Understanding the reasons care workers move on and their future intentions

Scoping Study

February 2023

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Published by Skills for Care

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Skills for Care commissioned Qa Research to undertake this research to better understand the reasons why care workers leave jobs in social care, what factors motivate them to leave, what factors might have motivated them to stay, and their future intentions. This was a pilot project in two geographical areas, the North West and the East Midlands, designed to test a methodology with a view to rolling the research out to the rest of the country to gain a broader picture of the issues at a national level.

The research comprised online quantitative surveys of current care staff and leavers, distributed by employers that had opted in to the pilot study. The number of leavers surveys completed was insufficient to provide a robust sample, however the survey of current staff received 539 responses and as such the quantitative findings discussed within this report are based on this alone. Ten qualitative interviews were also conducted with leavers.

Caveats and limitations of the research: Please note that the results of qualitative research cannot be projected onto the overall population, due to the sample selection, interviewing methods and sample size. The quantitative sample was self-selecting and unweighted so is also not necessarily representative of the social care sector. For these reasons the findings of this report should be seen as indicative and advisory, rather than robust findings which can be generalised to the social care sector as a whole.

Key findings

What are the reasons for applying to work in social care?
- The majority of respondents wanted to work with and care for people (74%).
- Those in the youngest age range (16-24) were more likely than those in any of the older age groups to cite 'wanting to work with and care for/support people' as a reason for applying to work in adult social care.
- Findings from the qualitative interviews reflect this, with the desire to care for others being a key motivator along with the flexibility of the job to fit around family caring responsibilities.

What are the reasons for leaving?
- Almost a third of respondents (30%) said that they left their last role in adult social care due to poor workplace culture or communication. A fifth (20%) mentioned burnout or stress. 16% reported low pay to be the reason for leaving.
- Younger workers (16-24 and 25-44) were significantly more likely to leave because of poor workplace culture/communication.
- The importance of relationships and a positive working culture were noted frequently in the qualitative interviews.
- Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) reported that they intended to leave their current employment within the next couple of years, whilst just over half (53%) had no plans to leave.
- The main reason given for considering leaving their current role was pay (25%).
- Qualitative participants noted that pay was a factor, but there was also some recognition that, for their specific role and at this point in time, pay rates were reasonable. However, others felt that the cost of living crisis was beginning to bite.

What are the motivations to stay?
- When asked what motivated them to stay in their current job, the main motivation was similar to the reasons they joined the sector originally - they enjoyed working with their residents and clients and found the work rewarding (69%).
- Another key motivation to stay was getting on well with colleagues (65%). Younger workers (16-24) were significantly more likely than older workers (25-44 and 45-64) to give this response.
- Only a fifth (21%) said they were staying because they were happy with the pay.

Where do leavers go?
- Respondents intending to leave the sector were asked about their future intentions. Over half (52%) stated that they intended to look for work in a different sector.
- A third (34%) of respondents intended to remain in the care sector in a frontline or other role.
- Of those survey respondents looking to move to another sector, almost half of respondents (47%) were considering a job in the NHS.

Conclusions

It is common, and relatively easy, to change roles frequently.
- As Skills for Care's 'State of the adult social care sector and workforce' report (2022) shows, 63% of recruitment happens inside the care sector[1]. Similarly, 65% of the current care worker survey respondents in this research had been employed in at least one other job in adult social care.
- Working in the care sector provides flexibility but can also be unstable. The most common tenure for survey respondents was 3-5 years (this applied to their current role as well as previous roles, where applicable). This reflects findings from Skills for Care's 'State of' report, where three-quarters (73%) of the workforce had been working in the sector for at least three years[2].
- Some qualitative interviewees spoke about a new 'factory system' (in the context of a tight labour market) where it was possible to leave a role one day and walk into another the next. As a result, some employees were less inclined to tolerate any difficulties encountered in their working environment.

The main motivation to join adult social care is the main motivation to stay.
- Working in adult social care is attractive to people who wish to care for and support people. It also appears to be a key motivator to remain in the sector.
- Younger age groups (16-24) appear to be more likely than some of the older age groups (25-44, 45-64, and 65+) to be motivated by the desire to work with, and care for/support people. This is not to say that older age groups lose this motivation, but rather that other factors come into play over the life course, such as needing flexibility around caring responsibilities. This has implications for recruitment and retention strategies in tailoring communications to reflect these differences.
- Findings from the qualitative interviews suggested that in some cases high workload, combined with an increase in 'additional' tasks, had started to erode the core caring role (i.e. the essence of what had motivated people to work in adult social care in the first place was no longer there), and this had a negative effect on job satisfaction and personal well-being.

Motivation to stay.
- It appears that there are many factors, often working in combination, that can lead to a desire to change employment, and consequently these are the factors to consider in motivating people to stay.

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[1] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2022.pdf (p.59) AKA the 'State of' report
[2] Ibid (p.76)

- Poor workplace culture/communication, burnout or stress and lack of opportunities to progress were the top three reasons for leaving given by survey respondents, followed by pay.
- Whilst pay was also quite far down the list of motivations to stay in a current role with enjoying caring for others, and good relationships with colleagues and managers ranking higher, there is a possibility that this may be changing, possibly driven by the current cost-of-living crisis which gained momentum during the research period.
- Pay jumped to first place amongst survey respondents who were thinking of leaving their current job (25% of responses).
- Findings from the qualitative interviews suggest that other 'softer' aspects to the role (e.g. relationships and support) can act as protective factors (e.g. if employees are happy with these elements then some degree of dissatisfaction with pay can be tolerated).
- The qualitative interviews illustrated that the 'tipping point' could be an escalation in workplace conflict or poor quality relationships. In some cases, it was perceived that employers had let some of these situations fester and action or attention was only given to the issues once employees had stated their intention to leave.
- Younger workers (aged 16-24) were significantly more likely than older age groups (aged 45-64 and 65+) to leave a role due to poor workplace culture/ communication, and they were also significantly more likely to state that getting on well with colleagues motivated them to stay. This suggests these cultural/ relationship factors are particularly crucial for younger workers. Given that they are likely to have fewer personal caring commitments and are more 'mobile' in the employment market, getting these factors right early on is likely to reap rewards when it comes to retention.
- There were some significant differences by role type, with support workers being more likely than care workers/assistants to leave because of pay, and to mention lack of mental health support as a factor. This appears to be borne out in the qualitative interviews where some support workers appeared to be at 'the sharp end' in supporting challenging client groups which had an impact on their own mental health; in some cases the pay did not feel like adequate financial compensation for the emotional impact.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Skills for Care commissioned Qa Research to undertake this research to better understand the reasons why care workers leave jobs in social care, what factors motivate them to leave, what factors might have motivated them to stay, and their future intentions.

