

Workforce crisis in social care: Stakeholder views on policy reforms

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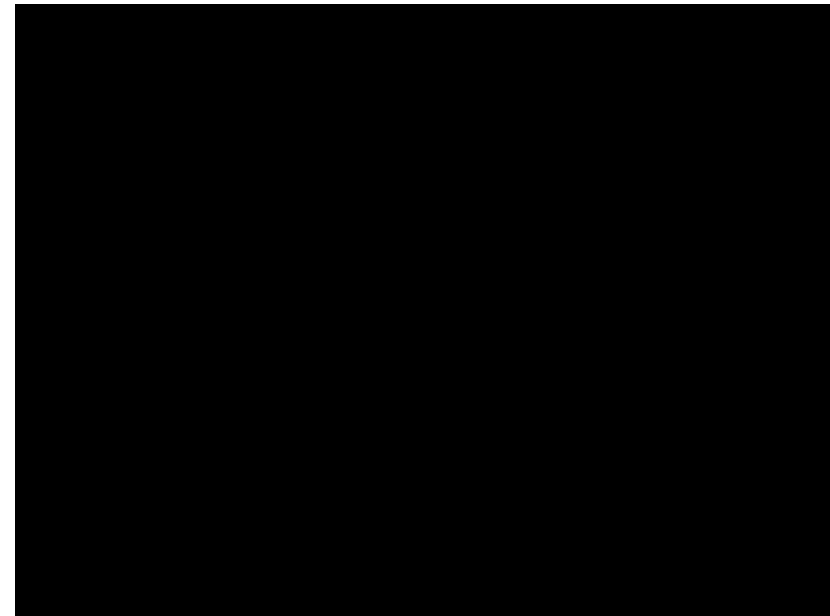
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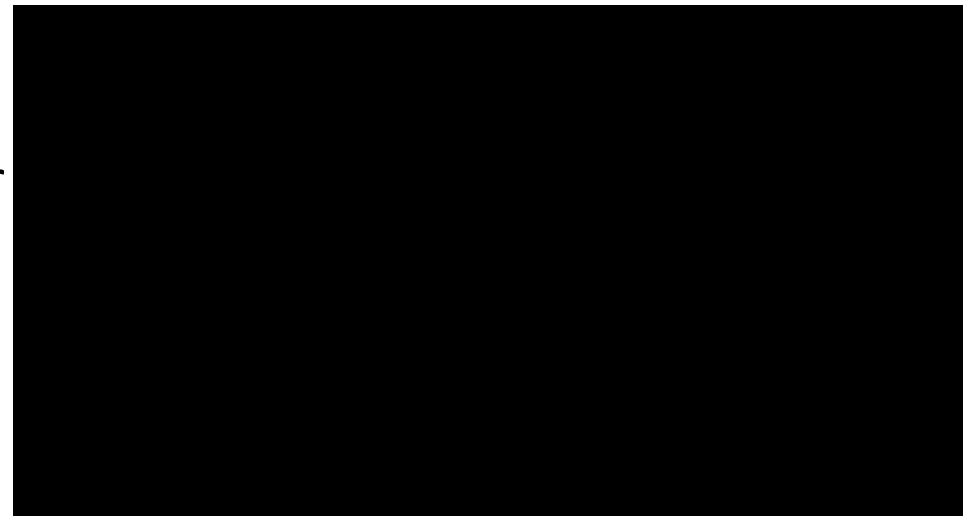
The crisis of social care in the UK

- Social care – long-term care (LTC). Supports adults with various needs in their own homes, care homes and day care centres.
- Some services are publicly funded (local authorities) but most people have to make top-up payments.
- Combination of growing need for support and chronic underfunding has led to high levels of ‘unmet need.’
- Covid-19



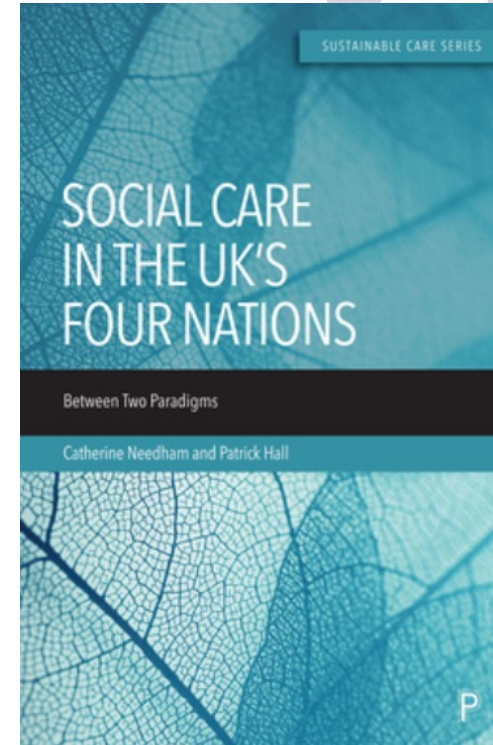
Social care workforce crisis

- More people work in social care than in the NHS
- Largely female, older workforce
- Low pay (under minimum wage) - poverty among care workers
(Health Foundation, 2022; Resolution Foundation, 2023)
- Poor terms and conditions: zero-hours contracts, only statutory leaves, benefits and pensions
- Burnout and abuse (ethnic minority workers)
- Crisis of recruitment and retention, high level of turnover
- Migrant workers are seen as the solution
- Exploitation of migrant workers



Conceptual framework

- Needham and Hall (2023) compared social care policies in the UK's four nations.
- There are internal tensions between different elements of social care policy reforms.
- Some of these tensions cannot be completely resolved, but policymakers and public officials should articulate and 'manage' them.



Two paradigms of social care (Needham and Hall, 2023)

Standardisation

- A care system is formalised, standardised and regulated.
- Attention is given to how to make the work of care more effective and efficient.
- ‘Signature’ policy reforms are the registration of care workers, the integration of social care with the NHS, and the introduction of a National Care Service.

Differentiation

- Care and support that is less formal, with lower levels of regulation and greater variation between people and localities.
- Care is approached from the perspective of the person who requires support, the focus is on what will give them choice and control.
- ‘Signature’ policy agenda is personalisation/self-directed support.

Research questions

1. Do stakeholder views reflect the tensions between standardisation and differentiation (Needham and Hall, 2023)?
2. How do stakeholders make sense of the tensions?
3. What does the focus on workforce issues add to our knowledge about the tensions?



The study design

Aim of the broader study:

- To map policy drivers of care workforce change in the UK.
- To understand the implications of policy reforms for the workforce.

Methods

- Literature review.
- Interviews; roundtables; prioritisation workshop (Cowan et al., 2021; JLA, 2021) and foresight exercise (OECD, n.d.) with stakeholders from a wide range of backgrounds.
- Meetings were recorded. Data from online whiteboards and chat was gathered.
- Analysis of the transcripts and notes.



Tensions were clearly articulated

Participants highlighted the tensions and explained that they shaped the working lives of people in social care.

“As with any change, values need to align - policy, commissioning, management, training, care inspectorate. At the moment [...] it’s not aligned. I think the care workforce feels pulled – if I train to do something and I know I can do it well and then I’m put in a care situation where I cannot deliver it that way [...], of course I will feel demotivated and I want to move somewhere else.”

(Roundtable 1)



Strong values and balanced views

There were balanced views even among people who were strong proponents of one paradigm. It was acknowledged that some problems with implementing reforms were caused by the current context.

“As long as [Personal Assistants are] not regulated, it is difficult to introduce quality standards and quality assurance. Some Local Authorities are developing digital platforms to connect self-employed PAs.”

(Roundtable 2)

“Registration is argued to improve ... [staff] retention. In Scotland we have set registration requirements. [...] Many staff struggled to achieve this, [and this is a] challenge to retention. [...] Staff cannot do professional development.”

(Roundtable 1)



Complex views on integration with health

Needham and Hall (2023) argue that integration of social care and healthcare is one of the signature policies of standardization. Most participants were very critical of this reform overall and/or its implementation.

“It's not clear what the benefit is for social care. It feels like a discussion about how to make social care more like health or how could health benefit more from social care and ignoring the rest of the remit of what social care does – help people to live everyday lives.”

(Roundtable 1)



Conclusions

- The tensions between the two paradigms were very much present in the discussions. The fault lines were clear but participants expressed nuanced views.
- Awareness of the context of reform implementation, e.g., shortage of workers, political interests, the long shadow of the NHS.
- The study adds complexity to the analysis of the standardisation-differentiation debate from the perspective of care workers and employers, two groups whose voice is often missing from the debates.





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