



Research Report



Recruitment, retention and career progression of social workers

Prepared for: The Local Government Association

Recruitment, retention and career progression of social workers

Prepared for: The Local Government Association

**Prepared by: June Wiseman (Director) and Elizabeth Davies (Research Manager),
BMG Research**

Date: June 2013



Produced by BMG Research

© Bostock Marketing Group Ltd, 2013

www.bmgresearch.co.uk

Project: 9091

Registered in England No. 2841970

Registered office:

7 Holt Court North
Heneage Street West
Aston Science Park
Birmingham
B7 4AX
UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 3336006

UK VAT Registration No. 580 6606 32

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Member No. B4626

Market Research Society Company Partner

British Quality Foundation Member

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 20252:2006

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 9001:2008

Investors in People Standard - Certificate No. WMQC 0614

Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) Member Company

Registered under the Data Protection Act - Registration No. Z5081943

The BMG Research logo is a trade mark of Bostock Marketing Group Ltd

Table of Contents

Executive summary.....	3
Key findings.....	3
1 Introduction.....	5
1.1 Context.....	5
1.2 Aims and objectives.....	5
1.3 Method.....	5
1.4 Report structure.....	6
2 Recent job evaluations, pay reviews and staff progression.....	7
3 Action planning to implement changes as a result of the NJC report.....	9
4 Response to the Employer Standards.....	14
5 Recruitment and retention.....	18
Appendix 1: Respondent profile 2013.....	19

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Has your council completed a <i>job evaluation/pay and grading</i> review that has included social workers since 2004?.....	7
Figure 2: Has your council used the role profiles from the NJC's report to undertake the job evaluation?.....	7
Figure 3: Does your council currently have a framework in place for social workers' career progression?.....	8
Figure 4: Have you introduced any refinements to your framework for social workers' career progression in the 2012-13 financial year?.....	8
Figure 5: Has your authority developed an agreed action plan to implement the recommendations from the National Joint Council's report?.....	9
Figure 6: What changes or potential changes would you expect to make to work you undertake as a result of using the NJC profiles and the accompanying recommendations?.....	10
Figure 7: What challenges would you expect to face when implementing changes as a result of the NJC profiles and the accompanying recommendations?.....	12
Figure 8: Is your authority currently using the Employer Standards for social workers?.....	14
Figure 9: Are Employer Standards for social workers currently being used within.....	14

Figure 10: Has your authority completed and published an annual 'health check' which assessed all social worker views and experiences of their practice conditions and working environment? 15

Figure 11: What benefits, if any, do you anticipate there will be from implementing the Employer Standards?..... 16

Figure 12: What challenges, if any, would you expect to face when implementing the Employer Standards?..... 17

Figure 13: Has your authority experienced issues with social work recruitment and/or retention issues for the 2012-13 financial year? 18

Figure 14: Which of the following actions, if any, is your authority taking to support the professional development of your social workers? 18

Table of Tables

Table 1: Region of responding council 19

Table 2: Type of responding council..... 19

Executive summary

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned BMG Research to undertake a telephone survey of Heads of Human Resources in the 152 councils in England (54 responding, a 36 per cent response rate). The survey further explored awareness and response to the recommendations in the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Working Party's (NJC) final report, published in December 2011, by building upon the existing 85 responses obtained in response to an initial survey in February-March 2012. It also explored council's responses to the Employer Standards.

Key findings

Key findings, unless otherwise stated, are from both the 2012 and 2013 surveys; the base is 100 where respondents from both years are included. For results from the 2013 survey along the base is 54.

Awareness and Response to the recommendations in the NJC final report:

- **The majority of councils have completed a job evaluation.** Eighty eight per cent (88 councils) had completed a job evaluation or pay and grading review that included social workers since 2004.
- **A quarter of councils have used the NJC report role profiles to complete the job evaluation.** Twenty five per cent (23 councils) had used the role profiles from the NJC report to do so.
- **Most councils have a framework for social worker's career progression.** The majority (85 per cent, or 46 councils) of councils that took part in the 2013 survey have a framework in place for social workers' career progression.
- **The majority of councils do not have an action plan to respond to the NJC report.** Over one-third (35 per cent, or 30 councils) of councils had developed an agreed action plan to implement the recommendations from the NJC's report whilst 55 per cent (47 councils) had not.
- **Challenges for implementing the changes were varied.** The main challenges to implementing changes as a result of the report included responding to changing costs in the current economic environment (25 per cent), dealing with changes to pay structures and terms and conditions (20 per cent), and communicating the changes to staff and responding to any queries (18 per cent).

Implementation of Employer Standards:

Key findings are from the 2013 survey only; the base is 54 respondents (or 36 per cent of councils with social care responsibilities):

- **There is a high level of awareness and use of the Employer Standards.** Two-thirds of councils (69 per cent) currently use the Employer Standards, 17 per cent were not using the standards and 15 per cent did not know. The majority (97 per cent) of councils that were using the Employer Standards were using them within the children's social care service and 78 per cent were also using them in their adult social care service.

- **There are a range of benefits from implementing the Employer Standards.** Councils that are currently using the Employer Standards most frequently believed they would benefit from general service improvement and raise standards (38 per cent), whilst one-fifth (22 per cent) felt they would lead to increased consistency of standards in their services.
- **Councils are facing a high level of issues with recruitment of social workers.** Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of councils had experienced issues with recruiting social workers in 2012-13 and nearly one-half (48 per cent) had experienced challenges in staff retention.
- **Councils provide a high level of professional development support.** All councils reported that they offered at least one type of professional development support and 78 per cent offered training for unqualified social workers.

