Recruitment and retention

A public service workforce for the twenty-first century
The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, health and criminal justice services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.
# Recruitment and retention

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Introduction

There was a time when we could assume that the brightest and best of each generation would want to join the public sector. But that is an assumption that we can no longer make, particularly when the financial rewards at the top of the private sector are so great, and too often public sector workers are weighed down by bureaucracy and silly rules.

Tony Blair, 1999 (Ref. 1)

Why recruitment and retention matter now

The UK labour market is currently highly competitive with unemployment at an historically low level. This means that all employers have to compete harder to attract and retain staff. Within this context, there are widespread reports of recruitment and retention problems across local public services [Exhibit 1]. There are concerns about shortfalls in the number of staff, with fewer younger people being attracted to work for the public sector in the first place and a potential ‘demographic time bomb’ with 27 per cent of the public sector workforce now aged 50 or over. There are also concerns about skill shortages, both in terms of basic skill levels in the workforce, and in the key leadership, management and technical skills that are needed to deliver public service improvements.

Exhibit 1

What are the headlines?

Reporting of recruitment and retention problems across public services is widespread.

Source: Audit Commission analysis of newspaper headlines

As at June 2002 the International Labour Organisation unemployment count was 5.2 per cent (Source: Office for National Statistics).

Source: Office for National Statistics.
And recruitment is expensive. The average direct cost of recruiting a member of staff is £3,456 (Ref. 2). Earlier research from the Commission showed that, on average, a new recruit performs at only 60 per cent of their productive potential when they are first appointed, reaching 100 per cent only after they have been in a post for a year.

A wide range of recruitment and retention initiatives are in place across the public sector, with action being led by Government, professions, national organisations and local employers. Major strategies include:

- recruiting key workers from overseas;
- encouraging workers who have left to return;
- re-engineering traditional skill mix requirements, enhancing existing roles and creating new ones;
- widening the pool by recruiting from non-traditional groups and running ‘grow-your-own’ initiatives; and
- improving the working lives of staff and reducing unnecessary administrative work.

But recruitment and retention remain a major challenge, and the scale of that challenge is reflected in targets set by Government across key public services. The NHS Plan sets targets for the recruitment of 35,000 more nurses, midwives and health visitors, 15,000 more consultants and GPs and 30,000 more therapists and scientists by 2008 (Ref. 3). The Department for Education and Skills plans to have an extra 10,000 teachers, 20,000 non-teaching staff and 1,000 bursars by 2006 (Ref. 4). The Home Office has increased funding to boost police recruitment by 9,000 by 2003 (Ref. 5). Other areas do not have formal recruitment targets set, but will clearly need more staff if delivery targets are to be met. For example, the number of childcare workers must increase significantly in order to meet the target of a pre-school place being available for every four year old by 2005.

The Audit Commission’s contribution

There is an extensive body of research on recruitment and retention in public services, but most of it addresses specific professions or sectors (Refs. 6–10). Our study takes a different approach by looking across the public sector as a whole, offering new evidence and bringing together the findings from existing work.¹

Our study began with a series of interviews with key national stakeholders. Many of those we interviewed thought that the size, nature and causes of recruitment and retention problems in the public sector are already well known and that the Commission’s study should focus on exploring solutions to a clearly understood problem. But while it is clear that many employers are struggling to recruit the staff they need, our analysis did not show a shared understanding about how big the problem is, where problems are most or least acute, or, critically, about why there is a problem in the first place.
We decided that we could provide most help to those struggling to recruit and retain staff by focusing on three key questions:

- What do we know about the size and nature of recruitment and retention problems across the public sector?
- What lies behind the key decisions to join, remain in or leave a public sector job?
- What local approaches are proving successful in tackling recruitment and retention difficulties?

This report is designed for local leaders and managers. It focuses on the action that local leaders can take now to increase recruitment and improve retention in their organisations, and on what Government and other national stakeholders can do to help to create and sustain an environment in which local leaders are able to satisfy the aspirations of their staff.

What we found

Our findings may surprise some people. At sector level, the existing vacancy data does not allow us to draw reliable conclusions about the true size and scale of the recruitment and retention problem. At employer level, a key piece of the information jigsaw is missing – most public sector employers are not asking their staff why they are leaving. And there are no single issue solutions. A complex interaction of economic, demographic, social and political factors impact on the demand for, and supply of, public sector staff. These issues demand long-term, multi-stakeholder interventions. This study acknowledges the long-term national context, but focuses on short- to medium-term local action.

There are also immediate pressure points around individuals, and their decisions to join, stay or leave. Most public sector staff are leaving because of push, not pull, factors. Many of the critical short- and medium-term solutions can be delivered at local level. And leadership and management are crucial since the right solutions are not stand-alone fixes that can be left to human resources directorates. Instead they lie at the heart of how organisations are managed and led.

What we did

We spoke to a wide spectrum of stakeholders including Government, local employers, staff, regulators, trade unions, and the public to find good practice and learning and to identify the key common issues in local public services. We focused on the public services within the Commission’s remit. There were seven elements within our study:

- a series of interviews with national policymakers, trade unions, professional organisations, training agencies and inspectorates to explore their priorities, and their understanding of the problems and issues;
• focus groups and interviews with potential, current and ex-staff at unqualified, qualified and leadership levels;
• a telephone survey of 300 former public sector staff asking them why they joined, and why they left the public sector (the Commission survey);
• analysis of existing data on skills and staffing levels;
• media monitoring of messages that the public, and potential staff, receive about the public sector in the national press;
• case studies on successful local initiatives to tackle recruitment and retention difficulties; and
• a ‘listening and learning’ event to discuss our interim findings with key stakeholders.

Our next steps

Our findings, analysis and recommendations are available in this report, in a one-page briefing, and in a short summary. Where 📺 is seen, more information is also available on the Commission’s website. As well as our own launch event, members of the study team are speaking at a range of conferences and events organised by other bodies. We have produced a pocketbook to complement the report. The pocketbook contains headlines from the study, brief case studies of local initiatives, and a discussion guide. We hope that it will prove helpful in stimulating debate and discussion between frontline staff and leaders on the key recruitment and retention issues facing local public services. Finally, we are considering the potential for collecting follow-up data in order to explore how stakeholders are responding to the challenge of recruiting, retaining and motivating their staff.
The public sector now

The public sector labour market is changing, with increasing numbers of staff employed by the private sector to deliver services. There is a lack of easily comparable information about vacancies across the public sector as a whole. While the remedy for the imbalance in overall demand and supply is inevitably long term, action can, and should, be taken now, by focusing on problems that can be addressed in the short and medium term.
This chapter provides an overview of who works in the public sector. We outline the key factors influencing demand for and supply of public sector staff, and look at the impact on demand of large increases in investment in key public services, like education and health.

We explore the existing data on vacancies across the public sector and find that it does not allow us to draw reliable conclusions about the size and scale of the recruitment and retention problem. While we can identify some key pressure points and broad trends, developing a shared and sufficiently detailed picture of vacancies and trends across the public sector requires substantial long-term effort, and central co-ordination.

Who provides public services?

The public sector employs around five million people in an enormous array of different roles. The majority of public sector employees work in education, local government and the NHS. Between them, these sectors employ nearly 80 per cent of all public sector staff. The remainder work in, for example, central government departments, the armed forces and the police.

The proportion of the workforce employed by the public sector is falling [Exhibit 2]. In 1981 public sector employees made up nearly 30 per cent of the UK workforce. This proportion had fallen to under 20 per cent in 2001. Large-scale privatisation of key national services and contracting out were largely responsible for these changes.

Exhibit 2
Proportion of workers in the public and private sectors
The proportion of public sector employees is falling.

Source: Economic Trends No.583, June 2002
Although fewer people are employed by public sector employers the number of people providing public services has increased. This reflects a shift between public and private sector employment, with many employees now providing a public service but employed by private companies. For example, the proportion of private sector workers in education increased from 23 per cent in 1990 to 38 per cent in 2000. The proportion of private sector health and social workers increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 43 per cent in 2000 (Ref. 11) [Exhibit 3]. The voluntary sector currently employs 2 per cent of the workforce and the numbers employed are growing. Many of those employed in the voluntary sector work with public sector workers to deliver public services, particularly in the area of social care. Such trends are likely to continue, with the Government expecting the continued growth of a mixed economy in the provision of public services (Ref. 12).

Currently there are a number of key differences in the composition of the public and private sector workforces [Exhibit 4]. Analysis of these differences shows that some perceptions about public sector work are wrong – for example, there are more staff on temporary contracts in the public sector, which is traditionally thought of as offering greater job security. Beyond this, however, different workforces require different recruitment and retention challenges, and demand different strategies. For example, the higher proportion of part-time and female staff in the public sector sharpens the need for flexible working policies. The higher proportion of qualified staff means that time spent in training is a key supply issue.

**Exhibit 3**

**Public and private sector staff delivering public services**

The proportion of private sector workers in education and health and social work is increasing.

Source: Economic Trends No.583 June 2001
Exhibit 4
Profiles of public and private sector workers
There are key differences between public and private sector workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have more qualifications</th>
<th>Have fewer qualifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>44 per cent have at least one degree or National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 5</td>
<td>24 per cent have at least one degree or NVQ level 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only 21 per cent have no qualifications or a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 1</td>
<td>33 per cent have no qualifications or a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 1</td>
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<tr>
<th>Are more likely to be female and work part time</th>
<th>Are less likely to be female and work part time</th>
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<tr>
<td>63 per cent are female and 30 per cent work part time</td>
<td>42 per cent are female and 23 per cent work part time</td>
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<tr>
<th>Are older</th>
<th>Are younger</th>
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<td>Only 16 per cent are aged 29 years or below 27 per cent are aged 50 years or over Nearly two-thirds of workplaces have no employees under the age of 21</td>
<td>31 per cent are aged 29 years or below 21 per cent are aged 50 years or over Around one-third of workplaces have no employees under the age of 21</td>
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<tr>
<th>Are more likely to be on fixed-term or temporary contracts</th>
<th>Are less likely to be on fixed-term or temporary contracts</th>
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<tr>
<td>More than 10 per cent are on either fixed-term or temporary contracts Fixed-term working is used in 72 per cent of all public sector workplaces</td>
<td>Just under 6 per cent are on either fixed-term or temporary contracts Fixed-term working is used in 34 per cent of all private sector workplaces</td>
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<th>Are more likely to belong to a union</th>
<th>Are less likely to belong to a union</th>
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<tr>
<td>59 per cent are members of a trade union 76 per cent (of those in workplaces with 25 employees or more) are covered by collective agreements</td>
<td>Only 19 per cent are members of a trade union 31 per cent are covered by collective agreements</td>
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<th>Are more satisfied but more stressed in their jobs</th>
<th>Are less stressed but less satisfied in their jobs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mean job satisfaction score fell from 5.6 in 1991 to 5.4 in 1998 Mean General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) mental stress score rose from 10.4 in 1991 to 11.7 in 1998</td>
<td>Mean job satisfaction score fell from 5.4 in 1991 to 5.3 in 1998 Mean GHQ mental stress score rose from 10.1 in 1991 to 10.6 in 1998</td>
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It is likely that many of those currently providing public services from the private sector were previously public sector employees, keeping the composition of the workforce delivering public services relatively stable. But the shift to a more mixed economy of provision is likely to be matched by a shift in the composition of the workforce delivering public services. At the sector level, recruitment and retention strategies will need to match this shift. At the local level, employers who are aware of the composition of their own workforce are more likely to be able to match their actions to the needs and priorities of their staff.
What do we know about staff shortages in the public sector?

What causes shortages?

20 The simple explanation for staff shortages is that demand is driven by the number of people needing and wanting to use a service. Shortages are temporary as supply adjusts to meet demand. But the supply of workers is also affected by the strength of the economy, the number of people of working age in the population, and policy and practice around retirement. The availability of workers to meet existing demand (the number of unemployed people per job vacancy) is currently at its lowest point since 1987, II and demographic trends mean that fewer young people are entering the workforce.

