

**DETERMINANTS OF THE COMPOSITION OF  
THE WORKFORCE IN LOW SKILLED SECTORS  
OF THE UK ECONOMY: SOCIAL CARE AND  
RETAIL SECTORS**

**Final Report**

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**Note**

Members of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) and its secretariat met and corresponded with the research authors in order to develop and steer this research project. However, the findings are the responsibility of the authors, and the findings and views presented in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the MAC.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to develop further understanding of the supply and demand side factors that affect the composition of the low-skilled labour market, with particular reference to the social care and retail sectors.

Following an initial literature review, the study adopted a case study approach, focusing on low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors in the West Midlands. It involved interviews with employers, recruitment agencies, migrant workers (non UK nationals who had come to the UK for work after 2003), UK-born workers in low-skilled roles, UK-born job seekers on out-of-work benefits with no/ low qualifications and stakeholders. The findings presented in this report draw on these case studies. They may contrast with results of studies in other parts of the UK and/or focusing on other sectors. They complement analyses from other data sources (such as the Labour Force Survey).

### ***Key findings from the qualitative case studies***

*What are the key features of work organisation, conditions and pay in low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors?*

- Low-skilled roles in these sectors are characterised by flexibility, fragmentation, insecurity and instability.
- Employers' drive for flexibility means that many low skilled roles in social care and retail are not offered as permanent full-time jobs with fixed hours and incomes, which would offer the job security many job seekers sought. Functional flexibility means that organisational structures tend to be fairly flat, so that there are limited clear routes for progression.
- Low hours and zero hours contracts are not new in these sectors but there is indicative evidence that they have become more commonplace.
- Fragmentation of hours of work was most evident in domiciliary care.
- Low (usually around the National Minimum Wage or just above) and uncertain pay makes roles unattractive for those moving off benefits.

*Do employers have a preference to employ migrant workers? What are the advantages and disadvantages of employing migrant workers?*

- Generally, the migrant workers interviewed in the retail and social care sectors are employed in the same low-skilled roles as UK-born workers.
- There is little evidence from the case studies of segmentation into 'migrants' and 'British' jobs; except in the case of jobs in shops catering for specific 'national'/'ethnic' groups or the most casualised jobs in the retail sector. Moreover, there is qualitative evidence that UK-born workers are moving into roles with previous concentrations of migrant workers, such as night-time shifts in the retail sector.
- Low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors are ports of entry to the labour market for people moving into their first job in the UK.
- For some migrant workers interviewed in both sectors the prevalence of part-time/ low hours working meant that such jobs were considered unsuitable in the long-term. However, there was a sub-group of migrant workers interviewed in the care sector with

allied relevant experience in their home countries who were keen to have a career in care.

- In general, the employers interviewed in the social care and retail sectors tended to have no automatic preference for migrant workers vis-à-vis as UK workers at the bottom end of the labour market. However, as an exception, one employer interviewed expressed a specific preference for migrant workers, on the grounds that migrant workers were trustworthy, reliable and worked hard.
- In general, interviewees were concerned to point out that their recruitment, selection and employment practices accorded with their legal obligations and they identified both advantages and disadvantages of employing migrant workers.
- Advantages of employing migrants cited by some of the employers interviewed were their reliability, flexibility and (in some instances in social care) being able to employ people with qualifications and experience in a relevant field, albeit that because qualifications were gained outside the UK migrant workers may be paid at the 'unqualified' rate.
- There was evidence that some migrant workers interviewed are beginning to feel resentful of employers taking advantage of their flexibility.
- Disadvantages of employing migrant workers in the social care and retail sectors included shortcomings in English language skills (which are of key importance in virtually all roles in these sectors), a desire to work long hours in circumstances where these hours were either not available - for example, when jobs were organised on a part-time or low-hours basis, or where working long hours was seen as undesirable, for example, in the social care sector where tiredness was thought to impact on quality of care, and the time and administrative burden involved in checking eligibility to work in the UK.
- While a minority of social care employers interviewed in the West Midlands felt that they were reliant on migrant workers, in general reliance on migrant workers in large parts of the social care and retail sectors is less evident than in some other sectors in the region.

*(How) are young people disadvantaged in the labour market?*

- Young people (both the UK-born and migrants) are particularly clustered in those parts of the retail sector which caters for people like them (e.g. fashion, technology, etc.). Employers had a preference for employing young people relative to other workforce groups in such niches where they were perceived to be a good 'fit'. This was one particular advantage of employing young people.
- In the retail sector students (both UK and international students) tended to be regarded more favourably than UK-born young people who were not students on the basis of their greater flexibility, confidence and other soft skills.
- The evidence from the interviews indicated that employment of young people in social care is more uncommon than in the retail sector.
- Employers reported large numbers of young people applying for jobs in retailing, whereas low-skilled jobs in the care sector were less attractive (and glamorous) for young people.
- Some retail employers interviewed made negative assumptions about young people in relation to perceived unreliability, lack of confidence and inappropriate dress.
- However, some made particular efforts to employ young people in accordance with corporate social responsibility policies and because they recognised that the retail sector could offer a 'first step' into the labour market.



- By contrast, there was a lack of young people in the social care sector and some employers interviewed were dubious about the suitability of young people for care roles (partly on the grounds that they lacked responsibility) and so needed to be particularly convinced that a young job applicant was suitable before taking them on.
- Social care employers interviewed tended to identify few advantages of employing young people other than to counter an ageing workforce.
- On balance, in both the retail and social care sectors employers interviewed tended to be more vociferous about the disadvantages of employing young people than of employing migrants, noting the unreliability, lack of interest and work ethic and other inappropriate behaviour of some young people.

*What methods are used by employers to recruit low-skilled labour? What job search methods do migrants and UK resident workers in low-skilled jobs typically use?*

- Typically employers interviewed used a variety of recruitment methods for low-skilled positions, even if one method was dominant.
- There has been a structural shift towards greater use of the internet in recruitment – especially amongst large retailers using their own organisational websites, and a decline in use of the local press – which formerly was a ‘go to’ channel for employers and job seekers alike.
- A key rationale for employers’ use of the Public Employment Service for recruitment was that it is free. Employers reported varying results from this channel. There were concerns that a high proportion of applicants were ‘time wasters’ who ‘had to apply’ and did not want the job.
- The case study evidence suggested a decline in use of recruitment agencies in recent years, with reasons for decline given by employers interviewed including greater ease of finding potential applicants than formerly, considerations of expense and dissatisfaction with the service provided by some agencies.
- However, the fact that agencies can deal with the whole of the recruitment process, check eligibility to work in the UK and vet applicants could be appealing to some employers.
- Informal recruitment methods are generally recognised as delivering ‘good quality’ results.
- Nearly all employers interviewed recruited solely in English – reflecting the requirement for workers to have good English language skills.
- Most migrant workers and UK-born job seekers interviewed used more than one job search method.
- Younger people were more confident than older people in using the internet and some migrants were particularly ‘social media savvy’.
- UK-born job seekers were more likely to use the Public Employment Service than migrants, while migrants were more likely than UK-born job seekers to use recruitment agencies and also to use informal methods more actively, with use of the latter usurping the former as length of stay in the UK increased.
- Overall, the qualitative case study evidence suggests that there are not major mismatches between employers’ recruitment methods and job seekers’ search channels.

*What attributes are employers seeking in candidates for jobs? How do their selection practices and procedures operate and do they disadvantage certain job seekers?*

- In both social care and retail sectors a foremost criterion in selection is English language skills. Job seekers with poor English language skills are at a disadvantage.
- Appearance at interview is important and is taken to reflect how much a candidate wants the job.
- Greater onus tends to be placed on previous relevant experience than on formal educational qualifications, but there were also opportunities for individuals with no experience who displayed the behavioural attributes desired by employers.
- Employers tend to recruit on 'attitude' – encompassing a 'caring approach' (in social care), 'customer service' (in retail), and (in both sectors) 'people skills', 'friendliness', 'commitment', 'reliability', 'hard-working' and 'punctuality' – rather than skills.
- Local people may be preferred, but a car is essential for domiciliary care.
- In general, job seekers and migrant workers interviewed had a good appreciation of the attributes sought by employers.
- Selection practices and procedures differed to some extent between sectors, by size of establishment and whether the establishment was part of a chain.
- Large supermarkets tended to have an initial web-based sift of applicants and then test the behaviours of those selected in group-based sessions and individual interviews.
- Other employers interviewed tended to use more conventional face-to-face interviews.
- Most employers interviewed reported large numbers of applicants for jobs (and in some cases 'too many'), although in domiciliary care there was a need for more applicants.
- There were mixed views emerging from the qualitative research about the quality of applicants, although there was general agreement that some of the longer-term unemployed with little work experience were not work ready.

*What are the constraints faced by migrant workers and UK-born unemployed people in securing employment in low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors? What factors disadvantage UK-born job seekers in the labour market?*

- Good English language skills (spoken, reading and writing) are important for securing employment in the social care and retail sectors.
- Individuals lacking IT skills to search for jobs, fill in application forms and undertake (simple) communication online are disadvantaged in accessing vacancies – even if jobs which they seek do not involve IT skills.
- Employers take less account of formal qualifications than of soft skills (such as reliability, trustworthiness, sociability and a positive attitude). However, some migrant workers found that non-UK qualifications did not 'count' in the UK labour market.
- A long period out of the labour market tends to be regarded negatively by employers.
- Lack of care and lack of understanding about the importance of appearance (i.e. being smart) at interview is a disadvantage for job seekers in the recruitment and selection process.
- Non-work commitments place constraints on the jobs that some job seekers can consider.
- Job seekers who are reliant on public transport are more physically constrained in how far and when they can travel to work than those with access to a car. Lack of a car is a key limiting factor in access to domiciliary care jobs.

- There is a widespread view amongst job seekers that it is not worth travelling far for a low paid, low hours job.
- However, many employers expressed a preference for local workers for low-skilled work, on the basis that they would not have travel/transport problems getting to work on time and also recognising that it did not make financial sense for workers on the National Minimum Wage to travel far, especially for part-time jobs. Additionally, some of the employers interviewed felt a sense of social responsibility (corporate or personal) towards 'giving local people a chance' because it is 'the right thing to do'.
- Issues of geographical immobility are less apparent for migrant workers than for UK-born job seekers.
- Requirements for flexibility, patterns of fragmented working hours, uncertainty about working hours and pay pose barriers to accessing work and were at odds with many UK-born job seekers' desire for fixed hours and permanent contracts, and the certainty that these implied. This suggests a mismatch in the characteristics of low-skilled jobs available and the characteristics of jobs that many job seekers value.
- Fear of benefit sanctions for not making enough job applications meant that some individuals applied for jobs that they felt they would never get, or were not interested in, with knock on effects for employers having to deal with them and for keener job applicants.
- Migrant workers interviewed demonstrated reluctance to claim benefits – and, in general appeared to be more tenacious in their search for work than UK-born job seekers.

