



Care workers: matching supply and demand

Employment issues in the care of children
and older people living at home

Conference report

Aims

Topics

Core themes

Discussion topics

Workshops

Conclusions

Sheffield Hallam University
20-21 June 2002

This conference addressed some critical issues relating to how the supply of care workers – both those involved in childcare and those who provide domiciliary care for older people living in their own homes – can be stimulated to match the growing demand for their caring labour. The conference heard contributions from leading experts in the field, drawn from employers, trade unions, policymakers and academics, representing seven different European countries.

The event was sponsored by the Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and developed themes which had been explored in the Foundation's transnational research project, 'Employment in Household Services' (Cancedda 2001). The conference was hosted at Sheffield Hallam University and was attended by over 60 individuals with professional, policy and academic interests in the conference topic.

Aims

The aims of the conference were to:

- consider ways in which workers can be successfully recruited into this work;
- develop understanding of the skills and qualities which enable care workers to do their jobs and develop their businesses effectively, giving a high standard of service;
- explore ways in which good quality jobs in care can be developed, with fair pay and conditions, proper attention to health and safety and social protection, and opportunities for career development;
- consider similarities as well as differences regarding the supply of workers in childcare and elder care.

Topics

The topics discussed included:

- the continuing predominance of women in the care services workforce;
- the high social but low monetary value of care services in the eyes of consumers;
- complexity in training and qualifications for the sector;
- the scope for improving career development opportunities;
- mechanisms for addressing low rates of pay;
- measures to encourage recruits to enter the sector;
- changes in the role of public sector agencies in relation to care services;
- increasing regulation of organisations and agencies supplying care services;
- the extent to which the sector can be made attractive to profit-making firms.

Core themes

The conference examined a range of different policy initiatives from across Europe. Evidence from the Foundation's research in household services and elsewhere shows that European

states have developed a variety of policy innovations and entrepreneurial initiatives to address these important questions. Speakers at the conference highlighted some of these, and opening plenary presentations addressed a number of core themes:

Sue Yeandle, from Sheffield Hallam University, UK, opened the conference with an introductory paper on ‘Care work as an employment sector’. She drew participants’ attention to some of the less discussed aspects of care work: its focus on clients who are vulnerable people needing special protection as they receive services; the fact that care work often involves bodily care and intimate attention to personal needs; and the special qualities of sensitivity to others, and to their relationship with their homes. Carers working in domiciliary environments need to develop an awareness of such issues if the service they provide is to be of high quality. These features were contrasted with the tendency to evaluate care work as low skill and worthy of only the lowest pay. This contradiction was highlighted as a key challenge facing those responsible for organising services and recruiting and training workers.

Dr Géry Coomans, Research Director, ISMEA (Institut des Sciences Mathématiques et Economiques Appliqués), France, spoke about ‘Labour supply in a European context: demographic determinants and competence issues’. In a technical paper outlining some critical demographic and labour market trends, it was stressed that Europe’s demography was expected to change very significantly in the coming decades. Whereas the current economic system was based on abundant labour supply, the coming era will be characterised by scarcity of human resources. This will significantly change labour market behaviour, bringing with it the need for considerable organisational innovation.

The working age population of the EU is expected to peak at the end of the current decade, and then to decline. The working age population will also age, notably so after about 2007. An important outcome of these developments will be overall labour shortages – especially in northern Italy, parts of Germany, Austria and Benelux. The question then arises, ‘What social policy, and what human resource management policy can promote at the same time better employability, better jobs and higher productivity?’

When trends in education are added to this picture, it is evident that shortages of people with lower levels of qualification will be especially acute. This means that organisations which rely on low skill/low wage strategies will face increasing difficulty in accessing an adequate labour supply. It was therefore argued that any occupation drawing on ‘low qualified women around the age of 30’ would need significantly to improve the quality of the jobs offered, in order to make them more attractive to workers with higher levels of educational achievement.

Claire Cameron, from the Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, London addressed the conference on the topic, ‘Care workers in Europe: future needs’. Speaking about the programme of research on care work which has been developed at the Thomas Coram RU, she highlighted the contemporary context for care work in Europe: declining numbers of children, more equal workforce participation between men and women, growing numbers of older people, and their emerging preference for formal services – possibly linked to the disappearance of some sources of informal care.

In her view, the boundaries of care work were becoming increasingly blurred, with significant roles being played by policymakers and practitioners in health, education, welfare/social work

and housing, and with developing roles and partnerships for both family/informal carers, and for care and domestic workers. These shifts beg the question, ‘What is care work – is it social care, supportive care, labour market support, or part of pedagogy?’ Participants were encouraged to reflect on this, and to consider whether care work could be encompassed within a single concept, or needed to be differentiated – perhaps into social care (for older people), and pedagogy (for children and young people).

