



A Crisis of Care: How Can the Care Industry Recover From its Talent Crisis?

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With the fastest-growing number of vacancies of any sector at the end of 2020, health and social care work is currently up against an existential threat¹. Despite being rightly recognised as essential work, businesses are struggling to fill roles at the rate they need to – causing the UK government to run a campaign, “Care for Others. Make a Difference”, with the hope of encouraging people to join the workforce.

Much of this struggle can be explained by the twin forces of Brexit and COVID-19. Yet staffing concerns are not new to the sector. The Guardian reported in 2017 that there had been a 12% drop overall in fulltime equivalent staffing numbers since September 2009, despite growing need for such roles².

In reality, the last 18 months have simply exposed and exacerbated existing structural issues. Low pay, punishing hours and technical barriers to entry have made care work unappealing to the majority of UK workers. But as the population ages, rates of chronic health conditions increase and demand for support increases, the sector simply cannot afford to continue under its current model of employment.

In this eBook, we explore what has gone wrong with staffing in the care sector – as well as offering some hope for how businesses might reimagine their approach and overcome the current crisis.

The State of UK Care Work Staffing

There are currently

1.65 million

jobs in the UK'S Adult Social Care sector³.

Social care staff turnover was

30%

between April 2019 and March 2020⁴.

The WHO estimates there will be a global healthcare workforce gap of

14.5 million

by 2030⁵.



1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/07/you-feel-made-difference-laid-off-workers-join-uk-care-sector-covid> 2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/08/uk-social-care-crisis-staff-shortages> 3. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/national-information/The-size-and-structure-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England.aspx#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20who> 4. <https://www.ft.com/content/d90c2858-e4df-496d-a2b9-4c28846f47ae> 5. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/health-workforce>

Essential Workers

How the pandemic and Brexit brought attention to the crisis

COVID-19 was particularly rough on the care sector. Social care workers faced among the highest mortality rates by occupation during the first phase of the pandemic, and their sickness rates more than doubled between February and October 2020⁷.

On top of this, 56% of care home nurses reported that they felt worse than normal in terms of both their physical and mental wellbeing⁸; one survey found that 75% report worsened mental health and sharp increase in anxiety⁹.

Much of this was a result of the sudden increase in pressure on the job, but it was also driven by economic concerns. The Institute for Employment Studies estimated that care workers earning the National Living Wage faced an effective pay cut of up to two-thirds of their earnings if required to self-isolate after testing positive for COVID-19 – even after accounting for Statutory Sick Pay¹⁰.

Many also felt the government had demonstrated a lack of support for the sector. From failures to adequately provide PPE during the first wave of the virus¹¹ to a perceived favouritism of the NHS over private care businesses, the trust of workers that they will be looked after has taken a serious dent during the pandemic.

Ultimately, a third of care sector staff were reportedly considering quitting their jobs by July 2020¹².



6. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationbeforeandduringlockdownenglandandwales/deathsregisteredbetween9marchand30jun2020> 7. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/COVID-19/days-lost-due-to-sickness.aspx> 8. <https://www.qni.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/The-Experience-of-Care-Home-Staff-During-Covid-19-2.pdf> 9. <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/three-quarters-care-workers-mental-health-has-worsened-during-pandemic> 10. <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/potential-impact-covid-19-government-policy-adult-social-care-workforce> 11. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/10/care-homes-failed-by-lack-of-ppe-during-uk-covid-first-wave-say-mps> 12. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/07/10/third-social-workers-considering-quitting-profession-wake-covid-finds-survey/>

The Brexit Crunch

Adding fuel to the pandemic's fire, the care sector has also begun to feel the full impact of Brexit. With 12% of UK healthcare workers being non-british nationals¹³, Brexit has cut a hole in the available healthcare workforce.

Despite efforts to paper over that hole - by adding specific roles to the 'Shortage Occupation List'¹⁴ - many foreign-born workers report no longer feeling at home in the country post-Brexit. In particular, many cite confusion around legal requirements for EU citizens and changes to the national culture¹⁵.

The effects of this will be felt different depending on geography. In parts of South-East England, a third of care workers are non-british citizens¹⁶; that figure is just 6% in Yorkshire and the Humber.¹⁷ It is also true that the proportion of foreign workers is higher in the NHS than private businesses¹⁸.

