

'We're all in this together'

Supplementary learning paper 2:

Staff Motivation and Commitment

The second in a series of short papers where we examine themes emerging from our report 'We're all in this together: the impact of Covid-19 on the future of social care: a view from the workforce.'

In August 2020, ARC Scotland published the report, **"We're all in this together" The Impact of Covid-19 on the future of social care in Scotland: a view from the workforce**. This was based on our analysis of survey responses from 623 social care frontline staff and managers. The key findings from our report were:

- Supported people are perceived by social care staff to be better able to cope and more resilient than many would have thought.
- Supported people are perceived to prefer support that is constructed around their needs and preferences, and provided in a relaxed, non-pressurised way.
- Social care staff are motivated, resilient, adaptable, and proud of the way their work changes people's lives, but feel undervalued professionally.
- There is now an opportunity to use learning from the 'lockdown experience' to re-appraise the way the social care workforce functions, in particular how to make use of more flexible, autonomous, and creative ways of working.

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Introduction

Social care staff who responded to our survey described increased motivation for their work arising from lockdown prior to summer 2020. However, at the time of writing (February 2021) many social care staff reported feelings of 'burnout' and dips in motivation as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues.

This paper sets out learning from the nine local provider forums facilitated by ARC Scotland. It explores factors that helped and hindered staff motivation and commitment during the pandemic and how this experience can help inform longer term changes to social care in Scotland. We conclude with recommendations for change for:

- Social care provider organisations
- Local areas
- National bodies

Our consultations with Provider Forums took place Oct 2020 – Jan 21, before the publication of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland. However, readers will notice similarities in our findings and recommendations including:

- Implementation of the Fair Work Framework.
- Recognition of the value of the social care workforce.
- A shift of focus from regulation and inspection towards relationships and supported people's preferences (motivating factors for the workforce).
- The importance of supporting providers to work collaboratively to foster peer support, sharing of knowledge, innovations and resources.

What has helped staff motivation and commitment over this period?

Trust and autonomy to work differently and creatively

Disruption of familiar processes threw people into new situations, and many social care staff grasped the opportunity to do things differently. Provider Forum members reported increased trust, with frontline staff often taking a lead and trying new things without waiting to be told what to do. Increased autonomy was motivating as people felt more able to exercise their professional and creative capabilities. This injected a renewed sense of purpose and subsequent pride in having done a good job at keeping people safe whilst maintaining services.

Restricted access to the community, and increased use of technology, saw workers experiment by arranging different activities such as online dance clubs, baking competitions, advisory group meetings and activities focused on the home. Taking on new and sometimes younger workers, bought fresh ideas and approaches that encouraged innovative thinking.

“It was all new and it gave us momentum”

Managers and senior officers have shown their appreciation of frontline staff

through letters of thanks, encouraging emails as well as directly speaking to people on video calls. Increased visibility and connection with managers has had a flattening effect, making everyone feel connected with decisions. Organisations have offered tokens of appreciation, including giving an extra day off, sending cakes, hampers and gift vouchers and awarding small financial bonuses. This has all helped staff feel appreciated and valued. One Provider Forum reported that positive recognition of activities by the SSSC was a boost for staff.

Access to technology

Technology has helped support a shared feeling that we really are all in this together - on a 'mission' to enhance lives and facilitate opportunities for supported people. People have formed online support groups and new forums to share good news stories, ideas and challenges, and maintain the motivation of both supported people and staff.

Increased use of social media has enabled other people to see the work that is being done and positive comments from families have made staff feel recognised and appreciated.

Messaging software has enabled staff who are supporting the same person to contact each other and exchange ideas and how they are feeling. Video conferencing fostered informal communication and encouraged issues to be raised more easily, and has been a good medium for support and encouragement for staff, from both immediate colleagues and senior managers. Managers recognised the importance of meeting face to face, even if this was online.

“Social media has helped keep people’s spirits up”

Good and regular communication

helped people stay connected and keep up to date with what was happening, including staff who were furloughed and those working from home. Staff have felt they have had 'more of a say' with increased direct contact with managers. Some found online meetings promoted more effective communication as without the need the travel, managers were able to attend more team or local meetings. Regular face-to-face groups and quick responses to emails and phone calls all helped to prevent isolation and discouragement.

“Just speaking to staff can help with their motivation”

...What has helped?

Peer Support

It has been important to make space for informal peer support, such as time for a coffee and chat. Some organisations have encouraged staff to 'buddy up' with each other to provide peer support outside team meetings. Some teams have enhanced their business meetings with more social activities like a quiz or Thai chi. Overwhelmingly, teams worked well together and there has been a sense of solidarity. Provider Forums have been a valuable source of peer support for those attending. Seeing others responding in similar ways helped spur people on, particularly where contact with HSCPs had diminished.