*Training, skills and progression: What does the availability of training look like? How has it changed? And does availability of training and opportunities for progression account for differences in willingness to work in low-skilled jobs?*

- The case study interviews focused on two main types of training: first, that to do jobs employees already had, and secondly, that to allow progression to higher level work.
- Aside from Health and Safety training, training by employers tended to focus on 'hard skills' (such as use of a till in retailing and how to lift people in social care). This is explained by the fact that employees were generally recruited on the basis that they already possessed the requisite 'soft skills'.
- There was a divergence in practices towards accreditation of training in the social care and retail sectors. Often in the residential care sector there was an expectation that employees would work towards NVQ level 2 (and sometimes level 3) qualifications. Some employers also linked pay to achievement in training, and employees were generally supportive of this approach. In the retail sector there tended to be relatively less emphasis on accredited training.
- In both sectors young people were most likely to receive training because financial support was available for them.
- Relatively flat employment structures in both sectors limited opportunities for progression. This meant that some employees lacked interest in training and had no or limited aspirations for progression; rather several of the migrant workers and UK-born workers were just grateful to have a job in a difficult labour market.
- Some migrant workers interviewed felt that they were discriminated against because they were migrants when opportunities for progression arose and that they were 'overlooked'.

- Rather than ‘vertical’ moves, typically work histories of migrant workers and UK-born workers were characterised by ‘horizontal’ moves from low-skilled job to low-skilled job – within and between sectors.

*Comparison of the composition of the workforce in the social care and retail sectors*

- Employers interviewed in both the social care and retail sectors place great emphasis on communication skills. Hence, in both sectors a prerequisite for employment is achievement of a threshold level (set by the employer) of proficiency in English language skills (speaking, understanding and writing); albeit the level of skills at which this threshold was set was higher for some employers than for others. Poor English language skills was cited by employers interviewed in both sectors as a disadvantage of employing migrant workers, even though they acknowledged that migrant workers tended to work hard. Indeed, for many employers interviewed satisfactory/good communication skills in the English language was a key prerequisite for employment and lack of such skills outweighed working hard and other possible attributes that migrant workers might have. This is in contrast to some other sectors, including construction and some parts of the hospitality sector, where there is less direct interaction with customers. However, as an exception within the social care sector, in the case of one private residential care home employer interviewed, the threshold level for English language skills was set at a lower level than evidenced generally, resulting in a preference for migrant workers (recruited via existing migrant worker employees), despite relatively poor English language skills.
- In both sectors work tends to be organised on a fragmented hours and/or low hours basis.
- Young people (both migrants and the UK-born) tend to gravitate to the retail sector rather than the social care sector. This was recognised by the employers interviewed, many of whom acknowledged that the retail sector was one in which people commonly sought their first jobs. By contrast, social care tended to be seen as less glamorous and employers interviewed tended to be more reluctant to recruit young people (when they applied).
- The retail employers interviewed tended to have no problems in finding enough candidates for vacancies, albeit not all candidates were suitable. In contrast, recruitment challenges – in terms of quantity and quality of candidates – tended to be greater in social care than in the retail sector.
- The case study evidence suggests that greater emphasis is placed on training for formal qualifications in the social care sector than in the retail sector.

## **A. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents a selective literature review which informed the qualitative case study work reported in Section B.

### **A1. INTRODUCTION**

This section provides an introduction to the substantive sections of the literature review providing perspectives on the supply of workers to low-skilled roles (section A2), the demand for workers in low-skilled roles (section A3) and a summary of issues and implications (section A4).

In order to set the context, the following sub-sections outline key features of recent and projected employment change (section A1.1), before highlighting the continuing demand for workers in low-skilled roles (section A1.2). Then key features of employment in the two sectors which are the focus of this study, both of which are amongst the largest migrant employing sectors in the UK (Frontier Economics, 2013) – social care (section A1.3) and retail (section A1.4) - are outlined. In relation to the literature review it should be borne in mind that ‘migrant’ is a term that is in widespread use, but is inconsistently defined. In practice, both ‘nationality’ and ‘country of birth’ are used to define migrants in the literature, and coverage of migrants also varies by information source. For the qualitative research reported in section B the focus is on migrants who are non UK nationals who came to the UK for work after 2003.

#### **A1.1 Key features of employment change**

The structure of UK employment has changed significantly over the last thirty years or so. In a review paper, Gregory (2000) suggested that the fastest employment growth in the UK towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was in atypical work, particularly jobs that are part-time, fixed-term or done without a contract, in order to serve ‘24/7’ operations and meet shifting daily, weekly and seasonal demands, and ‘just-in-time’ production and delivery. This reflects pressures on employers to reduce their costs and enhance competitiveness, by making themselves more flexible, adaptable and responsive to market fluctuations. The service sector has been the main site of employment expansion in the UK (Wilson and Homenidou, 2012); such that the sector accounted for around 71 per cent of total UK employment in 1990 and 82 per cent in 2010. This general increase masks a small decline in the number of jobs in the wholesale and retail sector, but an increase in jobs in the health and social work sector (of which care is part) Jobs in the service sector, particularly in tourism and the retail industry, are amongst the most likely to require flexibility at the expense of job security (Tomlinson and Walker, 2010; Lindsay and McQuaid, 2005).

Jobs that have historically recruited relatively unqualified people and new labour market entrants have been particularly susceptible to the changes outlined above. Additionally, the skills required by employers have changed, particularly in the balance of skilled and unskilled manual work requiring traditionally male craft skills and physical strength, and occupations requiring knowledge, technical skills and interpersonal, often client-focused

skills in personal, consumer and public services and many managerial, technological and administrative jobs.

According to the most recent Working Futures employment projections (Wilson and Homenidou, 2012) the UK economy is expected to see a slow recovery over the medium-term, but in the short-term growth is projected to remain subdued and unemployment to fall only slowly. The overall impact of the economic crisis on employment has been substantial with the loss of around 2 million jobs. The projections indicate that the economy and labour market is likely to continue to be subject to structural change in favour of services, along with some rebalancing of jobs from the public to private sectors.

Changing patterns of employment by occupation are largely dominated by longer-term trends rather than the cyclical position of the economy. Key features of occupational change over the period from 1990 to 2010 (see Wilson and Homenidou, 2012) are increases in the numbers of jobs in managerial, professional and associate professional and technical occupations, and also in caring, leisure and other service occupations. By contrast employment has declined in administrative and secretarial and in skilled trades occupations, and also amongst plant, process and machine operatives. Sales and customer service occupations saw a modest increase in employment, while the medium-term decline in employment in elementary occupations has begun to stabilise. Structural changes in the sectoral patterns of employment are a key driver, albeit these have become less important in recent years than changing patterns of skill demands within sectors, driven by a combination of technological change and organisational change. Skill-biased technical change linked to information and communications technologies has been a particularly significant factor, although this has been partially offset by factors leading to polarisation in skill demands, with growth in some relatively less skilled jobs in services, as well as in high skilled ones (Goos and Manning, 2007), as discussed below.

An additional feature of recent employment change and flexible working that is of particular pertinence for the low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors is the rise of zero-hours contracts (i.e. an employment contract under which an employer is not required to offer an employee any defined number of working hours and an employee is neither guaranteed any set number of working hours nor obliged to take any hours offered). Such arrangements offer maximum flexibility for employers, and while suiting some workers, are a source of insecurity for others who need a certain number of hours of work for financial security, and who are reluctant to turn down offers of work for fear of not being offered work in the future. According to the data from the Labour Force Survey the number of people employed on zero-hours contracts rose from 134,000 (0.5 per cent of the workforce) in 2006 to 208,000 (0.7 per cent of the workforce) in 2012 (Pennycook et al., 2013). However, Pennycook et al. (2013) believe these figures to be an under-estimate, citing that 150,000 domiciliary care-workers are on zero-hours contracts. They highlight that those employed on zero-hours contracts receive lower gross weekly pay and work fewer hours per week on average than those who do not, and that the prevalence of zero-hours contracts is higher among young people (aged 16-24 years) than amongst other age groups. Of particular relevance to migrant employment is the fact that the employment of non-UK nationals is higher among workplaces utilising zero-hours contracts than those who do not. It is also worthy of note that people on zero-hours contracts are more likely to be working in small than in large workplaces, and in the private sector than in the public sector.

## **A1.2 Continuing demand for workers in low-skilled roles**

Although the projected rise of 1.96 million jobs in professional, associate professional and managerial occupations is the dominant feature of projected employment change between 2010 and 2020, it is likely that lower-skilled jobs will remain a significant component of the labour market. The latest Working Futures employment projections at the time of writing suggest an employment increase of 10 per cent in caring, personal service and other occupations and 3 per cent in low-skilled elementary jobs between 2010 and 2020, with most of these jobs in services (Wilson and Homenidou, 2012). The sales and customer service occupation group has until recently also been the beneficiary of employment growth, but modest job losses are now projected, especially for the less skilled sales occupations sub-category. This polarisation of demand for skills, with growth at both top and bottom ends of the skills spectrum, appears to be an increasingly common feature across developed economies, with the 'hollowing out of the middle' or polarisation of jobs between those that are stable, well-paid and skilled on the one hand and those that are unstable, poorly paid and low-skilled on the other. Compared with other European countries, this trend is particularly evident in the UK (Eurofound, 2007). Despite this, it is clear that recession and restructuring has hit those with low or no qualifications particularly hard and there has been a reduction in the demand for unqualified labour over the medium term (Wilson and Homenidou, 2012). However, it should also be borne in mind across the occupational spectrum that so called 'replacement demand' (i.e. the needs of employers to replace many of their workers who leave due to retirement, occupational mobility, geographical mobility, or other reasons) can usually easily outweigh any losses resulting from structural changes.

Atkinson and Williams (2003) have suggested that there are two distinct low-skilled labour markets. The first is composed of traditional, blue-collar, largely male, full-time employment based on manual, operative, assembly and process work. Pay in this market is high relative to other types of low-skilled work. Such work is found predominantly in the manufacturing and construction sectors. However, this is a shrinking market, particularly due to technological change. The second low-skill labour market is composed of non-manual, often service sector employment, often involving customer-facing jobs in the retail, hospitality and leisure industries, plus social care, but also including cleaning, transport, security and related jobs. This market is characterised by disproportionately high shares of female and part-time workers, and pay levels are uniformly low. This market is expanding.