1 Introduction

BMG Research has prepared this report for the Local Government Association (LGA) in order to summarise the key findings from a survey of Heads of Human Resources within councils in England. This report builds upon findings from a similar survey undertaken by BMG with Heads of Human resources in March 2012.

1.1 Context

In December 2011 the National Joint Council for Local Government Services Working Party (NJC) published a report outlining recommendations in relation to the recruitment, retention and career progression of social workers and provided recommended social worker role profiles to:

- assist councils and others employing social workers to check their current evaluations of social worker and support roles; and
- help employers consider how social work roles can be developed to deliver the career pathways under discussion as part of social work reform.

Research undertaken by BMG in 2012 identified that whilst there was a high level of awareness of the NJC report and its recommendations amongst councils, only one-quarter of councils that completed a job evaluation or pay and grading review that included social workers since 2004 had used the role profiles from the NJC report to undertake this. However, the majority of councils that were aware of the NJC report had or were developing an action plan to implement its recommendations.

In addition, from this year, Ofsted, CQC and peer reviews will be looking for evidence of employers implementing the Employer Standards for Social Workers which build on existing guidelines for employers of social workers, and are envisaged to be incorporated within an emerging self-regulation and improvement framework for public services.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The research undertaken by BMG in March 2012 developed an understanding of councils' awareness and initial response to the report published by NJC. It provides a baseline against which progress and developments in relation to the recommendations and profiles can be measured.

The aim of the survey in 2013 was to explore council's policies and practices in relation to the recruitment, retention and career progression for social workers further, as well as the employer standards for social workers. This follow-up survey assesses progress since 2012 and identifies the challenges faced by authorities. Additionally the survey also examines the extent to which employer standards are used within councils.

1.3 Method

A sample frame of 152 Heads of Human Resources was provided to BMG Research by the LGA. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were undertaken with councils within the Human Resources Departments at 54 councils representing a 36 per cent response rate. A sample size of 54 from a population of 152 has a maximum standard error of +/-10.7 per

cent at the 95 per cent level of confidence. The survey took place between the 12th March and 19th April 2013.

Within this sample the research captured responses from councils across all the English regions and from a range of council types. A full breakdown of the number of councils by region and type can be found in Appendix 1.

In the first instance Heads of Human Resources were approached; however, in some cases interviewers were directed to speak with other key members of staff that had responsibility for this area. Respondents were all at a minimum of managerial level.

An introductory email was sent to contacts by the LGA to set up the research. Contacts were called up to 10 times before being logged as a non-response. Only six councils declined to take part in the research.

Interviews took between 8 and 10 minutes. The survey was designed by the LGA in partnership with BMG Research and built upon questions asked in 2012; however, councils that had not taken part in the survey in 2012 were identified and asked some questions from the previous survey to ensure their full experience of implementing the NJC recommendations was captured. Survey areas included:

- Recent job evaluations and pay reviews
- Action planning to implement changes as a result of the NJC report
- Response to the Employer Standards

Of the councils that took part, nearly three-quarters (72 per cent, or 39 councils) had taken part in the survey in 2012.

This report provides a summary of the results and, where relevant, makes comparisons with findings from the 2012 survey. In Chapters 2 and 3 where possible findings from the 2012 survey are combined with findings from 2013 to see where progress has been made in the last year, bases for these findings are provided on individual charts. Chapters 4 and 5 include responses from the 2013 survey only as the questions in these sections were not asked in 2012.

1.4 Report structure

Following this introduction this report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 explores council's recent job evaluations, pay reviews, and current career progression frameworks; Chapter 3 looks at the extent of action planning to implement changes as a result of the NJC report; Chapter 4 examines council's responses to the Employer Standards; and Chapter 5 explores any issues faced in the recruitment and retention of social workers in 2012-13.

For chapters on the NJC the base is 100 where respondents from both years are included and 54 where respondents from only respondents from 2013 are included (unless otherwise stated). For chapter on Employer Standards the base is 54 (all respondents from 2013).

2 Recent job evaluations, pay reviews and staff progression

The majority (88 per cent, or 88 councils) of councils that responded to either the 2012 or 2013 survey had completed a job evaluation/pay and grading review that has included social workers since 2004. Only 11 per cent had not done this and one per cent did not know.

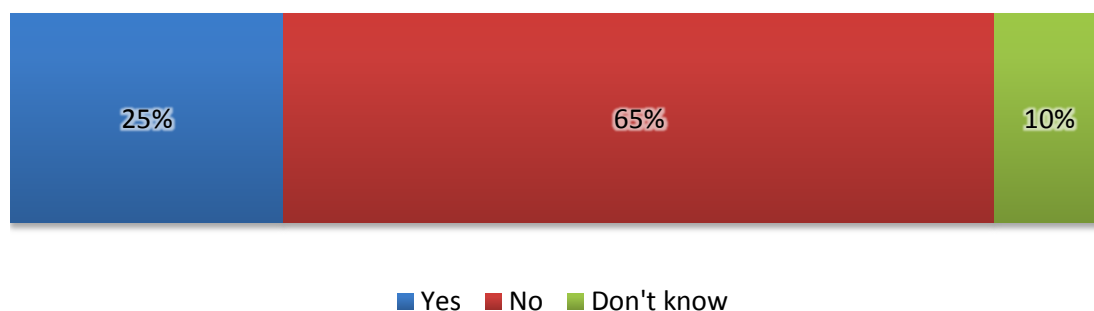
Figure 1: Has your council completed a *job evaluation/pay and grading* review that has included social workers since 2004?



Base=100. Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 or 2013 survey

One-quarter (25 per cent, or 23 councils) of councils that responded to either the 2012 or 2013 survey that had undertaken job evaluations or pay and grading reviews had used the role profiles from the NJC report to undertake these. However, the majority (65 per cent) had not used these or did not know (10 per cent).