21 In addition, public services do not operate in a free market and supply may not change to meet demand in a straightforward way. National funding priorities play a critical, and perhaps the most important, role in determining demand for public sector workers. Recent increases in funding in specific services have raised demand for workers beyond need-driven levels [Case example 1]. So while the numbers of staff in some areas has actually increased, so too has the number of recorded vacancies as demand has risen faster than supply.

22 And given the high proportion of qualified staff in the public sector workforce, simply increasing funding will not immediately increase the supply of workers:

The biggest constraint the NHS faces today is no longer a shortage of financial resources. It is shortage of human resources the doctors, nurses, therapists and other health professionals who keep the NHS going day-in and day-out.

NHS Plan (Department of Health, 2000) (Ref. 3)

23 There are key long-term issues in the demand for, and supply of, public sector workers that only Government can resolve. The review of the public sector labour market within the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2002 concludes that Departments need to develop pay and workforce strategies, taking into account local or regional challenges, around recruitment and retention to ensure delivery and value for money. While undoubtedly helpful, workforce planning and Government action alone will not resolve all recruitment and retention difficulties. With the funding priorities of the government of the day a key driver of demand for public sector staff, and supply a long-term issue, an exact match between supply ‘in the pipeline’ and demand in the present will always be challenging to achieve. In this context, effective short- and medium-term action at local level is equally critical.

Case example 1
The demand for teachers
Recent research has shown that the demand for teachers is affected more by the increased funding available than by pupil numbers. If current patterns and projected increases in spending on schools continue as planned, as many as 70,000 new teachers will be needed by 2004. If staffing levels were determined by expected increases in pupil numbers, however, demand would reduce significantly with only 6,900 new teachers needed over the same period.

Source: Johnson M., Making Teacher Supply Boom-Proof, Institute for Public Policy Research (2001)
What does existing data tell us?

Data and analysis of the public sector labour market is central to our ability to forecast market changes. The review identified areas where data is poor or non-existent.

CSR 2002

Our study drew the same conclusion. Information on vacancies across the public sector is collected and published by a variety of organisations, including government departments, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), trade unions and individual employers. Much of the information that is collected focuses on specific jobs or sectors; and the different methods of collecting information, different definitions of a vacancy, different timescales and different reporting structures, make it difficult to construct a consistent and comprehensive picture. Some information sources rely on numbers, others ask how difficult employers are finding it to recruit staff in key areas. Depending on the source of information about vacancy levels, and the definition of a vacancy that is used, conclusions on the size of the problem can vary dramatically (Case example 2). These different conclusions are likely to lead to significantly different actions.

Case example 2

Vacancies in radiography

The Audit Commission and the Department of Health surveyed vacancy rates in radiography over the same time period.

The Commission’s survey was completed by the manager of the radiology department. The Department’s survey is collected routinely from Trusts’ Human Resources departments. The Department’s survey includes only vacancies of three months or more, in order to highlight vacancies that are difficult to fill. The Commission’s survey was a snapshot of all current vacancies.

In both surveys, vacancies for radiologists were highest in the north of England, while for radiographers vacancies were highest in London and the south east.

The Commission found a mean vacancy rate for both consultant radiologists and radiographers of 10 per cent for 2000-02. The Department found a 4.6 per cent vacancy rate for consultant radiologists and 4.4 per cent for radiographers.

Source: Acute Hospital Portfolio, Radiology, Audit Commission, 2002

HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, the Office for National Statistics and others are therefore doing further work to improve and co-ordinate data collection and analysis on the public sector workforce CSR 2002.
What we do know is that difficulties in filling public sector vacancies are reported across all sectors and skill groups, and right across the country. At the regional level, problems are compounded in London and the south east by the higher cost of living, higher housing costs, and increased employment opportunities in the capital. But problems have emerged across all regions with differences apparent within, as well as between them. At the moment, demand is outstripping supply, and the age profile of the public sector workforce gives cause for concern as fewer young people are entering the workforce.

What should be done?

It is clear that the public sector labour market is changing. Increasing numbers of staff are being employed by the private sector to deliver public services, but the current composition of the public sector workforce still differs significantly from that of the private sector. And there is a lack of easily comparable information about vacancies across the public sector as a whole.

The remedy for the imbalance in overall demand and supply is inevitably long term. This does not mean that action can, or should, wait. Demand by local people and Government for improved public services forces Government and public sector organisations to take action to manage staff shortages quickly. In this context, focusing on problems which can be addressed in the short and medium term is critical.

Our next chapters seek to identify these problems. Why do people join, and why do people leave, the public sector? What does this tell us about what we must get right to recruit, retain and motivate staff? What initiatives are proving successful at local level? And what can Government and national stakeholders do to help local employers create and sustain a working environment that attracts and keeps staff?
Why people join

The biggest single reason that people identify for joining the public sector is the opportunity to ‘make a difference’ for service users and local communities. People want to ‘make a difference’, in a job that satisfies them, and with a reward package that meets their needs. Taken together, these three factors need to outweigh the alternatives that are open to them. And, for most people, sector is not a deciding factor – they choose a job or profession, not a sector.
30 Please choose the job that they do for many reasons. Market forces influence choice – people have more choice when unemployment is low and demand for their skills high. However, choice of work is as much about individual behaviours and motivations as it is about market forces. If employers are to successfully tackle recruitment and retention problems it is critical that the motivations, needs and priorities of their employees and potential employees, are understood and acted upon. This chapter explores what motivates people to work in the public sector.

31 People decide where to work after weighing up their options, but this is not a precise science. As a former NHS consultant described it in one of our focus groups, *I more or less came to the conclusion unconsciously in terms of assessing pros and cons*. Our analysis shows that people consider how well a job or profession would match their motivations, their perception of how it is rewarded, and its image and status, weighing up that package against the other options that are available to them [Exhibit 5]. For most people, sector is not a deciding factor – most people choose a job or profession, not a sector.

**Exhibit 5**

**Choice of work**

People consider how well a job matches their motivations, their perception of its reward and its image and status.

*Source: Audit Commission analysis*
What people want from work

What originally attracted people to work in the public sector? We asked people what motivated them to enter the job or profession that they had chosen. Different reasons, but common underlying themes, emerged [Exhibit 6].

Making a positive difference is the single biggest factor. 42 per cent of public sector workers in our survey said this had been the main or secondary reason for choosing their job. Staff also value working with others (both team members and local people) – a positive factor cited by 39 per cent of those surveyed. And 28 per cent of workers had held a long-term ambition to enter their chosen profession, with a further 24 per cent saying that they considered the work inherently interesting. This diversity of reasons, but common principles, was also reflected in our focus group discussions [Box A, overleaf].

**Exhibit 6**

**Reasons for entering public sector work**

Reasons are varied, but there are common underlying themes.

Source: The Commission survey
Box A

Workers are motivated by different things...

It was good fun, it was good socially, and I wanted to get up the grade, get some money... and get to a position where I could make some changes, improve the service for the people.

Former NHS nurse

I would never put myself into a job that I completely hate because it paid me great amounts of money because I think you’ve got to enjoy what you do.

Current social worker

This will sound corny, but it [teaching] is something that I have always felt I wanted to do. Even as a child I would pretend to teach my dolls.

Current head teacher

…but ‘making a difference’ is the biggest single factor

I liked the idea of having an impact on people’s education, giving people a chance.

Former teacher

I wanted to do something where I could go home and say, ‘What I did today really made a difference to someone, it made their quality of life better’, or, ‘it gave them a spark, a bit of inspiration’.

Senior health authority employee

I think that my main motivating factor was working with people and watching the changes... It can be awesome to see and it’s kept me in my job.

Current social worker

You get a great deal of satisfaction from it. When you can walk out of an elderly person’s house and leave them with a smile on their face you know you’ve done a good job.

Current domiciliary care worker

Source: Audit Commission

Most of the people we spoke to joined the public sector because they wanted to do a particular job, and a public sector role happened to fit the bill [Box B]. Few said that they had weighed up whether to do the job in the public, private or voluntary sector, either because similar jobs were not widely available in other sectors, or because they were not aware of similar private or voluntary sector roles. Only 5 per cent of our survey respondents had a specific commitment to working in the public sector. Our focus groups of potential public sector staff shared this majority view. They told us that their choice of career would be based on the specific characteristics of the job – no one said that they were committed to working in the public sector per se.
Box B

For most, it is the job, not the sector, than matters

I think sometimes it’s personality that draws towards certain specific types of work. For me it wasn’t anything political or anything…it was that was my interest was working with people.

Current social worker

There weren’t as many private sector places around at the time. Now there are quite a lot of private sector places. A job just came up and I liked the job description, applied for it and got it. It didn’t really matter who it was, the health authority or social services. What if it had been a private one?

I would probably have gone for that.

Current social service worker

It has all got to do with job satisfaction and just getting on with it. I wouldn’t turn down a job in the public sector and I wouldn’t turn down a job in the private sector.

Potential public sector employee, final year university

For a few, sector is crucial

I always promised I would work in the NHS because I trained in the NHS. I did a couple of agency shifts in the private sector when I first came to London and it was awful. The care, I thought it was just scary…I am just not a private sector person.

Former NHS nurse

Source: Audit Commission

For most of our focus group participants, the ability to ‘make a difference’ through their work was not dependent on sector. But for a few making a difference is not the same as “working for the common good”, which can only happen in not-for-profit sectors. For this group, working for society as a whole, rather than those who can afford to pay for treatment or services, or for the benefit of shareholders, is a crucial motivation. And for some respondents, although serving the public had not been their main reason for joining the public sector, it was something they came to appreciate and value.

Was it (joining the fire brigade) anything to do with public service?

I wouldn’t say it was anything to do with it really. It wasn’t something that attracted me to it. But once you’re in the job, you’re aware of it.

Former fire officer
Box C

Public sector workers are likely to weigh up the whole package

My working hours are fairly flexible to be honest, and that is definitely a bit of a plus for me. I do like to decide if I want to go into the office at eight in the morning or at ten.

Senior health authority employee

The training is brilliant... You do learn an awful lot. There's a lot you think that you know until you do a course like that. Then you think, 'Flippin' heck!'

Current domiciliary care worker

If you're a basic teacher the money isn't that great, but you do get lots of holidays and things.

Year 13 student

The pension set up is favourable as well. You know everybody talks about how good the police pension is.

Senior police officer

The great thing about being a social worker is that you're never bored. You are dealing with the interface of people's lives, where they really need help... And we are working with lawyers, doctors, psychiatrists.

Senior social services employee

Source: Audit Commission

Perceived reward

36 From our national interviews two significantly different views of the impact of pay and reward on recruitment and retention emerged. Pay tended to be seen by some as the primary cause of recruitment and retention problems, but by others as having limited importance compared to other factors, and other types of reward. So what reward do public sector workers seek?

37 Our research shows that the link between reward and motivation is more intricate than that expressed by either of these points of view. Yes, people want a level of pay that accurately reflects their responsibilities and demonstrates that society attaches value to their work. The level of pay was cited as the third most important reason why workers left their jobs, and was the biggest single factor that could have enticed them to stay. However, few people in our survey said that pay influenced their choice of job. Instead our discussions revealed that people see pay as one part of a bigger reward package that includes pensions, bonus schemes, annual leave entitlement, job flexibility and, crucially, whether the work itself is rewarding [Box C].

38 Taken together, elements of this reward package must, of course, meet the basic needs of employees. In some areas, notably London and the south east, the higher cost of living means that a higher salary is needed to cover the ‘must have’ factors.

Image and perception

40 Work that is seen to have value is likely to motivate people, especially people who want to ‘make a difference’. Our research shows that a strong measure of ‘value’ for public sector workers is the public image of their job or profession.