Amongst the key issues for low-skilled employees in these types of low-skilled employment are whether these jobs are sustainable and offer opportunities for development. In relation to this, Atkinson and Williams (2003) identify two possibilities. The first is that these jobs are a stepping-stone to better paid more stable employment. The second is that these jobs are essentially poor jobs, and not only that, there is little chance that they will lead to better opportunities. They offer little opportunity for advancement or even providing sustained employment, and when progress is made, it is not very substantial.

### **A1.3 Key features of social care employment**

#### *An expanding sector*

Social care is an expanding sector in terms of employment (Wilson, 2012), employing an estimated 1.5 million people in 2012, often in small to medium-sized organisations. Most adult social care jobs are in domiciliary care (42 per cent) and residential care respectively (40 per cent). The majority of the jobs are in the independent sector as over the years more and more services has been contracted out by local authorities to for profit and not for profit providers (Skills for Care, 2013a), as outlined below.

#### *Care workforce profile*

The vast majority of staff in adult social care work as carers, support workers or senior carers in direct care roles. Many of these roles would be considered as lower skilled jobs given the highest level of formal qualification associated with these jobs (typically level 2 for carers). However, it needs to be emphasised that although qualification requirements are low, carers need to bring particular attributes and soft skills to the job in order to provide quality care; (hence many employers might not refer to them as low skilled). Other low-skilled jobs in adult social care include ancillary jobs, such as catering, cleaning, transport or maintenance. The main focus of attention in this report is on carers, though reference is made to other roles.

Social care has historically relied on a low paid female workforce. This is especially the case for care workers (Bessa et al., 2013 cited in Low Pay Commission, 2013; Whittaker, 2013), who are often paid not much more than the National Minimum Wage (that is if any unpaid travel time is excluded) (Low Pay Commission, 2013). More recently, there has also been some evidence that some employers do not comply with the minimum wage due to various reasons, including unpaid training time or unpaid travelling time between appointments (HMRC, 2013).

#### *Consequences of policy changes for adult social care*

Policy changes introduced since the 1990s have led to marked changes within the adult care sector (which is the key focus here). First there has been a shift from residential care to more domiciliary care to enable people to live longer in their own homes. Secondly an expansion of private sector employment, following the introduction of a mixed-economy of care, often has resulted in less advantageous contracts for workers in the private sector compared with those working in the public sector. Thirdly, more recently, there has been an increase in uptake of direct payments which were designed to give those eligible for publicly funded care services more choice and flexibility over the purchase of their services.

It is estimated that the adult social care sector in England employed 1.5 million people in 2012. There were an estimated 1.63 million jobs in adult social care as people may have more than one job. In contrast to some sectors, adult social care expanded during the recession and is projected to continue to grow (Skills for Care, 2013a). Estimates for 2012 indicate that most jobs in adult social care were in domiciliary care (42 per cent) and



residential care (40 per cent), and the remainder in community care (14 per cent) and day care (4 per cent) (Skills for Care, 2013a).

### *Future prospects*

Looking to the future, labour market projections suggest that new job openings due to retirements of existing staff as well as employment growth will be significant (Tamkin and Behling, 2012). The growth and ageing of the UK population is likely to lead to a 20 per cent increase in demand for residential care, home care, day centres and meals per decade.

The largest occupational group within the adult social care sector is care workers, followed by those working in roles that do not involve direct care or managerial or professional roles (classified in some statistics as 'other roles'). Care worker occupations are considered to be low-qualified jobs. If care workers do not already have a relevant qualification, employers will often require a readiness to embark on Level 2 training in health and social care. Some may have been trained up to Level 3 and may still be working as care workers, and some may have higher qualifications but may choose to work in entry level roles as a stepping stone to other roles or due to lack of other opportunities (this may be the case particularly for migrants). It should be noted that while care workers may have low level formal qualifications, their job requires soft skills which can be considered at least equally important as formal qualifications (Cangiano et al., 2009), such that in the eyes of employers there are 'skilled' roles.

Statistics for 2011 indicate that there is unmet demand for labour, with a 3.7 per cent vacancy rate for direct care (this includes care workers and senior care workers) and a steady increase in notifications to Jobcentres for vacancies for 'care assistants and home carers' over the years. A turnover rate of 21.7 per cent in direct care indicates a need for ongoing recruitment. Domiciliary care has high vacancy and turnover rates (Skills for Care, 2012b). Alongside projected growth in the social care sector, these relatively high turnover rates indicate that there are ongoing opportunities for employment in low skilled roles in social care.

### *Workers born outside the UK*

Data from the National Minimum Data Set for social care (NMDS-SC), considered to be a robust, although not comprehensive source of workforce data, indicate that 18 per cent of care workers in England were born outside of the UK, slightly more than compared to the overall adult social care workforce (16 per cent). 70 per cent of non UK born care workers were from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). Overall, half of the non-British born care workers have either come from the Philippines, India, Poland, Nigeria or Zimbabwe (see Table 1). This indicates the importance of historical links with Commonwealth countries and the role of more recent migration that took place following the opening of the labour market in 2004 to Eastern and Central European countries (including Poland).

The share of non-British born care workers varies across England, with the largest single concentration in London, followed by the South East, and the lowest percentage in the northern England (Skills for Care, 2012a, work sheet 10). A substantial share of non-British born care workers also works in the West Midlands (18%), where the fieldwork took place.

As Table 1 shows, the most frequently represented nationalities are similar to those found across England. Different nationalities may be found more frequently in some parts of the West Midlands than in others.

Just under one fifth of care workers (18 per cent) in the UK and the West Midlands respectively are Non-British (see Table 1), with the majority coming from Non-EU countries.

**Table 1: Adult social care workforce in England and the West Midlands by nationality (August 2013)**

Nationality	England			West Midlands		
	All Workers	Care Worker	Other job roles <sup>1</sup>	All Workers	Care Worker	Other job roles <sup>1</sup>
<b>I. British/Non-British</b>						
British	84%	82%	90%	88%	82%	94%
Non-British	16%	18%	10%	12%	18%	7%
<b>II. Non-British - by EU/Non-EU</b>						
Non-EU	70%	70%	55%	74%	70%	58%
EU (non-British)	30%	30%	45%	26%	30%	42%
<b>III. Non British - Top 5 nationalities<sup>2</sup></b>						
Philippines	13%	11%	11%	11%	9%	9%
India	10%	9%	10%	15%	13%	20%
Poland	10%	10%	19%	8%	8%	19%
Nigeria	9%	11%	2%	not in top 5	not in top 5	not in top 5
Zimbabwe	8%	9%	2%	15%	17%	2%
Jamaica	not in top 5	not in top 5	not in top 5	5%	6%	5%
All other countries	50%	50%	56%	46%	48%	45%
Base (non British)	73.125	48.769	6.562	6.109	4.264	468

Source: National Minimum Data Set, Regional key statistics for the West Midlands, Tables 11 and 12 <https://www.nmds-sc-online.org.uk/research/researchdocs.aspx?id=10>

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Other job roles are defined as those not involving direct care or managerial and professional roles.

<sup>2</sup> Other nationalities featured in the top 5 nationalities of the 16 local authorities within the West Midlands among care workers are: Ireland (Coventry, Solihull); Romania (Herefordshire, Worcestershire); Ghana (Walsall, Stoke-on Trent, Telford and Wrekin); South Africa (Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Solihull, Telford and Wrekin); and Thailand (Shropshire).

## A1.4 Key features of employment in the retail sector

### *Drivers of employment change*

The retail sector (defined as division 47 of the 2007 Standard Industrial Classification) accounts for around 10 per cent of all employment in the UK (Gambin et al, 2012). Between 2008 and 2011, there was a sharp decline in employment in the sector as 4 per cent of jobs in the sector were lost, but the latest Working Futures projections show that retail is

expected to resume growth in 2013, albeit at a slower rate than in the past (Wilson and Homenidou, 2012). Alongside generally slow post-recession growth, a key issue for lower skilled work in the retail sector is the increasing use of technology to substitute for sales and customer services jobs, particularly the increased use of automated point of sales technologies and the growth of on-line retailing.

### *The profile of employment in the retail sector*

Much of the growth in the retail sector is expected to be in part-time jobs, estimated to increase from 52 per cent of jobs in the sector to 56 per cent between 2010 and 2020. There is a higher incidence of part-time work in the retail sector compared to the economy as a whole, and part-time employment in the retail sector in the UK is higher than in other EU countries and the US (Oxford Institute of Retail Management, 2004).

Retail is a particularly important source of entry to the labour market for many groups, particularly young people and women with family responsibilities (BMG, 2006; Bunt et al., 2005; DTZ Consulting, 2009; Skillsmart, 2004a). More than 30 per cent of employees in the retail sector are aged between 16 and 24 years old, compared to around 13 per cent across all sectors (Gambin et al, 2012). Women account for 58 per cent of employees in the retail sector, compared to 46 per cent of all employees (Gambin et al, 2012). The growth of part-time employment, alongside non-standard hours of work, which are common features of the sector, have been held to be particularly beneficial to these groups who may otherwise struggle to find work that allows them to manage their commitments outside work. Other groups that are over-represented in the retail sector include ethnic minorities and people over 45.

Self-employment in the retail sector is less common than in the economy as a whole, accounting for around 8 per cent of workers in retail, compared to 14 per cent of workers across all sectors (Gambin et al, 2012).

Pay in the retail sector, particularly in sales and customer service roles, has traditionally been low (Lindsay and McQuaid, 2004). Due to the relatively high proportion of workers paid at or near the National Minimum Wage (NMW), the sector is particularly susceptible to changes in the NMW and there is evidence that this is one of the contributing factors to the increased use of part-time roles and flexible or zero-hour contracts in the sector (Tomlinson and Walker, 2010).

### *Migrants in the retail sector*

Traditionally, migration has had a limited impact on the retail sector, and relatively few migrants have found employment in the sector (Salt, 2005). There is some evidence that recent migrants have been willing to take jobs in retail that were otherwise hard-to-fill, for example night work (Hogarth *et al.*, 2003) and also that the number of migrants working in the retail sector is growing. Drawing on data from the UK Border Agency, Mosley et al (2012) estimate that 41,000 migrants were registered as retail employees in the period between 2004 and 2009, making the retail sector the sixth largest by registration.

More recent research on employment of migrants using data from the Labour Force Survey highlights the continuing importance of retail for migrant employment (Frontier Economics, 2013). The sector accounted for 9 per cent of migrants employed in the UK in 2012, compared with 10 per cent in 1994. Other sectors saw more marked changes than retail in the share of migrant workers over this period.

