**A Question of Engagement**

**Measuring workforce engagement in the independent and voluntary sectors**

**August 2015**

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**Background - Integration and Engagement**

An ‘engaged workforce’ is one of nine desired outcomes arising from the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014.

**National Health and Wellbeing Outcome 8**: People who work in health and social care services feel engaged with the work they do and are supported to continuously improve the information, care and treatment they provide.

In March 2014 a meeting was convened by the Joint Improvement Team (JIT), which included representatives from the Scottish Government - Health Workforce, Local Authorities, CCPS, Scottish Care, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and the Care Inspectorate. The purpose was to see what information could be gathered to identify trends in workforce engagement as integration progresses. It was believed that there will be a need to generate comparable data for all 32 local partnership areas to underpin the anticipated accountability processes associated with integration.

Chris Bruce from the JIT asked if a single common question could be posed through staff surveys that would start to give local integration authorities some data on levels of engagement.

The indicator chosen by the Scottish Government as a proxy for staff engagement is, ‘the percentage of staff who say they would recommend their workplace as a good place to work’ and so, *‘Would you recommend your workplace as a good place to work?’* was selected as the single common question.

There was, and remains, considerable debate as to whether satisfaction in the workplace is an appropriate outcome indicator of engagement in the context of integration. Nevertheless, it was agreed that it was important to start with a fairly simple and achievable means of investigating engagement and develop future approaches from any learning gained.

The NHS and Local Authorities agreed to embed this question in their staff surveys. However, although some voluntary and independent sector providers conduct regular staff surveys and some even use this question amongst others as a means of determining workplace satisfaction, it was felt impractical to attempt to sample existing surveys to get comparative data.

**The Voluntary and Independent Sector Survey**

As a consequence of the meeting described above and at the request of the JIT, CCPS and Scottish Care agreed to work with the SSSC so that it could conduct a national survey in which the ‘one common question’ would be asked. However, this was considered an excellent opportunity to test out some other questions that could help to measure engagement in relation to integration and to explore how effective this type of survey approach is likely to be at identifying engagement trends as integration progresses. It was also hoped that the findings from this piece of work could help providers further develop their own engagement strategies.

Three additional questions were drafted, all aimed at finding out about aspects of engagement. These were questions about how:

* **Involved** people felt they were in the running of their service or organisation;
* **Valued** people felt their role was relative to colleagues in other organisations/sectors and;
* The extent to which employees felt they had **opportunity to support people in a personal outcomes-focussed way**.

Involvement in how the workplace runs is an indicator of engagement, irrespective of an integrated context. Feeling less valued relative to colleagues in the statutory sector was an issue raised by voluntary and independent sector providers that were consulted when the Integration legislation was being created. A shift to an outcomes-focussed way of working is a desired outcome of both Integration and Self Directed Support legislation.

In addition to the four main questions, five ‘qualifier’ questions were also asked to enable the results to be sorted by:

* Sector type
* SSSC Registration status
* Service type
* Role
* Location (local authority area worked in)

A major logistical difficulty was immediately encountered in issuing the survey. The SSSC only has direct contact details for people who are registered Social Workers, Managers or Social Service Workers.

The voluntary and independent sectors employ 68% of the total social services workforce, around 129,000 people. Within this, at the time of the survey, less than a third are registered workers. This meant that the unregistered component of the workforce could only be asked to complete the survey via the organisation they work for and so a request went out via the CCPS and Scottish Care provider networks.

**The responses**

The survey was sent out directly to 34,976 registrants by the SSSC on 4 March 2015 and closed at the end of that month. It was also distributed via providers. In total, 1019 people responded. The link to the survey was sent by email to registrants a few days before it was publicised by providers and resulted in an initial surge of responses (approximately 800). Overall the response rate represents 2.9% of those directly emailed.

The survey did not ask respondents to identify who they work for and so it is not possible to say how many separate organisations were involved. However, views from a mixture of job roles and work settings are represented in the responses.

Respondents were given the option to skip any question. On average 94.2% of people answered the qualifier questions and 88.3% of people answered the main questions.

Slightly more responses were received from the independent (56.1%) compared with the voluntary sector (40.8%). A small number (3.1%) classified themselves as ‘other’ sector.

The table below shows the spread of registration status and the relatively small number of unregistered workers who responded. (X axis = number of respondents)

The predominant response from registered, as opposed to unregistered workers, has the effect of disproportionately representing certain categories of workers relative to proportion of that type of service in the sector that they work in. For example, the independent has only a small number of children’s services, but in terms of survey response, this category had the second largest number of respondents in the survey. Similarly, there is a disproportionately small number of respondents in the voluntary sector from care at home and housing support relative to the size of provision in this sector.

It is not possible to say if the results would have been different if a greater percentage of the responses had been from unregistered workers. It could be postulated that the registered workforce should be a more engaged workforce than those who have not had to register because of the continuous professional development requirements of registration.