The 'State of the adult social care sector and workforce' report (2022)[3] by Skills for Care shows that in 2021/22 the number of people working in adult social care was estimated at 1.5 million; more than in the NHS headcount of 1.4 million. Between 2012/13 and 2020/21 filled posts have consistently increased to keep up with the rising demand for care. However, the number of vacant posts increased by 52% in 2021/22 (to 165,000) and the vacancy rate as of August 2022 stood at 11.1%, the highest since records began in 2012/13. This growing vacancy rate in the context of rising demand for care suggests that this is due to recruitment and retention difficulties in the sector.

This data also shows that adult social care vacancy rates fell at the beginning of the pandemic when there were fewer jobs available in the wider economy and that as more jobs became available in the wider economy in the later stages of the pandemic, vacancy rates in adult social care increased substantially - it would seem that when there are more jobs available in other sectors, fewer adult social care posts get filled. It is also the case that many leavers remain in the sector; 63% of recruitment comes from within adult social care[4].

Low pay is an issue that can negatively affect recruitment and retention. In 2021/22 pay increases in adult social care were larger than pre-pandemic, with pay going up 49p compared to a 19p increase in the national living wage[5]. However, despite this increase, average pay rates for care workers are still some of the lowest in the economy and are also lower than comparable roles in the NHS. For example, average care worker pay is £1 per hour less than healthcare assistants (HCAs) in the NHS that are new to their roles, and £1.80 below HCA's with more than two years of experience[6].

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[3] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2022.pdf (p.34)
[4] Ibid (p.69)
[5] Ibid (p.14)
[6] Ibid (p.15)

Skills for Care already has a wealth of intelligence around factors that may influence turnover. This includes 'Secrets of Success' (2017)[7], an extensive evidence review conducted in 2021[8] and robust data from the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set (ASC-WDS), reported annually through the 'State of' reports, including reporting on the reasons staff change employment, whether that be changing employers within adult social care or exiting the sector. Recruitment challenges are also a consistent feature of Skills for Care's monthly digest summarising feedback from the sector[9].

Many of these pieces of research point towards pay, hours and progression as barriers to retention. However, as mentioned previously, most recruitment comes from within the sector, suggesting that often leavers are not exiting the sector altogether for different pay and terms and conditions but are moving between care employers. Other trends noted by Skills for Care, based on data gathered through the ASC-WDS[10], include significant differences in turnover rates between provision types, with greater retention challenges felt in nursing home services and domiciliary care settings. Turnover rates also tend to be higher in the first year of employment and also amongst those under the age of 20.

What remains unclear, is the reasons why people leave jobs in adult social care, including those who move between employers, as well as those that leave the sector altogether. More evidence is needed to understand this, alongside the factors that might motivate them to stay. Skills for Care supports the adult social care sector with recruitment and retention and understanding these factors is fundamental to any basis for a sector wide retention strategy. This research seeks to explore these issues in more detail.

1.2 Aims and objectives

1.2.1 Research aim
The purpose of this research was to gain empirical evidence to validate theories behind churn and turnover in the workforce.

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[7] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Recruitment-support/Retaining-your-staff/Secrets-of-Success/Recruitment-and-retention-secrets-of-success-report.pdf

[8] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Adult-social-care-workforce-data/Evidence-review-and-consultation-analysis.pdf

[9] 'Sector Insights' is published internally and is shared with the Department for Health and Social Care with the purpose of gaining an accurate and deeper understanding of the social care sector and workforce.

[10] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2022.pdf (Ch.3)

1.2.2 Research objectives

Skills for Care commissioned this pilot project in two geographical areas, the North West and the East Midlands, order to test the methodology and assumptions, with a view to potentially rolling the research out to the rest of the country to gain a broader picture of the issue at a national level.

Through surveys of existing care workers and those that have left jobs in the past six months, Skills for Care hoped to:

	Survey of existing care workers	Survey of leavers
• Establish length of service in care sector/current employer	✓	✓
• Understand motivations/reasons for working in care	✓	✓
• Explore reasons for leaving previous employer	✓	✓
• Explore reasons for leaving this employer	✗	✓
• Gather data on future intentions/aspirations	✓	✓
• Collect views on what makes their current employer a 'good' employer	✓	✗
• Collect views on what they would like to see change in the care sector (e.g. pay, contract type, progression, hours, recognition)	✓	✓
• Collect profile/demographic information to examine any differences in intentions to stay/reasons for leaving for people from a diverse background	✓	✓

2. Overview of research methods

2.1 Employer engagement

Qa Research conducted four individual depth interviews with employers (two from the North West and two from the East Midlands) to test out initial ideas for the survey questions and to help refine the scope of the research. These employers were recruited with the assistance of Skills for Care via their regional networks. Skills for Care also publicised the research at various employer events to raise awareness that the research would be taking place.

An information sheet for employers was designed to explain the purpose of the research and how they could support it by distributing the online survey links to their staff. The information sheet included a link to an online form whereby employers could opt-in to the research and collected some further information, including:

- Contact name
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Job title
- Organisation name
- Type of provision (domiciliary, residential etc.)

- Region (North West or East Midlands)
- Full postcode
- Number of employees
- Estimate of current turnover rate
- CQC Provider ID (if known)
- Latest CQC rating

Skills for Care distributed the information sheet via its regional networks and events. Employers that opted in to take part in the research were sent links to the online survey for current care workers and the leavers survey and asked to distribute these to staff.

Unique survey links were created for each employer to enable Qa Research to monitor which were participating so that bespoke reminder emails could be distributed to employers that had signed up, but where staff survey completions had not been received, along with general reminder emails to encourage employers to continue distributing the survey links to staff.

Qa Research monitored the overall number, and regional split, of employers signing up to the research. Skills for Care then increased publicity as required via its regional networks. The online sign-up form was live for the duration of the research (28 June to 31 December 2022).

A total of 126 employers signed up to take part in the research. Table 1 shows the breakdown by pilot area.

Table 1 - Employer participation rate

Pilot area	Employers opting-in	Employers whose employees (leavers or current) completed at least one survey	
East Midlands	47	13	28%
North West	79	31	39%
Total	**126**	**44***	**35%**
45 employers were represented in total but it was not possible to identify which region one should be attributed to			

It is not possible to determine a response rate for the surveys as it is not known how many employees (current and leavers) were invited to participate by their employer.