Figure 2: Has your council used the role profiles from the NJC's report to undertake the job evaluation?

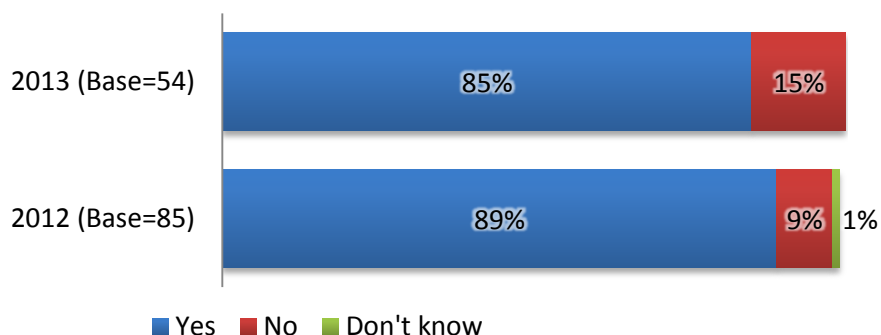


Base=88. Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 or 2013 survey that have completed a job evaluation or pay grading review that has included social workers since 2004

Further to this, of the 33 councils surveyed in 2013 that previously reported that they had completed a job evaluation/pay and grading review that included social workers since 2004, one-third (33 per cent) had completed a new review in the financial year 2012-13; however, only one council had used the NJC's role profiles to do this.

The majority (85 per cent, or 46 councils) of councils that responded to the 2013 survey have a framework in place for social workers' career progression. Only 10 per cent did not have a framework in place at the time of the survey. These figures were broadly the same in both 2012 and 2013 (with 89 per cent, or 76 councils having a framework in place in 2012).

Figure 3: Does your council currently have a framework in place for social workers' career progression?



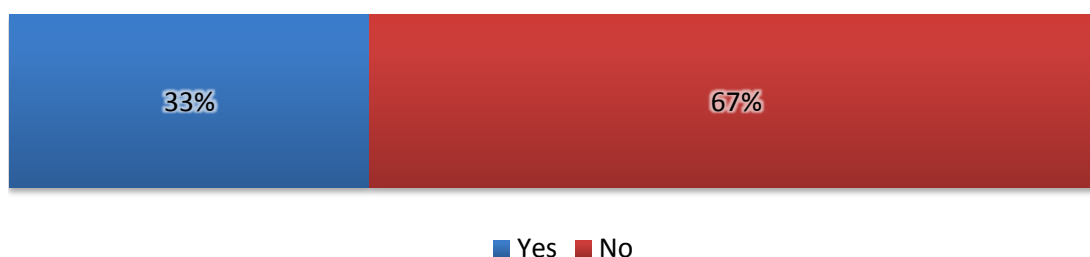
Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 or 2013 survey

A total of 88 councils reported in the 2012 or 2013 survey that they had a framework in place for social workers' prior to March 2012. The majority (67 per cent) of councils that had a framework for social workers' career progression in place prior to March 2012 reported that they had introduced refinements to this in the 2012-2013 financial year.

Refinements that councils had undertaken ranged; however, several noted that they had introduced the Assistant Support Year in Employment (ASYE) or that they had introduced more structure around roles, progression, and training.

'We have taken on board the work of the working group and we have now a more formalised framework for social workers to progress through.' **Survey respondent 2013, London Borough**

Figure 4: Have you introduced any refinements to your framework for social workers' career progression in the 2012-13 financial year?



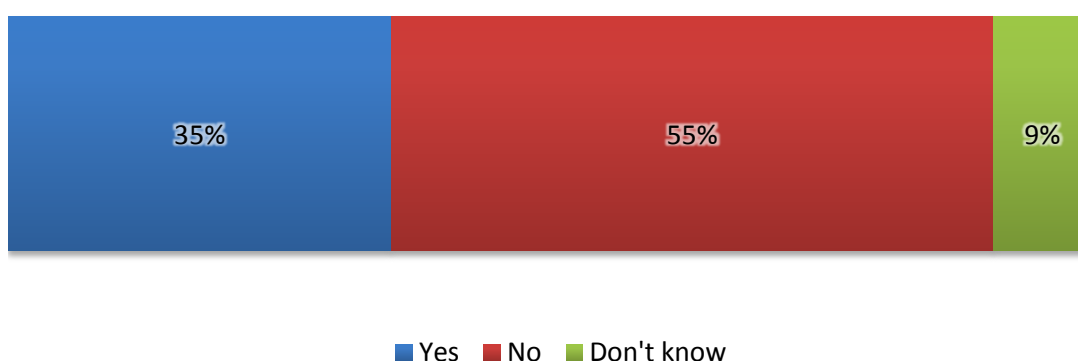
Base=45. Base definition: Councils that had a framework for social workers' career progression in place prior to March 2012

3 Action planning to implement changes as a result of the NJC report

Over one-third (35 per cent, or 30 councils) of councils that responded to both the 2012 and 2013 surveys had developed an agreed action plan to implement the recommendations from the NJC's report; however, over one-half (55 per cent, or 47 councils) had not and nine per cent did not know.

Five out of the eight councils that had developed an action plan in 2012-13 had consulted Trade Unions on the development of these plans.

Figure 5: Has your authority developed an agreed action plan to implement the recommendations from the National Joint Council's report?



