approaches to services were undertaken with the caveats that no one is the same and that independence could mean different things to different individuals, with some making big steps, and others smaller, but no less significant. In addition, this approach to encouraging independence and more positive lifestyles was developed over a period of time, taking in a number of stages depending on the person's needs so as to not overwhelm them. Another common phrase by respondents was the need to always respect the dignity of those they support.

Workers identified a common set of skills and tools in order to undertake these tasks. These included listening skills so that the voice of the user was heard and they owned the objectives and outcomes.

Listening to the person I support - respecting them as individuals - getting to know the person, their likes, dislikes - being positive - take small steps - being realistic.

—PARTICIPANT 53, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

An essential part of this process was building trust, which involved considerable time and patience. Many people who are supported by services were afraid or unsure regarding changes to their lives. In this context, respondents stressed the importance of communication skills so that users were aware of the implications of change and feel comfortable.

Interpersonal relations

Just as poor interpersonal relations with peers within the workplace could be a hindrance, good relationships were seen as significant facilitators towards helping workers achieve their ends. The sharing of information, knowledge and expertise

within the team through arranging ‘team development days’ and ‘group planning and activities’, setting up meetings to discuss common clients or cases, provide sufficient evidence. Strong personal and supportive relationships with peers was one of the most cited factors that helped workers achieve their goals across the three sectors.

A good team is always guaranteed that you work well – good communication, support and mutual trust with your colleagues is more important than from a supervisor.

–PARTICIPANT 34, PUBLIC SECTOR

Similarly among private and voluntary sector respondents:

Help from team members who are positive and get on with doing.

–PARTICIPANT 25, PRIVATE SECTOR

My colleagues help me do my best at work – they are a great team and we all complement each other with different skills and support.

–PARTICIPANT 55, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

In addition, workers in the public and voluntary sectors particularly cited how positive relations with line managers were crucial to achieving successful outcomes in their work.

Encouragement by my line manager who appreciates my work, acknowledges this through productive supervision and appraisals and an open door policy.

–PARTICIPANT 15, PUBLIC SECTOR

Personally, I feel that having such a supportive, approachable management team helps me do my best – both managers are so respectful of their staff and truly passionate about the project – always encouraging me to go above and beyond as an employee.

–PARTICIPANT 33, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Areas of the line management role that were cited as particularly useful included formal supervision.

Future aspirations - Where would you like to be in 5-10 years?

KEY FINDINGS

- Across all sectors, the majority of respondents expressed a desire to stay in care work over the next five years. Some expressed a hope for a better pay settlement during that period.
- Public sector workers were more optimistic about being able to secure a 'traditional' career path of gaining qualifications and experience and moving onto management roles.
- Career aspirations were seen to be limited by lack of opportunities in the more remote, rural areas. Some of those seeking further promotion did so with the caveat that they would still want direct contact with people supported by services and have the ability to help them in their lives.
- A minority of respondents expressed a desire to leave the sector, due to excessive workloads, stress and low pay.

Across all sectors, the majority of respondents expressed a desire to stay in care work. Many of our respondents saw themselves in similar roles in five years (although sometimes expressing a hope for a better pay settlement during that period).

Public sector employees were perhaps most likely to articulate a 'traditional' approach to career aspirations. A number of these respondents mentioned undertaking training, achieving SVQs, and potentially moving towards senior or management roles.

I aspire to have career in care - in 5 to 10 years I would like to be working with children and moving up the ladder in a service.

—PARTICIPANT 31, PUBLIC SECTOR

In some cases there was an awareness that career progression might be limited by few job openings becoming available. Public sector employees, particularly in rural communities, questioned the extent to which positions would become available. Others expressed an interest in working in specialist fields in care or in moving into social work or nursing.

I have just recently started a care course. In 5 to 10 years' time I would definitely like to be in management or steering close to. I would also consider going into social work someday; perhaps I would like to run my own domiciliary care business.

—PARTICIPANT 4, PRIVATE SECTOR

Some respondents were keen to stay in the sector, but were reluctant to pursue promotions that would result in higher workloads and spending less time delivering care.

I care about the people I work with and I am not interested in moving elsewhere for promotion. I have been asked to take promotion where I work. However, our senior workers do not get to work directly with our customers very often which is what I enjoy. Our senior workers do a 50 – 60 hour week plus going on call and are under a lot of pressure. I do not want to do this. In 5-10 years' time I hope to be doing the same job. Hopefully we will continue to get funding to allow me to do this.

—PARTICIPANT 35, PRIVATE SECTOR

We should also acknowledge that a smaller number of respondents expressed a desire to leave the sector. Excessive workloads, stress and low pay were the push factors for these respondents.

I used to want it as a career. Now I am not sure as there is not much financial reward for so many hours and it's a struggle. I am currently off sick as I am so exhausted. This seems to be normal from what the other staff say.