## **A2. SUPPLY OF WORKERS TO LOW-SKILLED ROLES**

This section examines the literature on the extent to which lower-skilled UK workers and migrants possess the skills and attributes that are advantageous in seeking employment, maintaining employment and progressing within employment. First, it considers the profile of the lower-skilled workforce and the impact the recession has had on the characteristics of the supply of workers to lower skilled roles. In particular, it looks at the phenomenon of 'bumping down' in which higher skilled individuals, due to the lack of availability of higher skilled work, compete with lower skilled people for lower-skilled roles. Migrant workers often possess higher-level qualifications, but a feature of recent migration flows is the increasing proportion of higher-skilled migrants working in lower-skilled jobs. Section A2.2 further outlines this phenomenon. Section A2.3 examines the barriers faced by lower-skilled workers in seeking employment and reviews literature which attempts to explain why migrants are less likely to face some of these barriers. Section A2.4 moves the focus away from finding and maintaining employment to progressing within employment, looking particularly at the literature available on the availability of skills training and the role it plays in career development for lower-skilled workers. Following these sections which have a generic focus, and so which are of relevance to both social care and retail, sections A2.5 and A2.6 are concerned with summarising some supply-side issues of particular importance for the social care and retail sectors, respectively.

### **A2.1 Changing qualification profiles of workers / the labour force**

The increase in the proportion of the workforce who possess higher level qualifications means that those without qualifications have become increasingly disadvantaged in the labour market as employers are able to directly compare those with and without qualifications and place greater emphasis on formal academic, technical and vocational qualifications (Atkinson and Williams, 2003). This process became particularly apparent as demand for labour fell during the recession. Lower skilled people are increasingly facing competition from those with higher qualifications who have been forced to 'bump down' in the labour market by a general shortage of vacancies.

Additionally, authors such as Atkinson and Williams (*ibid*) have found that a lack of qualifications can impede progression as when people with low or no qualifications seek to move up in the labour market they face competition from those with higher level qualifications.

There is also some evidence that there is a skills 'mismatch' between the skills possessed by job seekers and employees and the skills employers are looking for (see, for example, Belt et al., 2010; Frogner, 2002; Green et al., 1998). Evidence from the Employer Skills Survey has consistently shown that a lack of skills, work experience and appropriate

qualifications within the applicant pool are primary reasons employers have vacancies they consider 'hard to fill' (Davies et al., 2012; Winterbotham et al., 2014). A particular issue raised in the literature relates to the demand for 'soft' or generic skills (such as punctuality, reliability, trustworthiness, sociability and a positive attitude, which are applicable across many jobs/sectors) by the expanding service sector (as mentioned in section A1.3 in relation to social care and explored in section A3.1). Drawing on survey of CBI member employers, a CBI report (2007) revealed that in recruitment decisions, employers gave an 80 per cent weighting to non-certified soft and generic skills compared to a 20 per cent weighting to skills amenable to certification. Possession of a positive attitude and these types of generic employability skills, and how to deploy them, has been shown to be associated with possession of formal qualifications, as well as personal characteristics (Hillage and Pollard, 1998), primarily social class, and there is evidence of a marked reluctance by employers to invest in the development of these skills. The importance of a positive attitude was endorsed in a survey of CBI member employers in 2013 (CBI, 2013) which showed that the most important factors employers weigh up when recruiting school or college leavers are their attitudes to work (mentioned by 78 per cent of respondents), followed by their general aptitudes (mentioned by 57 per cent of respondents).

As a result, a substantial proportion of lower skilled people face cumulative disadvantage; indeed, as the number of individuals with no qualifications decreases, this has become more apparent (Hasluck, 2011a). While recession and longer-term restructuring in the economy have hit all groups, those with no or low qualifications, and those with lower skill levels, have been hit particularly hard. While higher skilled people can 'bump down' in the labour market to take less skilled work, those with lower skills are confined to particular segments of the labour market by their lack of skills and so are limited to competing for only a subset of all jobs available. They are also vulnerable to supply-side shocks of the type represented by influxes of migrants, many of whom possess higher qualifications and higher skill levels. Consequently, there is a risk that labour market change may result in the residualisation of lower-skilled workers as they are left behind by a labour market that requires skills, attitudes and characteristics that they do not have.

## **A2.2 Migration flows – quantity and quality**

There are several different approaches to explaining migration flows. According to the neoclassical economic theory approach migration (and subsequent return) decisions are based on individuals' rational assessment about maximising earnings from employment over a period, in other words, an individual would move for a more lucrative job and then return once target earnings have been achieved or economic conditions have improved (Sjaastad, 1962). This suggests that the supply of migrant workers is determined by their assessment of the labour market opportunities in their origin country, the destination country and competing destination countries. 'Push' factors from origin countries include a lack of appropriate employment opportunities, high unemployment, low wages and poor life chances more generally. 'Pull' factors to destination countries include a greater quantity and variety of employment opportunities, higher wages and the prospect of realising greater financial returns in the short- and medium-term than in the origin country.

The large inflows of A8 migrants to the UK in the period from 2004 to 2007 coincided with three circumstances favouring migration from eastern and central Europe to the UK:

- a buoyant labour market in the UK;
- much higher unemployment rates in key migrant source countries than the UK; and
- exchange rate differentials that favoured migration to the UK.

Buffer theory suggests that as the UK entered recession, migrant workers would return home, freeing-up jobs for the local population (Dobson et al., 2009). However, as the migrants' countries of origin also entered recession, the differential between these countries and the UK did not narrow enough to make mass return migration a significant phenomenon. Furthermore, as Pijpers (2008) has noted, in practice, 'orderly' migration flows in response to economic factors do not correspond to the 'messy' pattern of migration dynamics in the EU.

While economic factors are of key importance in the decisions of migrant workers they are not the only factors. Krings et al. (2013) use the concept of 'worklife pathways' to understand the way in which moves abroad (especially for young well-educated people within the EU) are not only work-related but also involve lifestyle choices as part of a broader aspiration. Hence, other factors identified in the literature include:

- social networks created and recreated by migrant workers as they move (Epstein, 2008) which, once established, can perpetuate migration flows even in the absence of the initial migration trigger (McGovern, 2007);
- a desire to explore other countries and cultures (Williams, 2007); and
- to learn and practise a new language (and here the global reach of the English language is important in the case of the UK) (Green et al., 2007).

So, for some migrants with higher levels of education employment in less skilled jobs may not represent labour market entrapment, but rather offer an opportunity for personal self-development by acquiring competencies (in social and language terms) which may be useful at a later stage of their labour market career (Williams, 2009).

Occupationally, migrant employment has traditionally displayed a bi-polar distribution in which migrant employment relative to employment of the UK-born has been greatest in the highest and lowest-skilled jobs. However, this bi-polar distribution is less apparent amongst more recent cohorts of migrant workers, who have been disproportionately concentrated in less-skilled occupations irrespective of their skill levels (see Green et al. (2010) for evidence from the East Midlands and Turner (2010) for evidence from Ireland). This suggests that recent arrivals are becoming increasingly segmented at the lower end of the labour market, with potential consequences for employment opportunities for low skilled people.

### **A2.3 Barriers to employment**

There has been a large amount of research looking at the barriers faced by lower-skilled workers in finding employment in low-skilled jobs. This focuses on the ways in which lower-skilled workers may be particularly hindered by personal circumstances and the locational and societal context in which they are seeking work (see, for example, Green and Owen, 2006; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) and the ways in which barriers interact with, and reinforce, each other.

### *Factors impinging on employability*

Following McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) 'employability framework', these can be divided into three broad areas:

- Barriers related to individual characteristics - including possession of sought-after qualifications, skills and attributes; previous employment experience; demographic characteristics; health; and the ability to be geographically mobile. A lack of qualifications and employment experience means that there is a limited pool of jobs to which individuals can apply. Poor health may impact on jobs which can be undertaken. Individuals who are geographically immobile have access to a smaller pool of jobs.
- Barriers related to personal circumstances - including childcare and other caring responsibilities; access to transport; and access to financial capital. Caring responsibilities may limit the spatial and temporal range of jobs that individuals can undertake. Similarly, individuals lacking private transport are limited to a smaller geographical area in which they can feasibly travel to work.
- Barriers related to external factors, which include both barriers related to demand - such as the state of the macro economy and the quantity and nature of demand in local labour markets, vacancy characteristics and recruitment practices, and also the differential impact of enabling support factors, including policies related to employment, transport, childcare, etc., which may help individuals to take up jobs which they could not undertake without such support.

In addition to facing barriers to finding employment, lower-skilled people may experience barriers to sustaining employment in insecure jobs, and so get caught in a 'low pay, no pay' cycle (Shildrick et al, 2010). However, there is relatively little literature which addresses questions of sustainable employment, despite the increasing emphasis placed on this in policy-making. This has been partially addressed in more recent research (Green et al., 2013), which has critiqued McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) 'employability framework', highlighting some of the same factors noted above, but also placing greater emphasis on the role of employer/ organisational practices in influencing the employment of lower-skilled individuals through their commitment to training, their recruitment and selection practices, and the nature of their working practices. Green et al. (2013) also highlight the importance of local contextual factors, including local labour market operation and norms, in influencing employability.

### *The role of wage levels*

Economic theory suggests that there should be more opportunities for employment in the UK compared to the countries of northern Europe. Although wage levels for lower-skilled workers are usually higher in northern Europe, these higher wage levels come as a result of wage-setting institutions in these countries ensuring that low-skilled workers are paid above what is considered the market rate, as well as an acceptance that when demand for labour in these countries falls, low-skilled workers are more likely to lose their jobs because of the relative cost of employing them (Krugman, 1994). Consequently, low-skilled work in these countries is characterised by its temporary and part-time nature (DiPrete, 2005). In contrast, in the UK (and the USA), wage levels are more responsive to market conditions, which

makes employment more resistant to weakening labour demand, but also means that low-skilled workers are more susceptible to low pay, particularly during recession.

