Skills for Care commissioned research\(^1\) to obtain evidence about the attitudes of men to employment in the care sector, the experience of male workers currently working in the care sector, whether men require particular approaches to learning and development, and to produce recommendations to increase the attractiveness of the care sector to men. This summary is modelled closely on the conclusions and recommendations of the report received by Skills for Care.

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**Awareness of social care**

Care work appears almost absent from consideration as an option for school leavers and jobseekers. Indeed awareness had been low among most current employees until they ‘stumbled’ upon social care. For many employees the trigger to apply for a job in social care was family or friends who already work in the sector and who recommended that they try it. For others it was through caring for a family member and coming into contact with nurses, care workers or day centres which made them aware that the sector exists.

**Life-stage and consideration of care work**

There is quite a distinct life-stage trend in relation to male attitudes to employment in care work. There is a very small niche of young men who consider care work at age 16–18, and this will be a very difficult market to ‘crack’ in terms of generating any significant increase in interest. However, interest increases slightly as males enter their twenties, and then again during and after parenthood. Older men – aged 50 or more – often have had much more exposure to ‘care’, whether with elderly parents, experiences of child care or wider experiences including contacts with care workers. Thus any promotional activity has to recognise the greater opportunity afforded by targeting key life-stage groupings.

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**‘Segmentation’ of men**

There is a significant rejecter group who reject care work on a personal level. Rejection can be a combination of self-assessment of their own personal attributes and skills and, in some cases, outright sexism—alongside their perception of a career with fairly unpleasant routine tasks.

Others are more amenable to the nature of care work and their potential ability for it, but are also rejecters because they have a negative view of the sector’s wages or salaries, conditions of service, and opportunities to progress.

Among the non-rejecters, possibly making up a quarter to a third of male jobseekers (although the research sample was small and not necessarily perfectly representative of the region’s male jobseekers), reaction to being presented with the care sector as an option was mainly one of *bemusement*. In other words, the sector was simply outside their frame of reference for job-search or career choice, so it was difficult to gauge their potential to *convert*.

However, there was a small niche that are ready to convert—at least in terms of exploring employment options in care. These were the individuals who, as a result of the stimulus of this project’s focus groups, expressed quite significant and genuine interest in the option of care work.

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\(^1\) Vector Research conducted the research in the West Midlands.
Limited perspectives
As well as there being a limited awareness of the care sector as a career option, the perceptions that men did have were very limited. Care, in the mind of the target groups researched, equates to work with elderly people, envisaged as being ‘in homes’. And the sector is seen as:

- essentially unskilled
- low paid
- with flat management structures.

Several respondents – including employers, male employees and jobseekers – felt very negative about media coverage in which men were rarely presented and in which these perceptions were reinforced. Respondents felt that the TV campaign for social work which ran during this study portrayed an essentially female profession. There was, however, a disparity between perceptions and reality, as one advert involved a female worker and the other a male worker.

recommendations

Awareness-raising
The absence of social care from the male mind at key career life-stages has to be addressed. However, the focus on life-stage may have to be the inverse of how most careers are promoted, in that older age groups should be the *primary* target.

- The 50-plus empty-nester age group has to be targeted, given its greater propensity to consider care work due to lower income demands than 30–49 year old men with children.
- The 20–25 age group appears to be another key potential group; they have left behind most of the baggage of adolescence and some of them could well be attracted by an area of work currently ‘off the radar’.

Nonetheless, any targeting does require an underlying raising of awareness of the sector as such, which may have to start with schools, be supported by information and guidance providers, and be presented with maximum impact by JobCentre Plus.

It may be necessary to evaluate existing social care open day events to understand how men currently use these events and how they can best be tailored to meet their needs.

These observations reinforce existing Skills for Care promotion of Care Ambassador schemes, ‘I Care...’ materials and liaison with JobCentre Plus, including the Care Sector Routeway work on pre-employment training.

Widen perspectives
All promotional material has to widen the very blinkered perspectives of many men towards social care. In particular it has to:

a) raise the profile of ‘non-elderly’ adult social care
b) project the fact that social care is increasingly about supporting or helping people to live independently (supporting ‘self-care’), and is more personalised nowadays, not institutional as some older jobseekers still perceive
c) show that care has supervisory and management roles which are much more responsible and better remunerated than the commonly-perceived minimum wage care roles.