2.2 Quantitative surveys

2.2.1 Survey of current care workers

This survey was aimed at understanding why care workers leave employers, but also what motivates them to stay in the sector. The survey link was distributed by the employers to current (and joining) employees. Respondents were asked about their previous position, reasons for leaving, why they choose to stay in their current role, whether they were thinking of leaving, and demographic profile questions.
The online survey was live from 28 June until 31 December. To encourage participation, the survey included an option for respondents to enter a prize draw to win one of three prizes of high street gift vouchers.

Survey data was analysed using Askia software and data tables, including cross-tabulations, were produced. Statistical significance testing was applied to identify any meaningful differences between different types of respondent. Where results are described as 'significant' throughout the report this means that the statistical tests proved a significant difference.

The base (i.e., the number of people answering the question) is shown in the data tables and charts included in this report. The charts also show where the question was multiple response. Where the figure is shown as 0% at least one respondent gave this answer, but the total count makes up less than 0.5% of the overall total; a blank shows no one has given this answer.

2.2.2 Leavers survey

The purpose of this survey was to explore the reasons for respondents leaving' their last employment and gauge what they wanted to do in the future (whether in the care sector or not). The survey link was distributed by the employers to employees leaving the organisation during the research period. Respondents were asked about the last position they held, their reasons for leaving, future plans, and demographic profile questions.

The online survey was live from the 28 June until 31 December. The survey included an option for respondents to enter a prize draw to win one of three prizes of high street gift vouchers.

Due to the low response rate to this survey[11], the findings have not been included in this report.

Caveats and limitations of the research: For both surveys, the sampling was not random or controlled and had no quotas imposed; the data was not weighted. This means the results of the study are only indicative, exploratory in nature, and cannot be considered representative of the general population of adult social care sector employees. The results point to potential issues with employment in the care sector and how respondents rank them by importance. Additionally, the survey findings informed the qualitative stage. Respondents were asked to talk in more detail on the reasons for leaving.

2.3 Qualitative in-depth interviews

The leavers survey invited respondents to take part in a qualitative telephone interview at a later date. This invitation was subsequently extended to existing care staff that had been in their current role for six months or less.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore in more detail why respondents had left adult social care roles, in what circumstances it happened, and their experiences of this. Qa conducted the interviews via Zoom or telephone. Participants received a £30 gift voucher as a thank you for their time.

Qa Research carried out 10 in-depth interviews; seven with leavers survey respondents, and three with current care worker survey respondents. Roles represented included support worker, volunteer coordinator and care worker/assistant.

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[11] Only 26 responses were received for the Leavers survey. A discussion about the methodology is included in Chapter 4.2

Provision types represented included supported living, domiciliary care, residential care without nursing and day care. Both regions were represented. Selected findings have been included alongside findings from the survey to provide further illustration.

3. Key findings from the research

3.1. Survey of current care workers

3.2.1 Response profile
The survey of current adult social care employees received 539 responses: 426 from the North West and 112 from the East Midlands[12].

Organisational profile: 56% of responses came from supported living, 48% residential care with nursing, 37% day care, and 28% domiciliary care (some organisations offered multiple types of care, hence this does not add up to 100%). 70% of responses came from providers with 100 employees or more. Three-quarters (74%) of responses came from organisations rated 'Outstanding' (14%) or 'Good' (60%)[13].

Respondent demographics: Respondents were predominantly female (82%) and White (88%). The majority were aged 25-44 (40%) or 45-64 (45%). A third (33%) had dependent children at home, and 16% were providing unpaid care to family members.

Current role and contract basis
Two-fifths of the respondents were support workers (42%), three in ten were care workers or assistants (28%) and nurses accounted for 4%. A quarter (26%) stated that they held other roles (see Figure 1).

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[12] It was not possible to identify the region of one respondent.
[13] The CQC rating was unknown for 25% of respondents. 2% of responses came from organisations 'Requiring Improvement'. No responses were received from employers rated 'Inadequate'.

Figure 1 - Current job role

What is your current job title?
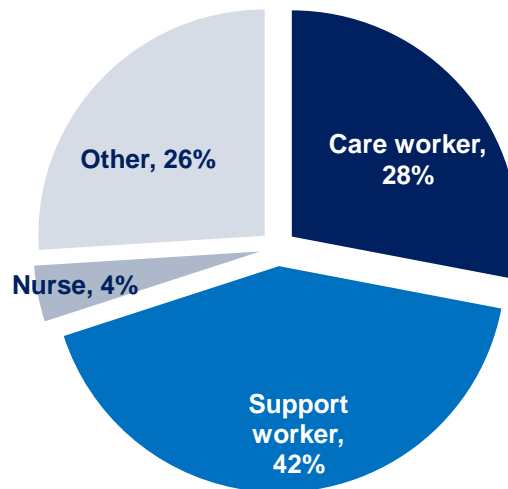
Base: 539

Other roles listed by respondents included:

- Activity coordinator
- Administration
- Advisory worker
- Ancillary
- Assistant manager
- CHAP (Care Home Assistant Practitioner)
- Cook or kitchen assistant
- Dementia advisor or care
- Domestic or housekeeper
- Finance
- House manager
- Housing project worker
- HR
- Management
- Project worker
- Reception
- Registered manager
- Service coordinator
- Team leader

The majority of respondents (89%) were employed on a permanent contract. 'Other' types of contract noted included, bank, student placement, and six month rolling contract (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Respondents by contract type

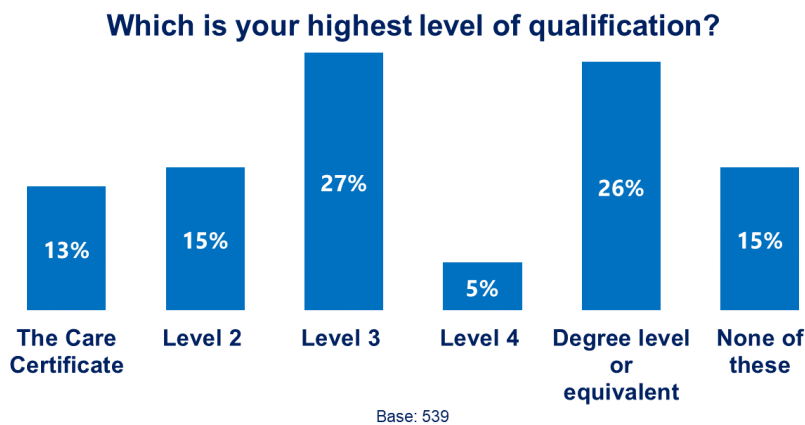| Contract type	Count	%*
Apprenticeship	4	1%
Permanent contract	481	89%
Temporary contract	14	3%
Zero hours contract	30	6%
Other	10	2%
Base: 539		
* responses do not add up to 100% due to rounding		

Almost two-thirds of respondents were full-time (63%), a third (33%) were part-time, and 4% worked variable hours.