Base=85. Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 or 2013 survey that were aware of the NJC report

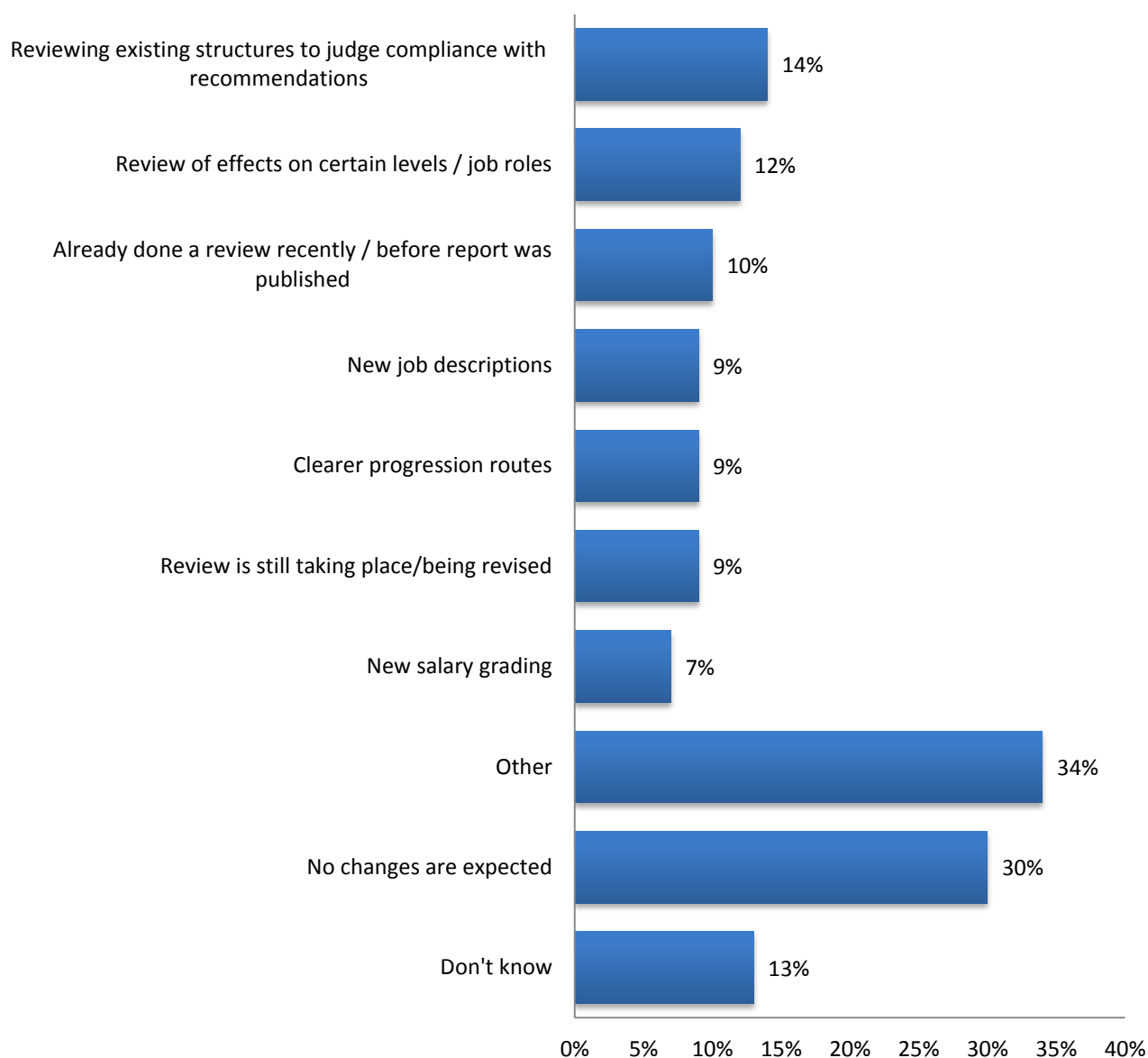
When asked about the changes the council expected to make as a result of the NJC report councils consulted in 2012 and 2013 reported several key changes including:

- Reviewing their existing structures to judge their compliance with the report's recommendations (14 per cent).
- A review of the effects of the report on certain role levels and types (12 per cent).

Other changes identified by respondents included the creation of new posts for new starters to gain social work qualifications and employing social work consultants. Figure 6 shows the range of changes expected by councils.

However nearly one-third (30 per cent) did not expect to make any changes.

Figure 6: What changes or potential changes would you expect to make to work you undertake as a result of using the NJC profiles and the accompanying recommendations?



Base=93. Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 survey and those that had developed an action plan to implement recommendations from the NJC report in the 2013 survey

Councils that reported in 2012 that they had an action plan to implement changes recommended by the NJC appear to have implemented more changes than were initially expected.

One-fifth (20 per cent) of councils had reviewed existing structures to judge compliance with the recommendations (compared to 13 per cent that expected to do this in 2012); 16 per cent needed to establish clearer progression routes (compared to nine per cent that expected to do this); and 16 per cent needed to review the effects of the changes on certain jobs levels and types (compared to nine per cent that expected to).

