



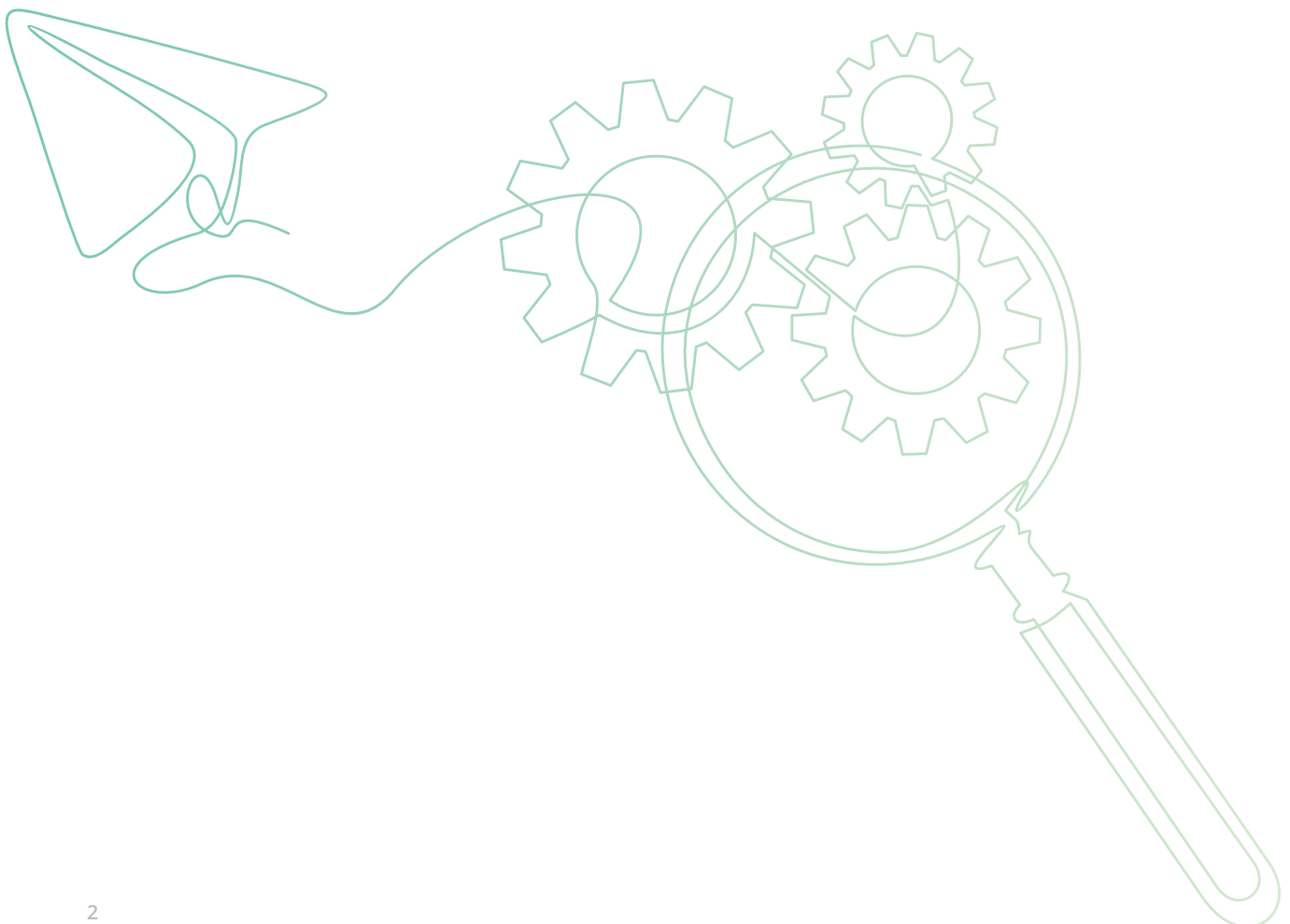
Social work jobseekers report

A stylized magnifying glass with a black outline. The handle is a simple line extending from the bottom left. The lens is a large circle with a double border, centered over a light purple hexagon. Inside the circle, the text "Jobseekers Research 2025" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Jobseekers
Research
2025**