—PARTICIPANT 29, PRIVATE SECTOR

I aspire to have a career in 5 years' time which doesn't involve people with problems! Something with plenty of colour and joy – like being a florist...

—PARTICIPANT 50, VOLUNTARY SECTOR

There was also the usual turnover anticipated from retirement of those in their late 50s.

Consistent with previous studies, when asked about their aspirations for the future, many care workers expressed a desire to stay in the sector. For many (especially voluntary sector care workers) continuity in their current role – but with better pay and more support – was welcome. Public sector employers appear to have been most effective at articulating potential career pathways for their employees, and there are perhaps lessons here for organisations in other sectors. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of respondents were contemplating leaving the sector – employees in their 50s often saw themselves as retiring in the medium term; and some others were seeking alternative, better-paid and less stressful opportunities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report has been to present an overview of the views and insights of front-line workers in public, private and voluntary sectors concerning a number of crucial areas of work and employment in social care.

Interpersonal relationships were seen as central to care workers feeling valued in work. There were sectoral differences regarding which relationships contributed to these positive feelings. Private sector respondents were more likely to highlight how good relationships with people supported by services were key to feeling valued. In contrast, public and voluntary sector respondents were more likely to cite good relationships with managers and peers through team work and support and supervision (as well as relationships with users) as essential to feeling valued at work.

A key challenge revealed by the data relates to the on-going culture within social care of 'doing more with the same or less' through work intensification. Respondents across all sectors reported problems achieving a *work-life balance*. Imbalance between work and non-work responsibilities has a number of negative outcomes that has been well established in the literature. In terms of job attitudes, employees reporting high levels of work-life conflict tend to exhibit lower levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Both work-to-life and life-to-work conflict have also been associated with increased stress and burnout (Anderson et al., 2002; Kinnunen and Mauno, 1998), cognitive difficulties such as staying awake, lack of concentration, and low alertness (MacEwen and Barling, 1994), and reduced levels of general health and energy (Frone, Russell, and Barnes, 1996). The evidence from this research is that covering additional hours for absent colleagues, or understaffed services, working unsocial and long hours, and fragmented and unpredictable shifts took a considerable toll on the ability of workers to sustain a full family or social life. For some respondents, work spilled into their personal time and restricted their breaks. There was also evidence of significant health and well-being implications as workers reported considerable fatigue and exhaustion, which could affect performance. Workers developed personal coping strategies to alleviate these conditions, while a small number of respondents were able to take advantage of flexible working policies established by their employer.

Respondents' views on *support and supervision* capture wide variation in experiences. Good practice was reported by respondents who experienced regular and consistent supervision that was focused on learning, development and practice-sharing. A minority of respondents reported much more negative experiences, drawing attention to the need to resource supervision properly and to ensure that managers and senior staff are trained to deliver effective supervision. These results reflect other research in the sector that has raised concerns regarding opportunities for supervision over the last few years. There is

some evidence that social care providers have been rationalising their supervision procedures by moving to team rather than one-to-one supervision (Cunningham, 2011). Given that supervision and appraisal are key tools for identifying training needs, this diminution of provision raises concerns regarding development opportunities for social care workers.

Care workers are the 'backbone' of the social care system. While recruiting care staff employers normally seek people 'with a vocation or commitment to the value of the work they are doing' which is 'often more important to the employer than initial training and qualifications that a person may bring to the job' (Rainbird et al, 2009: 76). However, research (Rainbird et al, 2009) emphasizes that in order for care staff to effectively utilise their skills they need access to relevant qualifications and have training and development opportunities that will enable them to develop more specific expertise in their area of care. Workers across the three sectors had traditionally reported valuable *learning and development* experiences. However, austerity in public expenditure meant that these opportunities for formal training were becoming increasingly constrained and limited to mandatory/statutory training. In addition, constrained resources meant that some respondents found it difficult to attend training events. In response, and largely due to continued commitment to their work and the lives of the people they support, participants across the three sectors reported taking personal initiatives to continue their learning. These include learning online, subscribing to newsletters, keeping up to date with National Care Standards, networking with other workers in alternative care providers. A significant source of learning and knowledge was identified as team members - their peers and line managers - as well as those they support. Moreover, participants reported that their need to attain qualifications at SVQ level for compliance with statutory requirements was a big incentive to continue with training. Some respondents undertook significant independent efforts to continue training, raising questions regarding what happens to those who do not have the resources to do so. Again, results from this analysis of frontline staff reflects other research that highlights that training is sometimes insufficiently resourced or inconsistent (Cavendish Review, 2013).

Other specific formal human resource management interventions that appeared to be helpful included good communications and autonomy and discretion in shaping services. In the latter case, it was participants from the voluntary sector that were more likely to cite participation and autonomy at work as a useful tool to help achieve their outcomes at work.