Qualification level

Respondents had varying qualifications with a quarter (27%) having a Level 3 qualification and a quarter (26%) a degree (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Highest level of qualification

Which is your highest level of qualification?

The Care Certificate: 13% | Level 2: 15% | Level 3: 27% | Level 4: 5% | Degree level or equivalent: 26% | None of these: 15%

Base: 539

3.2.2 Reasons for applying for work in adult social care

Respondents were asked to select the (multiple) reasons why they applied to work in adult social care. The most common reason given was that respondents wanted to work with and care for people (74%). Experience of caring for a loved one (27%), and a need for local work (22%) were also important factors, along with a job that would fit around caring responsibilities (19%). A fifth (18%) had chosen a role in adult social care as a career change (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Top 5 reasons for applying for work in adult social care

What were your reasons for applying for work in adult social care? (Top 5)

Reason	Percentage
I wanted to work with and care for/support people	74%
I had experience of caring for a loved one	27%
I needed local work	22%
The job/hours fitted well around my own caring responsibilities	19%
I wanted a career change	18%

Base: 539 (multiple choice question)

Further analysis shows that those in the youngest age range (16-24) were more likely than those in all the older age groups to cite 'wanting to work with and care for/support people' as a reason for applying to work in adult social care. This difference was significant when compared with the oldest age grouping (84% of 16-24's vs. 57% of those 65+). It may be that other motivators such as job security and work that fits around personal caring responsibilities are less apparent at this stage in life.

Findings from the qualitative interviews reflect this, with the desire to care for others being a key motivator along with the flexibility of the job to fit around family caring responsibilities.

"I've always worked in in the care environment…I've always enjoyed helping people and seeing the end results and helping them to become independent…I get great satisfaction out of working with people and helping them to live a normal life."

"My children were very young…it fitted around them. So I started working with learning disabilities, I kind of enjoy it. The money is not always great. But yeah, it just kind of worked for me."

3.3.3   Current and previous roles

Respondents had been employed in their current role for a variety of time, with the largest proportion (22%) having been in their current role for 3-5 years (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Length of employment in current role

How long have you been employed in this role?

Less than 6 months	6-12 months	1-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	More than 15 years
17%	12%	17%	22%	17%	8%	7%

Base: 539
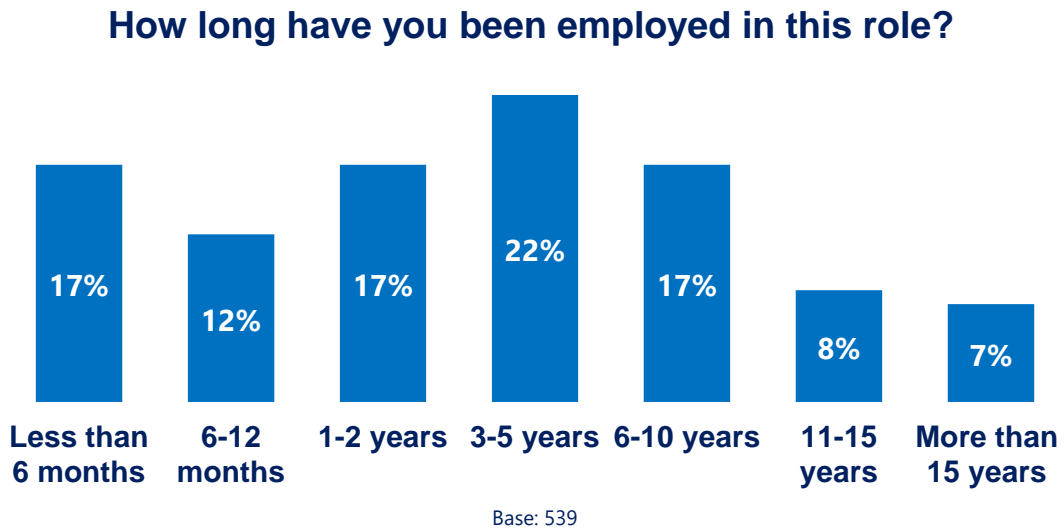
Two-thirds (63%) of respondents had previously worked in adult social care. Of these, 82% had previously worked in frontline care, and 21% had previously worked in a non-frontline role (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Nature of previous adult social care role

Have you previously been employed in another adult social care role?

Yes, as a frontline worker	82%
Yes, in a non-frontline role	21%

Base: 337 (multiple response question)

Understanding the reasons why care workers move on and their future intentions – scoping study
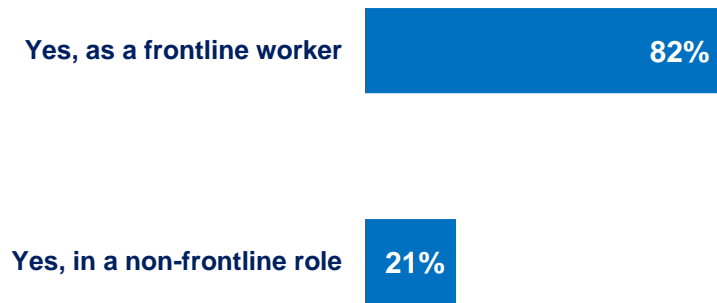
Of those that have had at least one other job previously, a small minority (3%) had worked for 10 or more employers, however, the largest proportion had worked for just one other employer (see Figure 6). The average number of employers across the sample was three.
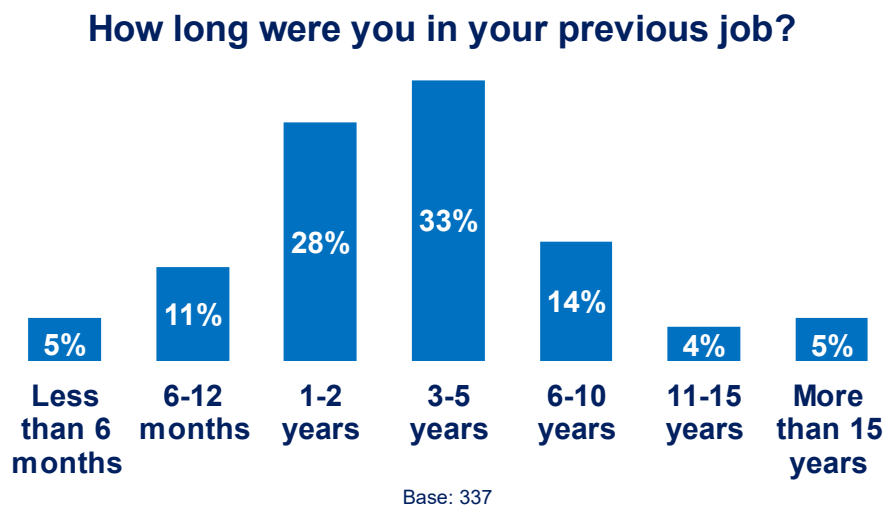
Figure 6 - Number of previous adult social care employers

How many previous employers in adult social care have you worked for?