Key messages from this year's research

- One in Five respondents are actively searching for a new job with seven in ten open to new roles.
- Ability to work flexibly and work/life balance continue to be the most important factors for people looking for new jobs.
- Respondents are most likely to search for new vacancies on specialist websites, an increase of almost 30 percentage points since 2024, followed by employer careers sites.
- Social media platforms are used professionally by 70% of respondents, mostly LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Facebook.
- Around 1 in 5 consider themselves to be neurodivergent. Of this cohort, the support most would like to see from potential employers during the recruitment process are interview process adjustments and clear communication.



Introduction

This report details the annual research carried out by Community Care Jobs on social worker job seeking behaviour. It provides recruiters with insight on the most effective ways of spending tight resources within the context of an extremely competitive recruitment marketplace.

Methodology

The survey took place between June and July 2025 and gathered the views of 3,517 respondents, from every region and country in the UK and across a range of roles and organisations.

Respondents answered an online questionnaire, which was promoted on the Community Care website, through pop-ups and a news article, and via targeted emails. They were also incentivised by a prize draw for two £50 vouchers.

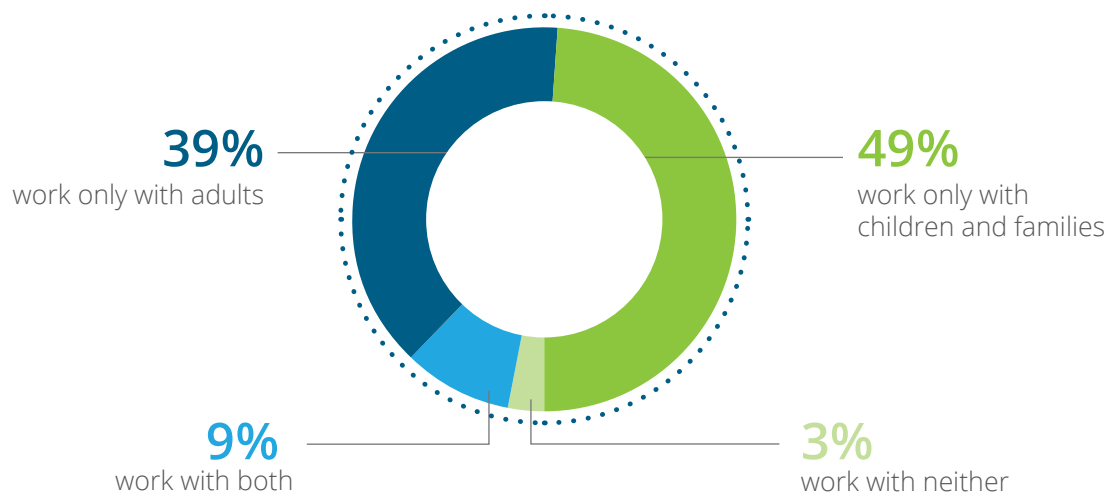
Demographics

Of those who took part, the vast majority (72%) work for a local authority. Another 7% worked for the NHS, 5% in the private sector and 4% for a charity or voluntary organisation.