"Everyone recognised the value of relationships"

Job security and attention to working conditions and well-being of staff

For some, being able to continue working has in itself been motivating. There are concerns that the mental wellbeing of people who were unable to go to work, for example those who were shielding, may have suffered more than those who were able to continue to work.

Some organisations have mental health champions who can be approached for support, others held wellbeing workshops such as yoga, stress awareness, mental health first aid and mindfulness sessions, which were well received. Having face-to-face conversation was noted as one of the most important ways of supporting people's wellbeing.

Having good guidance, access to testing and confidence that they would have access to all Personal Protective Equipment they needed, helped increase confidence and reduce anxiety about working in social care during a pandemic.

Positive feedback from families and supported people

lifted workers' moods and reminded them why they do their jobs. This reinforced awareness of the essential work being undertaken in a time of national crisis. Seeing how much supported people appreciate staff efforts, what they have achieved and how much difference online meetings make to their week, has been a huge motivation.

Public support

This has been significant a boost for the social care workforce, including 'clap for carers'. All the Provider Forums discerned a change in public attitude to the sector, with greater recognition of the importance of social care.

"Getting a lot of support from the community helped"

Dedication and pride

Was evident across all of the Provider Forums. People working in the sector have invested emotional and physical energy with enthusiasm and professionalism. Personal sacrifices have been made in order to keep vulnerable people safe and well cared for. People have re-evaluated their priorities and concluded they want to do the job because it is vital.



What has **challenged** staff motivation and commitment over this period?

Differing pay and conditions

Third and independent provider organisations reported being unable to compete with the pay and conditions offered in the statutory sector for 'the same work', and note that this affects the commitment of staff to remain with the organisation who may have trained and invested in them. This turnover has a negative impact on the motivation of those managing services.

There are also perceived imbalances within individual sectors and organisations. For example: unequal distribution of extra payments, children's workers are seen to be paid more than adult workers, and personal assistants who do sleepovers can be paid more than their manager. The financial incentive to take on a managerial role may be limited where remuneration is not significantly more attractive than that of a support worker.

In terms of COVID response, resentment has been observed in some staff where people self-isolating and furloughed continue to get paid while colleagues cover their work with no additional payment, or where home workers feel undue pressure to prove what they are doing.

"Council staff get paid a higher wage for the same work"

Isolation

The sense of camaraderie and being able to chat with colleagues about things that come up are hard to replicate where people are geographically distanced. The absence of physical presence affects the nature of the support available to staff. This may have more significant impact for those used to working in buildings-based services.

"It is a lonely job, and staff not getting to meet physically has been difficult"

Pressures on managers

The focus on 'frontline staff' staff may have drawn attention from the pressures in other roles, particularly service managers. Managers have adapted to increasingly demanding and complex circumstances, whilst bearing responsibility for the effectiveness, motivation and well-being of their staff teams. Managers have reported feeling the impact of this, and are themselves now experiencing burnout and fatigue, with little sense that their own wellbeing is being looked out for and supported. As noted above, the pay differentials between managers and their staff often do not reflect this extra stress and responsibility.

"You feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders"

Work-life balance

This has been stretched to a point where people feel they need to be constantly available and many struggle to switch off when the home has become a workplace. Not everyone has office space at home and their home life can conflict with work requirements. During the second lockdown the challenge of home-schooling has had a more pronounced effect on workers.

Towards the end of 2020, many people reported feeling very tired and finding it a challenge to remain motivated. As time goes on, and planning (both for work and personal life) remains on hold, people have found it more difficult to be creative in keeping things going. Staff have been encouraged to take breaks and use annual leave, however the inability to go on holiday or visit family has taken its toll on morale. People are experiencing technology fatigue. Some people have attended back-to-back meetings over VC, which becomes exhausting.

"Tired from being tied to your desk all day"

...What has challenged?

Change, fear and stress

Having to adjust to continually changing work-patterns and situations over a long period has been stressful. It has been difficult to plan how to deliver services where others are making decisions and a manager may have no control over what they have to direct staff to do and when.

As people have become accustomed to living in pandemic mode, underlying anxieties have continued to fester. On top of anxiety about COVID, access to PPE and what guidance they should be following, staff have been worried about their jobs and what the world will look like in the future.

“Stress levels have been elevated”

Reliance on technology

Effective use of ICT requires good internet connections which aren't always available. The hardware did not always suit the user, for example some found Chromebooks issued by Connecting Scotland difficult for people using *Zoom*. There was also concern that people-oriented services don't operate as effectively over the virtual realm, which can impact on motivation and commitment. It can feel dehumanising when people want to be in a room with other human beings, and it has been distressing to end someone's employment through *Teams*.

