

Recruitment and retention in adult social care: secrets of success

Learning from employers what works well

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Read the full report at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/secretsofsuccess

Executive summary

Introduction

We know that there is a real and enduring challenge for employers within the sector to recruit, develop and retain the right people to deliver high quality, person-centred care and support services. We are also aware that there is no single solution to this challenge, especially given the wide variation in recruitment and retention circumstances across the country.

We therefore decided to conduct a piece of research amongst adult social care employers with a turnover of less than 10% to explore what it is that they do that they feel contributes to their success in relation to recruitment and retention. To compliment this we conducted research amongst individual employers to explore their experiences of recruitment and retention.

Our hope is that by disseminating their ideas on good practice others can learn from the experiences and that we can use the information to shape our future resources.

Adult social care employers

Our research amongst employers with low staff turnover rates found that the things that make a difference do not necessarily cost organisations more but can have a positive impact on potential candidates and existing employees. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that staff turnover is an influencing factor in organisations obtaining favourable ratings from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

A) Attracting more people

Attracting the right people, with the right values, behaviours and attitudes to work in adult social care is vital.

“When recruiting we have in our minds ‘would we like them to look after our family member?’”

(Foxglove Care Limited, Residential care provider)

Employers told us that:

- you need to have a good understanding of local needs and circumstances to underpin your recruitment planning process; this enables you to be proactive and strategic, rather than reactive
- it’s important to pay above the National Living Wage, but also to sell the wider benefits of working in adult social care; employees value good working conditions, especially flexibility
- developing a positive organisational culture, where staff are supported and valued and have opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge reinforces the message that working in adult social care can be a good career choice
- building a strong reputation for being a good employer means that existing staff will spread the word and will attract like-minded people, that ‘fit’ the organisations values to apply for your vacancies
- being honest about the realities of the job saves time for both potential job applicants and organisations and helps ensure a good match with the organisation’s ethos and values and the people who need care and support.

“You need to offer a competitive pay rates, good working conditions, training and development.”

(Greek and Greek Cypriot Community of Enfield, Domiciliary care provider)

B) Taking on the right people

Having attracted the right people to apply for your vacancies it is important to select and employ the best people for the jobs.

“Don’t just fill the vacancies. Fill them with the right people.”

(Claxton House, Atlanta Healthcare, Residential care provider)

Employers told us that:

- finding staff with the right values and behaviours is more important than finding staff who are already qualified; skills can be taught but personal attributes (kindness, compassion, reliability, honesty, etc.) cannot
- life experience and a willingness to learn can be more desirable than previous work experience (reflecting the principles of values based recruitment)
- inviting candidates for ‘taster shifts’ and involving people who need care and support and their families (or friends and advocates) in the recruitment process helps you to establish whether candidates ‘walk the talk’
- you need to take a multi-pronged approach to communicating the values, behaviours and attitudes you look for in staff so that candidates are clear about whether the role is right for them
- values based interviews enable you to explore whether candidates will ‘fit’ your organisational needs.

“Spending time with the candidate at the beginning of the process will pay dividends later on. Informal interviews allow you to select / deselect candidates from the process at an early stage.”
(Orchard Vale Trust, Residential care provider)

C) Developing talent and skills

Once the right people have been recruited the priority is to ensure that they stay and grow with you.

“Treat employees as the key to the business – invest in them and involve them in the direction of the business.”
(Step-A-Side, ‘Other’¹ provider)

Employers told us that:

- investing in staff should not be a tick box exercise; find out what they need and then explore the best way/s of addressing it
- there is funding available to help you support and develop your staff if you look for it (almost half had accessed Skills for Care’s Workforce Development Fund² and a similar number had invested in apprenticeships)
- learning and development needs can be identified in many different ways, including through the induction process, regular structured

¹ Privately owned home care agency

² www.skillsforcare.org.uk/WDF

supervision sessions, performance appraisals, performance development plans and reflections on practice

- as well as formal training, knowledge and skills can be developed through mentoring or buddying, bespoke schemes to support staff in specific roles and through apprenticeships. Likewise, continuous professional development can be delivered through group knowledge transfer sessions and professional development time
- it's important to ensure that all staff understand and uphold the values of your organisation; by creating a positive and open environment staff are more likely to thrive and grow.