41 Many workers perceive this image to be negative and, in extreme cases, are reluctant to admit what they do for a living [Box D].
Participants in our study felt that people stereotype them in an unrealistic and generally negative way. Social workers are seen as either ‘do-gooders’ or as interfering. Teachers are, on one hand, often portrayed as overworked and underpaid, and so as people to be pitied. But on the other hand they can be portrayed as failing to educate and control children, and therefore to be blamed for much of what is wrong in society. The sense of being blamed or pitied was stronger for people from professional groups. Some public sector workers, for example, domiciliary care assistants, feel that often people do not know, or do not understand, the complexities of what they actually do. Overall, people felt that they were much more likely to be blamed, pitied or misunderstood, than respected as competent professionals.

Of the former public sector workers surveyed, 68 per cent thought that the image of their former profession would discourage people from entering that job. Only 9 per cent thought the opposite – that the image would encourage people to enter.

Summary

People choose their job after balancing how well it will match up against what they want from their working life, how well it is rewarded, and how positively it is perceived, weighed against the other options that are open to them. Taken together, these three factors need to outweigh the alternatives – the balance must be right. For most of the people we spoke to, whether a job is in the public, private or voluntary sector is not an important factor. The critical recruitment issue is whether they will be able to make a positive difference to people’s lives, in a job that satisfies them, and with a reward package that meets their needs.

Recruiting staff is, of course, only the first step. Since ‘making a difference’ is the single most important motivating factor for those working in the public sector, do staff have the space to make this difference in practice? Does their work satisfy them? And is it sufficiently rewarded and valued? The next chapter asks why people leave their public sector jobs.

Box D
Many public sector workers feel that their image is a negative one...

It was more respected years ago than it is now. I think a lot of the caring professions, doctors, nurses, teachers, they had a higher regard in the communities than they have now. Now there is far more criticism.

Former education/social service employee

I would not admit to it [being a nurse]. You either get from older people, ‘oh you little angel’ or from younger ones that you are a trollop with a short skirt and fishnets on... Nurses are not really thought of as a trained profession, working in a trained occupation. I don’t think it has a lot of status to be honest.

Former NHS Nurse

I rarely tell people what I do, because of the stigma that goes with it, you’re damned if you do, you’re damned if you don’t. Social workers can never win.

Former social services employee

How do you think that members of the public view your work?

We’re cleaners. People don’t realise what you do.

Current domiciliary care workers

Source: Audit Commission
Why people leave

For people who lead and manage staff in any sector, understanding the factors that combine to create a negative work experience – and so tip the balance in favour of people leaving – is vital. But most public sector employers are not asking why people leave their jobs. We found that most public sector staff leave not because of compelling alternatives, but because of push factors that they see as being specific to the public sector.
Surprisingly, many public sector employers know little about why people leave their jobs. Only one in five of the former public sector workers we interviewed had had an exit survey. But people are prepared to tell it ‘as it is’ – 77 per cent of those who had been asked said that they had given their real reason for leaving. If employers are to develop meaningful recruitment and retention initiatives they cannot afford to miss this key piece of the information jigsaw.

We surveyed former public sector workers to find out why they had left public sector work. People told us that stress was the biggest single factor in their decision to leave. We wanted to know what lies beneath people’s sense of stress, and we asked leavers to unpick what had caused that stress for them. This chapter tells their story of the underlying reasons why they left [Exhibit 7], what would have persuaded them to stay [Exhibit 8, overleaf] and whether they would return.

We asked leavers if they would consider returning to their former public sector role. Forty-four per cent said that they would, and 53 per cent said that they would not.³

### Exhibit 7

#### Why did people leave?

The experience of work in practice, and the sense of being valued are key.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucracy and paperwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload/hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not valued by government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not valued by manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not valued by public</td>
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<tr>
<td>Line manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Commission survey

³ Three per cent did not know.
What would have persuaded people to stay?

Better pay was the most significant factor that would have persuaded people to stay, but for 14 per cent of people nothing could have persuaded them to stay.

Our analysis identifies six main factors that underpin the decision to leave:

- the sense of being overwhelmed by bureaucracy, paperwork and targets;
- insufficient resources, leading to unmanageable workloads;
- a lack of autonomy;
- feeling undervalued by Government, managers and the public;
- pay that is not ‘felt fair’; and
- a change agenda that feels imposed and irrelevant.

Bureaucracy, paperwork and targets

*It is important that all front line health professionals concentrate on providing high quality health services to the public. Anything preventing this, particularly unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy, needs to be removed.*

Rt Hon. Lord MacDonald of Tradeston and Lord Hunt of Kings Heath [Ref. 16]

Half of the former public sector workers we surveyed said that too much bureaucracy and paperwork was the most important reason why they left. This was strongly supported in focus group discussions, where a wide range of employees reported that increasing amounts of their time are spent completing paperwork [Box E]. While
some of this is seen as being important to the job, much was felt to be unnecessary and time consuming. This concern about the level of bureaucracy is reflected in other research. A recent study for the Home Office (Ref. 17) found that, of the 43 per cent of police officer time spent in the station, two-fifths is spent on paperwork. And there have been initiatives aimed at reducing unnecessary bureaucracy for GPs, and for teachers (Refs. 18 and 19). Ten per cent of workers in our survey said that a reduction in bureaucracy could have encouraged them stay in their former jobs.

Workers also cited too many targets as a reason to leave, both in our survey and in focus group discussions. Many felt that the content of their work was increasingly driven not by what matters but by what could be measured [Box E]. Staff concern about the numbers of targets and measures is shared by policymakers and by regulators. For example, significant effort has been put into reducing the number of best value performance indicators that councils have to collect. And reducing the burden of regulation is one of the Audit Commission’s four strategic goals. But it is just as important that staff fully understand the purpose of targets, and how the information they gather is used to improve services. Targets are important to demonstrate the link between what individuals do and what organisations do, but they need to be few and their relevance evident. Our study suggests that too many public sector staff do not see how performance measurement relates to their own primary goal to make a positive difference in people’s lives.

Autonomy

For 28 per cent of those questioned, the lack of autonomy in their job was an important factor in their decision to leave. Workers value autonomy but feel it is under threat in the public sector [Box F, overleaf]. Eighty-two per cent feel that they are more able to decide what they do and when they do it in their new job outside the public sector.

The PSPP research into motivation found that the level of delegation was an important motivating factor for employees (Ref. 14). This is supported by other research showing that staff value having control over work decisions and that those staff who have more control are more likely to feel positive about their job (Ref. 20). The positive impact on employees’ motivation and morale through maximising staff participation in discussions about their work and its organisation was recognised by many of those we interviewed for this study.

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**Box E**

**Workers think there is too much bureaucracy, paperwork and targets**

The amount of paperwork now, that became absolutely enormous. If I could have made one suggestion I would have had a Bill through parliament where they got rid of all the unnecessary paperwork.

**Former education/social service employee**

There is a constant sort of drive to indicate performances. I think the actual work is suffering because of that.

**Current social worker**

In the end I just used to dread going to work because when I got there, from start to finish, there would be people in my ear, meeting after meeting…and then I ended up having to stay after work to finish protocols and guidelines.

**Former NHS nurse**

The downside is the paperwork, which you feel nobody is going to look at. I am not against paperwork if I feel that it is going to progress me or my pupils but I would say that with a good 80 per cent of it that doesn’t happen.

**Former teacher**

Source: Audit Commission
Box F

Workers feel that autonomy matters...

I like to be left to my own devices to try and think things out for myself.
Current childcare assistant

I think you can use your own approach on how you work with people...I think that's really nice to be able to sort of shift the way that you approach the job.
Current social worker

...but that it is under pressure...

There is too much outside pressure dictating what people have to do.
Current head teacher

It doesn’t give you any scope, you can’t use your imagination, you’ve got to tick boxes and stuff and just fit them in this little box and the questions that you ask, you’re not having interplay with people...
Current social worker

Source: Audit Commission

Resources and workload

Public sector workers feel under pressure to deliver services [Box G]. Seven in ten of the people we spoke to said that the lack of staff and/or other resources was a key reason in their decision to leave. Both the number of hours worked and the amount and intensity of work are causing problems for workers. Sixty-five per cent said that having too much work was an important reason for leaving. And a reduction in working hours was the second most important factor that could have enticed workers to stay.

Other research supports these findings. For example, in a recent Royal College of Nursing survey, 55 per cent of nurses reported that they work longer than their contracted hours and one in six nurses leaving the NHS identified the number of working hours as the reason for their move (Ref. 21).

These problems are not unique to the public sector. There have been changes in the pattern of hours worked in the UK in the economy as a whole and the overall picture is one of increasing hours and increasing work intensity. The number of people working long hours increased from 17 per cent in 1983 to 20 per cent in 1998 (Ref. 22). For public sector workers, particularly for those working in education, work intensity increased over the 1990s. For private sector workers intensity increased more in the 1980s.
Box G

Workers feel under pressure from lack of staff and resources

I found that when one person left they weren’t replaced. Jobs weren’t re-advertised and you were expected to take on that role of whoever had left.

Former education/social services employee

The frustrations are the lack of staff. You find that quite often you are doing what I call conveyor belt physio. You’ve got so many patients.

Former NHS therapist

It is frustrating...when there are kids running around an estate and the effect on the old people...and you haven’t got the resources to do anything about it. You just feel you wish you could sort this mess out, but it is hard.

Current police officer

Source: Audit Commission

Being valued

The importance to workers of feeling valued emerges as a significant factor in people’s decisions to stay or leave. Three-quarters of those who were working outside the public sector at the time of our survey felt that they were more valued in their new organisation. And our analysis shows, that for public sector workers – workers who want to ‘make a difference’ – the sense of being valued and rewarded comes not only from line managers but also from a broader range of stakeholders. Not feeling valued by Government, management, and the general public were all cited as important factors in workers’ decisions to leave. And indeed the perceived lack of value by Government was more frequently cited than a perceived lack of value by managers – 56 per cent compared to 49 per cent. Many felt that Government over-relied on staff commitment to making a difference [Box H].

Box H

Employees feel that the Government relies on the public sector ethos to retain workers in difficult circumstances...

I feel that the Government relies on the people that do public sector jobs because the majority of them have got a feeling of care for other people and because of this feeling they treat them badly.

Former fireman

I think we get used as a soft spot, like us and fireman and policemen, we can all get lumped in with the same brush and I think we get used because we do serve the public.

Former NHS nurse
The politicians especially will use public sector workers for their own ends… So I think the public sector workers are sometimes used, well a lot of times are used by the government for their own ends.

Former police officer

…although a few are more positive
The Government are really good at the minute talking about the nurses being so rare and Tony Blair is quite big on it at the minute, pushing the super nurses.

Former NHS nurse

Source: Audit Commission

But local management and leadership are still vital. As well as the 49 per cent who said that not feeling valued by their managers was an important factor in encouraging them to leave, 32 per cent also cited a poor relationship with their line manager as a reason for leaving [Box I]. And for one in five more support from their manager would have helped to persuade them to stay in their job. Focus group discussions suggested that some employees think that their managers do not understand the challenges that they face, and that this causes significant friction in their working lives. Professional staff in particular expressed the view that new managers lacked empathy with, and understanding of, the professionals they had been brought in to manage.

Box I

Employees feel that their managers do not fully understand or value them
I think that if you’re working flat out all of the time, you don’t really get a chance to appreciate, or be appreciated. Hospitals in general don’t thank, or are not very good at giving positive feedback to people. So you get a lot of people being quite resentful because they’re not being told that they’re doing a good job.

Former NHS nurse

I don’t think we have really grasped well things such as, ‘What is your development plan, what do you want to do for the future, what can you do to do that, and what can I do to help you’. If you are in management and you have come up through the ranks, you may not be tuned in to that style of people skills.

Senior police officer

I think most of the higher management should come out of their ivory tower and see what happens at the coal face. I’ve been to meetings and it’s like, ‘You’ve got to lose so and so off your staffing budget.’ And you think, ‘Yeah, but do you realise what that means to the rest of the staff team and the clients and activities?’ They don’t realise, it’s just numbers to them.

Current social worker
I think I just got tired of the politics to be honest. When you are sitting around a table and there are five consultants, a business manager and an operations manager, a nurse is a very small person…and you just get tired of being told your ideas are not right.

