Executive summary

Summary of the research

The Recruitment and Retention Implementation Plan for the adult social care sector in England was produced in 2011 with the goal of strengthening recruitment and retention practices across the adult social care sector in England. The Department of Health (DH) sub-group on recruitment and retention is responsible for the delivery of the Implementation Plan.

ICF GHK was commissioned in November 2012 to undertake an evaluation of the Implementation Plan. There were two key research questions:

- describing and assessing the effectiveness of the activities undertaken as part of the Recruitment & Retention Implementation Plan; and
- assessing the impact that this work stream has had on the overall recruitment and retention challenges facing the sector.

The evaluation methodology involved a set of scoping interviews with Skills for Care staff and members of the sub-group and a review of relevant documents. The scoping research was used to develop an evaluation framework for the Implementation Plan. The main research phase included analysis of key datasets held by Skills for Care and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. This was used to set a baseline for the Implementation Plan. A second round of interviews with key members of the sub-group and a wider group of stakeholders with an interest in this issue was then undertaken, assessing their views on the main achievements of the Implementation Plan and how the Plan (and its delivery) could be improved in future.

Key findings

The Implementation Plan represents the sector’s main response to a significant challenge. There is a need for the sector’s workforce to grow in order to meet the rising demand for adult social care services (caused, primarily, by an ageing population). There is evidence that there are challenges with staff retention. In 2011, there was a 19% turnover rate; with many of those changing jobs leaving the sector altogether. There is also emerging evidence that a relatively small group of staff contribute to a high level of churn. Stakeholders reported that one of the main reasons for this is that new entrants to the sector are not sufficiently aware of, or prepared for, work in the sector. Employers report that replacing staff is very expensive, and resources are used for recruitment which could be otherwise utilised in more productive ways (such as staff development).

The baseline analysis undertaken as part of this evaluation provides further evidence supporting the rationale for the Plan and the activities which have been carried out. The analysis shows that, from 2009 to 2012, there was an increase in the proportion of new starters in the sector each year. This supports the need, identified in the Implementation Plan, for improved recruitment and induction practices in the sector.

The Implementation Plan describes a set of activities for starting to address these challenges. These were set out across six main themes: promoting social care; attracting a diverse workforce; managing new interests and recruits; retention; research and intelligence; and standards, learning and qualifications. In practice, the main activities of the Implementation Plan have been to develop or update a set of tools, products and guidance for the sector’s employers and disseminate these to the sector through events aimed at key careers and employment intermediaries and employers. As part of its service level agreement with DH, Skills for Care has played a central role in delivering these activities. The membership of the DH sub-group has also played an important role in advising on the key activities to be undertaken and disseminating the main products of the Implementation Plan through its members’ networks.

Over the two years since the publication of the Implementation Plan, there have been considerable changes to the context in which it operates. This is largely a result of the publication by the DH of the white paper ‘Caring for our Future’, which included commitments to carry out ideas and projects (or variants thereof) which were originally outlined in the Implementation Plan. As a result, several of the original goals of the Implementation Plan have had to adapt to this different context.
The suite of products and tools developed as part of the Implementation Plan are being disseminated. Stakeholders consider the tools to be professionally produced and to address key parts of the challenge being faced. In the development of apprenticeships, which is a priority area for the government, there has been significant progress made. The number of apprentices in the sector has increased significantly since 2011. While this is a separate strand of work for Skills for Care, the apprenticeships programme was included in the Implementation Plan and members of the sub-group have sought to contribute to this through the dissemination of tools and guidance through their own networks. The roadshows delivered to careers and employment intermediaries were well-attended across England, with all the key organisations represented. There is evidence that the roadshows have had a significant impact on the knowledge of these target groups, although the longer term impacts of this (particularly in relation to whether it altered attendees’ behaviours in the workplace) have not yet been examined.