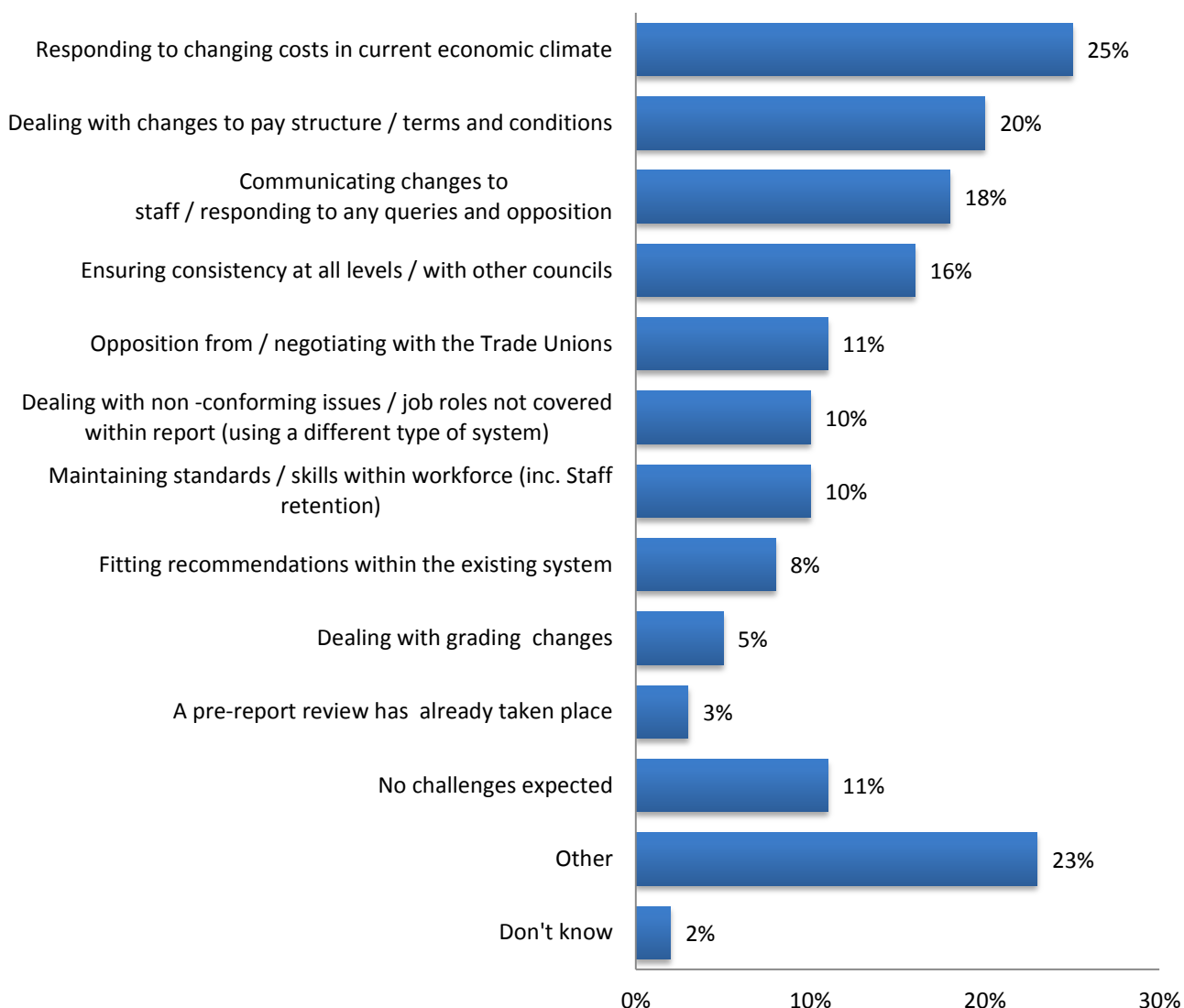
Unexpected changes specifically mentioned by councils included incorporating the ASYE, ensuring consistency in the wording of job roles, and changes to how social workers are recruited.

The most frequently cited challenges expected to implement these changes identified by councils consulted in 2012 and 2013 included responding to changing costs in the current economic environment (25 per cent), dealing with changes to pay structures and terms and conditions (20 per cent), and communicating the changes to staff and responding to any queries (18 per cent).

'The economic part of things will be a challenge as it may affect the spending review in every council, so that is [a] challenge for everyone.' **Survey respondent 2012, London Borough**

Other responses tended to be specific to the situation of individual councils. Figure 7 shows the range of challenges expected by councils.

Figure 7: What challenges would you expect to face when implementing changes as a result of the NJC profiles and the accompanying recommendations?



Base=93. Base definition: All councils that took part in the 2012 survey and those that had developed an action plan to implement recommendations from the NJC report in the 2013 survey

Other feedback on the NJC report included:

'We found it useful and made changes on the basis of the report. We are revising our progression criteria.' **Survey respondent 2013, County Council, Yorkshire and the Humber**

'We already had a recruitment and retention strategy in place at the time of this report. As such we didn't see any need to amend it.' **Survey respondent 2013, London Borough**

'We don't feel that they are relevant to us. We did a report in 2001 looking at comparability of professional status and qualifications and as such, we felt

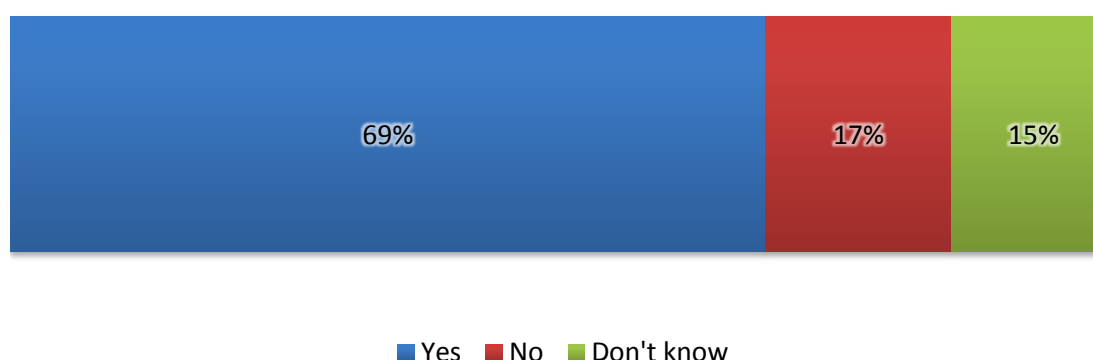
most of the recommendations we had already addressed.' **Survey respondent 2013, Unitary Authority, South East**

'It's about ensuring that the Social Work degree incorporates and enables people to come in and do the job to the capabilities and have the sufficient standards that are required.' **Survey respondent 2013, London Borough**

4 Response to the Employer Standards

Awareness and use of the Employer Standards for social workers was high with two-thirds of councils (69 per cent) currently using them. Only 17 per cent were not using the standards and 15 per cent did not know.