“Offer extensive training and support where and when it is needed. Less confident staff may need the support to get the best from them.”

(DICE Healthcare Limited, Domiciliary care provider)

D) Keeping your people

Retaining good staff is especially important to organisations delivering adult social care as continuity of staff is crucial in delivering high quality care to people who need care and support.

“To be an 'outstanding' care provider [means providing] a secure happy environment where staff can be themselves and grow and develop.”

(Chestnut Grove Rest House, Residential care provider)

Employers told us that:

- respecting and valuing staff, investing in learning and development, embedding the organisation's values and celebrating achievements all go a long way to improving staff retention
- involving staff in decision making and paying above the local minimum (paying competitively) also ensure that staff feel valued for the work that they do, which in turn has a positive impact on retention rates
- it pays to be as flexible as possible when it comes to setting working hours; different shift patterns suit different types of workers and employers who can accommodate this are rewarded with more loyal staff
- it's important to support staff and to take into account their responsibilities outside of the workplace as these can affect performance at work. Ensuring staff are physically and mentally fit for work goes hand in hand with providing a positive workplace culture
- measuring staff satisfaction can be useful in identifying ways to further develop the culture of the organisation but whether this is done formally

or informally, the crucial part is to be seen to listen to and act upon what staff tell you.

“Maintain high levels of staff motivation by supporting staff development, tackling performance issues, and developing a culture of shared ownership over successes.”

(Old Hastings House, Residential care provider)

Useful resources from Skills for Care

Finding and keeping workers has lots of practical resources themed under the four sections above.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/finderskeepers

Practical support for your organisation is available if you'd like more bespoke help with your recruitment and retention.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/RandRsupport

Values and behaviours based recruitment toolkit has guidance and templates to help you recruit and retain people with the right values.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/valuesandbehaviours

I Care...Ambassadors is a great way to develop your existing staff and find new staff by delivering careers activities in your local community.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/icareambassadors

Think Care Careers has information about working in social care, the different job roles available and how you can progress in your career.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/thinkcarecareers

A Question of Care – A career for you? is an interactive scenario based quiz that helps potential candidates assess whether they have the right values to work in social care.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/QofCare

Learning and development is vital in delivering high quality care and support and we have resources to help.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/learning

Individual employers

Similarly we're aware of the challenges faced by those who directly employ personal assistants (PAs), often called individual employers, to enable them to live their personal, social or professional lives according to their wishes and interests.

Our research amongst this group of employers found, for many, employing people that they know (friends, family, neighbours, or people known through school, work or the community) had been successful. However, where this was not possible or desirable, then individual employers stressed the need to seek recommendations and support from others to identify suitable candidates for the role.

Getting recruitment right involves being very clear from the start about what the role entails and then, for many, using your instincts to select a candidate who is a good 'fit' with you, rather than being reliant on finding people with specific qualifications or experience. The recruitment process could be improved if there was greater access to registers or databases of personal assistants who understand the role and have been vetted in advance.

Putting aside issues relating to low pay and hours required, in order to retain personal assistants, individual employers identified a range of things that fall under the umbrella term of 'being a good employer' and which contribute to successfully retaining PAs. This included establishing good lines of communication, treating staff with respect, being flexible and creating a positive working environment.

Useful resources from Skills for Care :

Individual employers may find the following resources useful:

Information hub for individual employers and PAs has lots of useful resources to help you as an employer, including details of organisations that provide local support (in your area) and details about money for training. There's also sections for PAs and support organisations.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iehpahub

Employing personal assistant's toolkit provides step by step guidance for individuals about employing PAs.

www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk

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