### *Moves into and out of employment*

However, this does not mean that low-skilled workers in the UK are not particularly susceptible to losing their jobs in an economic downturn. Research by Kenway (2008) has shown that almost half of the men and a third of the women making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance had last claimed that benefit less than six months previously. Similarly, Harker (2006) found that almost 70 per cent of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claims were repeat claims, with 40 per cent of claimants who moved into work returning to benefit within six months. Green et al. (2007) found that when looking at the usual occupation of JSA claimants, those who had worked in less-skilled occupations were the most likely to churn between employment and unemployment. Temporary employment is a common feature of the hospitality industry, but has also become increasingly prevalent in other sectors as employers seek to maximise flexibility and minimise costs. Gregory (2000) has found that once someone has been out of work, they are more likely to re-enter work in a low-skilled, low-paid, insecure occupation. As a result, lower-skilled people are vulnerable to 'churning' between period of employment and unemployment, between being in paid work and being on benefits. Even when spells of unemployment are of relatively short duration, frequent job changes, in particular a series of horizontal moves between similar jobs, precludes skills development and progress in employment. This, combined with perceived difficulties and delays in restarting claiming benefits after a period of employment, act as a disincentive for lower-skilled workers to take temporary employment (Atfield, et al, 2011; Lindsay and McQuaid, 2004).

### *Differences in 'frames of reference'*

A key issue arising is the extent to which barriers to finding and sustaining employment are differentially experienced by migrants vis-à-vis UK-born workers. A small amount of literature also attempts to explain why migrants may not experience the same difficulties. In terms of labour supply characteristics, Anderson and Ruhs (2010: 27) emphasise that: "potential workers are differentially constrained and have different frames of reference". This means that motivations to work in particular types of job vary and that what is acceptable to some potential workers may not be acceptable to others, and so there may be differentiated pathways in the labour market. A low paid job, with unsocial hours, few prospects for development and uncertainty about whether it will continue beyond the short-term may be very unattractive to some jobseekers but be acceptable to others. Previous research has shown that some groups of migrant workers, particularly those recent migrants from A8 countries who need to earn money immediately and expect their stay in the UK to be for a limited period, are more likely to accept temporary employment with unsociable hours, which is regarded as unsuitable by lower-skilled British-born workers (Atfield et al., 2011). Likewise, migrants with high levels of hard and soft skills, seeing a particular job as a temporary 'stepping stone' towards longer-term upward mobility, in the destination country, another destination or the home country, may willingly 'over perform' in such roles (Scott, 2013a).



### *Changes in the benefit system*

Government policies which aim to incentivise work may be thought of as trying to alter the frames of reference of job seekers and this can be done by making work relatively more attractive than claiming out-of-work benefits. Recent policies to incentivise work revolve around reform of the tax and benefits system to make work pay, policies to improve the quality of work so that it is seen as a realistic route and, on the other hand, policies may operate to make work relatively more attractive by making benefits less attractive.

The major reform relating to the tax and benefit system which is currently being rolled out by the Coalition Government is Universal Credit (DWP 2010). Universal Credit is intended to make work pay and simplify tax and benefit arrangements, which in turn should address the issue of uncertainties associated with churning in and out of the labour market and the interactions between work and benefits (see e.g. Shildrick et al 2010). Universal Credit is also intended to tackle so-called 'cultures of worklessness'. Hence, the impending changes associated with Universal Credit are potentially important for changing the frame of reference for job seekers and should, if the scheme works as intended, obviate the issue about better off calculations when entering work and remove some of the risk of churning between work and unemployment and the risks associated with interrupted benefit claims. The original timetable for Universal Credit announced in 2011 (DWP, 2011) committed to moving over 1 million benefit claimants to Universal Credit by April 2014 and the scheme being fully operational by 2017. However, there have been criticisms of management and administration of the scheme and progress to date (National Audit Office, 2013; Schmuecker, 2013), such that it will not be operational in the area in which qualitative research is taking place.

On the issue of making work pay, which is central to concerns here, Tarr and Finn (2012) note that as devised Universal Credit may encourage take-up of 'mini jobs', but that the incentive to work full-time increases only marginally for some groups and for others is weaker than in the preceding out-of-work benefits system. Furthermore, given that other costs related to taking up work (e.g. for childcare) are likely to persist, the supposed benefits of working may not be realised by some groups. Whilst undoubtedly an important consideration, the incentives to work may not produce much change in outcome, even if they may produce changes in behaviour, if employers are reluctant to employ them.

However, research suggests that 'making work pay' is not the only issue that helps to shape frames of references regarding churning between employment and unemployment. Drawing on interviews with work-welfare 'cyclers' in two cities in Scotland, McCollum (2011) suggests that some individuals who saw frequent transitions into and out of work seemed to 'give up' on the concept of attaining sustained or rewarding employment. This meant that they did not put as much effort into finding or staying in jobs that they did get. In turn this might mean that employers are reluctant to recruit them because of their work history, or to invest in training them if they did not have a 'good' attitude to their job. In this way agency and structure can interact to reproduce labour market disadvantage.

From a policy perspective, incentives to work may be increased through increasingly stringent active labour market policies with 'strengthened conditionality' regarding claims of out-of-work benefits and associated sanctions. An examination of the potential effects of a

stronger sanction system using international evidence indicates that sanctions tend to reduce benefit use and raise exits from benefit, but the evidence about destinations is somewhat patchy, and there are concerns that exits prompted by sanctions can lead to individuals entering poorer quality work (Griggs and Evans, 2010).

Specific recent reforms designed to incentivise work include the 'benefits cap' and the so-called 'bedroom tax' (HM Government, 2012). The former reduces the maximum allowances to be paid for individuals and families who are in receipt of out-of-work benefit and, in doing so, attempts to provide stronger incentives to work. The latter related to residents of social housing who are deemed to be under-occupying their properties; Housing Benefit is reduced by 14 per cent for one extra bedroom and by 25 per cent for two extra bedrooms.

In terms of 'making work pay' the National Minimum Wage sets a minimum legal wage, but it does not guarantee a certain number of hours, as highlighted by use of zero hours contracts by some employers. Campaigns for better working conditions may make work more attractive compared with benefits. The Living Wage campaign is an example of a movement which attempts to link wages paid to the individual need, yet there is no mechanism to compel employers to become part of living wage schemes (Lawton and Pennycock, 2013). From a frames of reference perspective, living wages may make work more attractive to UK-born job seekers and offer some sense of jobs being of a better quality.

#### *Perspectives on working in the service sector*

The differing frames of reference of different workers have is particularly relevant when considering work in the service sector. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), Lindsay and McQuaid (2004), Francis (2002), McQuaid and Lindsay (2002), TERU (1999) and Furlong (1993) have all found that particular groups of lower-skilled workers, as well as unemployed people with low skills, are likely to hold negative views about work in the service sector, and this has had an impact on their likelihood to seek work in this sector as well as to engage in training in the kinds of skills that would enable them to progress within these kinds of jobs. This has been found to be particularly the case amongst older male workers (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) who perceived work in the service sector as 'women's work' (see also McDowell, 2004) and were concerned about the low pay levels associated with work in the service sector (Charles and James, 2003), and amongst younger male workers (Francis, 2002; Furlong, 1993) who failed to recognise that many of the heavy manufacturing and engineering jobs that were available to their fathers were no longer available in the same numbers.

#### *Differential propensities for geographical mobility*

Frames of reference are also of significance when considering differential propensities for geographical mobility. Previous research by Green et al. (2013) highlighted, in general, a greater propensity for internal mobility (both residential moves and longer commutes to work) for migrants than for UK-born workers. Research by Trevena et al. (2013), focusing on internal mobility amongst 83 post-accession Polish migrants to the UK, provides insights into changing patterns of mobility over time, and the heterogeneity of experience amongst migrants. Their tracking study reveals that migrants arriving in the UK via recruitment agencies, and with no children, were the most mobile internally; and these internal moves were often interspersed with short-term return migration. Those who arrived via personal

networks and with (especially school-age) children were least likely to migrate internally within the UK. The conclusion of the study that propensity to move internally declined over time, and this was associated with the ability of migrants to secure permanent employment and stable accommodation. This suggests that migrants may become more akin to UK-born people in their internal mobility behaviour.

#### **A2.4 Progression in employment – the role of training**

Training potentially provides opportunities for progression with an individual's current employer. It has also been found to limit the likelihood that lower-skilled employees will be 'forced' to alternate between employment and unemployment and make horizontal moves between organisations that do not result in progression in order to sustain employment (Atfield et al, 2011). Economic theory suggests that countries that protect the wage levels of low-skilled workers are prone to higher levels of unemployment and cycling between employment and unemployment, but authors such as McIntosh and Steedman, (2002), Freeman and Schettkat (2000), Card et al. (1999) and Krueger and Pischke (1997) have found that training has mediated these effects in countries such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Amongst the key factors here prior success in the academic system has emerged as a key determinant of inclination to take up training in the future. Vocational training, which does not replicate courses found in schools, has been highlighted as playing an important role also. However, while the literature and statistical analyses show evidence of a correlation between training and more secure employment, such studies tend to lack evidence concerning how these mechanisms operate in practice.

Lower-skilled jobs, particularly in the service sector, have traditionally been regarded as offering few opportunities for progression, either within the employee's current organisation or to more highly skilled work elsewhere. Recent case study research on prospects for improving progression in low paid low-skilled jobs in the social care and retail sectors has reiterated that currently progression is not widespread, with key contextual factors being flat organisational structures and limited opportunities for hierarchical progression in small organisations (Devins et al., 2014) More generally, the 'hollowing out of the middle' of the labour market as a whole has made movement from the unstable, low paid, lower-skilled section of the economy into the relatively stable, well-paid, skilled section of the economy increasingly difficult.

Policies related to training and up-skilling have largely focussed on the supply side of the equation, while it remains the responsibility of the individual employee to undertake training to ensure their employability (Nickson et al., 2003) and the UK vocational and education training (VET) system is largely characterised by voluntarism (Finegold and Soskice, 1988; Hogarth et al., 2009).

Barriers to training supply at the level of the organisation include constraints imposed by the size of the organisation; a smaller than average share of higher-skilled employees within the organisation and a lack of a 'culture of learning'; exposure to foreign competition; limited possibilities for progression or reward; lack of flexibility in training provision; and high staff turnover (Johnson et al., 2009; Westhead, 1998; Green et al., 1996; and Green, 1993).

This last factor is of particular relevance in relation to organisations employing migrants. Having a flexible, mobile workforce provided by migrants may prove detrimental to the provision of training for the low skilled workforce as a whole as employers may not feel it is worth developing training programmes. Research has shown that employers perceived migrants to be more likely to move on from their current job, even when they had a permanent contract, either as they improved their language skills which enabled them to seek different types of employment in the UK or because they decided to return to their country of origin (Atfield et al, 2011).

Wilson (2003) found that much of the training provided by employers was related either to induction or health and safety, rather than being focused on developing skills that might improve productivity or other aspects of employment that could lead to promotion, and the literature shows that this is particularly the case for low skilled workers in hospitality and retail work (Cullen, 2009). Formal certification of skills is also less likely in the service sector than in manual and technical occupations (Felstead et al., 1999; Canny, 2004), which reduces the extent to which an individual can use skills training as a vehicle for finding employment with a different employer.