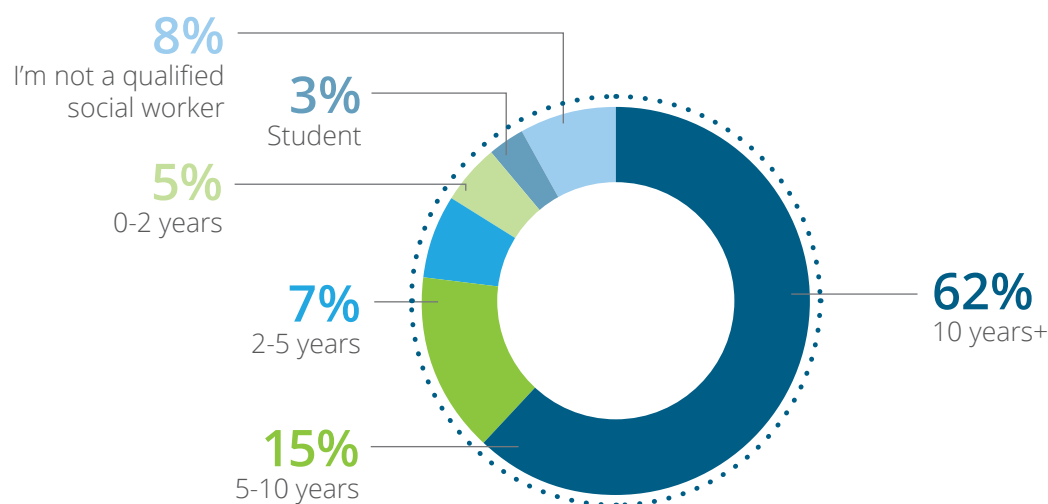
The average age of respondents was 50, which is slightly higher than in previous years (46 in 2021, 47 in 2022 and 2023, 49 in 2024). The gender breakdown of respondents was 84% women and 13% men in 2025, with 3% preferring not to say.

Half of all respondents, 43%, were frontline social workers, including newly qualified, senior and advanced practitioners. A further 16% were managers and 20% were practitioners or support workers.

Area of work



Number of years respondents have held a social work qualification



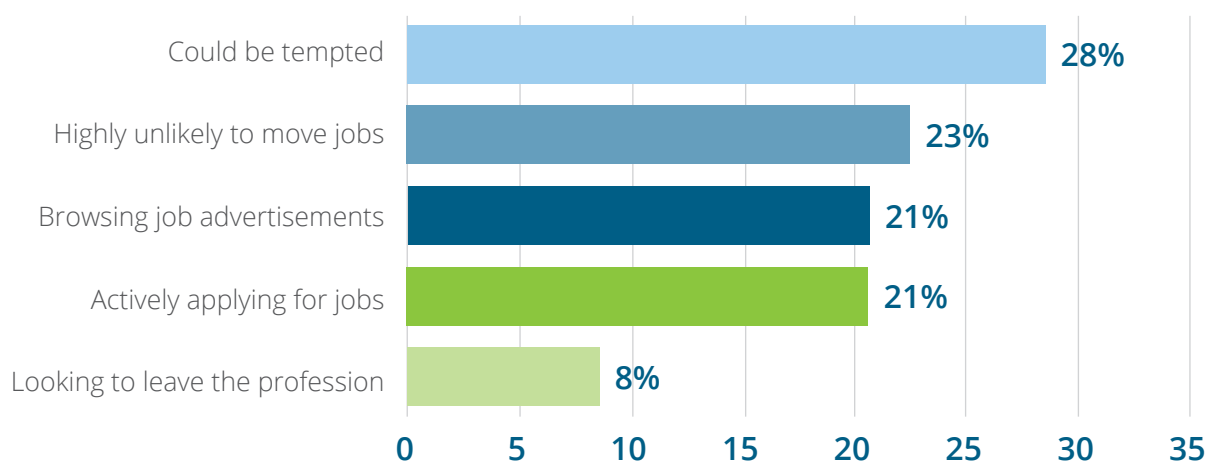
How many social workers are looking for a new job?

While official figures show that there are record numbers of social workers in post, as of September 2024^{1,2}, the latest Local Government Association health check³, with responses from 6961 social workers, found that social workers are continuing to struggle with workload, administrative burdens and increasing need.

In this year's survey, more respondents have indicated that they are actively looking for a job (21%, up from 16% last year) with 42% either actively looking or browsing other roles (up from 38% in 2024).

Fewer are not looking for a new job but could be tempted by the right role (28%, down from 33%).

The main reasons cited by those looking to leave the sector (207 respondents) are stress (63%) and burnout (59%).