There was a balanced spread of responses between managerial and non-managerial posts as illustrated in the table below:

Most local authority areas were represented in the responses, but the number of responses does not necessarily reflect the size of the populations and, therefore, the number of support providers in these locations.

**Main Question Results**

The responses from the independent and voluntary sectors were broadly similar in respect of the four main questions. However, whilst it was not a specific objective to compare results between the sectors, it may be helpful for those working to develop the workforce in the respective sectors to see the results pertaining only to their sector. The graphs for each are, therefore, shown side by side.

**Q1 - ‘To what extent are you involved in how your service/organisation makes decisions about how it is run?’**

Some groups of workers responded more positively about being involved than others. In both sectors, care at home and housing support staff responded more positively to the question about being involved and those in adult residential care generally less so. For other categories of worker there was less consistency of opinion between the sectors.

In the section on involvement, two themes emerged quite strongly in comments made by people in both sectors. Managers and supervisors spoke of numerous means and mechanisms for involvement. This is consistent with findings in the recently completed Voluntary and Independent Sector Benchmarking Survey[[1]](#footnote-1), which showed that the vast majority of organisations undertook involvement and participation initiatives such as staff engagement surveys, staff meetings and team meetings on a regular basis.

However, amongst frontline workers, whilst many described opportunities for putting across suggestions, a lot said they didn’t feel that suggestions were acted upon.

*“Staff are involved in policy changes and always shown new paperwork. However I often feel that our opinion is not valued.”*

*“Although often involved, my input seems undervalued and insignificant.”*

There were a smaller number of more acutely negative comments on involvement. More of these were from workers in the independent sector, although there were some in the voluntary sector as well. Typically these comments expressed concern over few or limited opportunities for involvement and a low level of regard given to their opinions when they were expressed.

**Q2 - ‘To what extent is your role valued by people you work with from other organisations (for example, from other health and social care organisations)?’**

Comments across all the categories of staff in this section reflected that where relationships had been built up with external partners there was a relatively high level of appreciation for the roles of people working in the voluntary and independent sectors:

*“I work very closely with CPN’s and health professionals and I feel we value each other’s input in the daily lives of the people we support”.*

*“The service has excellent working relationships with Care Management. AHP, commissioners and CI. We offer use if our training facilities to NHS and other support providers”*

*“I feel my opinion is valued.”*

However, a number of comments reflected that people feel less valued by those working in partner organisations:

*At times medical staff will recognise support staff as being knowledgeable/valuable. However I have also heard, ‘Oh they are only a support worker’.”*

*Most outside people (doctors, care managers, social workers), etc. think my role is a joke and I have no part to play in the care sector’.*

Whilst it is likely that the ‘outside people’ referred to would challenge this statement, this perception of value being placed on care/support workers was found in several comments.

**Question 3 ‘To what extent does your role give you the opportunity to support those who use your service to meet their individual needs and outcomes?**

Combining the sectors, 21 people, out of 737 respondents (just under 3%) said that they never had the opportunity to provide support in a way that met service users’ needs and outcomes. Of this relatively small number, the majority (11 people) worked in adult residential care. However, this needs to be put in perspective because, overall, most respondents were from this workplace category and most actually indicated that they often or always had the opportunity to support people in a way that met their desired outcomes.

Some comments articulated how people felt they helped individuals achieve their outcomes:

*“By being committed and caring, listening to what they have to say.”*

*“By having a housing plan with all my residents and their views and wishes respected I can ensure that I can support their needs to the best of my ability”.*

A large number of comments were less about the nature of the support, but rather described what was preventing them for supporting people as they would like:

*“I am given every opportunity to support the people who use of service, but sometimes due to staff shortages I am unable to meet their needs.”*

*“To an extent it is a rushed job, then on to the next because of the timescales…”*

*“….due to paperwork there is very little time to spend one to one with residents.”*

There is resonance between these comments on pressure on time and other sources of workforce information. For example, the SCVO Workforce Survey 2015[[2]](#footnote-2) found that 54% of respondents said they felt overstretched at work half the time or more.

**Question 4: ‘Would you recommend your workplace as a good place to work?’**

There were some reservations about asking this question because there could be many reasons why someone might or might not recommend their place of work. However, it can still be seen as an indicator of satisfaction within the workplace and sector in general.

**Summary**

The main purpose of the survey was to help provide a benchmark position of engagement in the voluntary and independent sector at the early stages of integration so that this can be seen alongside similar information drawn from surveys conducted by the statutory partners. The limitations of the survey means that it cannot be taken as a benchmark. However it does contribute to the overall understanding of workforce engagement and anyone seeking to develop a benchmark can learn from this report. This said, the survey paints a generally positive picture, but with some obvious areas where engagement could be improved.