Furthermore, there is evidence in the literature which indicates that employers target training at those who they consider most likely to benefit from it, and that those employees who are identified as being likely to benefit from training are most likely to be those with higher previous levels of educational attainment (Hughes et al., 2004; the OECD, 1999; Shields, 1998), those who have already undertaken some training (NESS, 2009) and employees in more managerial roles (Metcalf et al., 1994). Metcalf et al. (ibid) also found that employers considered training for lower-skilled workers in anything that was not focused on immediate job and task-specific skills was disadvantageous because it increased staff turnover and dissatisfaction and raised unrealistic expectations, for example in relation to opportunities for progression (see also Keep, 1999).

However, even when opportunities for training are provided, take-up may be affected by a range of factors including: lack of financial support, lack of information about the training available and its potential benefits; family commitments; lack of transport; and previous negative experiences of education (Johnson et al., 2009).

McQuaid et al. (2012) used a stated preference approach to gain insights into the motivators and barriers to participation into significant workplace learning (i.e. a regular commitments to training for two years resulting in a qualification) by low-skilled employees in the hotels and catering sector (where there are high levels of skills gaps in low-skilled occupations) and the care sector (which is characterised by a stronger culture of workplace learning). Pay emerged as the dominant factor in motivations for training, but other research evidence suggests that financial returns for low-skilled employees undertaking training are low (see discussion below). After pay, time was the next most important factor; if training was to be conducted in the individual's own time it would be a significant barrier. Job attributes (increased satisfaction, security or responsibility) did not emerge as strong influencers. McQuaid et al. (2012) also reported that the main barriers to employees' engagement in training were financial (i.e. fees for training), followed by time considerations. This suggests that the main barriers to training related to extrinsic factors. Conversely, employers felt that

employees' barriers to training were related to intrinsic factors (e.g. a lack of self-confidence) rather than extrinsic ones.

Johnson et al. (2009) found that although training in more generic, soft skills may be useful to employers in the service sector, this type of training is less likely to result in people either finding work that is 'good quality' in the sense that it is stable and well-paid, or progressing within work, due to the nature of employment in these industries (Felstead et al., 2007; Canny, 2004). As noted above, the financial returns to acquiring skills or qualifications appear to be lower and less certain for lower-skilled and qualified workers (Johnson et al., 2009; McIntosh and Garrett, 2009; Dickerson and Vignoles, 2007; Jenkins et al, 2007) and lower-skilled workers continue to experience difficulties in finding higher-paid work due to their lack of higher-level qualifications. Research has shown that migrants are more likely than lower-skilled British workers to want to undertake training with the aim of progressing to higher-level employment, but they were also less likely than British-born lower-skilled workers to be offered training or to believe that opportunities for progression existed with their current employer (Atfield et al, 2011).

There have been concerns that the recession commencing in 2008 would have a negative impact on the incidence, intensity and quality of work related training activity, so reducing opportunities for training and progression in employment. However, research based on large scale employer surveys covering all sectors, complemented by in-depth employer interviews, has revealed that the recession has had little effect on training, albeit the gradual decline in training over the last decade has continued (Felstead et al., 2013). Of course some employers have legal obligations to train; these and others may also see no alternative to training in order to meet operational needs and satisfy customer demands. Using a typology of employers distinguishing non-trainers, 'cutters' (those that cut back on training in recession), 'stickers' (those that maintained training during recession) and 'boosters' (those that increased training in recession) and a disaggregation by Sector Skills Council (SSC), analysis shows that employers in Skills for Care and Development (which includes social care) were much less likely than average across the whole economy to be non-trainers and much more likely to be 'stickers' (i.e. to maintain training), and were slightly less likely than average to be 'cutters' and more likely than average to be 'boosters' in terms of training expenditure and coverage (Felstead et al., 2013). Although the data are not disaggregated by occupation, the results underscore the continuing importance of work related training for social care. By contrast, for Skillsmart Retail (the SSC covering retail), the proportion of non-trainers was higher than the average across the economy, and the proportion of 'stickers' was slightly lower than average; (together these categories covered nearly 90 per cent of Skillsmart Retail employers). This suggests that work related training is less well entrenched in the retail sector than in the social care sector.

## **A2.5 Supply side issues: social care**

It is expected that the adult social care workforce will need to continue to grow due to the ageing of the population. Projections published by Skills for Care (2013a) estimate a growth in adult social care jobs between 20 per cent (under a restricted resources scenario) and 60 per cent (under a maximising choice scenario) between 2012 and 2025.

However, the sector continues to experience recruitment and retention problems (Rubery *et al*, 2011; Skills for Care, 2012b). A provider survey conducted by Rubery *et al*, 2011 reported that pay was the main reason for recruitment problems (particularly for independent domiciliary care providers), followed by the nature of work, (better paid) jobs offered by local competitors, transport costs and working time schedules. There is mixed evidence as to whether the recession improved recruitment problems, with the majority (particularly independent and public domiciliary care providers) reporting that recruitment was easier while many providers (particularly homes) did not notice any changes and for some providers recruitment was even more difficult (Rubery *et al*, 2011). Some of the key reasons for staff turnover mirror those for recruitment problems, such as better pay or better working hours. Main reasons for staff turnover also included family responsibilities, given that the workforce is largely female, and embarking on a (new) career within the NHS (Rubery *et al*, 2011) which may also equate to better paid jobs. Pay and working conditions in the independent and voluntary sector are strongly influenced by the commissioning framework set by local authorities and the social care budget available to local authorities.

Looking to the future, Rubery *et al* (2011) caution that care providers may need to tap into new segments of the labour force in order to achieve the projected expansion of adult social care jobs and that human resources practices (including working hours) may need to change in order to appeal to a wider group than hitherto attracted. Currently the sector heavily draws on people who can incorporate the fragmented and unsocial working hours into their lifestyle.

#### *Job requirements and recruitment*

There is evidence that in the adult social care sector attitudes are more important than relevant qualifications as suitable candidates can be taught the skills required for the job. Having said this, experience as an informal carer or care worker, relevant skills and qualifications are often regarded as desirable although not necessary to get the job. Given the nature of the service delivery, availability to work certain hours (e.g. weekend or early mornings and evenings) is essential (Rubery *et al*, 2011).

Although care providers employ a range of recruitment channels, including for example Jobcentre Plus, much of the recruitment is informal via word of mouth (Rubery *et al*, 2011).

#### *Sustaining and progressing in employment - the role of training*

The social care sector provides services to vulnerable people and is therefore subject to regulation. Depending on the type of services provided care providers have to register with the regulator, Care Quality Commission (CQC), and need to meet essential standards of quality and safety which are assessed by the CQC on a regular basis. Moreover, those standards are considered good practice for those care providers which do not have to register with the CQC. Adequately supporting the workforce, including through training and professional development is key to achieving these standards. Previously, regulations have specified the minimum percentage of people who need to have achieved or be working towards a certain level of qualification, depending on the job and the sub-sector. Such targets are no longer in place. Skills for Care (2013c) recommends in its advice on meeting workforce specific standards that following the completion of the common induction

standards all carers should be given the opportunity to achieve a relevant level 2 qualification, recommending the Level 2 Diploma in Health and Social Care. However, Skills for Care also promotes the uptake of apprenticeships in health and social care.

A study of care workers conducted by Rubery *et al* (2011) found that care workers, often having no or low levels of formal qualifications, appreciate the training being offered (including training for a specific user group they support) and see this as one of the hallmarks of a good employer. Similarly, there is some evidence that care providers offer relevant training (including level 3 qualifications) to help retain staff and keep them interested and motivated (see for example, Hasluck *et al*, 2008), funding and in-house rules permitting.

Opportunities for carer progression are limited. However, there is a pathway of vocational qualifications (largely on the job) that enables progression to management positions for the very determined. There is some evidence (e.g. Rubery *et al*, 2011) that many carers may prefer to continue working in their role due to the intrinsic job satisfaction they get from directly supporting people. Moreover, Rubery *et al* (2011) found that those not wanting to progress also argued that the financial reward of a promotion was limited compared to the increased responsibility and stress and that they would not be able to work the required hours due to their own caring responsibilities. Although men were only a minority in the study by Rubery *et al* (2011), they were more likely to be interested in promotion than women.

#### *Migrant care workers*

Stakeholders in the social care sector have suggested that changes in UK immigration rules may lead to a greater reliance on care workers from within the European Union (particularly from A8 countries) than from those outside of the EU. This might mean that greater attention needs to be paid to the proficiency in the English language skills and cultural awareness as this group may be at a disadvantage compared to those migrating from Commonwealth countries where English is an official language (Manthorpe *et al.*, 2010).

There is limited information about the length of stay in the UK of migrant care workers (Avista Consulting, 2009) although there is some evidence that visa-holders will stay for the full length of their visa and that care workers from A8 countries will move on to other jobs. This is especially the case if having improved their proficiency in English language they are in a better position to search for jobs that better align with their level of qualification (Manthorpe, *et al.*, 2010).

A qualitative study of the experiences of 32 Zimbabwean carers (McGregor, 2007) paints a rather bleak picture of their UK experience. Zimbabweans who had left their country in the wake of the economic and political crisis found work as carers in the UK as these jobs offered easy entry into the labour market, assisted by informal networks that had developed over time. However, highly skilled Zimbabweans from a range of occupational groups working as care workers were acutely aware of the downgrading they had to accept in order to earn money and also experienced cultural tensions as care work is provided by family members in their home country rather than by care workers. For some people care work offered comparatively better opportunities to make ends meet than jobs in other industry sectors. Others were able to improve their situation by changing jobs within the care sector.

However, there was a predominant feeling of being “trapped in temporary care jobs” within this group. Those whose work status enabled them to look for alternative employment were looking for opportunities to eventually move into more highly skilled jobs in the health or social care sector. However, on balance, going back to their home country was not considered as an option in the short term by most.

There is evidence that only a small proportion of care workers are recruited directly from abroad. Focusing on migrants whose previous job was abroad, Hussein et al. (2011) found in their analysis of one of the early data sets from the NMDS-SC that most were working as care workers in the UK, followed by those working as senior care workers. Results also showed that migrants recruited recently from abroad were younger and more likely to have higher qualifications.