Former NHS nurse

Source: Audit Commission

Pay and progression

While pay is not the deciding factor for people when choosing a public sector job, people in our survey did express clear dissatisfaction with pay. Thirty-six per cent of those questioned said that inadequate pay was an important reason why they left their job, and 24 per cent said that they felt that better pay would have encouraged them to stay. In the focus groups many were dissatisfied not simply with the level of their pay, but with how it compared to that of those doing similar work in the public and private sectors and, critically, with temporary and agency staff [Box J]. It is in making these comparisons that people’s perception of whether their pay is ‘felt fair’ is tested.

Box J

Workers compare their levels of pay unfavourably with that of other groups...

I compare myself to my husband. There’s always been about £1 difference per hour….his has gone up, and he’s not in a job where he’s going to be earning thousands. His has gradually gone up and up. He’s on nearly £8 something an hour now whereas I’m £5 something an hour.

Domiciliary care assistant

I do [feel unrewarded in terms of pay] because teachers get paid more than we do. A head of a school gets a lot more. I think social services salaries could be a little bit more.

Current social services employee

Look at all the danger of being out there, all the bad shifts, all the unsociable hours. And then you get someone with twenty years service and doing very little on the street. They work Monday to Friday and get five or six thousand pounds more than frontline officers.

Current police officer

…but particularly with agency staff

Bank holiday Monday I was earning my £10 an hour on a night shift, supported by two agency nurses earning £35 an hour. And they are asking me, ‘What do I do’ And bringing absolutely everything they do to me to check!

Former social service employee
Well I think actually they are lacking the workers... because what I find now is a lot of social workers are actually going for locum posts which pays a lot more money. Most of the boroughs are run specifically on locum workers, which it has bad feelings with social workers who are actually employed, because you’re doing the same work and you’ve been paid less money than a locum worker and that’s a really big thing [here] at the moment.

Current social worker

Another thing that upsets me is when we get supply teachers in and the supply teacher will ask you what the children are doing and you go round telling her and explaining to all the children. I don’t know how many times more pay she will get than we would get for that afternoon’s work.

Current childcare assistant

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Our study indicates that people take a long-term view of pay and their career. For example, 48 per cent of those who left the public sector earn less in their new job. While one-quarter of these people say that the drop in their salary is due to a fall in working hours, three-quarters are paid less for similar hours. It is likely that many workers see the drop in salary as temporary and an acceptable ‘sacrifice’ for moving to a new career with better prospects [Box K].

The pace and management of change

Fifty-five per cent of respondents in our survey said that the number of change and improvement initiatives had had a significant impact on their decision to leave, and the impact of change was also significant in our focus groups [Box L]. The pace of change in the public sector has been the subject of other research. In a recent UNISON survey, 54 per cent of those working in local government, and 51 per cent in the health service, reported that there had been major organisational change in their workplace in the previous year (Ref. 23). The negative impact of the pace of change was seen in our focus groups as a specifically public sector problem. New initiatives were seen as Government initiatives, and people thought that the private sector made significantly less demand in terms of ‘top-down’ initiatives. For some, their managers explicitly present change as an external imposition, rather than a locally owned priority.
**Box L**

**Most employees are unconvinced about the impact of the changes they face...**

*I think another problem with teaching has been one initiative after another initiative. You just get one thing in place and you change to something else, then you get that settled in and you change to something else. It could be paperwork, it could be assessments, targets, profiling, mentoring, National Curriculum, and so it goes on.*

**Former teacher**

*They would come out with some pea-brained scheme...and put it into operation and then eighteen months later somebody would come out with another one and another two years later someone would come out with something else...They would reinvent the wheel and it would go around and around again.*

**Former emergency services employee**

*It’s a very unsettling way of working...when you constantly have been restructured where things are changing.*

**Current social worker**

*...a few are more positive...*  
*I enjoy my job, and I feel that in this day and age there are so many changes all the time, and it isn’t a case of getting bored because you are always trying to keep up with what is happening and current innovations.*

**Current head teacher**

*...and for some change is introduced as an external imposition*  
*And when a manager turns around and tells me that the only way we will get listened to is by creating a waiting list, because that is the only thing that politicians and managers understand, and I have worked all my life to ensure that there isn’t a waiting list, to me that was one of the psychological last straws.*

**Former NHS consultant**

*Source: Audit Commission*

**Summary**

It is when the balance tips from positive to negative, and when there are other viable career options, that people decide to leave the public sector. Each of the negatives discussed above can remain a ‘background annoyance’ if people are contented with other aspects of their working lives, and particularly if they continue to find their work personally rewarding. In our focus groups we found many instances where people clearly felt that what they got out of their job in terms of personal fulfilment made up for a lack of financial reward and positive feedback.
If several of these ‘background annoyance’ factors combine, any single factor can shift from being in the background to being a ‘psychological last straw’ and can tip the balance. Pay, for example, becomes a key retention issue if people are demoralised for other reasons, and is critical when people feel that they cannot really make a difference, or when they witness agency staff earning more than them while shouldering less responsibility.

We considered whether ‘hindsight justification’ was encouraging people to overplay the benefits of their new job, whether it was leavers’ length of service rather than their dissatisfaction that explained their decision to go, and whether the level of dissatisfaction we encountered is simply what we would expect to see in any group of staff. But it is push, not pull factors that are pivotal at the moment – and the same factors that underpin decisions to leave are experienced as frustrations by those who stay. Those who left had a wide range of different lengths of service. Our judgement is that the level of dissatisfaction among the people we spoke to is too high. This is particularly worrying when affordability means that raising pay to levels that will compensate for other dissatisfactions is not always a viable strategy.

For those people who lead and manage staff in any sector, understanding the factors that combine to create a negative work experience is vitally important. But this presents a particular challenge for public sector managers and leaders. People identify a range of positives about their work in the public sector, but most are seen as job specific advantages, rather than positives of public sector work in general. In contrast, all of the negatives people identified were felt to be particular to the public sector, or most likely to occur in the public sector.

How are local public sector employers responding to these challenges? The next chapter looks at a range of creative local responses to:

- improving recruitment;
- ensuring staff stay; and
- making the best use of staff.
The local response

Successful local action is possible. We found a wide and creative range of activities at a local level that aim to increase recruitment, improve retention, and make the best use of available staff resources. The best responses we found move away from a primary focus on recruitment to a holistic focus on people’s whole work experience.
The biggest single reason people identify for joining the public sector is the opportunity to make a difference for service users and local communities. For almost all of the people we spoke to, this is a job-specific, not a sector-specific advantage of their work. By contrast, people are leaving the public sector because of factors that they do see as sector-specific. Key frustrations have combined to mean that, for them, the balance has tipped so that the costs outweigh the benefits.

The context for these individual decisions to join, stay or leave is one in which, in many areas and in many professions, demand is outstripping supply. For many of the older workers in our study, the job they wanted to do was only available in the public sector. That too is changing, and people have a range of choices. This chapter looks at initiatives that local employers are taking to encourage people to continue to make the choice to work in the public sector.

We found three types of initiatives:

- **Improving recruitment**
  - London Borough of Lewisham: streamlining recruitment processes
  - North Wales Police: working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus
  - Bradford Vision: widening the pool
  - Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust: flexible working

- **Encouraging workers to stay**
  - Essex Social Services: improving your image
  - Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust: managing sickness absence and workplace stress
  - Dudley Social Services: creating a progressive management culture
  - Huntington School: cutting teachers’ workloads

- **Making the most of the skills and capacity of existing staff**
  - Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust: black and ethnic minority leadership scheme
  - London Borough of Enfield: primary school supply teacher pool
  - East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust: community paramedics

Each initiative was prompted by a specific concern about either recruitment, retention, or service delivery. But in practice most are holistic, seeing action to improve recruitment and retention as part of the wider business strategy of the whole organisation, rather than as one-off initiatives wholly driven by Human Resources (HR).
Improving recruitment

Case studies in this section are of four local initiatives that have succeeded in improving the numbers and/or quality of new recruits. The key lessons from the case studies are:

• informed, quick and professional responses to job advertisement enquiries are essential for maximising applications;
• routine monitoring of recruitment and retention data through regular collation of staffing and applicant profile statistics will ensure that recruitment initiatives are driven by the bigger picture rather than just the latest concern;
• success in addressing diversity issues can only be achieved through efficient, effective targeted recruitment campaigns based on knowledge of the local community; and
• any initiative to attract a specific group of staff will benefit from being profession-led and in partnership with HR. Success is less likely for initiatives that are seen as top-down ‘HR regimes’.

Case study 1

London Borough of Lewisham: streamlining recruitment processes

The London Borough of Lewisham serves a diverse population of almost 250,000 people in south east London. The borough employs 9,000 staff and advertises around 650 posts per year.

The aims:

• to maximise numbers of applicants by presenting a positive impression of the council at their first point of contact;
• to project a modern image of the council as a good place to work; and
• to speed up the recruitment process and make it more user-friendly to attract applicants and reduce costs to the council.

Approach

Handling of telephone responses to job adverts is outsourced to a call centre. The centre collects applicants’ details and sends electronic information to the council, and application packs are sent out within 48 hours of the call.

As one of the first clients of an online solutions provider specialising in public sector recruitment, the council’s website now has a seamless interface with an external recruitment website. Real time online applications can be returned electronically, application forms can be downloaded and emailed back, or printed off and posted back. Browsers can register for email notification of new vacancies as they are advertised. The annual cost to the council is roughly the equivalent of advertising one senior position in the national press. The council is extending these facilities to internal-only posts (that account for one-third of all council jobs) via the corporate intranet.
The council is committed to routine monitoring of staff and employment issues. An annual staff profile is published. The website and call centre add valuable extra information on the profile of potential employees. Recruitment processes are monitored via feedback questionnaires for managers and applicants. For senior posts, where no one was appointed, questionnaires are sent to people who received an application pack but did not apply.

These activities are part of a larger, medium- to long-term strategy for more general promotion of the council as a good place to work, through employer branding, modernising job advertisements, attendance at recruitment fairs, and surveys of applicants and local people.

**Outcomes and benefits**
- 25 per cent of all job applications are now received online, compared with 15 per cent one year ago.
- The time from advertisement to closing date is now shorter, usually around two weeks.
- The council was runner-up in the Society of Chief Personnel Officers’ Recruitment Advertising Awards for ‘Best Public Sector Recruitment Website’ in March 2002.

**What Lewisham Borough Council learned**
- Potential employees get a lasting impression of an organisation from their first contact. Informed, quick and professional responses to job enquiries are essential.
- Routine monitoring of recruitment and retention data through regular collation of staffing and applicant profile statistics will help recruitment initiatives to be driven by the bigger picture, rather than just by the latest concern.
- Recruitment processes can only be refined effectively through taking a strategic view of the whole process.

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**Case study 2**

**North Wales Police: working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus**

North Wales Police cover a large geographical area which is home to approximately 657,000 people, with large rural regions, busy towns, two cities and Snowdonia National Park.

**The aims:**
- to increase the number of suitable applicants to the force;
- to increase the number of women applying to join the force; and
- to provide learning and development for staff in both organisations through working in partnership.
Approach

Jobcentre Plus staff get awareness training from the police recruitment team. They provide expert advice to callers as well as handling key recruitment tasks for North Wales Police (the force) including:

- call handling;
- sending out recruitment packs and application forms;
- acknowledging return of application forms by letter;
- conducting an objective first paper sift; and
- forwarding all application forms to the force.

Jobcentre Plus also provides expert advice for the force’s recruitment campaigns. Partnership campaigns have involved:

- advertising using selected newspapers and Job Centres throughout North Wales, newspapers outside of the force area, on the force’s website, on the back of buses and on local radio;
- using Job Centres for recruitment consultation;
- using Jobcentre Plus’s Big Yellow Open Top Bus at locations such as shopping centres; and
- advertising showing the varied range of work that police constables do.