Possible strategies for meeting future care needs included policies to stimulate informal care, using migration and other mechanisms to increase the pool of low-skilled care workers, or professionalising care work to attract a more highly educated workforce. These questions offered an important stimulus to discussion during the conference.

Bill McClimont, Chair of the UK Home Care Association, gave his plenary address on ‘The home care workforce’. He emphasised that, in the UK, health and social care services were increasingly being brought together. Providers of services were trying to respond to demographic changes, but also faced pressures arising from the cost containment policies of public sector purchasers of care services, and from the introduction (which was welcome) of legally enforceable minimum quality standards. In the UK, the situation was one of significant change, with new professional bodies for care workers, and new national codes of conduct and professional registers being introduced. This speaker highlighted the need for a change in the social perception of the status of home care work, and provided some interesting thoughts about the implications of the new technology now becoming available to aid the development of care services.

Anne Longfield, Director of Kids Club Network spoke about ‘Recruiting the care workforce: challenges in the childcare sector’. She particularly highlighted some of the difficulties faced in recruiting workers into childcare jobs. The UK government had developed a number of recruitment campaigns, most recently relating to childminding, and some satisfaction could be drawn from the fact that the workforce in day nurseries and in out-of-school clubs had more than doubled between 1998 and 2001. There had been a 40,000 net increase in the number of childcare workers over this period.

However, recruitment remained difficult, and turnover was also an issue. 40% of current out-of-school workers had been recruited in the last year, and employers faced competition from other industries. The image of childcare also remained somewhat negative regarding issues of pay and status.

The development of an effective training and education infrastructure was an urgent concern, currently being tackled. It was essential that perspectives from other European states were used in this process, and that greater integration of different systems was facilitated. It was emphasised that the UK now faced a key moment of opportunity in childcare: to create a growing body of high quality, skilled and respected early-years and childcare professions.

Discussion topics

Participants in the conference contributed to plenary discussions after each presentation. To set the scene for subsequent workshop discussion, *Dr Tony Gore of Sheffield Hallam University* summarised the main themes and issues emerging from the preceding presentations. He grouped these under six headings:

1. Professionalisation: The move to increase the professionalisation of the workforce, via better training and clearer accreditation, and the provision of a more extensive skills base, including education and counselling, could possibly lead to what might be called ‘care work plus’ activity. On the other hand, it was important to recognise that professionalisation of care work had distinct limits, imposed by the difficulty of establishing a firm degree of exclusivity in relation to its provision, and by the extent to which the ‘care work plus’ approach might be appropriate in all instances. At the same time, it was felt that the coexistence and development of these different models of care provision would run the danger of polarisation and segmentation in the sector, and this in turn could affect the perceived quality of the care being provided.
2. The temporal fragmentation of demand: The need for care provision is not constant over time, whether looked at from a day-by-day, week-by-week or life course perspective. Again, there are several models of care that can be constructed to deal with this unevenness, including the assembly of a ‘jigsaw’ of care provided by several care givers; the expansion of the care giver’s role to encompass other key domestic tasks which support the person in need; and the piecing together of ‘portfolio’ jobs where the care giver performs a different suite of support tasks for a range of different clients. In all cases, the key structural necessity is to build some form of effective work flexibility.
3. Financial tensions: These arise from a number of different sources, including the need to recoup the costs of improving skills levels and standards and quality of care via higher prices. However, using the price mechanism alone to meet increased costs would be highly discriminatory, since it would regulate access to care simply on the basis of ability to pay. This then raises the question of state subsidies, and what the basis of eligibility for these should be. One aspect of this is the question of the precise purpose of such subsidies: are they to ensure that those in ‘essential need’ can access care services, or are they more about freeing up an unpaid carer to enter a different part of the labour market?
4. Frameworks of provision: It is essential that decision-makers in the various policy domains governing the care sector recognise and understand the close interconnections between all of the component parts of the framework of care provision – training, qualifications, financial arrangements, organisational structures, delivery mechanisms, working terms and conditions, etc. In particular, the mode of delivering care services has to be such that it can secure the improved standards and better quality jobs that the regulatory frameworks and training schemes are working towards. This requires effective funding streams that are set up to achieve the same end, and provide organisations with a culture and structure that enables them to deliver what is required.
5. The importance of cultural values: The cross-European differences in cultural values (often expressed simply in terms of the tripartite division between Anglo-Saxon, Mediterranean and Nordic models) mediate the individual and social behaviour that develops in response to demographic, social and economic trends and pressures. These produce different approaches and preferences in the ways that people deal with major life course decisions; and this in turn sets boundaries around what will and what won’t work in terms of care provision in different contexts. In other words, because the care sector straddles the territory between the economic and the social spheres, it is difficult, if not impossible, to envisage a single European approach that would fit each country. This, of course, will become even more marked with the prospective incorporation of eastern European states over the next few years.