## **A2.6 Supply side issues: retail**

In terms of supply, there are two key issues for the retail sector in the short-to-medium term. The first is whether there will be numerically enough people to supply the sector and secondly, whether these people will be adequately skilled. Overall, the sector has not faced particular issues in either of these areas, although there is some evidence that when employers are recruiting they often receive a large number of applicants but few from people with what they consider to be the appropriate personality or attitude for customer-facing roles (Huddleston and Hirst, 2004). There is some evidence that particular parts of the retail sector experience this more than others. Authors such as Buchanan et al (2003) have hypothesised that although higher end retailers, particularly those in fashion retail, may have the highest and most exacting demands in terms of appearance and attitude, the prestige and image of these employers attracts those who are most likely to have suitable skills, while supermarkets and less prestigious employers struggle. This has been related to the idea that employers seek to recruit people who resemble their customers, so, for example, shops targeting a young, fashion-conscious clientele will employ young, fashion-conscious people and young, fashion-conscious people will be more likely to seek employment in such a shop.

It is possible that a decline in young people as a share of the population as a whole may bring numerical challenges to the sector due to its reliance on younger workers (as outlined in section A1.4), but the sector’s status as a pioneer for the employment of older people, including those past retirement age, may offset this to a certain extent. Skillsmart Retail (2010) has estimated that the number of workers in retail over the age of 50 years is due to increase by 22 per cent by 2020.

A more pressing issue for the sector has been how to retain and progress employees. The retail sector is often perceived as a sector that young people pass through, taking short-term employment, often alongside studies, before moving on to employment in other sectors. This has implications for training and skills in the sector, as is discussed later.

### *Skills mismatches and soft skills*

While noting that the retail sector, due to the high prevalence of jobs which require few formally recognised skills, is not seen as a sector prone to skills mismatches, Skillsmart (2007) reports that employers note a lack of customer handling skills in sales and



elementary occupations. Data from the UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey 2011 and 2013 (Davies al., 2012; Winterbotham et al., 2014) indicates that where skills gaps exist, they stem from incomplete training (because staff are new to their roles), high staff turnover and a lack of staff motivation. Additionally, as employers seek to improve the level of customer service provided to gain advantage in more difficult economic times, employees' proficiency may be stretched.

A particular issue for supply of lower skilled employees to the retail sector is the importance placed by employers on soft, generic skills. Lewis et al. (2008) found that there is a relative lack of demand by employers for qualifications in the retail sector, so their short supply amongst lower skilled people should not represent a barrier to employment. Instead, great emphasis is placed on personality and attitudinal characteristics - 'who you are' rather than 'what you know' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). This has long been recognised in the literature. Mills (1956:186) suggests that a 'personality market' exists in retail in which the employer "buys the employees' social personalities", with possession of both the right attitude and the right appearance being key for employability. The rationale for this is discussed further in section B3.1. However, the skills, attributes and personality traits sought by employers in the retail sector are not evenly spread throughout the population and are particularly strongly associated with class. Consequently, a focus on attitude can represent a barrier to employment in the same way as a lack of qualifications for many low skilled workers. For example, Lindsay and McQuaid (2005) found that a significant proportion of the long-term unemployed in Glasgow and Edinburgh would never consider entry-level jobs in the retail sector and one of the key reasons for this was that they perceived themselves to lack the appropriate soft skills.

The focus on attitude and personality, as well as the flexibility sought by employers in the retail sector, is also seen in the literature to be advantageous to students who make up a significant proportion of employees in the retail sector (38 per cent of students aged 20-24 were working in the retail and wholesale sector in 2006/7 compared to 20 per cent of other young people of the same age) (Munro et al, 2009). Consequently, it has been suggested that growth in student employment may come at the expense of lower skilled young people (Canny, 2002).

#### *Willingness to seek employment in the retail sector*

As has been noted, the retail sector provides an important entry point into employment for young people and a re-entry point for women looking to return to work after having children. However, the characteristics which make it attractive to these groups - flexibility, part-time employment, non-standard hours - also make it unsuitable for other groups. The prevalence of low pay in the sector adds to this, giving the sector a poor image (Hart et al, 2006) and meaning that some groups are neither willing nor able to consider work in the sector. This is particularly the case for older males with low skills (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2004). Lindsay (2005), Lindsay and McQuaid (2004), Francis (2002), McQuaid and Lindsay (2002), TERU (1999) and Furlong (1993) have all found that negative views about work in the service sector generally impact both on the likelihood of particular groups seeking work in the sector as well as their propensity to engage in the kind of training that would enable them to find work in the sector and progress in their job upon doing so.

Older male workers have been found to perceive work in retail and other service sector jobs as 'women's work' (Nixon, 2009 and 2006; McDowell, 2004; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) and to be most concerned about the low pay levels (Charles and James, 2003). Younger males have also been found to be disinclined to seek work in the retail sector, contrasting it unfavourably with the more stable and better paid manufacturing employment enjoyed by previous generations (Francis, 2002; Furlong, 1993). Consequently, although the decline in manufacturing employment has increased the number of males seeking employment, their reluctance to seek work in the retail sector has reduced the impact on supply.

Negative perceptions of the retail sector are not confined to men. Authors such as Roberts (2012) and Keep and James (2010) discuss the prevailing view that the retail sector represents something of a dead end; poorly paid and offering little chance of progression.

### *Sustaining and progressing in employment - the role of training*

As has been noted, although there are some specific issues concerning the supply of lower-skilled workers to the retail sector, overall, the sector has not experienced high levels of supply shortage either numerically or in terms of the skills available amongst those seeking to work in the sector. However, the sector, as a whole, has experienced difficulties in retaining workers and developing and training them to take on more demanding and highly skilled work. Staff turnover in the retail sector is high; in 2002 DfES put the figure at 43 per cent (although turnover in lower skilled work is generally high, so in this the retail sector is not exceptional). Sales assistants and retail cashiers are identified by Green et al. (2007) as being amongst the jobs most likely to be formerly held by those claiming JSA and note the prevalence of churning between employment and unemployment that occurs amongst people in these occupations.

There are two reasons for this suggested in the literature. First, the retail sector provides employment for a large number of young people, many of whom are students, who see their work in the sector as short-term; retail work is a stop-gap that fits around other commitments, but it is not a career. Secondly, the emphasis placed by employers on flexibility often comes at the expense of job security for employees (Tomlinson and Walker, 2010; Green et al. 2007; Evans, et al. 2004; Lindsay and McQuaid, 2004).

This has implications for training provision in the sector and increases in skills supply within the sector (Hart et al., 2006). Training in the retail sector has traditionally been characterised by its *ad hoc* nature, being largely undertaken on the job and unlikely to lead to a formal qualification. Both Felstead et al (1999) and Canny (2004) have found that people working in lower skilled service sector occupations, particularly women and young people, are significantly less likely to improve their skills through active involvement in education and training and are less likely to have their skills certified than those working in more traditional male manual and technical occupations. Furthermore, while younger employees are more likely than other groups to receive some kind of on-the-job training, albeit often uncredentialed, they are also more likely than older employees to leave the sector in any given period, meaning that training is often targeted at those who are least likely to benefit from it in the longer term and least likely to provide employers with a return in their investment in training.

While internal recruitment for higher skilled roles is relatively common in the retail sector, the mechanisms through which skills may be developed and used to progress in work have also often been unclear. This has limited not only the propensity of individuals to undertake training, but also the transferability of skills learnt across companies (Johnson et al., 2009). In recent years, Skillsmart Retail (the Sector Skills Council for retail) has sought to promote a more formalised career path with recognised qualifications, with the aim that this will lead to higher retention in the sector.

The flexibility sought by employers in the retail sector can also limit training provision. Employers may see little benefit in training people who work only a few hours or whose positions are temporary because there is less opportunity to recoup investment in training and it may also be logistically difficult to provide training for people who work irregular hours (Hart *et al.*, 2007; Huddleston and Hirst, 2004).

The use of Apprenticeships has become increasingly common over recent years. The majority of Apprenticeships are at Level 2 and often run alongside the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills (Gambin et al, 2012). This makes them suitable for lower skilled employees when they enter the sector, but the relative scarcity of higher level training and qualifications in retail means that employees find that there is little for them to progress on to on completion of their Level 2 Apprenticeship. Additionally, in 2008, Lewis et al. (2008) found that completion rates for Apprenticeships in retail were lower than for those in other industries.

Training in the retail sector is limited not only by the high staff turnover in the sector and atypical working conditions, but also by the prevalence of very small, independent employers (Gambin et al [2012] found that over 40 per cent of total employment in the UK retail sector is in companies with less than 25 employees). In 2008, ORC International for Skillsmart Retail found that smaller employers and those that were not part of a chain were significantly less likely to provide training than those that were larger (particularly those with more than 50 employees) and part of a chain (ORC International, 2008). Additionally, employers have been found to be reluctant to invest in training to improve generic skills, particularly amongst lower skilled employees. Cullen (2009) found that training for lower skilled employees in retail and hospitality work tended to focus on practical skills, suggesting that this was because these skills were more easily measured.

Skillsmart has also been active in providing training for job seekers wanting to enter the retail sector. Various authors have noted that although the retail sector is acknowledged by policy-makers as one of the key sectors for providing employment to young people and the long-term unemployed, and that the growth of this sector generally has implications for skills training needs, training provided to prepare these groups for employment in the sector is often inadequate, particularly for those individuals who are seeking customer-facing roles (see, for example, Cullen, 2008; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007).

### **A3. DEMAND FOR WORKERS IN LOW-SKILLED ROLES: WHO DO EMPLOYERS ENGAGE AND WHY?**

This section addresses demand for workers in low-skilled roles, and as such, it focuses on employers' perspectives. Section A3.1 discusses the rhetoric of the 'good migrant worker' and highlights the attributes that employers want from workers in low-skilled roles, while section A3.2 considers how employers use migrants in such roles. In section A3.3 the concept of hiring queues is discussed as a prelude to consideration of changing recruitment practices. A key feature emphasised here is the growing significance of informal recruitment methods. Section A3.4 provides a discussion of some of the findings from the literature on human resource management models adopted by employers operating in low-skilled segments of the labour market. Finally, sections A3.5 and A3.6 draw together demand-side issues relating to the social care and retail sectors, respectively.

#### **A3.1 Attributes employers want - the literature on the rhetoric of the 'good migrant worker' and the 'bad local worker'**

Employers will seek to recruit workers who meet the requirements of the job in question. In relation to low-skilled roles, 'flexibility' is a recurring theme in the literature on employers' requirements. Atkinson (1984) developed a typology of flexibility which outlines the various types of flexibility sought by employers:

- *internal numerical flexibility* - adjustments to the input of existing workers, for example by adjustments to working time;
- *external numerical flexibility* – adjustments to the size of the labour intake, or the number of workers from the external market, for example by employing workers on a temporary basis or on fixed term contracts;
- *functional flexibility* - the extent employees can be transferred to different activities and tasks within the firm; and
- *financial or wage flexibility* - a situation in which wage levels are not decided on a collective basis, but rather where there more differences between the wages of workers, so that pay and other employment costs reflect the supply of, and demand for, labour.

