

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF RECRUITMENT**

**Caroline Sturgeon examines the importance of recruitment as the first of three related articles from the Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit.**

Recruitment Matters...it matters to the person applying for the job...it matters to the employer looking for new skills, fresh ideas and appropriate value base...it matters to the users of the service and family carers that the person working with them is the 'right' person for the job...it matters to the service as a whole that the new recruit makes a positive contribution to the overall service provided...In fact recruitment matters so much that it is not surprising that it seems to be a major cause of stress and a topic of much debate for social service employers.

Ahead of the Workforce Unit's Conference on the 8th of November, this article will begin to look at why recruitment matters to the current workforce situation, explore some of the challenges ahead for employers, and highlight innovative ways that organisations are maximising recruitment potential.

### **Why does recruitment matter?**

The dictionary provides a very functional definition of the word "recruitment", or the process of obtaining new members or employees, giving little away about the crucial role recruitment plays in workforce development. However, the roots of the word recruitment come from the 17th Century French *recôitre*, meaning "new growth", and from the Latin word *crescere*, meaning 'to grow', providing an insight into the fresh ideas and new opportunities for development that recruitment can offer.

Of course, recruitment does not stand alone. Along with retention and registration, it is a key element of workforce planning and development. Recruitment is important not only as a way of bringing new staff with their own unique ideas and experience to an organisation, but also in setting the scene for new employees. A positive experience during the recruitment process will not only get new recruits off to a good start, but may even encourage those who are not successful to apply for a job with the organisation in the future, or at least give a decent report of the process to their friends and family. Having a smooth, well-organised recruitment process also makes good business sense. Studies by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development show 19% of leavers across all sectors leave within the first 6 months of employment, which is clearly costly to the organisation: poor recruitment and selection are cited as key contributors to this problem (CIPD 2007). Getting the right person for the job, and ensuring the recruitment process leads on to a well managed induction process will help minimise cost to the organisation and disruption to the service.

However, for a social service employer, getting the right person is not just about minimising costs, but also about safety. All recruitment procedures need to ensure that those unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults or children are not able to enter the workforce. The Scottish Executive (2007) has recently published "Safer Recruitment through Better Recruitment: Guidance in relation to staff working in social care and social work settings". The guidance offers useful advice in relation to meeting the existing safer recruitment requirements set out in the Scottish Social Services Council code of Practice for Employers, and to achieving the outcomes for users set out in the relevant National Care Standards. The guidance highlights the need for all employers to be working towards continual improvement in terms of safer recruitment practice, and gives suggestions for methods to improve current practice, such as using National Occupational Standards to help develop competency based job descriptions, and the use of assessment centres, screening interviews and panel interviews to enhance procedures. Copies of the guidance are available to download from [www.ccpscotland.org/workforceunit](http://www.ccpscotland.org/workforceunit) .

## What do we know about the current workforce?

Approximately 138,000 people work in the social services sector in Scotland. Since the mid 1990s this part of the workforce has experienced significant growth, with an increase of 42% in the 10 years to 2004 compared to just 7% for the economy as a whole, highlighting the growing importance of the sector both in terms of providing services, and in creating jobs. Proportionally there is a higher percentage of part-time workers in the social services sector (40%) than in the economy as a whole (25%), suggesting that flexibility and part-time opportunities are important to workers who may have other commitments. An overwhelming majority of the workforce are female, with just 19% men. Male workers are just one of a number of groups under-represented within the social services workforce (SSSC 2007). Other such groups include carers, people with disabilities and workers from BME communities. In terms of recruitment, under-representation equates to wasted resources and underused talent. Supporting and promoting a more diverse workforce would have positive benefits for recruitment as well as encouraging a more representative service, and therefore must be one of the key areas for development in the future. The importance of diversity was voiced very strongly by the Users and Carers Panel of the 21st Century Social Work Review:

*“The workforce should reflect the diversity of the population. Social workers should come from all sections of the community, e.g. the deaf community and minority ethnic communities, etc. Recruitment must not exclude people with life skills – qualifications are not enough. Social work services should take a strategic view of recruitment and retention and seek to overcome variations in pay and conditions.”*

(Scottish Executive 2006)

## Vacancies, skills gaps and turnover...

Recent research undertaken by Skills for Care and Development as part of the Sector Skills Agreement process has shown that the social services sector does have significant issues in recruiting new staff. 19% of social service workplaces reported ‘hard to fill’ vacancies, compared to just 10% across the wider Scottish economy. However fewer social service employers (4%) identified a skills shortage as a barrier to recruitment than employers in the wider economy (5%), perhaps suggesting that difficulty recruiting may be due to a shortage of applicants rather than a lack of people with the right skills. However in terms of staff turnover, social services have a significantly lower rate of 18% compared with 23% for the rest of the economy (SSSC 2007).