Meeting the challenge of involving all of the workforce in the running of their service/organisation is one such area. This process of consultation and information sharing is of paramount importance if Outcome 8 is to be achieved. This survey has been conducted at a time where there is growing recognition of the need to maximise the potential of front line social care workers. In isolation, the results can be challenged in terms of statistical validity. However when seen alongside, for example, the report based on discussion with the recently formed Support Worker Reference group[[3]](#footnote-3), one can see many common themes and comments reflected. Furthermore, the results have resonance with other workforce issues affecting the independent and voluntary sectors. The difficulties of recruiting and retaining people to work in social care have been highlighted in reports[[4]](#footnote-4) generated by both sectors recently. Understanding the extent to which the additional pressures of staff shortages contribute to some saying they would not recommend their place of work, or the degree to which having excellent engagement practice helps retain staff cannot be determined from this survey. However, it is clear that workforce engagement is a factor whichever way you look at it and so it is hoped that this survey contributes to the picture that is emerging of workforce engagement in Scotland.

It is debatable whether an engaged workforce will be an outcome of integration, but rather, can be seen as an input. In other words, having a more engaged workforce will more likely lead to the other integration outcomes and better outcomes for the workforce and supported people in general.

This survey may be helpful, therefore, to providers keen to develop their own engagement strategies. This could be by using or adapting the questions for their own surveys or consultation processes. Organisations could also consider where they sit relative to this general picture in terms of involvement of staff at all levels. The connection between a sense of value and well-developed relationships with external partners could be capitalised upon in organisations where these relationships exist and, where they don’t’, the active promotion externally of ‘what our organisation does’ could form part of its staff engagement strategy.

A great deal was learned from the process of conducting the survey. The recommendations below reflect this learning and will hopefully influence any future attempts to measure engagement.

**Recommendations**

Workplace satisfaction is an over simplistic measure of engagement. The Scottish Government should consider using the learning from this exercise to develop a wider definition and more meaningful indicators of engagement, in the context of integration. For example, take into account how empowered people feel to promote personal outcomes.

The additional questions asked in this survey did yield interesting results which, if used by organisations could help them shape their own engagement strategies. However, when asking about how valued people feel by external partners, the question could have been more specific, i.e. naming which partners, so that the results can be better acted on. Similarly, the question on influence could have been split so that frontline workers could express the level of influence on their specific service and managers’ answers reflect their influence within the wider organisation.

The difficulties created because there is no single means of surveying the whole workforce in the voluntary and independent sectors, in the way that is possible with the NHS and local authorities, will not go away. Consideration should therefore be given to moving away completely from trying to repeat this exercise, but move instead to encouraging providers to embed questions of engagement in their own surveys so that the results can be sampled. The involvement of providers in this way would encourage a greater sense of ownership of the results that is achieved by presenting results of a national survey. Furthermore the response rates are likely to be higher than was achieved through this survey.

The NHS and Local Authority surveys should consider developing a more sophisticated approach to looking at engagement in the context of integration. The additional questions used in this survey would make a good starting point for a discussion on creating a set of indicatiors of engagement that go beyond basic workplace satisfaction.

It is hoped that this report is seen as contributing to the Shared Vision and Strategy[[5]](#footnote-5) for social services in Scotland. An action identified within the strategy under ‘Supporting the Workforce’ is to, ‘Review existing workforce surveys and, if considered useful, undertake a workforce survey across the sector to better understand key issues for staff. It is recommended that the Social Work Services Strategic Forum, which is responsible for maintaining an overview of the implementation of the strategy, takes account of the findings and other recommendations in this report when considering this action.

1. Separate findings for voluntary and independent sectors can be found at:

   [CCPS Benchmarking Survey Report](http://www.ccpscotland.org/resources/2014-benchmarking-report-voluntary-sector-hr-network-ccps/) and [Scottish Care Benchmarking Survey News and Executive Summary](http://scottishcare.org/workforce-matters/news/benchmarking-survey--new-opportunities-for-participation/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A voluntary sector workforce survey conducted by Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations:

   [SCVO Workforce Survey 2015](http://www.scvo.org.uk/long-form-posts/scvo-workforce-survey-2015/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Support Worker Reference Group is facilitated by Scottish Care with membership from both the Independent and Voluntary sectors. More information: [Support Worker Reference Group Information and Report](http://scottishcare.org/workforce-matters/news/scottish-care-support-worker-reference-group--what039s-it-all-about/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Scottish Care Report on recruitment and retention: [In the Front Line and Supplementary Report](http://scottishcare.org/workforce-matters/news/scottish-care-publish-agency-staffing-supplementary-report-to-in-the-front-line/) and Report on Voluntary Sector Recruitment and Retention issues commissioned by Cornerstone: [Cornerstone News and Link to Report](https://www.cornerstone.org.uk/news-story.php?id=research-shows-creeping-third-sector-crisis) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Social Services in Scotland – a shared vision and strategy 2015-2020 available (online) from: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/social-services-workforce/SWSSF/visionandstrateg> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)