In lower-skilled job roles there is a particular emphasis on numerical flexibility (Atfield, et al, 2011).

Anderson and Ruhs (2012) observe that a key consideration in any assessment of what employers 'want' (in terms of skills, competencies and attributes of workers) is what they think they can get from the available supply of labour. Employers may be quite demanding regarding the types of workers they 'need' in these terms. In general, employers' requirements from workers may include formal qualifications, but also attributes and characteristics (sometimes known as 'employability' or 'soft' skills – as highlighted in previous sections). Such generic skills (which may be thought of by employers as 'personality characteristics') – including flexibility, reliability, ability to work hard, continuous improvement and team-working - are particularly important in the service sector (including for customer-facing roles in accommodation and food services) (Atfield et al., 2011).

Several studies have shown that for less-skilled roles employers tend to place most emphasis on soft skills and may disregard, or pay little attention to, formal educational

qualifications, looking instead for attitude, motivation and flexibility (Keep and James, 2010; Newton et al., 2005; Bills, 1992; see also the discussion in section 2.1). Indeed, in a review of employers and the recruitment of unemployed people, Hasluck (2011b) suggests that employers recruiting applicants for entry level jobs tend to look for an attitude that demonstrates a positive work ethic, an awareness of what the role in question entails, an aptitude for the basic requirements of the job, and 'fit' within the organisation. In theory, this should make it easier for lower skilled workers, who often have low or no qualifications, to find employment. However, some employers may be reluctant to recruit longer-term unemployed people, using duration of unemployment as an indicator of lack of motivation or desire to work (Devins and Hogarth, 2005).

There is considerable evidence from research involving employers that migrant workers are perceived to 'work harder', have a 'better work ethic' and be 'more reliable' than local UK workers (Dench et al., 2006; Green et al., 2008; Lloyd et al., 2008; House of Lords, 2008; Danson and Gilmore, 2009; MacKenzie and Forde, 2009; Thompson et al., 2013). Atfield et al. (2011) found that skills and attributes that employers particularly associated with migrant workers were that they were hard-working, trustworthy and reliable (e.g. more likely to turn up for work), well-educated and well-qualified, flexible and willing to work extra hours, had access to social networks that provide them with support and which enable them to recommend other 'good' workers as potential employees (see section 3.3 also), bilingual or polyglot skills, and a willingness to do jobs other people would not want to do. It has been suggested that these 'attributes' stem from migrants' different frame of reference and consequent willingness to meet the employers' terms. These attributes have become bound up with the rhetoric of the 'good migrant worker'. Findlay et al. (2012) suggest that these attributes associated with the 'good' migrant are of particular significance when there is a geographical distance and/or an institutional distance (i.e. when recruitment is via an agency – given that agencies are concerned with striving to supply a desirable product) between the employee and the employer. Scott (2013a: 1) postulates that employers' need for 'good' migrant workers is primarily about maximising labour power in downgraded jobs, rather than about absolute labour shortages, so emphasising that at the bottom end of the labour market recruitment is "not just about getting people in post, but about getting the right kind of people in post". Findlay et al. (2013) show how the 'right kind of people' involves selection on the basis of 'looking right' for the job in question (which may involve smiling, dress, tidiness, etc); and that in turn migrants might consciously monitor and adapt their appearance to fit preconceived traits associated with their nationality. By contrast, research has shown a mismatch between employers' expectations of UK young people during the recruitment process and young people's expectations of what is required of them (CIPD, 2013).

The 'good migrant worker' rhetoric is in opposition to that of a 'bad local worker' (Scott, 2013b; Dench et al., 2006; LSC, 2006). However, the latter concept has received much less attention in the literature than the former. However, one study focusing on the 'bad local worker' in the context of a meat processing work in South Wales, Tannock (2013) points to the way in which a discourse that constructs locals as 'bad workers' reframes a history of local labour conflict as an endemic deficit in local workers, and shifts attention away from problems of poor job quality to alleged problems of poor local labour supply. In turn, this legitimises the employment of migrant workers. Yet a key issue is poor quality jobs.

Research studies in the food processing industry (Geddes and Scott, 2010) and in social care (Moriarty et al., 2008) suggest that some employers admit that the (poor) working conditions and (low) wages they offer are unacceptable to many local UK workers. As intimated in section A2, new arrivals, in particular, may be willing to accept jobs with skill requirements markedly below their own qualification levels: hence the phenomenon of 'high quality workers in low quality jobs' (Anderson et al., 2006; Drinkwater et al., 2008).

### **A3.2 How employers use migrants in low-skilled roles**

McCollum and Findlay (2011) identified two main ways in which employers may use migrant workers:

- as a *complement* to the existing workforce – offering characteristics that are different to the lower-skilled indigenous labour force); and
- as a *substitute* for the existing workforce – offering the same qualities as the lower-skilled indigenous labour force but with economic advantages to the employer over the lower-skilled indigenous workers.

There is also a third possible way in which migrant workers may be used:

- as a *supplement* to the existing workforce – to provide additional numerical flexibility, as necessary, to meet changing demand; (this may be the case particularly in the hotel industry where marginal workers may be used to cope with varying patterns of demand (Dutton et al., 2008) and in construction where project-based work promotes the use of a transient and casualised workforce (Chan et al., 2010).

In the best case scenario for lower-skilled indigenous workers, there will be complementarities in the labour market whereby students and migrants are not competing with lower skilled workers for employment, but are instead filling roles that lower skilled workers are unable or unwilling to take.

How migrants have been and are used by employers in low-skilled roles varies by sector, occupation and over time. The ways in which they are used are also shaped by interrelationships between institutional norms, public policies and social relations (Anderson and Ruhs, 2012). In agriculture, for example, migrants have mostly been used as substitutes – to fill a shortage of labour. On the basis of an analysis of sectoral changes in Worker Registration Scheme data over the period from 2004 to 2011, McCollum et al. (2012) suggest that the demand for migrant workers in agriculture held up vis-à-vis other sectors throughout the period (i.e. up to and including the recession), but that employers in other sectors drew on migrant workers as a flexible source of labour to supplement existing labour supplies in the economic boom times prior to the recession, but with the onset of the economic downturn the requirement to turn to migrant labour to fill labour and skills shortages has to a large extent diminished. In the social care sector and retail sector it seems likely that migrants are being used mainly as supplements and complements.

### A3.3 Hiring queues and recruitment practices

#### *Hiring queues*

Employers' recruitment practices are important in influencing who is recruited. A number of factors may be influential here, including social and cultural factors as well as economic ones. It is possible that in some instances employers may 'stereotype' (i.e. assess the suitability of candidates for a job on the basis of gender, age, nationality, etc.), rather than assess candidates on their own merits, although there is limited empirical evidence that this is the case (Atfield et al., 2011; Tunstall et al., 2012). However, building on research in the UK food industry, Scott (2013b) suggests that a clear migrant–local hiring queue has emerged at the bottom of the UK labour market since European Union enlargement, reflecting a preference amongst low-wage employers in the industry for newly arrived A8 and A2 migrants and related prejudice towards would be domestic workers. The existence of such hiring queues (whether in the food industry or elsewhere), in which employers order different groups of competing workers according to their perceived employability, leads to the rhetorical identity constructions outlined in section A3.2 and translates into recruitment practices. Research by the Work Foundation (2008) suggests that those at the end of the queue are becoming even more detached from the labour market.

#### *Employers' recruitment practices*

The UK Commission's Employer Perspectives Survey, which is a UK-wide survey of around 15 thousand employers conducted between May and August 2012, provides an up-to-date picture of employers' recruitment practices and the channels used. It showed that employers typically use a range of channels when recruiting. The analysis of findings distinguished three categories of recruitment channels:

- *public free services* - incorporating Jobcentre Plus and government programmes and schemes such as the Work Programme;
- *private paid for services* - such as recruitment agencies or recruitment through the press and publications; and
- *private free services* - a combination of less formal recruitment practices such as word of mouth or employers' own recruitment networks, internal resources such as employers' own websites or internal notices and other free-to-use websites.

The survey results indicated that employers tend to make most use of private recruitment services which they do not have to pay for (including their organisation's own resources and networks) (Shury et al., 2012). Indeed, the single most common channel employers used to find candidates to fill vacant posts was 'word of mouth' (29 per cent of recruiting employers); and they used this more commonly than they did in 2010 (24 per cent of recruiting employers) (Shury et al., 2010). The increase in the proportion of employers using word of mouth or personal recommendations to recruit has possible implications for the profile of recruits. 28 per cent of recruiting employers had used Jobcentre Plus in recruiting staff in the 12 months prior to the survey, down from 31 per cent in 2010. Medium-sized employers (with 25-99 employees) and those in the accommodation sector were more likely than average to use Jobcentre Plus in their recruitment.

### *Use of the Public Employment Service*

Some studies (Atfield et al., 2011; Tunstall et al., 2012) have found that recruitment through the Jobcentre is regarded by some employers as rather bureaucratic and more time consuming than handling employment themselves. Some employers also question the standard of applicants coming via the Jobcentre. It is salient to note here, that paradoxically, policies to incentivise work may actually make it harder for UK-born job seekers with a history of unemployment and economic inactivity to convince employers of their suitability for specific vacancies, and this in turn may affect employers' preferences regarding recruitment methods. Green, Atfield et al. (2013) show that employers often seek out word of mouth and informal methods of recruitment in preference to recruitment via the Public Employment Service. This may be, in part, a function of the economic circumstances and the relative ease with which employers can fill jobs. However, the activation of the welfare to work domain has increased the numbers of applications for each job. Green, Atfield et al. (2013) reveal that some employers are concerned about lack of screening by Jobcentre Plus (and hence having to work through numerous unsuitable applications) and generally variable quality of applicants. These findings replicate earlier work (e.g. Bellis et al., 2011) and hint that requirements for job seekers to make numerous applications may do little to advance individual prospects and may turn employers away from use of the Public Employment Service.

Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme contractors and sub-contractors seek to enhance job seekers' employability, such that they are better able to apply for jobs and present themselves to employers, through provision of training, mentoring, coaching, information, advice and job search support services. Working with employers is a good way to help local job seekers, but this requires employers to be open to these types of approaches – and not all employers will engage in this way. Recent research which examined strategies which local actors have adopted to link job seekers to the labour market has highlighted the role of social clauses (Green et al., 2010; