

Increasing regulation of care services is making the sector less attractive for workers

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Over 1.5 million people currently work in the care sector in the UK and as the population ages, the demands for care and employees will increase. However, the health and social care sector have experienced challenges in recent years as a result of austerity measures in the public sector which has had implications for the pay and pensions of those working in the sector. With growing demands and fewer resources, the issue of workforce planning has become increasingly critical.

Research commissioned by the Borough of Poole and The Dorset Better Together Programme and carried out by Bournemouth University's National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice has explored some of the barriers to employment and how they can be tackled. While the research was carried out on a local level, its findings are relevant to the sector nationally and supports a wider body of [work](#) - The Health and Social Care Integration Programme - being undertaken by Better Together across the whole of Dorset.

As expected, care sector employees and employers reported a range of issues which have a negative impact on staff recruitment and retention, including low levels of pay, increasing demands placed on workers, the lack of a clear career progression paths and negative media perceptions of care work.

However, the research showed that a significant barrier to recruitment and retention of workers is the perceived vulnerability of staff and their culpability should an unexpected incident relating to risk or safeguarding occur. In a context of increased regulation and quality monitoring, unqualified care staff can feel vulnerable to allegations made against them, especially as this can result in immediate suspension which has significant personal financial implications.

As difficult as the current situation appears, lead

researcher Dr. Lee-Ann Fenge believes that it does not need to remain this way: "At a national level, more needs to be done to value those who work in the care sector by highlighting the benefits and rewards of care sector employment and not just the negative aspects of this type of work. Raising the status of the care sector through the provision of career progression pathways, clear qualification requirements, and enhanced pay levels would help to inspire future workers to join the sector".

This is not the only thing that needs to change to tackle the recruitment of the future care workforce. "Media perceptions of care work are incredibly powerful and more needs to be done to improve positive reporting of the rewards of working in the sector. It's a process which needs to start early on, with teachers, careers advisors and Job Centre personnel highlighting the benefits of work within the care sector," explained Dr. Fenge.

"A key motivating factor for many care workers is that they enhance the well-being of others every single day through their support and care, and they make a huge difference to people's lives" said Dr. Fenge, "However, too often that's not the message that comes across to either current or prospective care workers. We hope that by highlighting some of the barriers to employment, these issues can begin to be resolved and the care sector will become a more appealing place for people to work."

Provided by Bournemouth University

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