## What will influence recruitment in the future?

Demographic change is likely to be one of the key factors influencing recruitment in the future. Projections from Futureskills Scotland (2007) suggest that after steady growth in recent years Scotland’s labour force has now peaked at 2.61 million, and will decline slowly to 2.56 million over the next decade. In line with the population in general, the workforce is expected to have a greater proportion of older people by 2017. This reduction in the pool of workers available will ultimately mean that competition for new employees is likely to increase, ensuring that recruitment will remain a key issue for employees, while the importance of retaining good staff will grow in importance. For social services, demographic change is also likely to lead to an increase in demand for services, and therefore staff, as the proportion of older people within the population as a whole increases.

As well as changes in demography, changes in the type of service required in the future will clearly have implications for recruitment: personalisation of services, increasing use of Direct Payments, the growing importance of housing support, and joint working with health and education will all influence recruitment. Seeing recruitment within the wider context of workforce planning can help to build an overall recruitment strategy that gets away from recruiting reactively for today towards recruiting proactively for the future.

## **Opportunities for the future...**

Although recruitment is likely to remain challenging for employers in the future, the following challenges also offer major opportunities for development within the sector:

### **1. *Widening the Talent Pool: Encouraging Diversity in the Workforce***

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of underrepresented groups within the social services workforce. These include carers, workers with disabilities, men and workers from BME communities. In terms of recruitment, under-representation in the workforce implies under use of talent and resources. By developing innovative policies to help encourage diversity in the workplace, employers can ensure that valuable skills within the community can be put to good use. In developing new policies, it is necessary to look at the reasons why certain groups find it more challenging than others to join the workforce. Perceived lack of work experience, or being out of the workplace for a number of years can be a barrier to carers joining the workforce, for example. Many carers and former carers have huge amounts of practical experience and insight into a caring role, but may not have the qualifications to match. Ensuring that prior learning and informal experience is taken into account in the recruitment process can help, while family friendly or flexible working conditions can enable carers to achieve a good work-life balance.

The image of the social services sector, and the way in which we target new workers can also be a barrier to developing a diverse workforce. Kibble's Men Can Care Campaign (Mark Smith et al. 2006) is one example of a successful project which challenged the traditional image of social care as "women's work". By tailoring their advertising to the male audience, drawing parallels between the caring role that men often play (such as leaders of football groups etc) and the skills required to work in residential child care, and offering the chance of intensive training with great career prospects, Kibble successfully managed to attract, recruit and retain a large number of men into their workforce. Adapting this principle could certainly have the potential to attract other underrepresented groups to the workforce.

### **2. *Involving Service Users in Recruitment***

Changing Lives: The 21st Century Review of Social Work (Scottish Executive 2006) clearly set out the vision that "services should meet the needs of people. People shouldn't have to fit services." Empowering the users of services to participate in the recruitment process can have many positive benefits for the service, and for ultimately getting the right person into the job. In the job analysis stage, for example, it is useful to find out whether service users look for the same things in staff as employers do. Research from Skills for Care and Development (SSSC 2007) discovered that although service users thought qualifications for staff were important for teaching basic skills, what was more important was "attitude" and well developed interpersonal skills. Opinions on the extent to which these could be taught was mixed. Enabling service users to participate in recruitment processes requires full commitment from the organisation, good planning, and investment in time, training and support to enable users to participate.

Aberlour Child Care Trust's Crannog Services, which are run in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council, were recently awarded a Care Accolade for their work in this field. Young people attending Crannog are full and equal partners in the recruitment interviewing process, including designing their own interviewing session, devising presentation subject content, and feeding back on individual candidates to inform the selection process. As well as enabling users to have their input on what is important for people working with them, the process also enables candidates to get a better feel for the organisation they would be working for, and sends out positive messages of engagement right from the start.

### **3. *Lessons from beyond the social services sector...***

Within the wider economy, social service employers are increasingly competing for employees from other sectors such as retail, the call centre industry, office work or the health service. How do these industries recruit and retain their staff? Are there any lessons to be learned from innovative recruitment methods used in other areas? West Midlands Police, for example, have put their own mark on podcasting by creating lively plodcasts designed to give people an insight into what a job with the police really entails. Local radio is to target a much wider and more diverse pool of potential recruits. The Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit is currently researching recruitment methods used in other industries, and considering how these could be adapted for use in social services. The findings from this research will be discussed at the Workforce Unit's Conference on the 8th of November.

#### 4. *Recruitment in Partnership*

Taking a partnership approach to recruitment has traditionally caused difficulties for providers, who are often quick to see each other as competitors rather than partners. However, could pooling resources and taking a joint approach to recruitment actually increase the chances of getting success? Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Enterprise have recently been looking at developing partnership approaches in the Borders areas, with joint information and recruitment days and even co-ordinated application forms. Part of the vision of this work is to move towards a “whole sector approach” to recruitment and retention: if we can begin to see the wider picture, and recognise that if we all invest in the development of the workforce now, recruiting trained and experienced staff in the future will be easier for everyone.

If you are interested in partnership approaches, your regional Learning Network is a good place to start for information: [www.learningnetworks.org.uk](http://www.learningnetworks.org.uk)

#### **Find out more...**

The Workforce Unit's Conference “Workforce Development Matters: Recruiting, Retaining and Registering Your Workforce” will take place at Stirling Management Centre on the 8th of November. We hope to see you there...your workforce matters!

#### **References**

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