The largest proportion of workers expressed dissatisfaction with their *pay and conditions* package. Discontent was most pronounced in the voluntary and private sectors, with the latter the most critical. These findings are perhaps unsurprising given the financial pressures affecting the social care sector. Austerity in public finances is significantly impacting on public sector income and activities with

consequences for its own workforce. The brunt of austerity measures has been seen to fall most heavily on local authorities. Care providers are strongly reliant on local authority (LA) fees as a source of income, which has always made the negotiation of annual prices rises and subsequent pay increases difficult. The longstanding shortfall in annual rises in LA fees generates major financial problems for providers (Cunningham, 2008).

As public funding for care has fallen during the recent economic crisis, and demand for services has risen, austerity has added to this squeeze (Cunningham, 2011), leading to increasing insecurity for providers and real pay cuts. This has come in addition to a trend that has seen pay for unsocial working hours been eliminated or reduced including overtime premiums, night work, weekend working and public holiday working (Rubery et al, 2011). Furthermore, around half of workers are neither paid for their travel time (in contravention of the national minimum wage legislation) nor compensated for travel costs (petrol, etc.) (Resolution Foundation, 2015).

In return for above-average funding increases, providers in Scottish care homes have implemented a £7 per hour minimum pay threshold for care staff, as a consequence of £10m Government funding, matched by £5m from Councils and £5m from providers (Scottish Care, 2015). Further increases in pay from the UK government's NLW have led to concerns expressed in the Scottish care sector. Despite the difficulties employers may experience in meeting the demands of the UK government's 'new' NLW (UKHCA, 2015; Scottish Care, 2015), or the 'real' Living Wage (Resolution Foundation, 2015), there are obvious benefits for organisations to meet these requirements beyond being compelled to because of statutory regulations. This is because this study reveals how poor pay is having a corrosive impact on morale for some employees in the sector. In particular, evidence suggests poor conditions of employment lead to perceptions among some respondents of being under-valued; others experience in-work poverty; contribute to poor service and, for some respondents, the inability to meet a decent standard of living leads to intentions to quit.

Pressures associated with pay, conditions and work intensification fed into the varying views that care workers had about their *future aspirations* in the sector. As we have seen above, many wanted to continue working in social care, but also hoped for pay improvements and opportunities for progression. These findings will be of interest for stakeholders in a social care sector that badly needs to retain and develop its best employees. Turnover rates are very high for care workers, running at around 22%, rising to 30% in domiciliary care (NMDS, 2010). A series of studies reveals some connection between turnover and absence and poor pay and conditions (Devins, et al, 2014). In particular lower levels where the living wage was in place (Wills and Linneker, 2012). Rising turnover rates are also linked to falling pay and the worsening of other terms (Resolution Foundation, 2015).

Moreover, a review of retention in social care indicates that enhancements such as uplifts for unsocial hours and payment for travel time, along with good training and development and progression structures can have a positive effect on staff turnover (Resolution Foundation, 2015).

Overall, although respondents from this study were able to point to many continuing and positive aspects to their work in social care, it was of some concern that aspects of work and employment were largely viewed negatively. Poor pay, difficult work-life balance, work intensification, increasing bureaucracy, difficult inter-personal relations and reduced opportunities for training and development, undermined morale and in a minority of cases their commitment to continue in social care. This leaves us to make a series of recommendations for policy, practice and future research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for policy

- Key stakeholders should continue to promote a 'national conversation' with regard to social care work, and whether and by how much it is or should be valued and rewarded in society. This should involve continued consultation between the social partners (employers, unions, government (central and local) officials around appropriate pay levels in social care and the means to achieve it.
- Further effort is required to build cross-sectoral cooperation between government, employers and unions regarding the best way to phase-in the new National Living Wage, and aspire to the 'real' Living Wage.

Recommendations for practice

- Drawing from data revealed in this project, there is a need to promote the business case for addressing issues of work-life balance within social care providers. This should highlight the negative implications for worker health and performance from the lack of work-life balance and intensified workloads. This should be targeted at levels of government and provider organisations.
- There is a need to invest adequate resources in social care so as to ensure the consistency of supervision across the three sectors. There would be value in a move towards a commitment of resourcing an agreed guaranteed supervisory frequency, depending on care setting for every social care worker.
- Key stakeholders should investigate what lessons can be drawn from informal approaches to learning and development to be transferred to facilitate formal, organisational programmes. There is a need to ensure that informal workplace learning contributes towards overall progress on employee learning, qualification and training across the sector.
- Using the results of this study, key stakeholders should promote the social care sector as a good place to work because of its close, supportive team-based working relationships.

Recommendations for future research

- There is a need to investigate career paths across public, private and voluntary providers to understand any differences and barriers to progression. Consideration for the potential of location-specific projects (such as those promoting retention in remote rural communities) to complement national strategy is required.
- Further research is needed into commissioning practices and how these influence staffing levels at the frontline and with line management roles. Particular focus should be on whether there is adequate support for front-line staff following austerity driven restructuring of management roles.

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