All of these approaches are relevant to the improved recruitment of women into social care, as well as men, of course.

Unpleasant tasks
In some instances the less pleasant intimate care tasks have to be faced head-on as part and parcel of some care work. Men’s attitudes can change so they get used to this aspect
of the work, which is only one element of a rewarding job.

Variety of roles and a balanced workforce
As part of raising awareness about career progression opportunities, it is necessary to stress to men the potential to move between different sub-sectors within social care, increasing opportunities for career progression and development.

It might also be necessary to promote to employers the value of a ‘balanced’ workforce in social care from the viewpoint of people who use services and their families, and so the workforce itself can feel fully responsive to men’s and women’s needs and wants.

Promotional support for employers
There is a need to engage with employers to help design appropriate advertising materials and promote use of appropriate channels to encourage more male applicants locally. (Skills for Care’s ‘I Care…’ materials, including the career pathways pages at www.skillsforcare.org.uk include case studies and images of men working in social care.)

Push career development
It is also important to encourage employers to support supervisor and manager level qualifications where appropriate, to encourage retention.

Key promotional messages
The key messages that need to underpin any campaign to promote the sector to men are as follows.

1. Adult social care does offer an emotionally rewarding career, with more job satisfaction than most careers (this confirms the key known positive attribute of social care work).
2. Furthermore, the sector is not the limited, flat-structured and ‘soft’, female, do-gooder type of employment commonly perceived (by those who have any view of it at all), but is a sector with challenging management, developmental, technical and commercial aspects.
3. The sector is diverse, with a range of job-types, duties and tasks involving physical, emotional and technical support.

Promotional vehicles
The key mechanisms for promoting care work to men would appear to be as follows.

(a) Introducing the concept of care work to younger men
- For the under-19 age group: Work experience placements and links with schools, including the promotion of volunteering to foster awareness, ideally with equal numbers of male and female students involved.
- Schools careers advice should be reviewed in terms of where care work is positioned.

(b) Targeting key age groups
- For the 20–25 and 50+ age groups: Care sector open days – along the lines of those run in the Black Country in March and April 2009, particularly those held in local football grounds – would appear to offer potential for generating adult interest.
- Making sure that social care is fully represented when support is being given to jobseekers following major redundancy announcements.
- Further engagement with JobCentre Plus to present social care as a serious career option, including promotional packages linked to redundancy interventions – an area which has already resulted in many new male entrants to the sector.
Any opportunity to present the sector and its opportunities direct to adult male “non-rejecters” should be grasped as this appears to generate serious interest, albeit from small numbers. Conducting just two focus groups with jobseekers undertaking training, in the apparently unrelated areas of retail and white goods, revealed one or two individuals with serious interest in care work.

The lack of ‘top-of-mind’ awareness of care work as an option leads to such individuals following other options, implying the need to target captive audiences and explain the diversity of the care sector and its opportunities. Adult social care is clearly in competition with other sectors, including some that also have caring elements, such as nursing and healthcare assistants, children’s services and housing. Employers might need, therefore, to find points at which jobseekers are ‘captive’ or at which reasonable numbers can be approached and presented with imaginative and attractive picture of the sector. Dialogue with Jobcentre Plus, training providers and colleges should identify the target points for jobseekers.

**Equality and diversity – consistency with the sector’s established values**

Many of the issues and approaches that the research identifies are also relevant to the continuing drive to improve the recruitment of women into social care, as well as of men. In particular, the development of leadership and management roles, and of the training and qualifications for them, and increasing the awareness of them, is relevant to the whole workforce.

As more becomes known about the existing adult social care workforce, it may be possible to target further ‘segmented’ potential male care worker recruitment markets, for example:

- particular ethnic minority groups—given that NMDS-SC is showing that high proportions of the current workforce in various urban centres were born overseas, and given varying cultural attitudes to the concepts both of care and of gender roles

- gay people—given that it is widely thought that many gay men have an affinity for caring work roles, although it is also important to beware of stereotypes that ill-serve men gay or straight in care work. Nonetheless, targeting gay media for recruitment advertising could strengthen workforce diversity. This is modelled in the NHS Carers Direct and various foster parent recruitment campaigns’ prominence on the national www.pinkpaper.com site (like most gay news sites, this has both men and women readers).