Information overload

The quantity of guidance issued by multiple sources has been overwhelming, and difficult to keep up with as it changes. People want accurate guidance quickly, but sometimes managers need to sift through and re-word information so that relevant messages can be directed to the right people in a language everyone can understand. People have been accessing different information from different sources and can get confused when messages seem to conflict, or have been interpreted differently.

Communication from local NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships was not always clear in the early days of the pandemic; it has sometimes been perceived as ambiguous, overly complicated or inaccurate. Providers have often not been involved in key discussions and are then required to deal with information that might be communicated late on Friday afternoon with a directive to circulate, only to be retracted on Monday morning.



Provider Forums ideas for change

Investment in people - organisations could investigate ways to shift resources from buildings and travel to people; both the workforce and those receiving support.

Career path - look at ways to improve opportunities for development and progression.

Recognise the level of commitment - leaders in organisations need to acknowledge and publicly celebrate the achievements and efforts of the whole workforce.

What could we do in our organisation?



Promote job satisfaction - promote the ability of workers to work creatively with the people they support and with their colleagues.

Staff wellbeing – this is considered and invested in.

Organisational culture - encourage open discussion, involvement in decision-making, peer support and trust

Reduce silos and promote collaboration - bring people from different organisations together to share resources and experiences, eg joint training.

Commissioning - consider pay and conditions for people working in commissioned services and involve providers, carers and supported people in developing local commissioning arrangements that support flexible self-directed approaches.

What could we do locally?



Raise profile of social care - promote positive stories and link with schools and colleges to show how work in social care is a positive career choice.

Connectivity - improve access to internet, devices and training in local areas.

Review impact of service reductions - consider the social and wider costs of reductions in the level of services available to people and changes in eligibility criteria, which also impacts on the ability of organisations to provide adequate care and support.

Pay and conditions - explore measures to lift pay, and address disparities at a national level.

Public recognition - national leaders and bodies to share positive stories about social care and the work that has been done throughout this difficult time.

Commissioning - a national approach to encourage less restrictive commissioning practices that can encourage creativity and innovation.

What could we do nationally?



Funding - prioritise funding for social care.

Connectivity - a comprehensive approach to digital exclusion.

Access to resources - ensure that social care staff have access PPE, vaccines, etc.

Rethink how we work - continue the national conversation about the future of social care and listen to the experiences of people with experience of support and working in care.

Recommendations

For social care provider organisations

Devolve responsibility, and nurture trust, creativity and innovation within the workforce

- Recognise capacity demonstrated by frontline workforce to work more creatively and independently in response to the individuals they support. Seek to reduce organisational 'controlling' measures and enhance opportunities for devolving responsibility and decision-making to the frontline, fostering personalised creative responses and autonomy.

Adopt a broader use of technology

- Remove organisational barriers to legitimate use of video calling, messaging applications and social media, to support both work practice and informal peer connections.

Develop an appreciative culture

- Seek mechanisms to connect feedback and recognition from supported people and families directly back to the workforce, such as through use of social media or regular phone calls.
- Celebrate both the workforce and the people they support, for instance by making achievements and stories more widely visible.

Maintain focus on holistic wellbeing of workforce

- Maintain enhanced pastoral support to staff with greater holistic consideration of wellbeing, both formally and informally.
- Encourage regular personal contact with between staff and managers, and within teams.
- Consider impact of new technology and ways of working. Ensure this approach is consistent at all levels of organisation, from front line to managerial.

For local authority areas

- **Ensure connectivity** and access to hardware to enable effective remote working.
- **Seek opportunities to connect** colleagues and build supportive relationships across the sector: for example through Provider Forums, and collective training.
- **Streamline the provision of guidance** and information from HSCP to providers. Consider the use of language and accessibility of information to staff at all levels so this does not require to be 're-interpreted' by individual providers.

For Scottish Government and other national bodies

- **Raise public awareness** of the value of vital role played by Scotland's social care sector.
- **Capitalise on the motivation, commitment and appetite for change** evident in Scotland's social care workforce by pursuing policies that nurture autonomy, creativity and innovation – in the best interests of supported people – as opposed to regulation and inspection.
- Provide support for providers from all sectors to connect at local levels to **foster collaboration**, peer support and sharing of knowledge, innovations and resources.
- **Improve pay and conditions** - Provider organisations (and their representative bodies), local authorities and the Scottish Government should work together to fully implement the **Fair Work Framework** within Scotland's social care sector. This should go beyond payment of the living wage. (please see 'Recruitment' paper for further detail)