The lessons learned from these campaigns informed a later women’s campaign. While the proportion of women in the local force reflected the national proportion (17 per cent), North Wales Police were sure that more local women could be recruited. A public consultation research project was undertaken to find out what women wanted to see in job adverts, where women notice adverts, and what formats are most effective. As a result of the research, the campaign included:

- a public launch with prominent women invited as keynote speakers;
- targeted advertising, displaying posters in leisure centre changing rooms, supermarkets, libraries, crèches and nurseries;
- women-only information sessions;
- articles in the local press about the successes of women in the local force, including the challenges of changing career;
- radio coverage of the success of the recruiting campaign; and
- awareness sessions for school and college careers staff.

Outcomes and benefits:

- No financial cost to the force (excluding shared advertising costs), so a major saving in resources.
- Recruiting targets met for the last two years – applications to the force in 2001/02 increased by 36 per cent on the previous year.
- Application requests from women peaked at 40 per cent of all requests at the height of the campaign, and has now levelled off at around 32 per cent, compared with the pre-campaign figure of 23 per cent.
In November 2001, the partnership won a national award for innovation in recruiting presented by Personnel Today magazine.

The partnership is now broadened to include support staff and special constables.

**What North Wales Police learned**

- Success in addressing diversity, gender and language balance issues can only be achieved through efficient, effective targeted campaigns based on research.
- Work-life balance has to be acknowledged, and realistic options considered that recognise and balance organisational needs and commitments.
- Embracing diversity in all its forms, and being transparent in dealings with applicants, partners and colleagues will help to ensure success.

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**Case study 3**

**Bradford Vision: widening the pool**

Bradford has a population of 486,000, one-fifth of whom are South Asian. A series of recruitment initiatives were set up in 1998 in partnership with a local girls’ secondary school, where 98 per cent of the students are from the South Asian community. The partnership was awarded NHS Human Resources Beacon status in 1999 on the basis of its pioneering work. A former assistant head has been employed full-time by Bradford Vision, to roll out the initiatives across all secondary schools and to develop new projects.

**The aims:**

- to increase the number of young people starting careers in the NHS;
- to increase the ethnic diversity of the NHS workforce, making it more representative of the local population; and
- to raise awareness of the range of careers the NHS can offer.

**Approach**

**Preparation for Nursing**

I didn’t know that I’d react to some of the tasks in the way that I did. I still want to nurse but now have a better perspective because I’ve seen some of the negatives as well as the positives.

**Preparation for Nursing (Adults with Learning Disabilities) student**

Targeted students (those studying relevant A levels or GNVQ) are supported and encouraged to consider careers in healthcare via 12-week placement courses running alongside the school curriculum. Students gain practical experience by working alongside designated ‘buddies’ in care settings, as well as taking part in more traditional classroom-based activities.

The involvement and support of students’ families is crucial. Family members are invited to the introductory session at school, to attend assessed presentations given...
by the students and to an awards ceremony at the end of the course. Bradford University’s School of Health Studies guarantees an interview to all students successfully completing the scheme and meeting entry requirements.

**NHS Mastermind**

NHS Mastermind aims to increase awareness of the scope of the NHS as an employer by giving school students the opportunity to put a range of healthcare professionals under the spotlight.

NHS staff are selected to become ‘contestants’ at the event, where they each have six minutes in the famous black leather chair to answer a question submitted by local secondary school pupils, about their profession. Participants in March 2002 included a consultant anaesthetist, a theatre nurse, a director of corporate development, a dietician, and a community development worker. Questions asked included:

- To a GP: *What are the best and worst things about your job?*
- To a paramedic: *If I wanted to become a paramedic, what would I have to do?*
- To an occupational therapist: *How do you give people hope and who benefits from your help?*

Once their time in the chair is over, NHS participants and their colleagues are available for one-to-one questioning at profession-specific stands.

**Outcomes and benefits**

- Of 12 students participating in the first ‘Preparation for…’ course in 1999, 11 were from minority ethnic backgrounds and all 12 are now employed as nurses.
- The ‘Preparation for…’ model has since been replicated for other NHS staff shortage areas including midwifery, radiography, and learning disabilities.
- Local careers service providers will be tracking all students who attend NHS Mastermind events over a five-year period in order to collect data on initial career choices.
- Evaluation by NHS Mastermind participants, attendees and their teachers has been extremely positive, with a high proportion of pupils saying they would now consider an NHS career.

**What Bradford Vision learned**

- The benefits of health and education partnership events are not just for students – professionals can gain a sense of empowerment through involvement too.
- Local careers service providers should be engaged in partnerships with education as early as possible.
- Organisations must be prepared to let go once partnerships are able to run schemes themselves.

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Case study 4
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust: flexible working

Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust covers a population of 240,000 in Hampshire. The trust employs 2,500 people, of which 1,200 are nursing staff.

The aims:
• to increase the number of nurses returning to work;
• to reduce the numbers of nurses who leave due to changes in personal circumstances;
• to promote the trust as a people-focused and flexible employer; and
• to promote Winchester as an attractive place to live and work.

Approach
The trust’s monthly Recruitment and Retention Group is a forum for brainstorming solutions to local recruitment and retention problems. Initiatives have included:

**Flexi-Nurse**
The trust noticed that some permanent nursing staff who had left because their domestic circumstances had changed were subsequently working as bank or agency staff. The Flexi-Nurse initiative was set up in conjunction with the Return to Practice course to offer more flexible, individually tailored contracts to nurses.

Two nurses were seconded part-time to get the initiative up and running. Internally, time was spent ‘creating a brokerage’, selling the idea that, say, six part-timers could be a workable solution to three full-time vacancies to ward managers. Externally, the Return To Practice course and flexible contracts were publicised under the slogan *Time to share, Time to care* with advertising on local parish notice boards and the backs of local buses, as well as in more traditional media and on local television and radio.

**Join Our Team CD-ROM**
A *Join Our Team CD-ROM* containing a wealth of information on working for the trust and living in and around Winchester was designed to reach a wide audience of former and potential NHS employees. The CD is structured around the five departments where the most significant staffing issues exist: medical imaging, pathology, pharmacy, nursing, and therapy services. Each section contains text, policy documents and video interviews with staff covering the following areas:
• Winchester as an exciting place to live and work;
• development and training opportunities;
• flexible working;
• role enhancement;
• accommodation and staff benefits; and
• useful website links and contacts.

Copies of the CD have been disseminated across the south of England as an insert in *Nursing Times.*
Outcomes and benefits

- More than 40 nursing staff have been employed on flexible contracts and many existing staff, who may otherwise have left, have transferred to individually tailored contracts.
- Many of the nurses who returned to work have since increased their hours or returned to full-time work as their circumstances change again, consolidating the positive effects of the campaign.
- The nursing vacancy rate has dropped from more than 10 per cent at its worst four years ago to a more stable 2 to 3 per cent.
- Requests for copies of Join Our Team have been flooding in from the public and other NHS trusts since the disk’s launch.

What Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust learned

- Any initiative for specific groups of staff needs to be profession-led and in partnership with HR. Putting some effort into ‘internal sales’ at the outset creates a sense of ownership and allows staff to pick up the initiative and run with it themselves. Success is less likely for ‘HR regimes’ from above.
- Developing an underpinning policy is essential, both in terms of ‘selling’ new initiatives to senior management and for promoting equality of opportunity for all staff. This often means simply formalising on paper what is already happening in pockets on the ground.
- New media can offer potential staff far greater insight into what it is like living and working in your area.
- Today’s part-timers are tomorrow’s full-timers.

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Encouraging workers to stay

Case studies in this section highlight local initiatives to address some of the ‘push’ factors that have been shown to shift the balance and influence staff’s decisions to leave. The key lessons that emerge from these case studies include:

- impacts can be made on local workload and retention issues with a series of ‘small’ answers, rather than with one ‘big’ answer;
- it is helpful to fit new initiatives as far as possible into existing systems in order to avoid duplication, time wasting, more stress and further ‘initiative overload’;
- positive media has a significant impact on the morale of current staff, as well as promoting the organisation to potential staff as a rewarding place to work;
- changing management culture is a permanent ongoing process of reflection and adaptation; and
listening to staff is challenging. There will be anxieties for staff raising sensitive issues, for management having to hear and act upon difficult messages, and for everyone dealing with positive change.

Case study 5

**Essex Social Services: promoting a positive media image**

**Essex Social Services** employs approximately 7,000 staff. The council was awarded Beacon status in 2002/03 for its adoption services. Its media relations work is just one aspect of an inclusive and wide-ranging recruitment and retention programme.

**The aims:**
- to influence staff retention, through a positive and proactive relationship with local media; and
- to promote the department as a rewarding place to work.

**Approach**

With nearly 70 media outlets in the county, Essex Social Services has focused upon media relations and management as a crucial aspect of its recruitment and retention strategy. The council’s attitude is not to be afraid of the media: *We are doing a good job and have nothing to hide.*

Shouting about what the authority has done well makes staff feel that they are valued and that they are making a positive difference, as well as selling the council as a good place to work to job seekers. Good-news stories are promoted in the media, and staff advertising campaigns are linked to these, whenever possible. All internal projects have a communication strategy built in from the start – what to tell, to whom and when – developed in partnership with dedicated media and promotions co-ordinators for each departmental division.

Staff have media awareness training as part of their development programmes and are given information on aspects of dealing with the media, for example, on self-presentation. Staff are encouraged to find good stories for the internal staff journal and each story is considered to see whether it could be of interest to local, specialist or national media.

**Outcomes and benefits**

- A recent advertising campaign for social care workers, run in partnership with private providers, raised awareness of the value of social care and of how shortages impact on the county and its residents.
- Three days into the campaign, more than 120 calls had been made to the information line from people wanting to find out more about a career in social care.
- More than 500 application packs were distributed. More than 10 per cent of those people who received a pack returned an application.

**What Essex Social Services have learned**

- Positive media has a significant impact on current staff, as well as promoting the organisation to the public as a rewarding place to work.
• Communication strategies should be developed as an integral part of projects, with media specialists engaged as early as possible.
• Combined job advertisements, such as a quarterly double spread, offer greater opportunities to promote the council as a place to work as well as to advertise posts.

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Case study 6
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust: managing sickness absence and workplace stress

Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust provides a comprehensive District General Hospital service together with integrated Mental Health and Maternity Services.

The aims:
• to support staff who are unwell, minimising absence from work and disruption to services; and
• to address workplace stress factors to minimise absence and retain staff.

Approach
A Workplace Stress Audit, led by an independent Chartered Occupational Psychologist and rolled out on a directorate-by-directorate basis, uses a questionnaire to ask staff what they think are the key causes of workplace stress. The survey is followed up by a listening group, where a representative group of staff describe their own workplace stressors, give examples of frustrations in their everyday working lives, and propose solutions. Proposals form the basis of a directorate action plan that is reviewed at 18-month intervals.

The audit was piloted in two directorates, and has been used in a further four, as well as with a cross-cutting group of senior managers.

Return interviews can be held with staff returning from short-term sickness absence or with those who have been off for longer periods depending on individual circumstances. If possible, managers hand a letter to staff inviting them to a meeting, giving staff the opportunity to receive verbal reassurance. Managers reiterate that the purpose of interviews is not to question the genuineness of sickness episodes but to explore any issues that the trust can help with, and to support better attendance and health for all staff. HR presence ensures consistency of approach, but the meetings are manager-led. The meetings offer an opportunity to remind staff of other services available to them (occupational health, staff counsellor, career breaks, reduced hours or duties) and to promote a culture in which feeling one degree under does not necessarily mean having a day off.

Staff signed off on long-term sick leave are contacted after four weeks and are referred to occupational health after six weeks.
Directorate and individual financial incentive schemes have been in place since 1999. The individual scheme places all staff who have had no sick leave in the past twelve months into a monthly draw, and the first five picked each receive £200. Directorates that achieve an annual sickness absence rate of less than 3 per cent, or a greater than 1 per cent improvement on the last year, receive between £5,000 and £10,000 to use for the benefit of staff.