¹'Social worker numbers hit new record high in adults' services'. Community Care, February 2025. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2025/02/12/social-worker-numbers-hit-new-record-high-in-adults-services/>

²'Record numbers of children's social workers in post but fewer holding cases, figures reveal'. Community Care, March 2025. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2025/03/04/record-numbers-of-childrens-social-workers-in-post-but-fewer-holding-cases-figures-reveal/>

³'Social workers continuing to struggle with workload, admin and increasing need, finds 'health check'.' Community Care, May 2025. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2025/05/07/social-workers-continuing-to-struggle-with-workload-admin-and-increasing-need-finds-health-check/>

Permanent roles versus agency work

Social work, by and large, is still a profession in which people prefer to work in permanent, full-time roles. Similarly to last year (18%), only 17% of respondents preferred to work as locums, either full or part-time.

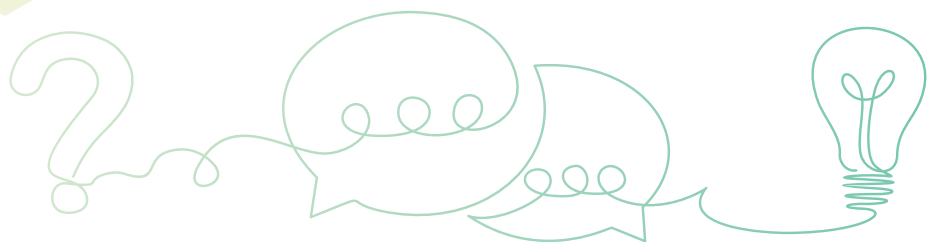
The top reasons locum workers prefer this work is due to the flexibility it offers, closely followed by better pay – the same as last year's results. Many commented on the advantages of being able to stay out of office politics and move employers easily if they didn't like the environment or the management.

However, while only one in 20 permanent workers would prefer to go locum, consistent with last year's findings, over a quarter of locums (27%) would like to be permanent – up from 20% in 2024. Reasons given for being unable to work in a permanent role included the salary and limited part-time opportunities.

An important consideration for employers is the implementation of rules limiting the use of agency workers in children's services in England⁴. It's possible that the regional price caps that are in the process of being implemented will reduce the financial benefit from being a locum, which might make it more likely that people will convert to permanent roles.

“Permanent work means I can be present and active for the team. I can ensure they get the support they need and I get to spend time doing joint visits on complex safeguarding cases and when they are stuck.”

“The right job opportunity to progress my career has not come up. When it did the application process was too long and repetitive.”



⁴ 'Caps on agency social worker pay show significant regional variations.' Community Care, August, 2025. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2025/08/28/caps-on-agency-social-worker-pay-show-significant-regional-variations/>

Preference for locum work

“I do not want to be involved in the organisational politics, so prefer locum roles.”

“Being a locum gives you much more money and flexibility”

“I have found that working as a locum senior social worker gives me more control about how my career develops and grows. ... I stayed in my last locum post for 3+ years.”

“Locum work gives me flexibility and is rewarding.”

Preference for permanent work

Those preferring to be permanent cite financial security (including benefits) and circumstances (ie children or caring responsibilities)

“Security mainly, as I have children. Also, I like my role, colleagues and managers.”

“I like the reassurance of a permanent contract and the benefits of working in an organisation, such as access to training and workplace pension.”

“Job security and I like belonging to a team that is stable, building relationships with colleagues, which enhances my practice as we work towards a common goal with shared principles.”

Preference for part-time work

The proportion preferring part-time work remains fairly consistent at around 26%. However, several respondents commented that they would prefer to work part-time but that they couldn't afford to do so, or that their employer didn't allow them to work the hours they wanted to. Fewer than a quarter of social work roles are advertised as part-time or flexible hours⁵.

“I cannot get a part-time post in my service. They do not allow staff to work part-time due to the nature of the job. Therefore I am actively looking for employment somewhere else.”

“The main benefit of working from the office is peer support, which does not exist in a hot-desking environment.”

What tempts a social worker to consider a new job?

Better work-life balance remains the top temptation to consider a new job this year, ahead of increased pay, with the former having increased in significance this year.

As last year, these factors are followed by flexible working and less stress, but the former is also significantly more important to workers than in 2024.

The top three key factors which tempt social workers to change jobs

2025

- 1 Better work-life balance (59%)
- 2 Increased pay (52%)
- 3 Less stress (47%)
= Flexible working (47%)

2024

- 1 Better work-life balance (53%)
- 2 Increased pay (52%)
- 3 Less stress (37%)
= Flexible working (37%)

Work-life balance is the top priority for respondents regardless of their level of experience. Less experienced practitioners place more importance on career development than those who have been working in the sector for longer.

An increased salary is more of a priority when looking for a new job for those who have been qualified between 2-10 years and for workers on permanent contracts than for other groups.

⁵ 'Proportion of social work roles offered part-time grows slightly but remains less than a quarter'. Community Care, June 2024: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/06/07/proportion-of-social-work-roles-offered-part-time-grows-slightly-but-remains-less-than-a-quarter/>

Priorities according to demographic of social workers

Children's social workers

1 Better work/life balance (62%)

2 Increased pay (58%)

3 Flexible working (50%)

4 Less stress (44%)

5 Lower caseloads (38%)

Adults' social workers

Better work/life balance (60%) 1

Increased pay (55%) 2

Flexible working (51%) 3

Less stress (42%) 4

New work challenges (25%) 5

↑ 12%

Experienced social workers (10+ years)

1 Better work/life balance (60%)

2 Increased pay (54%)

3 Flexible working (52%)

4 Less stress (43%)

5 New work challenges (39%)

↑ 12%

Less experienced social workers (less than 2 years)

Better work/life balance (64%) 1

Increased pay (51%) 2

Career development (49%) 3

Lower caseloads (49%) 4

Flexible working (43% - didn't feature in the top 5 reasons for this group in 2024) 5

NEW

↑ 16%

What is flexible working?

For the first time this year, flexible working has come in the top 5 priorities looked for in a new job by those who have been qualified for less than 2 years.

When asked what flexible working means to them, respondents listed:

- Hybrid working
- Flexitime
- Compressed hours
- Home based
- Part-time
- Staggered hours
- Option to include weekends as a part of your working week
- Job sharing
- Phased retirement
- Educational term time
- Annualized hours

For the fifth year in a row, two-thirds (68%) of respondents wanted to advance their career without taking on managerial responsibility. At the same time, similarly to 2023 and 2024, 95% of respondents agreed that 'it is important to work in a stable team with stable management'.

“It is difficult to find the right part-time position as a senior social worker. My son is young and has additional needs and I need to be near home for his school; this is a barrier to sourcing part-time work as these vacancies are few and far between.”

Which benefits make a difference to social workers?

The most important benefits in any social work job are unchanged from 2023 and 2024:

2025

- 1 Flexible working
- 2 Ability and infrastructure to work from home occasionally
- 3 A good working/office environment
- 4 Holiday entitlement
- 5 Free parking

The importance of flexible working has increased from 49% in 2023 to 52% in 2025.

The least important benefits for all respondents were electric car charging, cycle to work schemes, relocation packages and being allowed to attend sector events.

Deciding on their next employer

When a worker is looking at the reputation of a potential employer, word of mouth recommendation from a social worker is the most important factor by far, with 81% of respondents selecting this. Stable management structure was the next most important, cited by 66%, and staff turnover was considered by 61% of respondents. A further 25% said that they valued general research across articles, social media, webinars or podcasts.