Base: 337
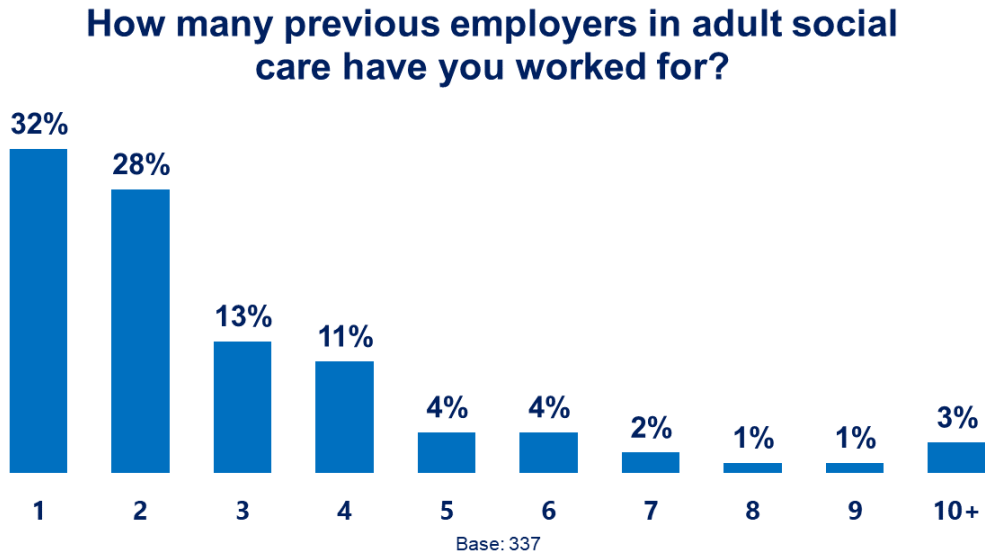
A third (33%) of participants had worked for 3-5 years in their previous job, with a quarter (28%) being in their previous job for 1-2 years. Only 5% had spent less than 6 months in their previous job, and at the other end of the range, 5% had been in their previous job for more than 15 years (see Figure 7). The average length of time in the previous role was 4.5 years[14].

Figure 7 - Length of time in previous role
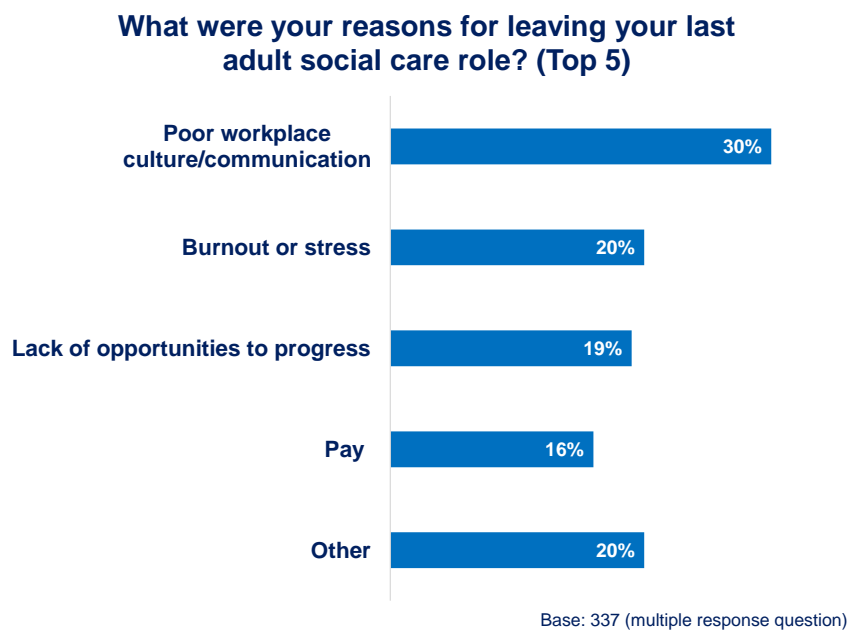
How long were you in your previous job?

Base: 337

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[14] mid-point values were assigned to the bands in order to calculate a mean score

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scoping study

Of all respondents who had another job, half (52%) had worked in an equivalent position and half (48%) in a different role.

3.3.4 Reasons for leaving previous role

Respondents were asked to select the (multiple) reasons why they left their last care position. Three in ten (30%) said it was due to poor workplace culture or communication, a fifth (20%) mentioned burnout or stress and a fifth (19%) it was because of lack of opportunities to progress. 16% reported low pay to be the reason for leaving (see Figure 8).

Figure 8 - Top 5 reasons for leaving last adult social care role

What were your reasons for leaving your last adult social care role? (Top 5)

Reason	Percentage
Poor workplace culture/communication	30%
Burnout or stress	20%
Lack of opportunities to progress	19%
Pay	16%
Other	20%

Base: 337 (multiple response question)

Support workers were significantly more likely to leave their employer because of pay (25%), compared to care workers/assistants (6%), also because of the perceived lack of mental health support (22% vs 11%), and lack of training (15% vs 7%)[15].

Men were significantly more likely to leave their previous employer because of poor workplace culture (41%) and lack of mental health support (25%), compared to women (27% and 13% correspondingly). Whilst women, were significantly more likely to have left their job because of travel difficulties (14%), compared to men (5%).

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[15] These differences were also statistically significant.

Different age groups also had different reasons for leaving: younger workers were significantly more likely to leave because of poor workplace culture/communication. For those aged 16-24 the figure was 47% and for those aged 25-44 it was 42% vs 21% for those aged 45-64 and 10% for those aged 65+.

Pay was more of an issue in larger organisations: 20% of respondents working for an employer with over 250 employees named pay as a reason for leaving, but only 7% of workers in organisations with fewer than 50 employees stated pay was a factor[16].