Outcomes and benefits
- Staff have said that they appreciate the opportunity to have a constructive discussion about their workplace stressors outside of day-to-day routines. Having an opportunity to talk things through made them feel better equipped to face situations at work.
- An 18-month follow-up in the first department to go through the stress audit showed a drop in the sickness absence rate from double figures (the highest in the trust) to well below the trust average. There had also been a significant reduction in staff turnover and there is now a waiting list of speculative applications to the directorate.
- The sickness absence rate across the whole trust has dropped to around 4.3 per cent from around 6.7 per cent in 1995.

What Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Healthcare NHS Trust learned
- Staff may be more open and honest with an independent facilitator who is not identified with a particular department or manager.
- Separate action plans may add to existing pressures on staff, so actions must be built into existing procedures as far as possible.
- There must be consistency in managing sickness absence across all directorates. HR input into meetings between managers and staff can help to facilitate this.
- Do not use meetings to challenge the genuineness of sickness episodes and do not underestimate staff’s sensitivities around these issues.

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Case study 7
Dudley Social Services: creating a progressive management culture

Dudley Social Services serves a socio-economically diverse population of 311,000 in the Black Country. The department employs nearly 2,200 staff.

The aims:
- to create an open, supportive and people-focused departmental culture;
- to develop a progressive management culture; and
- to focus on the development of individual staff.
Approach

A Direction, Style and Culture initiative was started six years ago with a ‘no-holds-barred’ feedback session with a cross-section of staff about the realities of working in the department. An action plan for management was developed and implemented over the next two years. Among the changes were managers being given greater freedom with fewer decisions having to go through management board, and senior managers becoming more accessible via an open door policy.

*I am expected to fulfil my role, but am given more of my own decision-making power about how to do that.*

Team Manager

A comprehensive programme of staff support and development was rolled out including one-to-one meetings between staff and their line managers, linked to individuals’ own development programmes. An in-house staff counsellor was employed and innovative approaches to secondment, redeployment, flexible hours and career breaks were explored to help retain staff needing new challenges or nearing burnout.

*The level of responsibility and variety of role that managers have here is clearly a good retention factor – the workload is still high but there are opportunities to get involved in other projects and directives.*

Team Manager

Middle management were seen as a crucial group of staff, both as the senior management of tomorrow and as the link to effective cultural communication with junior staff. The department offered staff routes to obtain management qualifications and take up rates are good. Middle managers attend quarterly Management Focus events on key national, local or corporate developments. These sessions invite cross-divisional discussion, input to, and ownership of the departmental way forward.

*The Management Focus events provide a valuable opportunity to network with managers in other divisions… You can realise that other managers are tackling the same issues and problems as you are.*

Team Manager

The high priority given to departmental development continues to be maintained. The workshop process has recently been repeated with an emphasis on consultation and involvement. A new action plan for the whole department is being developed.

Outcomes and benefits

- The opportunities to be involved and influence ways of working encourage people to stay, and enhance Dudley’s reputation as a place where people want to work.
- The communication and feedback mechanisms ensure staff feel listened to, respected and involved. Staff report that they feel valued and ‘looked after’, they feel a sense of loyalty to the council and like belonging to a single organisation rather than one of four divisions.
- Managers have relative freedom to introduce their own flexibilities in order to secure the best people.
• Management Focus events give staff a broader policy context to their work. Four Assistant Directors have gone on to become Directors of Social Services at other councils in the past six years.

What Dudley Social Services learned
• Changing management culture is a permanently, ongoing process of reflection and adaptation.
• Do not underestimate the time and resources needed to effect change. Commitment must be absolute and cascaded through the organisation effectively.
• Be realistic about anxieties that will arise – for staff talking about sensitive issues, for management having to hear and act upon difficult messages, and for everyone dealing with change.
• Consultation is not the same as democracy – proof that you have listened can be as important as demonstrable action.

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Case study 8
Huntington School: cutting teachers’ workloads
Huntington School is a comprehensive school/technical college of 1,500 pupils aged 11–18 serving the City of York. The school employs 100 teaching staff and 70 non-teaching staff.

The aims:
• to cut teacher workload; and
• to improve staff retention rates.

Approach
In the academic year 1998/99, one permanent member of staff left the school, but this figure rose to nine in 1999/2000 and to twenty in 2000/01. The proportion of staff leaving the profession altogether, rather than being promoted to posts at other schools or retiring, also increased across the period. The school implemented a series of innovative changes to turn this trend around.

Information on why staff were leaving and where they were going was collated and analysed, alongside finding out what staff in post found a strain in their jobs. A confidential stress survey asks teaching staff to rate 20 stress factors such as ‘very bad behaviour by a few pupils’, ‘particular demands from the senior management team or head’ and ‘finding time for marking’. The survey is circulated each year during the latter half of the autumn term, a high-pressure period in the school calendar. Results are analysed by type of post, acknowledging that different stress factors may affect, say, new teachers compared to heads of department. A separate stress survey is run for non-teaching staff.
Results from the survey have fed directly into proposals in the school’s development plan. ‘Bad behaviour by a few challenging pupils’ was the biggest source of stress and the school has invested in relevant training for staff and is taking a tougher stance in communication with parents. Factors such as finding time for marking and lack of time during term for a social life were a significant issue across all staff groups, so measures taken to cut teacher workload have included:

- employing a senior administrator to manage the site and to fund raise;
- giving every department a dedicated departmental assistant;
- using the office to compile all reports, attendance and progress statistics;
- employing external invigilators for most examinations;
- employing a PA to the Leadership Team as well as an office manager; and
- transferring the role of exams assistant and one-half of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator role to non-teachers.

Other mechanisms for monitoring stress have also been introduced. A list of stress-related staff absences is maintained, while the first part of every Senior Management Team meeting is dedicated to discussing any member of staff who is under pressure and what can be done to support them.

Staff development has emerged as a major retention factor. Enhanced training and opportunities packages are being developed for all teachers through a new professional review system. Each member of staff will have a meeting with the Head to discuss their individual career motivators, aspirations and career plans, and what the school can do to help consolidate upon and/or realise these. Each teacher has a five-year development plan.

Outcomes and benefits

- The number of permanent teaching staff leaving has fallen to eight this year, and only one of this number is leaving the profession altogether.
- Teachers have found that passing administrative tasks to dedicated departmental assistants or to the School Office has had an effect, freeing up significant amounts of time for marking and lesson planning.
- Departmental assistants appreciate being part of departmental teams and having greater roles and responsibilities, turnover among this group of staff is very low.

What Huntington School learned

- Impacts have been made on local workload and retention issues with a series of ‘small’ answers, rather than one ‘big’ answer.
- Anything new should be fitted as far as possible into existing systems to avoid duplication, time wasting, more stress and further ‘initiative overload’.
- Focus should be maintained on the stress factors that can be controlled at the school level.

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Making the most of the skills and capacity of existing staff

Case studies in this section were driven by concerns about service delivery and performance improvement, but had key impacts on staff retention, and on enhancing the reputation of the agency as a good employer. Key lessons from the case studies include:

- supporting participants’ managers throughout training and development processes is crucial. Managers must be aware that staff’s expectations of work may be changed by training. Managers may themselves need support to respond to new expectations and make best use of new skills;
- frontline staff are often the experts in how their roles could be expanded and enhanced. It can be helpful to set boundaries for new roles rather than defining every task;
- flexible working can suit both staff and customers; and
- initiatives that are primarily driven by non-recruitment needs and targets can have significant recruitment and retention benefits.

Case study 9
Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust: black and ethnic minority leadership scheme

Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust serves 390,000 people in a densely populated area of inner London. The trust employs 2,000 staff across a large number of sites.

The aims:
- to increase the proportion of Black and Asian staff at senior levels in the organisation;
- to invest in training and development; and
- to have a positive impact on staff retention through increasing internal promotion within the organisation.

Their approach

In 1997, the trust participated in a Black and Ethnic Minority Leadership Scheme set up by a steering group of nine London trusts. Following their own evaluation of the scheme, the trust decided to develop an internal programme that built upon the successes of the external course. The programme was refined to better suit their own needs, taking a broader view of management, and engaging a greater number of local staff, particularly those in administrative and clerical posts.

It was crucial that potential participants had the support of their managers, and that managers were fully aware of the duration and content of the course and of how participants’ work expectations might change as a result. An information session was held for interested staff and their managers. An assessment day was also run before final selections were made to see how potential participants worked together.
Applicants who do not obtain a place on the course should be given support in drawing up their own personal development plan.

The programme ran for two days a month over a nine month period using formal and informal learning methods including a development centre, a benchmarking project, reflective diaries and a mentoring scheme. The focus of the programme was as much about personal development and ‘soft’ management skills as it was about professional development and technical skills.

Two courses were run in the academic years 1999/2000 and 2000/01. This year the trust is hosting the course for a wider group of trusts. The London Regional Office of the NHS Executive has contributed funds enabling the trust to employ a Project Manager, as well as buying in some extra mentoring time and tendering out to further training providers.

Outcomes and benefits

- Of the twelve participants selected for the first internal course, ten were promoted within nine months (eight internally and two in other NHS organisations).
- Feedback from the course participants has been extremely positive.
- Retention benefits for the trust have been wider than just promotion of individual staff, with many who have been through the course now involved in internal diversity projects.
- Wider benefits for the trust include the development of an ‘off-the-shelf toolkit’ that can be applied to different groups of staff, or used as a long-term development programme to attract younger new recruits.
- The trust’s reputation as a champion in the areas of diversity and staff development, as well as a training provider, has been enhanced.

What Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust learned

- Expectations of the programme must be shared by all of the relevant stakeholders. Information sessions for participants and their managers and/or colleagues can help to facilitate this.
- Support for participants’ managers throughout the process is crucial. They need to be aware that participants’ expectations of work will have changed by the end of the course, managers themselves may need support in managing expectations and making best use of their staff’s new skills.
- Mentors have a crucial role to play and need careful selection, briefing and training.
- A development centre for applicants (prior to final selection) can help to ensure the right mix of participants on the course.

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Case study 10
London Borough of Enfield: primary school supply teacher pool

The London Borough of Enfield provides services to a population of 275,000 in the north of the capital. The borough has a large minority ethnic population. The authority has 65 primary schools, 17 secondary schools and 6 special schools.

The aims:
• to use primary schools’ recruitment and retention grants in a more effective way;
• to reduce primary schools’ spend on supply staff;
• to improve rates of supply staff cover in primary schools; and
• to improve the speed and efficiency with which quality supply staff are deployed in primary schools.

Approach
Considering the amount of money that each individual primary school would receive from the Government’s recruitment and retention grant to be too small to be effective in isolation, Enfield consulted their primary schools about pooling their monies for centralised initiatives. After consultation, it was agreed to investigate the options for re-introducing a primary school teacher supply pool.

Enfield’s primary schools agreed to return just under one-quarter of their total funds (approximately £45,000 in total) to the council in order to fund the scheme. A campaign to encourage teachers back from private agencies was started over the summer of 2001, particularly targeting retirees (since Enfield’s population has an older profile than many London boroughs) through posters and adverts around the authority in locations such as supermarkets, libraries, school halls and the local press. Adverts were also run in neighbouring areas. A service level agreement for the pool was drawn up. A hotline would be staffed from 07.30 to 18.30 on weekdays with an answerphone for out-of-hours calls. The scheme would be run by two dedicated staff working in shifts.

Sixty to seventy recruits were in place when the pool went live in September 2001, and numbers have increased to 130 since then. The database of supply staff, their available working days, key-stage abilities and other information is updated every school term via a survey. A follow-up campaign is currently planned, although word of mouth continues to bring in a steady stream of applications.