Ultimately though, staffing in the care sector has reached a crisis point. Between the impact of the pandemic and Brexit's thinning of the available talent, businesses will have to rethink the way they approach recruitment and staffing in order to survive. And to do that, they must look to the larger structural issues that underlie these more recent, visible challenges.



¹³. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/the-health-and-social-care-workforce-gap/> ¹⁴. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rule-changes-to-make-it-easier-to-recruit-health-and-care-staff> ¹⁵. <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=04389e63-d33a-4c3a-89d5-d992c-2f9a401> ¹⁶. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/dec/07/england-brexit-care-home-staff-immigration-rules> ¹⁷. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/the-health-and-social-care-workforce-gap/> ¹⁸. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/the-health-and-social-care-workforce-gap/>



Reasons for Optimism

How the pandemic has increased the public's passion for care

Despite the gloomy picture we have painted, there is good reason to believe care businesses are actually very well placed to adapt to the challenges they face. Positive sentiment towards care workers is as strong as it has ever been, with 36% of care providers reporting that they were approached during the pandemic by people offering to volunteer²⁶.

80% of UK workers now claim they are actively on the lookout for work they find meaningful²⁷, and 59% are willing to reskill post-pandemic²⁸.

With a renewed awareness of how important care work is, it may be fair to assume that some of this sentiment could be challenged into increasing the appeal of caring roles.

While the last 18 months have been uniquely tough, they have also shone a brighter light on the structural issues care work faces. In order to capitalise on the increase positive public sentiment, there are three things we believe the care sector can do:

²⁶. <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/adult-social-care-workforce-data/Workforce-intelligence/publications/Topics/COVID-19/COVID-19-survey.aspx>

²⁷. <https://www.monster.co.uk/advertise-a-job/hr-resources/market-news/labour-market-statistics-and-trends/are-uk-workers-coming-out-of-lockdown-andsearching-for-meaning/> ²⁸. <https://www.cv-library.co.uk/recruitment-insight/brits-willing-retrain/>



Three Ways the Care Sector can Solve Staffing Shortages

1 Embracing technology

According to Nuffield, the healthcare sector is at least a decade behind other industries in terms of technological adoption²⁹. This means there are huge gains to be made by simply bringing the sector up to speed.

From apps that help connect care workers with the people they support and improve staffing flexibility to the automation of administrative work that often creates extra strain for care workers, businesses can make a number of quick wins that would alleviate some of the most difficult aspects of care work.

There is, of course, a fine line to be walked: many have expressed trepidation over the excessive use of technology in such inherently human work, and any business looking to introduce tech should be very careful to ensure it does not result in harmful unexpected consequences³⁰.

²⁹. <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/files/2017-01/delivering-the-benefits-of-digital-technology-web-final.pdf> ³⁰. <https://www.theguardian.com/careers/2018/dec/04/the-rise-of-technology-in-care-how-will-it-affect-workers>

2

Improving public perception

Changing how care work is seen by the public is key to enticing new talent into the sector. If businesses can't rely on foreign labour in the way they used to, they will have to find ways to make the work more appealing to British-born workers.

In part, this may have to mean increasing wages. But it can also mean providing greater opportunities for personal and professional development; providing support and flexibility where it is wanted; and offering greater job security to those that need it.





3

Develop a blended workforce

Faced with such large staffing shortages, care businesses should seriously consider reimagining the way they structure their workforce. While full-time roles will always be necessary in care – to provide people with consistency and long-term human relationships – there is also a great opportunity to move towards a more flexible model.

A ‘blended workforce’ combines core, full-time staff with a pool of temporary workers that can be used on a flexible basis to suit a business’s staffing needs. Adopting such a model would allow care work to become far more accessible and appealing to a larger pool of workers, as it would not require the level of commitment or emotional intensity it has historically been perceived to require.

As the pandemic has shown, demand in care can fluctuate dramatically, and that means traditional models of steady employment will not always make the most sense – either financially or on a human level. The blended workforce model demonstrates how businesses could reconceptualize their workforce to more effectively and efficiently adapt to their clients’ needs.



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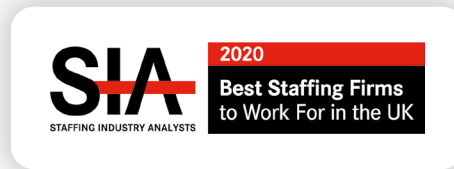
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