Part-time workers were also significantly more likely than full time workers to leave because of a change in personal circumstances (25% vs 10%).

The importance of relationships and a positive working culture were noted frequently in the qualitative interviews. One of the key reasons for leaving roles was poor relationships with managers and/or colleagues, a lack of support and/or feeling listened to, or that there was no time or opportunity to discuss issues. In some cases, participants felt that they had been bullied. Poor relationships had affected the mental health of some participants, and this had compounded their reasons for leaving.

"The main reason was the culture in the place…there's a lot of bullying going on. Nothing getting done about it."

"I had no support… and when you do go and kind of go to someone for help and support, I feel like you've just pushed to the backburner. And there are other reasons why I've ended up leaving as well… but if you're not getting the support from people up there, then you're failing down here on your own."

Pay was also an issue, particularly when people feel that it doesn't reflect the workload or level of responsibility, or additional tasks that erode their motivation for wanting to work in care.

"I think the pay is very, very low…[for] support workers, they've got a lot of responsibility. And as well, people come in with problems that you know, they're not your normal problems they come in in crisis, they come in suicidal… you're coping with a lot of emotion."

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[16] This was a statistically significant difference.

"I couldn't physically manage to do the workload… basically the workload was massive and it was just impossible to do in those six or seven hour shifts… because we were expected to do all these [other] things and as I say the computer side… so it was just impossible to fit all that in and then the beauty of what I enjoyed about the job, sitting down having a cup of tea and doing yoga with the residents, that was not possible because there was no time… so I was coming home not happy… this affected my mental health as well."

3.3.5 Current job and future plans

When asked what motivated them to stay in their current job (multiple choice question), similarly to why they joined the care sector, seven in ten respondents (69%) stated that they enjoyed working with their residents and clients and found the work rewarding. Only a fifth (21%) said they were staying because they were happy with the pay. However, 4% said they would be looking for another job (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 - Motivations to stay in current role

What motivates you to stay in your current job?

Motivation	%
I find caring for the residents/clients rewarding	69%
I get on well with my colleagues	65%
I get on well with my manager	51%
It is near where I live	47%
Good quality training	40%
Flexible working hours	32%
Protected/guaranteed working hours	29%
Opportunities to progress	28%
I'm happy with the pay	21%
Nothing – I am looking to leave	4%
Other	3%

Base: 539 (multiple response question)

The most frequent response given by those aged 16-24 was *"I get on well with my colleagues"* (80%), which is significantly more than those aged 25-44 and 45-64 (67% and 62% respectively). The youngest group (16-24) were also significantly more likely to value *"good quality training"* 56% compared with 39% of the 25-44 group, and 38% of the 45-64 group. This was also the case for *"opportunities to progress"* (44% of 16-24's compared with 38% of 25-44's and 19% of 45-64's).

Respondents were also asked (in an open question) specifically what makes their employing organisation a good place to work[17]. Analysis of the coded responses shows that a quarter of respondents (27%) said that staff and management were supportive and understanding. A further 16% claimed they had good teamwork and relations with other staff.

"Warm and friendly environment. I feel I can talk to my colleagues and manager about anything and can ask questions. The shifts can be flexible if necessary."

"Good communication between staff and management."

"Feeling of sense of togetherness and having support."

"You can go to your manager with whatever issues may arise and know that they will be dealt with promptly."

The qualitative research found that experiences of training were mixed, some participants spoke of too much, what they perceived to be, 'unnecessary' training, and some had felt the training was insufficient. However, where training was good, this was a motivator to stay.

"They were so short staffed, that I felt under pressure to do things that I wasn't trained for."

"I do think I've always had really good training. And I think that is what's helped to push me to get where I am today."

Respondents were asked how long they thought they would stay in their current job. Almost a quarter (23%) reported they intended to leave their current employment within the next couple of years, whilst just over half (53%) had no plans to leave. On average care workers/assistants were significantly more likely to intend to stay in their current role (58%) than support workers (46%).

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[17] 44% of respondents did not share a positive example.

Those looking to leave were asked to select (multiple) reasons why. For a quarter (25%) the main reason given was pay, with other reasons cited by one in ten respondents (see Figure 10). There were no significant variations by current job title, type of employment, gender or other factors.

Figure 10 - Top 5 reasons for leaving being considered

Why are you thinking of leaving? (Top 5)
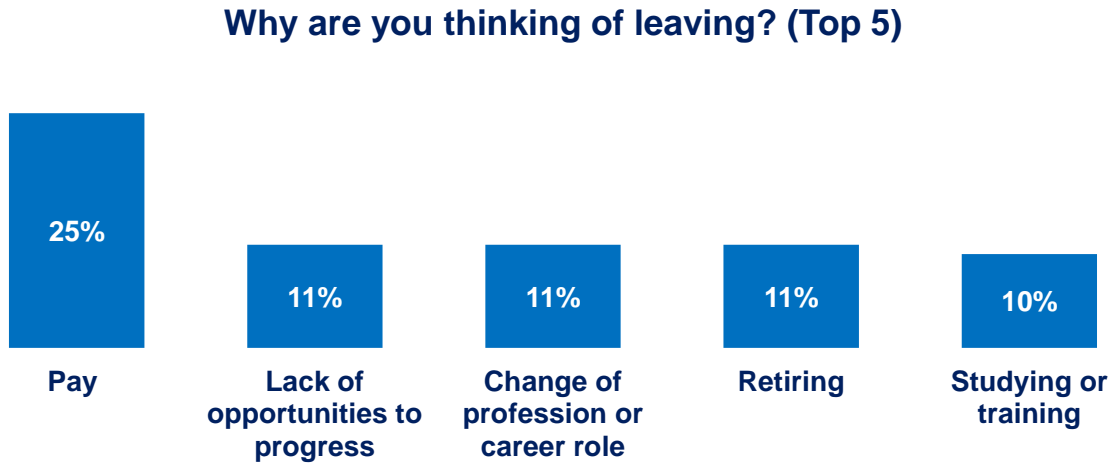
Base: 112 (multiple response question)

Whilst some qualitative research participants noted that pay was a factor, there was some recognition that, for their specific role and at this point in time, pay rates were reasonable. However, others felt that the cost of living crisis was beginning to bite.

*"I did [look outside the sector] but care work pays quite well at moment… and the hours and everything."*

"Travelling is a big issue… I think that's when it starts to become disproportionate, the more you've travelled and your compensation is not quite up to the cost of petrol or diesel, or whatever taxis cost or buses and that type of thing. And it adds to your hours as well that are unpaid for."