Attractions to the LEA pool for teachers include the opportunity to work in a local, non-profit set-up rather than for a private agency, and receiving payment in line with the national pay scales for teachers. Attractions for the schools as clients, apart from the cost benefits, are reassurance that staff have had all of the relevant police and other checks carried out, and that the LEA will deal with complaints or disciplinary issues.
Outcomes and benefits
- The pool is logging 50–60 calls per week, mostly for sickness or training cover.
- The success rate in deployment to date averages more than 95 per cent, (although this can drop in weeks where staff from many different schools are attending the same training course).
- Feedback from schools has been excellent, and having only two staff running the pool has meant good working relationships between the pool and the schools.
- The supply pool is working closely with the Recruitment Strategy Manager to identify vacancies and match supply teachers to possible long-term placements.

What the London Borough of Enfield has learned
- Having a small number of staff covering the system on shifts has been successful – schools prefer to know who they are contacting and dealing with.
- Restrict annual leave for staff covering the system to school holidays.
- Model the system around customer need rather than council convenience – staffing the system for at least one extra hour at either end of the working day (for instance 07.30 to 18.30) ensures greater success through greater convenience for schools.
- A dedicated answerphone to cover out-of-hours is vital.

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Case study 11
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust: community paramedics
The East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust is the most rural ambulance service in England. It covers Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, an area of 5,000 square miles with a population of 2.2 million. The trust employs 1,200 staff, 650 of whom provide emergency 999 and doctor’s urgent services.

The aims:
- to ensure equitable service, fast response times and appropriate care for patients;
- to create greater links with primary healthcare;
- to offer wider variety of role and enhanced career development options to existing paramedic staff; and
- to raise the profile and attractiveness of the ambulance service for potential staff.

Approach
The community paramedic concept was born out of a desire to provide fast response times to life-threatening emergencies in rural areas, without the prohibitive cost of providing round-the-clock full ambulance cover.
Community paramedics are not part of a traditional ambulance team, although they continue to do occasional shifts from an ambulance station to avoid ‘skills fade’. They have a response car with the full range of medical and life-saving equipment. Covering specific rural patches and based in primary care, they can respond quickly, assess, treat and, if hospitalisation is unnecessary, cancel the ambulance being sent from the nearest station. The hours freed by fewer emergency calls in rural areas allows them to take on a number of further roles in the practice and wider community. Initial on-the-job training from GPs includes:

- treating accident and emergency patients who attend the surgery;
- carrying out urgent home visits on behalf of the GP;
- assisting nurses with other tasks in the surgery, such as taking blood, immunisations, ECGs; and
- arranging and co-ordinating mother and toddler life support groups.

Local GPs have embraced the scheme, seeing it as giving them an extra professional resource at no extra cost. Among the many attractions for ambulance service staff are:

- opportunities to develop new skills and manage their own learning;
- opportunities to work in a new team;
- increased patient contact, especially in prevention and aftercare;
- enhanced career development; and
- being a visible element of the NHS in the local community.

**Outcomes and benefits**

- Within a little more than a year, 24 community paramedic schemes have been implemented at health centres in market towns and rural communities. Further schemes are planned.
- Current response times are faster than the targets and are met in rural as well as urban areas.
- The role has linked the ambulance service, primary care and social care, and facilitated greater public health education and involvement in healthcare.
- A major benefit for both patients and the NHS is that many patients are managed in the community with back up from primary care, with far fewer people unnecessarily going to casualty.
- Experienced paramedic staff, who previously had limited scope for movement and diversity of role, have seized the opportunity to learn new skills and apply their expertise in new settings:

> It’s the most interesting job I’ve ever had in the ambulance service, and I just wish it had come about a long time ago.

**Community Paramedic**

- The role is increasing the profile of the ambulance service at ground level, promoting it as an integrated part of the NHS, and has the potential to start changing the profile of the service by attracting new recruits.
What East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust learned

- Staff need some space to develop their own roles in new schemes. Define boundaries for the role rather than dictating the complete role.
- Traditional top-down management does not allow for differences of culture in the different settings in which staff may be performing similar roles.
- Initiatives that are driven by non-recruitment needs and targets can have significant recruitment and retention benefits.

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Summary

We found a wide and creative range of activities at local level aimed at increasing recruitment, improving retention, and making the best use of available staff resources. The best local case studies demonstrate the interdependency of recruitment, retention, diversity, morale, motivation and performance improvement. There are indications of a shift away from a primary focus on recruitment to an increasing focus on retention, the ‘whole work experience’ and using available staff creatively to deliver service outcomes.

The next chapter brings together our analysis of the changing public sector workforce, the reasons why people join and leave, and the learning from local good practice to identify the critical factors we must get right.
What does this tell us?

Recruitment and retention issues go to the heart of the way that organisations are managed and led. There are no simple solutions to recruitment and retention problems – no single action and no single stakeholder can resolve all of the problems alone. We identify four critical success factors for joint action. People’s work experience must match their expectations. They must feel that they are in an enabling and participative environment, where staff feel valued and rewarded, and where the shift from a public sector to a public services workforce is actively managed.
Our case studies show the range of action that is being taken at local level to increase recruitment, encourage people to stay, and make the best use of available staff resources. And there is a range of national initiatives to increase the overall supply of public sector staff and to improve the quality of their working lives. Taken together, will these initiatives ensure that there are enough staff, and that those staff are sufficiently skilled and motivated not just to deliver, but to improve and reform public services?

Our analysis suggests that there are four critical success factors:

• the experience of work must match people’s expectations;
• the working environment must engage, enable and support staff;
• those delivering public services must feel that they are valued, respected and fairly rewarded; and
• the shift from a public sector to a public services workforce must be actively managed to create a synergy, rather than a clash of values.

No single stakeholder can deliver success alone. Government and national bodies play a key role in setting the climate in which staff feel valued, in which local leaders and managers can deliver a positive work experience and constructive working environment, and in which the impact on people of increasing diversity of provision can be managed by design, rather than occur by accident.

Matching work experience to expectations

I just thought I could have a much better life just doing what I trained to do which was just treat people, not deal with all the rubbish that goes around.

 Former NHS therapist

What people expect from their work can be understood as a ‘psychological contract’ between employer and employee. The psychological contract is ‘the perception of both parties to the employment relationship, organisation and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship’. As a psychological contract, it depends on the subjective perceptions of staff. For the individual member of staff, the psychological contract is healthy if they believe that the organisation has delivered on its promises to them, that they are treated fairly, and that they can rely on continued delivery of promises in future (Ref. 20).

We know from our own and other research that the opportunity to make a difference is a promise public sector workers expect to see delivered. Working with people – both colleagues and clients – is also critically important. However, our research shows that many current and ex-staff do not feel that they have the space, the resources or the autonomy they need to make this difference in practice. They feel that they are...
working in an environment in which levels of bureaucracy, paperwork and externally imposed targets are diverting them from what they see as the core of their work – time spent with people.

81 There is a critical mismatch between employees’ views of what will make a difference and their understanding of the public service reform agenda. Too many staff do not feel part of the agenda for change. Earlier research by the Commission showed that while 75 per cent of local public service workers recognise the need for change, and in fact more than 50 per cent look forward to change as a challenge, 70 per cent feel that the reasons for change have not been communicated well and more than 75 per cent feel that change has not been managed well (Ref. 24).

82 In this context, two issues are critical. The pace and scale of change must not exceed the ability of staff to absorb and implement it. And the purpose and value of change must be clearly and adequately communicated to staff, if they are to engage with and drive it. Our research suggests that many public sector staff see key elements of the public service reform agenda – performance measurement and performance management – as a diversion from the core purpose of their work. And for some, this understanding is reinforced by local managers. Turning this around is clearly a shared responsibility between all stakeholders – Government, national bodies, and local employers. While Government and national bodies are key players in setting the pace of change, only local leaders and managers can bring nationally and locally driven change into a coherent programme that makes sense to their staff and enhances, rather than detracts from, their wish to make a difference.

An enabling and participative environment

When you’re teaching for a long time you become part of the furniture and people forget that you’ve got new ideas and tend not to use the experience that you’ve built up over that length of time.

Former teacher

83 Two key factors underpin an enabling and participative work environment:

- Progressive HR policies have a significant effect on staff motivation and morale, and management and leadership are critical determinants of a culture in which progressive policies translate into actual practice.

- Our study shows that public sector staff value progressive approaches to flexible working, training and development. But it also shows that a sense of being undervalued by, and a poor relationship with, managers can tip the balance between staying and leaving.

84 There is an increasing body of evidence of the impact of progressive HR and people development practices on morale, motivation and organisational culture (Ref. 20). For example, recent studies have found that employers who offer flexible working
arrangements to help their staff to balance their work with personal commitments are likely to receive a greater commitment from staff in return, and that this, in turn, supports an environment in which there is greater employee participation in decision making (Ref. 25). There is also evidence of a greater range and number of progressive HR practices in the public than in the private sector (Ref. 20).

In addition, there is a growing body of evidence of the impact of progressive HR practices on performance. The most recent Workplace Employee Relations Survey shows that there is a ‘strongly consistent’ relationship between a participative style of management and workplace performance (Ref. 26). And research conducted at the European level found that direct participation by employees in decision making had a ‘strong impact on economic performance’ (Ref. 27).

But HR policies alone are not enough. They need to be properly implemented in practice, and research suggests that this might not always be the case in the public sector (Ref. 28). For example, take-up of flexible working opportunities is often low and increasing take-up often hinges on changes to attitudes and culture within the organisation. It is line managers, not the HR department, that impact most on the immediate work environment of staff. And it is the leadership team that creates an organisational culture that values and rewards people skills in its managers. It is critical that recruitment and retention sit within organisations’ business strategies and are led, and seen to be led, from the top. The key ‘people measures’ should be the business of the Chief Executive and management team, not just the director of HR. As the Work Foundation point out on flexible working or ‘time sovereignty’:

> Cultures of ‘presenteeism’ are poison to the chances of time sovereignty. The attitude and behaviour of managers is critical. A joke about ‘part-timers’ or a glance at a watch can undo a hundred HR policies on flexibility (Ref. 29).

 Feeling valued and rewarded

I just want to be rewarded. If I’m worth another thousand pounds a year then give it to me.

Former police officer

It makes the job worthwhile when they come in and say, ‘Thank you very much for all you’ve done’. That’s very important.

Former teacher

Reward has conventionally been thought of as pay and income-related benefits. The theory of ‘total reward’ broadens this definition, including all the aspects of a job that, taken together, value and reward the employee (Refs. 30–31). This total reward package includes help with childcare, holidays and flexi-time, a rewarding and challenging work environment, development opportunities and the ability to achieve the desired work life balance.
Participants in the Commission’s survey and focus groups reinforce this broader definition of reward. For these staff, their level of pay is a crucial element, but it is not the only thing that makes up their sense of being fairly valued and rewarded. Just as important are levels of pay relative to other groups of staff within and outside the workplace, and the sense of being valued as doing a good and worthwhile job not just by managers, but by clients, the public and politicians.

Our study shows that public sector staff think that their image in the eyes of the public would discourage potential recruits. We analysed a broad sample of the national press to see if the evidence supports this perception. We reviewed media coverage of public sector stories – what they were about, how many there were and the way in which they were reported.

Our analysis showed that plenty of stories are told. In our six-week period, on average every adult could have seen 21 articles on health, 15 on the police, 10 on education, 3 on social services and 2 on local government.

But while coverage is extensive, the picture of public sector work presented to the reading public is unremittingly bleak [Exhibit 9]. All types of story across all the newspapers were reported negatively, but some were more critical than others – *The Daily Mail* reporting in the most negative manner and *The Guardian* the most positive.

### Exhibit 9

**The tone of media coverage of the public sector**

Our media analysis demonstrates that the messages the public receive via the media are largely negative.

- Very negative
- Fairly negative
- Neutral
- Fairly positive
- Very positive

Source: Audit Commission media analysis
Our survey of leavers showed that the feeling of being undervalued by Government, and by the public is as important to public sector workers as being valued by their managers. Our analysis suggests, that in the public sector, the psychological contract is part of a wider, unwritten contract with Government, citizens and the media. To create a real sense for public sector staff that they are rewarded and valued, their financial reward must be ‘felt fair’, their work experience must be rewarding, and their wish to be viewed as competent professionals, rather than as objects of pity or blame, must be realised.