6. The macro-economic and political context: This is not just a matter of the care sector competing for recruits with other sectors of the labour market, although this is clearly a key area of concern. It is also about the influence of growing levels of workforce participation on wider demographic trends (e.g., the steeply declining birth rates in the countries of southern Europe), and on people's educational, training and career choices. The issue of EU enlargement again brings with it an imbalance between the location of labour and the availability of jobs, and hence the possibility of migration to take up openings in the care sector in more affluent Member States and the danger of undermining efforts to enhance and professionalise the sector there. Finally, one unexplored aspect of care provision in society is: what would be the cost to the economy as a whole if all those currently providing care, on a paid or unpaid basis, were to withdraw their services for a single day? This would help to underline the true economic value of care in contemporary European society.

Workshops

Delegates attended one of three workshop sessions, based around the following themes:

Workshop on job creation and entrepreneurship in the care sector

Introducing this workshop, *Thom Crabbe, of the Daycare Trust, UK*, chose as his theme, 'Challenges and options for policy: job creation and entrepreneurship in the care sector'. He noted that a previously piecemeal approach to UK public policy on childcare had been taken forward in 1998 by the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, alongside policy initiatives designed to encourage parents and carers to seek employment, and an early education agenda whose aims include combating social exclusion and child poverty. Key mechanisms being used to deliver this agenda included the 150 Early Years and Childcare Partnerships which had been established across the country, the New Opportunities Fund (which distributed lottery funding) and the Early Years and Childcare Unit established in the Department for Education and Skills. As a key issue for public policy, this approach had met with some success, achieving a high profile across government, and including an interdepartmental review of childcare in 2002, with funding allocated for 2004–7 through the government's comprehensive spending review.

There was now growing capacity in the childcare sector (recruitment of 150,000 new childcare workers, and the creation of one million new childcare places by 2004 were cited) and some success in recruiting from under-represented groups – men, disabled people, minority ethnic groups – was being achieved.

Concerns about worker turnover were expressed – these were particularly worrying because of competition from other labour market sectors, the status of work in childcare, limited training capacity, and a 'dwindling pool' of labour from which new childcare workers could be drawn.

Within the sector, the trend was towards growth in enterprises providing nurseries and out-of-school care, with a decline in playgroups and childminding. Profitability issues were beginning to be better understood: recent reports suggested that 52% of nurseries were making a profit, compared with 12% making a loss, while only 31% of out-of-school provision was profitable, and 22% was loss-making. Childcare tended to draw on a very localised market, and childcare enterprises were strongly linked to their local employment markets, as well as highly sensitive to market and public policy. They were also highly labour intensive. Childcare entrepreneurs

were emerging – and while there was a developing trend towards larger enterprises, this was being hampered by a lack of entrepreneurial ‘know-how’.

Mr Crabbe concluded by pointing out that demand and supply of the childcare workforce was at a critical stage, with policy and funding facing an enormous challenge in continuing the desired growth. He encouraged participants to consider whether it was appropriate to continue ‘tinkering’ with the pool, or to develop a more radical policy, enabling childcare entrepreneurs, engaging with employers, developing children’s centres and ‘extended schools’, and creating a more integrated childcare workforce.

Workshop on training and skills issues in the care workforce and questions of working conditions and social protection

To stimulate discussion in this workshop, *Kaisa Kauppinen of the Institute of Occupational Health, Finland*, opened with a presentation focused on the quality of employment and work in the household services sector. She highlighted that, alongside significant job satisfaction (from developing meaningful relationships, helping those in need and using one’s creativity), workers in this field were exposed to a variety of risks: physical stress and diseases; fatigue, mental stress and ‘burnout’; violence and the threat of violence; and social isolation. Furthermore, low wages, precarious employment and long hours characterised the sector. In addition, society needed to face up to difficult issues relating to social protection, where there was widely varied experience, with some workers well protected, but others, especially those in undeclared work, in a very exposed situation. Some of the newer policy experiments, such as service agencies, fell between ‘self-employment’ and ‘employment’. Opportunities for career progression were almost universally poor – although social enterprises tended to offer better opportunities.