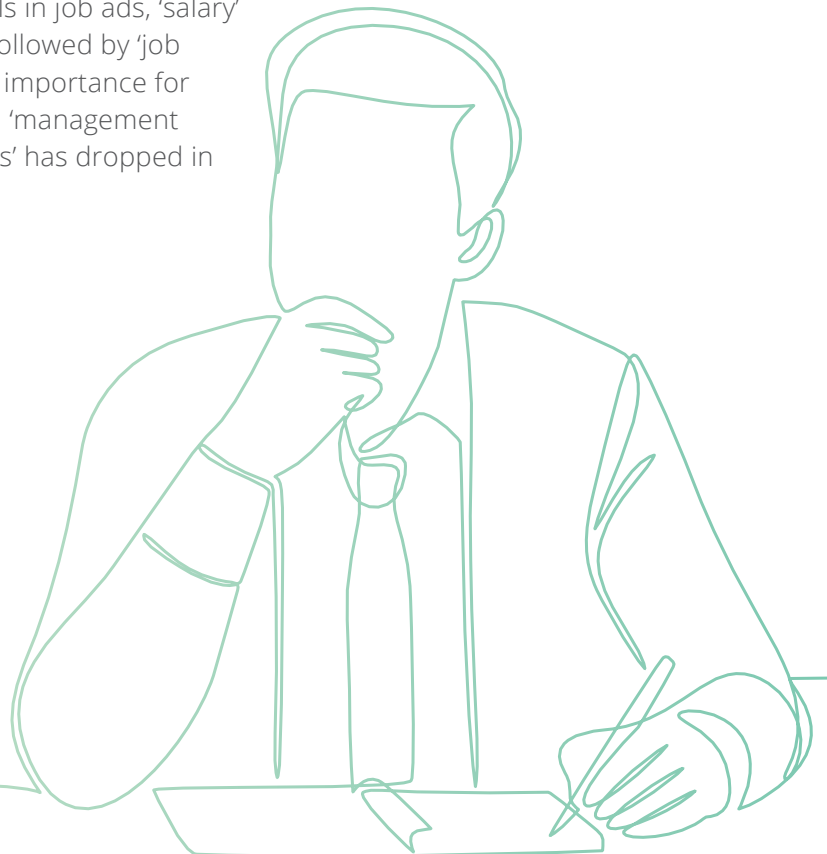
The number of workers prepared to work for 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' rated employers has remained consistent year-on-year, with 57% saying they would do so.

Social media platforms are used professionally for careers-related information and opportunities by 70% of respondents, up from 52% in 2024. When they do use social media, it is most likely to be LinkedIn (41%), followed by WhatsApp (25% - up from 12% in 2024) and Facebook (22%).

Job advertisements and application processes

In a major change year on year, specialist websites are most commonly used to search and apply for jobs (81%, up from 52% in 2024), with employers' careers sites falling in importance, being cited by 52% of respondents, down from 81% in 2024. These are followed by peer referral (48%) and job alert emails (43%).

In terms of the most important details in job ads, 'salary' remained in the top position (56%), followed by 'job description' (39%), with no change in importance for 'flexible working approach' (36%) and 'management approach' (33%). Curiously, 'caseloads' has dropped in importance (21% to 17%).



Top 5 details social workers want to see in job ads:

- 1 Salary (56%)
- 2 Job description (39%)
- 3 Approach to flexible working (36%)
- 4 Management approach (33%)
- 5 More about the team you would be working with (28%)

There is no change in the five key application processes to get right.

What encourages social workers to apply for a job?

- 1 Applications are acknowledged
- 2 High quality and swift communication throughout the process
- 3 Feedback is provided on applications
- 4 Applications are online
- 5 The opportunity to speak to someone before applying

Personality or aptitude tests, as well as detailed application forms, put people off from applying for a role. Nine in ten said having a one-page form would encourage them to apply for a new role, while 77% said the same about the ability to apply with a CV rather than filling out an online application form.

Having mobile friendly application processes is still important, with 61% saying this would encourage them to apply for a job.



Delivering an outstanding recruitment experience includes:

giving an accurate picture of the role, culture and the team

engaging in open and transparent communication

providing feedback after the interview

These have remained the top factors consistently over the past eight years for employers delivering an outstanding recruitment experience. When asked what they considered to be a timely response to an application, the most highly rated was receiving a personal response in 1-2 days.

Good working culture

Respondents were asked what advice they would give to employers to build a good working culture, particularly when social workers are working remotely and flexibly. They were allowed to write in their own responses and then we coded them up into different areas.