"I found a pay slip for when I was a project worker about 10 years ago. And my wage was pretty much the same, despite the fact of two promotions, in that time, and [I'd] taken on a hell of a lot more responsibility. In all fairness, when you start to see that you start to think…I am just being taken advantage of here…I'm not being valued, no matter what anybody says about our values. I'm not being valued because I'm having to buy food for my family with a credit card."

Respondents intending to leave their current job were asked about their future intentions. This was a multiple choice question, so respondents were able to select more than one future intention:

- 33% (n=40) were considering staying in social care. Of these, 72% (n=29) were exclusively considering social care; 27% (n=11) were considering social care amongst other options.
- 45% (n=55) were considering options outside of social care.
- 22% (n=27) were considering retirement, volunteering, or a return to education.

Figure 11 - Future intentions

What do you intend to do next?
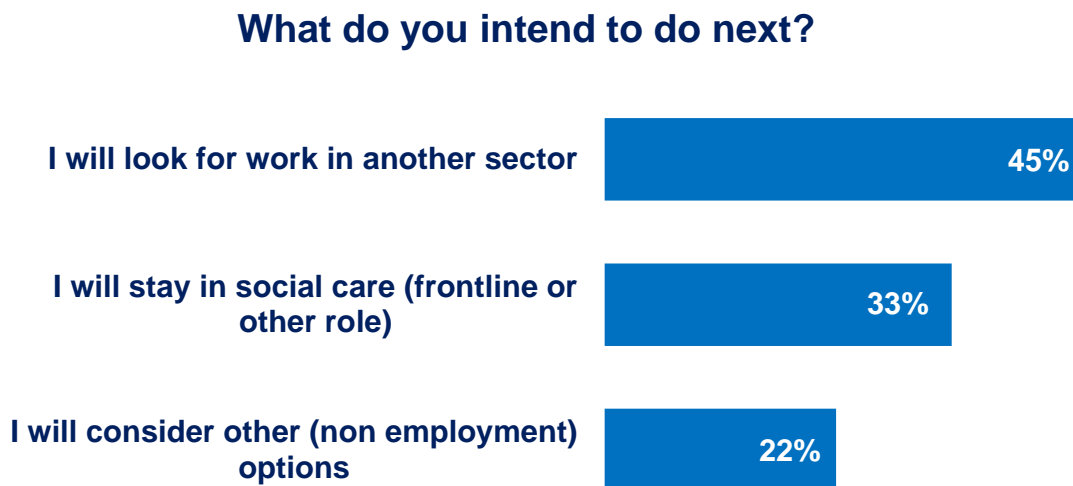
Base: 122 (multiple choice question)

Within the qualitative research, it was apparent that some participants wanted to remain in the sector, primarily because they enjoyed the work, but there was a view that employers are variable and there was a need to 'do your own research' by looking at job sites and taking heed of 'warning signs' in early communications with employers.
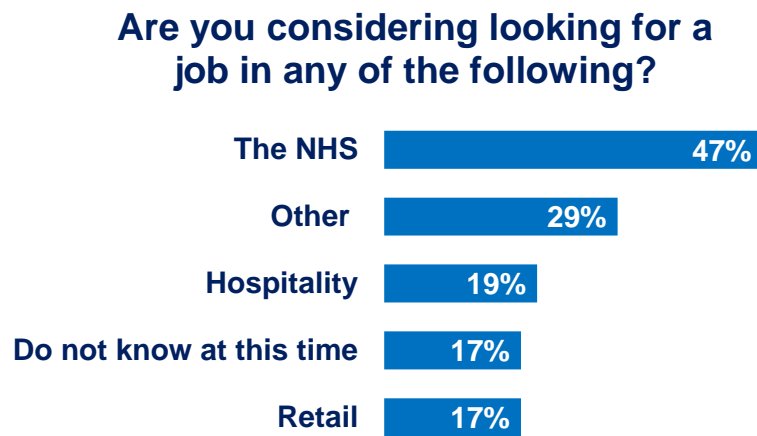
"I really did want to do care again. I do enjoy it. People say it's bad but it can be a lot of fun if you get the right support… people [need to do] the research… like if you're [always] on Indeed, and it's the same company…they've got high turnover, I definitely wouldn't. So, I would recommend it, but not all companies. There's a lot of bad ones out there. There's a lot of good ones as well… and there's warnings if they set you on straight away, like without any check, you know, like fast track your DBS and stuff."

Others, were unsure if they would return, some needed to take time out following a period of stress or burnout.

"That's something that I can't answer at the moment, because, due to the stress and mental health… I was having breakdowns as well in tears and things, so [I'm] taking time out at the moment, and I may or may not return to it next year."

Of those survey respondents looking to move to another sector, almost half (47%) were considering a job in the NHS (see Figure 12).

Figure 12 - Sectors under consideration

Are you considering looking for a job in any of the following?

Sector	Percentage
The NHS	47%
Other	29%
Hospitality	19%
Do not know at this time	17%
Retail	17%

Base: 58 (multiple response question)

The popularity of the NHS as a next job makes sense in the context of the qualitative interviews. Participants spoke at length about the desire to care for others being a key reason why they began working in care in the first place, and for some this was a motivator to stay. As such, similar roles in the NHS would seem to be a natural home for those looking to move out of adult social care.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

It is common, and relatively easy, to change roles frequently.

As Skills for Care's 'State of the adult social care sector and workforce' report shows, 63% of recruitment happens inside the care sector[18]. Similarly, 65% of current care worker survey respondents had been employed in at least one other job in adult social care. Working in the care sector provides flexibility but can also be unstable. Overall, 15% of survey respondents had worked in their previous job for more than 10 years. The most common tenure, in their current role, for survey respondents was 3-5 years; this was also the case for those with previous roles. This reflects findings from Skills for Care where the majority of the workforce had been working in the sector for at least three years[19].

Some qualitative interviewees spoke about a new 'factory system' (in the context of a tight labour market) where it was possible to leave a role one day and walk into another the next. As a result, some employees were less inclined to tolerate any difficulties encountered in their working environment.

The main motivation to join adult social care is the main motivation to stay.

Working in adult social care is attractive to people who wish to care for and support people, including those who already have personal experience caring for a loved one. It also appears to be a key motivator to remain in the sector.

Younger age groups (16-24) appear to be more likely than some of the older age groups (25-44, 45-64, and 65+) to be motivated by the desire to work with, and care for/support people. This is not to say that older age groups lose this motivation, but rather other factors come into play over the life course, such as needing flexibility around caring responsibilities. This has implications for recruitment and retention strategies in tailoring communications to reflect these differences.

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[18] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/Workforce-intelligence/documents/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2022.pdf (p.73)
[19] Ibid. (p.76)

Findings from the qualitative interviews suggested that in some cases high workload, combined with an increase in 'additional' tasks had started to erode the core caring role, i.e. the essence of what had motivated people to work in adult social care in the first place was no longer there, and this had a negative effect on job satisfaction and personal well-being.

Motivation to stay

It appears that there are many factors, often working in combination, that can lead to a desire to change employment, and consequently these are the factors to consider in motivating people to stay.

Poor workplace culture/communication, burnout or stress and lack of opportunities to progress were the top three reasons for leaving given by survey respondents, followed by pay. Whilst pay was also quite far down the list of motivations to stay in a current role with enjoying caring for others, and good relationships with colleagues and managers, ranking higher, there is a possibility that this may be changing, possibly driven by the current cost-of-living crisis which gained momentum during the research period. Pay jumped to first place amongst survey respondents who were thinking of leaving their current job (25% of responses). Whilst pay may not previously have been the decisive factor for leaving it may prove to be a more driving force in the future. However, further investigation would be required to test this hypothesis.

Findings from the qualitative interviews suggest that other 'softer' aspects to the role (e.g. relationships and support) can act as protective factors, e.g. if employees are happy with these elements then some degree of dissatisfaction with pay can be tolerated. The qualitative interviews illustrated that the 'tipping point' could be an escalation in workplace conflict or poor quality relationships. In some cases, it was perceived that employers had let some of these situations fester and action or attention was only given to the issues once employees had stated their intention to leave.

Younger workers (16-24) were significantly more likely than older age groups (45-64 and 65+) to leave a role due to poor workplace culture/communication, and they were also significantly more likely to state that getting on well with colleagues motivated them to stay. This suggests these cultural /relationship factors are particularly crucial for younger workers. Given that they are likely to have fewer personal caring commitments, and are more 'mobile' in the employment market, getting these factors right early on is likely to reap rewards when it comes to retention.

There were some significant differences by role type, with support workers being more likely than care workers/assistants to leave because of pay, and to mention lack of mental health support as a factor. This appears to be borne out in the qualitative interviews where some support workers appeared to be at 'the sharp end' in supporting challenging client groups which had an impact on their own mental health; and in some cases the pay did not feel like adequate financial compensation for the emotional impact.

4.2 Reflections on methodology

This research was a pilot study in two areas designed to test out a methodology to inform a potential national rollout. This section considers some of the key learning points and implications for scaling up. Further detail is included in the Appendix.

Employer engagement was crucial to the study. A number of approaches were adopted in order to try and achieve this, including initial consultation and awareness raising with employers, a detailed information sheet on the scope of and potential benefits of the research, targeted email reminders to employers, and frequent reminders via Skills for Care regional networks and events. Prize draws were offered for both surveys.

The methodology resulted in a robust overall sample for the survey of current care workers, but with a higher employer sign up rate and staff response to the survey in the North West than the East Midlands The qualitative interviews added depth to the survey findings, revealing the complex interplay of factors that can influence an employee to leave a job.

The response rate for the leavers survey was lower than anticipated, based on the number of employers signed up, their size, and those that specified turnover rates in the research opt-in form (which not all provided). Based on this alone we could have expected responses in the hundreds. However, what is not known is the extent to which this survey was distributed/promoted to leavers within individual employers, and the variation/peaks in turnover across the year . It is also known that employee exit surveys receive a considerably lower response than surveys of current employees due to a number of factors including, fear of repercussions, or employees have simply disengaged and already moved on.

The experience of this pilot would suggest that it could be very difficult to achieve robust, representative, samples across multiple geographical areas for an online survey of current employees, due to difficulties engaging a sufficient number of employers. This is likely to be even more difficult for leavers.

Alternative methodologies using telephone or postal surveys would be very labour intensive, would require considerable financial investment, and an external contractor would need access to a suitable database of contacts to manage the sample and issue reminders.

One potential avenue for Skills for Care to explore would be whether such an exercise could be integrated into any existing processes, e.g. as an adjunct to the ASC-WDS.

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6. Appendix

Additional information on methodology

Employer engagement was crucial to the study. A number of approaches were adopted in order to try and achieve this.

Qa Research conducted four individual depth interviews with employers (two from the North West and two from the East Midlands) to test out initial ideas for the survey questions and to help refine the scope of the research. These employers were recruited with the assistance of Skills for Care via their regional networks. Skills for Care also publicised the research at various employer events to raise awareness that the research would be taking place.

An information sheet for employers was designed to explain the purpose of the research and how they could support it by distributing the online survey links to their staff. An initial survey; to be distributed to all adult social care staff currently in their employment, and a leavers survey; to be distributed to adult social care staff leaving their roles during the research period. Skills for Care distributed this information sheet via their regional networks and events. The information leaflet also included a link to a short online form for employers to opt in to the research directly via Qa Research. The form requested the following information:

- Contact name
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Job title
- Organisation name
- Type of provision (domiciliary, residential etc.)

- Region (North West or East Midlands)
- Full postcode
- Number of employees
- Estimate of current turnover rate
- CQC Provider ID (if known)
- Latest CQC rating

Asking employers to opt-in and share their details directly with Qa Research allowed for direct communication with employers and easy monitoring of sign-ups. Qa Research kept Skills for Care informed of sign-ups by region so that they could conduct their own engagement and publicity in an attempt to achieve a balanced response per region.

An online survey method was adopted to enable easy distribution of the survey to employers and to make it easy for them to distribute to staff. Unique survey links per employer were created to enable Qa Research to monitor which employers were participating so that bespoke reminder emails could be distributed to employers that had

signed up, but where staff survey completions had not been received, along with general reminder emails to encourage employers to continue distributing the survey links to staff.

Asking employers to opt in to the research and provide some profile information at the outset meant that these questions did not need to repeated within the survey, thereby reducing the length of the survey to some extent. In addition, some of the profile information collected by the form may not have been accurately or consistently provided by staff if this was included within the surveys. Some of this profile data has also been used at the data analysis stage. At the analysis stage, the intention was to use some of the profile data from the online form (specifically the turnover rate) along with the number of completions of the leavers survey to estimate what proportion of leavers had been reached by the survey. However, the actual number of leavers surveys completed was insufficient for meaningful analysis.

The online sign-up form was live for the duration of the research, between the end of June and the end of December, and Skills for Care carried out ongoing employer engagement and publicity.

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Understanding the reasons why care workers move on and their future intentions –
scoping study