Figure 8: Is your authority currently using the Employer Standards for social workers?

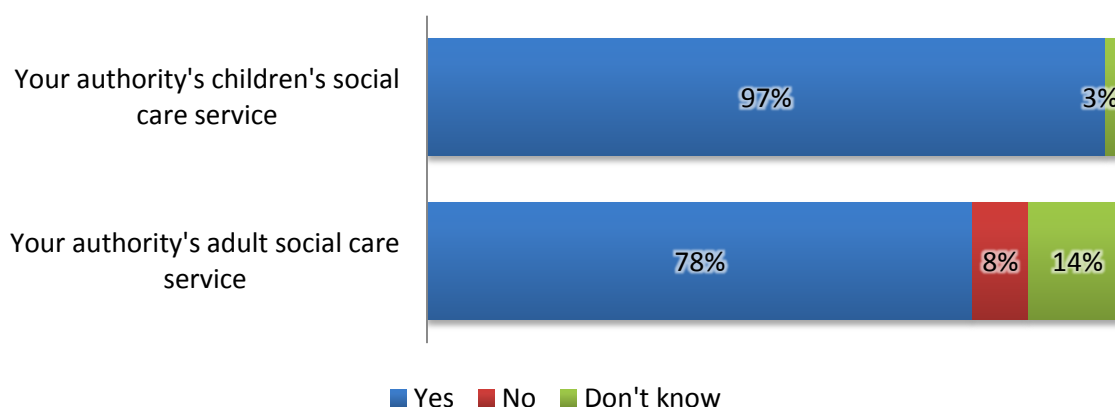


Base = 54. Base definition: All 2013 sample

Nearly all councils (97 per cent) that were using the Employer Standards were using them within the children's social care service.

A large proportion of councils (78 per cent) were also using the Employer Standards in their adult social care service; however, eight per cent were not and 14 per cent of councils did not know.

Figure 9: Are Employer Standards for social workers currently being used within...

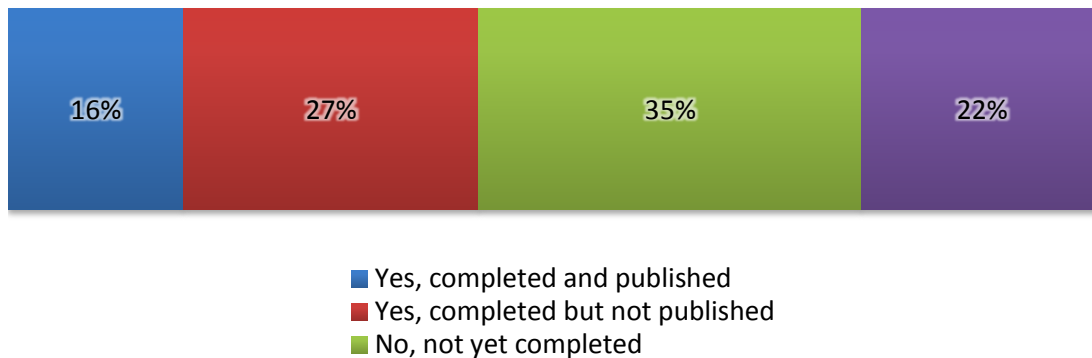


Base=37. Base definition: Authorities that are using the Employer Standards

Just over two-fifths (43 per cent) of councils that were using the Employer Standards at the time of the survey had completed an annual health check.

Sixteen per cent of all those using Employer Standards had subsequently published the findings from the health check and 27 per cent had completed the health check but not published. Over one-third (35 per cent) had not completed a health check whilst 22 per cent did not know.

Figure 10: Has your authority completed and published an annual ‘health check’ which assessed all social worker views and experiences of their practice conditions and working environment?



Base=37. Base definition: Councils that are currently using the Employer Standards

Councils reported anticipating a range of benefits from implementing the Employer Standards; these benefits have been coded and are shown in Figure 11.