Top 5 ways to build a good working culture:

2025

- 1 Allow/offer flexible working, hybrid working, condensed hours (30%)
- 2 Transparent and open communication (19%, up from 7% in 2024)
= Support and value employees and recognise their work (19%, up from 11%)
- 3 Good management and regular high quality supervision (14%)
- 4 Regular face-to-face/team/in-person meetings (13%)

2024

- 1 Allow/offer flexible working, hybrid working, condensed hours or more part time roles (25%)
- 2 Regular face-to-face/team/in-person meetings (13%)
- 3 Supportive environment for employees (11%)
- 4 Offer more flexibility (10%)
= Trust employees to manage their own workload and time (10%)
= More team building days (10%)

Allowing flexible working and having transparent and open communications are seen as ways to build a good working culture.

“Give staff the same compassion/flexibility as we would give the people we work with. We are also people with families, caring responsibilities and our own health struggles.”

“As long as the job is distributed fairly and they have flexibility, leave them alone and let them do their jobs.”

“Trust is the cornerstone of any successful flexible work environment. Use tools like Microsoft Teams or Zoom to facilitate regular communication. Set clear boundaries for working hours, particularly if you're operating in a hybrid environment.”

“Allow remote working, and trust the staff to get on with their work.”

“Leadership is not about being the best. Leadership is about making everyone else better.”

Neurodiversity in social work

One in five respondents (19%) consider themselves to be neurodivergent. When this group was asked 'What support would you like to see potential employers offering you during the recruitment process?', 52% highlighted adjustments to the interview process (ie giving questions in advance, allowing interviewees to bring notes with them), 34% emphasised the need for clear communication and transparency about the process and 18% requested ongoing support and understanding.

“Be transparent about each bit of the process. Be clear and communicate in writing with dates and times. Don't ask lots of 2-part questions as my brain can't always remember the second part; follow-on questions are a better approach. The stress of the interview may make others go blank, but in the field they might be an excellent worker. Help them relax so you get the best out of the interview. Think about the environment that you are interviewing in - I was once interviewed in a cupboard and it did not go well.”

“Acknowledgement and time for applicants to process questions and tasks required in the interview process.”

“A clear picture of the interview process, step by step. It would be good for neurodivergent practitioners to have an idea or a list of interview questions to be able to prepare.”

Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development⁶ (CIPD) found that a third (33%) of employees who are neurodivergent said that their experience at work in relation to their neurodivergence had had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. Around a fifth said it had had a negative impact on their ability to perform well in their job (21%), their intention to stay with their employer (19%) and the likelihood they'd recommend their employer to a friend (19%). From an employer's perspective, just over three-fifths (63%) of employers who've taken some action to create a neuroinclusive organisation said that they'd seen a positive impact of doing so on employee wellbeing. Furthermore, just over half (55%) had seen a positive impact on the culture of the organisation and a similar percentage had seen a positive impact on the quality of people management.

⁶ Thompson E, Miller J (2024) Neuroinclusion at work. <https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/2024-pdfs/2024-neuroinclusion-at-work-report-8545.pdf>

Conclusion

Although there have been some minor changes since 2024, the results this year are consistent with those of last year. Around seven in ten are open to new roles, with an increase on last year's findings of around one in five actively searching for a job in the sector. More respondents (52%) cited the ability to work flexibly as the most important factor in them looking for a new job.

Seven in ten are using social media platforms professionally, mostly LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Facebook.

Respondents are most likely to search for new vacancies on specialist websites (such as Community Care Jobs), followed by employer careers sites. When finding out about roles and deciding whether to apply, respondents are most likely to discuss it with their network to establish others' experiences with the potential employer, make direct contact with the organisation and Google the organisation.

The majority of respondents consistently indicate a strong preference for permanent roles as opposed to working as a locum (83% to 17%). 6% of those on permanent contracts would like to be locum, whereas 1 in 4 locums would like to be on a permanent contract.

The factors most likely to tempt respondents to consider a new job are a better work/life balance, increased salary, flexible working and less stress. The detail respondents would most like to see in job ads are salary and job description. To give an outstanding recruitment experience, recruiters should give an accurate picture of the role with open communication and interview feedback.

Around 1 in 5 consider themselves to be neurodivergent. Of this cohort, the support most would like to see from potential employers during the recruitment process are interview process adjustments and clear communication.





If you would like more information on this research or on how Community Care can meet your recruitment needs, please contact CommCareRecruitment@markallengroup.com