The impact of the Implementation Plan so far has largely been at the strategic level. Stakeholders reported that bringing together ideas of how to address recruitment and retention issues into one document for the first time, backed up by a group with membership from key organisations, was a key achievement in itself. It was also noted that the work to develop the Plan and its constituent activities may have influence the development of policy for the white paper.

The broad membership of the sub-group and the flexibility with which it has worked has also allowed it to address a wider range of issues, and provide support to different projects, than was included in the Implementation Plan. Examples of new activity that has been initiated or augmented by the sub-group include a pilot project in the north-east which is looking at new ways of linking Jobcentre Plus clients with jobs available in the sector, and activity which aims to address some of the practical barriers to offering work experience placements.

A range of new themes to include in a refreshed Implementation Plan were identified by stakeholders. Employers have a range of support needs in this area, such as how to test candidates for basic skills (such as English language skills), how and where to advertise posts they might have, and testing individuals for their values and behaviours. A continued focus on producing practical tools for employers to address these sorts of concerns (and ensuring they are able to access them easily) was noted. Stakeholders also reported that the sub-group should continue its role of generating ideas and feeding this into the policy-making process. Finally, there is a case for commissioning work to understand the nature of the challenge in greater depth, as there are still several gaps in the evidence base. There were also suggestions about how the Plan should be delivered in future. Stakeholders thought that monitoring and evaluation of the impact of activities should be embedded in the refreshed plan and linked to particular activities.

**Recommendations**

There are four recommendations to improve the effectiveness of delivery

In the refreshed version of the Implementation Plan and Strategy, the following actions should be considered.

1. **The refreshed Implementation Plan should be framed around key practical recruitment and retention challenges faced by employers.**

   The refreshed version of the Implementation Plan should include an internal-facing document setting out key responsibilities for the main activities, as well as a shorter document for distribution to employers outlining the main activities of the Implementation Plan and how they will help them to overcome particular problems in their recruitment and retention activities.

2. **Assign key activities / areas of activity to members of the sub-group to ensure a collective contribution with regular mechanisms for reporting progress.**

   In order to extend the responsibility for key activities under the new version of the Implementation Plan, members of the sub-group should be assigned responsibility for key areas of work (for example, anything relating to the marketing of the profession). They should then provide regular reports on any progress in their area of responsibility to the rest of the group on regular occasions.
3. **Ensure that the refreshed Implementation Plan has a robust evaluation framework included in order to assess the impact of the activities undertaken on an ongoing basis.**

Several activities within the Implementation Plan are still at a relatively early stage in their development (for example, the ‘I Care...Ambassadors’ initiative). The sub-group needs to consider how it will collect robust evidence on the impact of these activities and the contribution they are making to supporting employers carry out high quality recruitment and retention. The evaluation framework developed for this study and the baseline assessment undertaken should be used as the basis for this.

4. **Review membership of the sub-group to ensure that all key stakeholders are represented.**

Given recent policy changes, and adjustments to the make-up of the workforce, the process of refreshing the Plan should include a review of membership to ensure that all key bodies are present, and that all sections of the workforce are adequately involved. Bringing new members into the group will also add renewed enthusiasm for the work.

There are three recommendations for new areas of work to consider in the refreshed Plan

In the refreshed version of the Implementation Plan and Strategy, the following areas of work should be included.

5. **Develop a business case for a larger study into the nature of recruitment and retention problems in the sector.**

More work is required to understand the gaps in knowledge about the nature of the problem at hand. This would include a critical assessment of data held by Skills for Care, and a study to understand in depth, the nature of attrition in the social care sector.

6. **Ensure that future products are written in a style amenable to use by busy employers.**

In order to maximise the impact of future resources, the Implementation Plan should set a style for future products / tools which emphasises practicality and accessibility, starting from the understanding that most employers will not have time to review a large document.

7. **Continued work with employment intermediaries based on the findings of the pilot in the north east is likely to have a positive impact.**

In order to maximise the impact of future work with employment intermediaries, any future activities with these groups should be based on the findings of the current pilot work taking place in the north east region.