Changing the tone of the national conversation about public services is, of course, an enormous challenge. The public has a legitimate right to expect robust reporting of public service performance, and the national media are unlikely to see ‘good news stories’ as newsworthy as high-profile failure. Our survey shows that pay is the biggest single factor that would attract leavers back into the public sector if the other elements in the balance remain unchanged. If people are paid enough, they will put up with very difficult circumstances – but is this either a realistic, or a desirable option for the public sector? In the context of affordability, the challenge of changing the tone of the national conversation becomes more compelling.

From a public sector to a public services workforce: the impact on people

The involvement of the private sector raises questions about possible threats to the [public service] ethos. The boundaries between public and private services are increasingly difficult to define, and the picture is also confused by the emergence of new types of partnerships...We conclude that, in the mixed economy of public service, it is possible for private and voluntary sector bodies and people to uphold the public service ethos, although the profit motive may put it under strain. (Ref. 32)

Public Administration Select Committee, 2002

An increasing proportion of those providing public services are employed in the private sector. And this trend looks set to continue, with a more mixed economy of provision a key element of Government policy. The recent consultation paper on best value in local government, for example, points out:

the Government's commitment to diversity and plurality... there should be a 'level playing field' for all potential service providers and... Government has no ideological preference for any one form of provision over another. (Ref. 12)

In addition to private sector provision of public services, the Government is also committed to enhancing the role of the voluntary sector and social enterprise. At the moment, the voluntary sector employs only one-tenth the employees of the public sector, although it plays a central part in some sectors, most notably social care (Ref. 33). And Government is equally committed to increasing the role of social
enterprise in public services, as well as in the economy as a whole. The recent strategy on social enterprise outlines the expected benefits of mixed provision:

*If we are to encourage a greater spirit of enterprise in our public services, then there is no reason why all the partners in this process should come from the mainstream private sector. There are very real opportunities, I believe, to promote social enterprise as a key component in the process of modernising and reforming our public services.*

(Ref. 34)

Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

94 How will this convergence of public, private, voluntary and social enterprise staff in the provision of public services impact on public sector staff? Our research indicates that working alongside staff from private agencies is currently experienced as de-motivating by public sector employees. And other research supports the view that employees’ experience of organisational cultures, and their motivations, vary by sector.

95 Research on the psychological contract in the public sector found that workers in the public sector see their organisations as more bureaucratic and less dynamic than those in the private sector. Private sector staff think that their organisations are less ethical and public spirited than those in the public sector (Ref. 20). And research conducted by the Public Management Foundation suggests that senior managers in the public, private and voluntary sectors are motivated by different things (Ref. 35). Public sector managers see ‘benefiting the community’ as their primary goal. For private sector managers ‘helping the organisation to perform well financially’ was most important. And for those in the voluntary sector ‘satisfying users and customers’ came first, but with ‘benefiting the community’ and ‘helping the organisation to perform well financially’ a close joint second place.

96 The traditional view of the public sector ethos emphasises service, duty and obligation, rather than financial viability, profit or shareholder value. This definition chimes with the way in which our survey and focus group participants explain their primary motivation – making a difference. For staff, making a difference is about time spent with people, not time spent on measurement, monitoring, budgets and targets. The intention of the mixed economy is to inject enterprise and entrepreneurship into public services. The people aspects of this shift will need to be managed by design, not by default, if ‘service’ and ‘business’ are to create a synergy, rather than a clash, of values.
Recruiting and retaining the numbers, diversity and skill mix of staff needed to deliver, improve and reform public services is one of the biggest challenges facing stakeholders. Our study suggests that much is already being done, but that more needs to be done, to meet this challenge. There are long-term, national challenges in managing supply and demand, and immediate local challenges in service delivery. There are no quick fixes or single solutions, and our study does not attempt to provide ‘the answer’. But by looking at the changing workforce that is delivering public services, the reasons why people are joining and leaving, and the local initiatives that are proving successful, we identify the critical success factors for continued progress:

- people’s experience of work must match their expectations;
- the work environment must engage, enable and support staff to make a positive difference to service users and local communities;
- people who deliver public services should feel valued, respected and fairly rewarded; and
- the shift from a public sector to a public services workforce needs active management if it is to enhance, rather than threaten, the public sector ethos.
The Way Forward

Understanding the problem

Key issues
Demand for public sector staff is outstripping supply. The age profile of staff in some key professions suggests that shortages will increase if effective solutions are not found. There are geographical hotspots, with London and the south east experiencing the most severe problems.

The size of the recruitment and retention problem in the public sector is not properly understood. Debate about the true size of the problem can take the focus away from partnerships for effective solutions.

A complex interaction of economic, demographic, social and political factors impacts on demand for, and supply of, public sector staff. These issues demand long-term interventions by many organisations and agencies. Actions need to be tailored to the situation as no single action, and no single stakeholder, can resolve these problems alone.

What lies beneath
The number of recorded vacancies continues to outstrip supply and difficulties in filling vacancies are reported across all sectors and skill groups, and across the country. In addition, fewer younger workers are being attracted to an ageing public sector workforce.

There is a lack of easily comparable information on numbers of employees and vacancies across the public sector. Multiple sources of data with different collection methods, reporting formats, definitions and time frames make it difficult to construct a comprehensive picture of the size and nature of the problem.

With the funding priorities of the government of the day a key driver of demand for staff and supply a long-term issue, an exact match between supply ‘in the pipeline’ and demand in the present will always be challenging to achieve. In this context, effective short- and medium-term action at a local level is equally critical.

Taking action at the local level

Key issues
Public sector staff want to ‘make a difference’. But the balance between what people want from their work, and what they are getting is not right. Too many public sector workers feel that they cannot really make a difference in practice.

Only one in five of former public sector staff interviewed were asked why they were leaving. Employers are developing recruitment and retention initiatives with a key piece of the information jigsaw missing.

Most public sector staff leave because of push, not pull factors. So successful local action is possible. The best responses we found target people’s whole experience of work, and go to the heart of how organisations are led and managed.

What lies beneath
Decisions to join, stay or leave a job, profession or sector are complex. But critical to these decisions is how an employee’s expectations are matched by the work experience in practice.

Employers are missing vital information that would enable them to improve this working experience. As such many employers are implementing actions in the hope that they will have an impact but without full evidence and analysis of underlying causes.

Some of our case study sites found it helpful to begin with the service outcomes they need to deliver, rather than their traditional staffing establishment. This mirrors national thinking on re-engineering who does what to rebalance staff resources where there are key skill gaps.
Action for local employers

1. Develop management information systems to monitor turnover, exit survey outcomes, absence rates, diversity and job satisfaction. Ensure that the top team, as well as the HR Director, receive and use this information to set strategic goals, monitor and review performance, and agree action.

2. Compare your approach to recruitment and retention with the good practice case studies in this study. Develop a recruitment and retention strategy, if one does not exist, which aims to deliver strategic business goals while taking account of staff aspirations and local circumstances and opportunities.

3. Fully understand the work experience from the perspective of your staff, and take action to create and sustain a working environment in which people can make a difference. When people leave, ensure their reasons for going are recorded, analysed and acted upon.

4. Recognise that responsibility for solutions rests with the whole organisation – from the top team down to line managers.

5. Start with the service outcomes that need to be delivered, rather than the traditional staff establishment that has delivered them. This may provide fresh insight into the skill and staff mix needed.

6. Consider whether you can work with other organisations more closely. Shared employment could reduce costs and could ensure that scarce skills are maximised.

Action for central government and national bodies

1. The Spending Review 2002 proposes work to improve the collection and co-ordination of data on the public sector workforce. This could include developing a shared definition of a vacancy using impact on service outcomes as its starting place.

2. As well as statistical data, information collected in other ways, such as the required annual staff satisfaction surveys in the NHS, should be carried out in a consistent way that enables conclusions to be drawn across the public sector.

3. Take further steps to engage public sector staff with the values and purpose of the public service reform agenda.

4. A centre of excellence is being established in the Office of Public Services Reform that will promote and disseminate best practice. It will work with central departments and the Treasury in designing workforce strategies that support customer-focused services and reform.
Managing change

Key issues
The public sector is experiencing enormous and multi-faceted change, and staff clearly perceive that it is not being managed well enough. Staff are not opposed to change, but too many currently experience the public service reform agenda as a bureaucratic diversion from what really matters.

The workforce that delivers public services is changing. A more mixed economy of provision is already having an impact on people, and this impact needs to be actively managed if it is to create a synergy, rather than a clash of values.

The psychological contract between employer and employee in the public sector is part of a wider, unwritten contract with Government, citizens and the media. The tone of the national conversation about public services needs to change.

What lies beneath
The pace of change in the public sector means that the nature of work is changing in many areas. It is critical that staff understand the purpose of measurement and monitoring, and that they can see how time spent on ‘paperwork’ contributes to service improvement. Genuine local ownership of central initiatives will have a positive impact on staff morale and engagement.

How will the convergence of public, private, voluntary and social enterprise staff in the provision of public services impact on public sector staff? The traditional view of the public sector ethos emphasises service, duty and obligation, rather than financial viability, profit or shareholder value. There is potential here for learning and synergy – or for misalignment of cultures and values. This shift will affect the public sector ethos, and needs to be actively managed, rather than happening by default.

Workers think that the image and profile of their work will discourage new workers from joining. Our media analysis confirmed that the picture of public sector work to the reading public is unremittingly bleak. Staff feel that they are either blamed or pitied, rather than respected as competent professionals.
Action for local employers

7. Explain and communicate to staff the purpose of new initiatives and their intended impact on service improvement.

8. Engage and support employees through times of change, and ensure that line managers have the capacity, time and skills to deliver this support.

9. Develop a strategic approach to local media that engages staff in letting local people know about success stories.

Action for central government and national bodies

5. Consider the impact of policy change and new central initiatives on the recruitment of new staff and on the retention, morale and motivation of existing staff.

6. Consider the tone of contributions to the national conversation around public sector improvement, balancing the right of citizens and service users to hear robust and honest assessments of public sector performance with the impact on those who deliver services.

The Audit Commission’s contribution

- We will monitor our own contributions to the national conversation around public sector improvement, to ensure our judgements and studies continue to be communicated in a way that will deliver improvement.

- We will continue to seek ways to reduce the burden of regulation as one of our strategic goals.

- We have distilled the learning from our study into a pocketbook for local managers to stimulate reflection and action on local approaches to recruitment and retention.

- We will share the learning from this study and our follow-up data gathering as widely as possible.

- We will make further detail from our local case studies and national case examples available on our website.
Appendix 1: study methodologies

This report draws on a wide range of evidence, including:

- Thirty face-to-face interviews with representatives of national policymakers, trades unions, professional organisations, training agencies and inspectorates. These were conducted by the study team in June and July 2001 (during the scoping phase of the project) and between November 2001 and March 2002 (during the main research phase of the project).

- A series of seven focus groups, nineteen depth interviews and one paired depth interview with potential, current and former public sector staff by Cragg Ross Dawson Ltd. Focus groups included Year 13 students, final year university students, domiciliary care employees, childcare assistants, social workers, police officers and education employees. In-depth interviews were held with NHS consultants, NHS therapists, police officers, fire fighters, NHS nurses, NHS administrators, teachers, social service employees and a health authority employee. Fieldwork was carried out between 14 January and 5 February 2002.

- A telephone survey of 300 former public sector staff by NOP Consumer Research. We surveyed six key groups. Postcards inviting former employees (who left the public sector less than one year ago) to participate in the survey were distributed via employers, with willing participants mailing them back direct to NOP to book a telephone interview. Interviews were conducted between March and June 2002.


- Eleven case studies of successful local initiatives to tackle recruitment and retention difficulties. Research visits to the case study organisations were carried out by the study team between March and June 2002.

- Analysis of available staffing and vacancy data by the study team.
Appendix 2: acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the current and former public sector employees who participated in our survey and interviews.

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Responsibility for the content and conclusions in this report rests with the Commission alone.
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