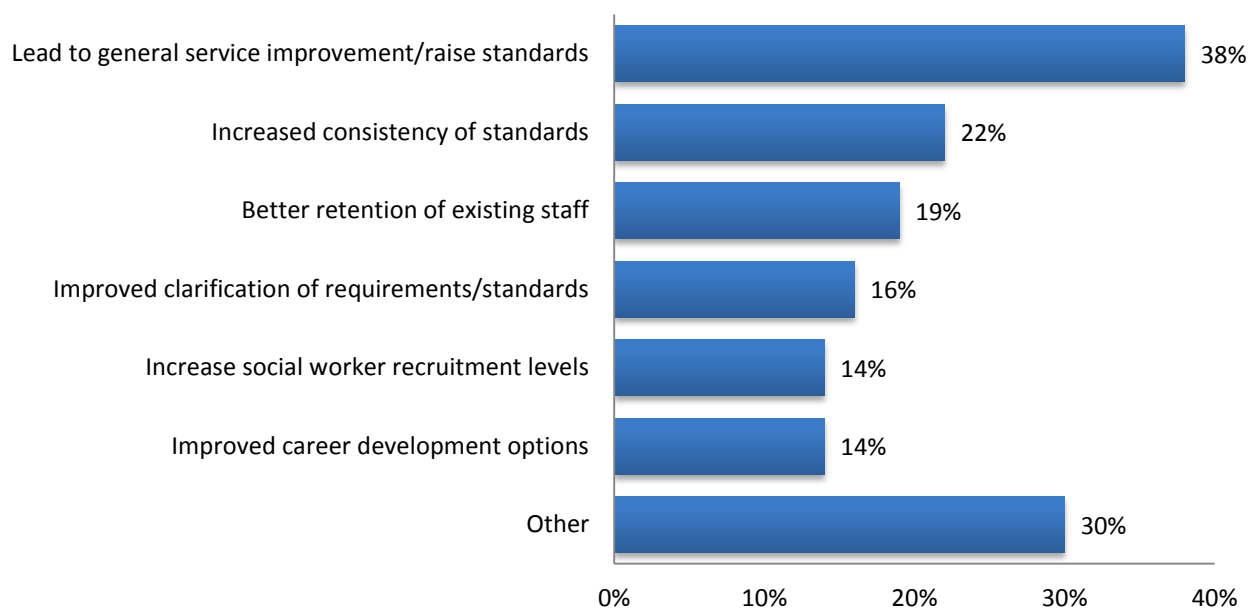
Councils most frequently stated that the standards would benefit from general service improvement and help to raise standards (38 per cent), whilst one-fifth (22 per cent) felt they would lead to increased consistency of standards in their services. Other benefits tended to be specific to the context of the responding local authority.

‘I think what it does for senior managers is it highlights the importance in looking after their social workers and it may have a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of social workers however, I don't expect it to be the most significant benefit.’ **Survey respondent 2013, County Council, South East**

‘It ensures consistency of approach and a bench mark for consideration. It also provides an external perspective.’ **Survey respondent 2013, Metropolitan District, North East**

‘Standards will be improved because the standards of management of social workers and the performance of social workers has improved.’ **Survey respondent 2013, County Council, Yorkshire and the Humber**

Figure 11: What benefits, if any, do you anticipate there will be from implementing the Employer Standards?



Base=37. Base definition: Councils that are currently using the Employer Standards

Councils also reported anticipating a range of challenges when implementing the Employer Standards; these challenges have been coded and are shown in Figure 12.

Councils most frequently stated that allocating enough resources and change management would be challenging (13 per cent for each); however, one-fifth of councils did not expect any challenges.

Other challenges raised tended to be specific to the context of councils interviewed or highlighted uncertainties or potential dependencies of what challenges may be faced. Comments included:

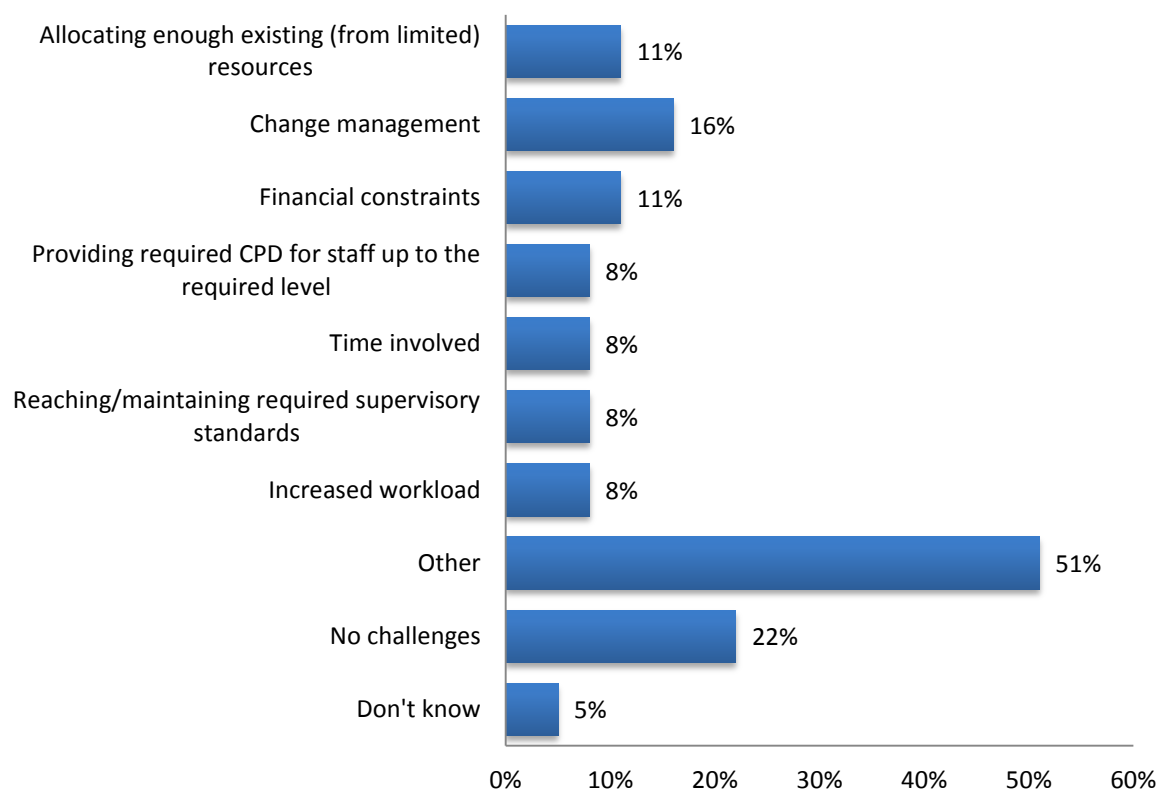
'A challenge would be in how we would resource these very good practices and if to see if we could implement them. Training for supervisory managers of social workers would be costly as well.' **Survey respondent 2013, County Council, South East**

'The only challenge would be financial. The cost of creating and implementing training plans and the modernisation of Social Workers e.g. using IT and computerised systems.' **Survey respondent 2013, Metropolitan District, North East**

'I think we will have the usual challenge on grading and different levels of social workers.' **Survey respondent 2013, Metropolitan District, Yorkshire and the Humber**

'Ensuring that all managers are given qualified social work support and to develop their competencies against those standards.' **Survey respondent 2013, London Borough**

Figure 12: What challenges, if any, would you expect to face when implementing the Employer Standards?