Richard Banks, from TOPSS (Training Organisation for the Personal Social Services) then spoke about the training and skills needs of the workforce in England. Within the policy framework ‘Modernising the social care workforce’, he drew attention to the importance of improving workforce planning, modernising the quality assurance of training outcomes, establishing appropriate regional and cross-sector partnerships, and clarifying roles and relationships. He pointed out that a new ‘environment’ for training and qualifications in the sector was emerging – focused on service users, codes of practice and conduct, registration, national minimum standards, best practice and performance measures.

Issues of workforce planning were being tackled primarily through establishing National Occupational Standards, matching qualifications to job roles, embedding basic skills training into induction programmes, and working to achieve NVQ (national vocational qualifications) targets with registered managers. Of critical importance in this process was the cultural shift being required of both managers and employees. New developments included workplace learning (both formal and informal), funding for employment-based learning programmes, addressing basic skills deficits/English as a new language (in appropriate circumstances), and involving service users in the training process.

Lola Morillo, from CCOO, Spain (Confederation of Workers), *Chris Lamb from UNISON* (the main UK trade union representing workers in this sector), *Kea Tijdens from the University of Amsterdam* and *Maureen Smith of Futurewise Solutions, UK*, responded. They shared many of the concerns, and noted the particular difficulties of organising domiciliary workers, especially

when there was much undeclared employment. Working conditions in private homes were highly variable, and private settings which were also clients' homes created some difficult challenges for protecting workers, not least with regard to health and safety issues. These themes were taken up and debated in discussion.

Workshop on funding regimes and employment relationships

Clare Ungerson, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Southampton, presented a paper based on cross-national research in Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK. The work had explored how these countries were developing forms of care delivery which allow for the care user to receive cash rather than care services. These policies aimed at greater empowerment (for care users) and consumerism, while also considering gender issues and the need for compensation for informal carers. The developments studied were also driven, to varying degrees, by strategies for cost containment, and for the establishment of quasi markets.

There was considerable variation between the countries in the way the policies were being implemented. In the presentation, it was stressed that some systems draw significantly on migrant labour (e.g. in Austria and Italy), while, in other cases (non-metropolitan areas of France and the Netherlands) most care workers had local origins. In France, it appeared that care workers were moving towards accreditation; whereas, despite some regulation and management of the scheme in the UK study, this appeared not to be happening in the same way. In the Netherlands and Austria, the study had revealed some evidence of the commodification of informal care. This was welcomed by the carers affected, but represented a significant cost without marked change in the caring labour provided.

Conclusions

In a final plenary discussion, an expert panel debated, with the audience of participants, the issues raised in the presentations and discussions. The panel, chaired by Robert Anderson of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, included: Anne Parker, Chair, National Care Standards Commission; Claude Martin, École Nationale de la Santé Publique, France; Marion Leonhardt, VERDI (Services Sector Trade Union), Germany; Chris Lamb, UNISON, UK; and Bill McClimont Chair, UK Home Care Association, and member of the UK General Social Care Council.

A number of important points and conclusions emerged from these discussions:

- The care sector falls within the ambit of four or five EU policy domains, so coordination of policy and activity is crucial;
- The future of the sector is also closely linked to issues around the retention and reintegration of older people into employment;
- Following the Lisbon summit, there has been an increased emphasis in EU policy on the creation of more and better quality jobs, and the care sector is seen as an important arena where this could be achieved;
- Linked to this is the drive to free up unpaid carers, so that they can participate in paid employment if they wish to do so;
- The activities of the care sector are also interwoven with broader workplace issues such as the division of labour, the temporal organisation of work, and the reconciliation of work and family life;

- Undeclared work poses a major barrier to the achievement of higher standards of care provision within the formal sector, and to securing improvements in job quality;
- Affordability was seen primarily as the need to bridge the gap that exists between the cost of providing high quality services and the costs that can be charged to consumers. This is clearly linked to the level of earnings elsewhere in the labour market, and to the question of the role that state subsidies should play;
- Potential tensions may arise if only some of the issues facing the care sector are tackled. Thus, a higher level and standard of training would raise the expectations of care workers for the terms and conditions of their future employment. However, if these are not met, they may well feel that they are not being allowed to do what they were trained to do, and leave to do more rewarding work. This would mean that the current high staff turnover would continue or even worsen, and that this investment would be wasted.

Tony Gore and Sue Yeandle, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

EF/03/62/EN