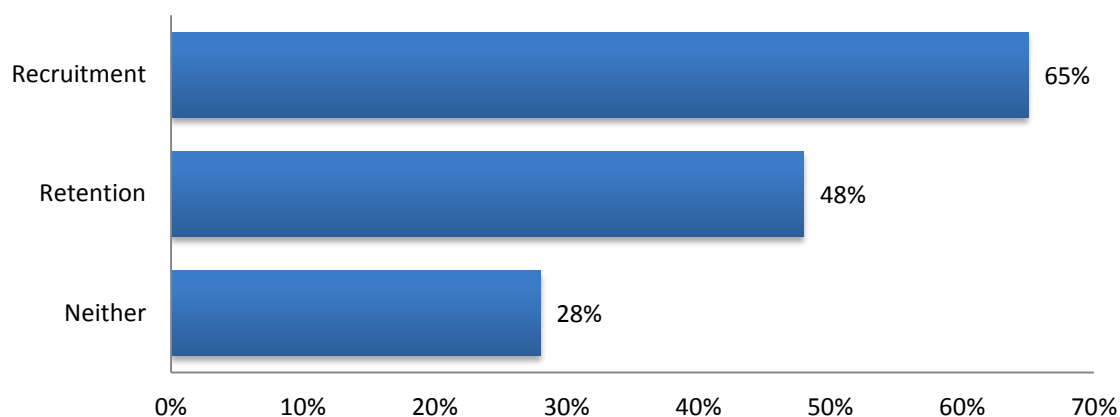


Base=37. Base definition: Councils that are currently using the Employer Standards

5 Recruitment and retention

Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of councils had experienced issues with recruiting social workers and nearly one-half (48 per cent) had experienced challenges in staff retention in 2012-13. Only 28 per cent had not experienced issues with either.

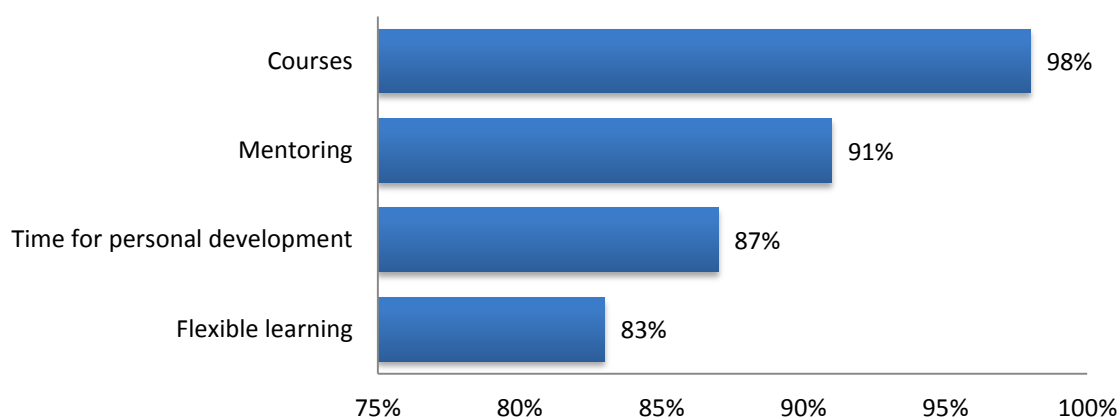
Figure 13: Has your authority experienced issues with social work recruitment and/or retention issues for the 2012-13 financial year?



Base=54. Base definition: All 2013 sample

All surveyed councils reported that their council offered at least one type of professional development support, as shown in Figure 14. Nearly all (98 per cent) allowed social work staff to undertake courses and 91 per cent offered mentoring support.

Figure 14: Which of the following actions, if any, is your authority taking to support the professional development of your social workers?



Base=54. Base definition: All 2013 sample

Further to this, over three-quarters (78 per cent) of respondent's councils offered training for unqualified social workers. Only one-fifth (20 per cent) did not offer training to unqualified social workers whilst two per cent did not know.

Appendix 1: Respondent profile 2013

Table 1: Region of responding council

Region	Number of councils	Total number of councils in region	Response rate (%)
North East	3	12	25%
North West	5	23	22%
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	15	40%
East Midlands	2	9	22%
West Midlands	7	14	50%
East of England	6	11	55%
Greater London	10	33	30%
South East	9	19	47%
South West	6	16	38%
Total councils	54	152	36%

Table 2: Type of responding council

Type of council	Number of councils	Total number of councils of this type	Response rate (%)
English Unitary	24	56	43%
London Borough	10	33	30%
Metropolitan District	11	36	31%
Counties	9	27	33%
Total councils	54	152	36%



With more than 20 years' experience, BMG Research has established a strong reputation for delivering high quality research and consultancy.

BMG serves both the social public sector and the commercial private sector, providing market and customer insight which is vital in the development of plans, the support of campaigns and the evaluation of performance.

Innovation and development is very much at the heart of our business, and considerable attention is paid to the utilisation of the most recent technologies and information systems to ensure that market and customer intelligence is widely shared.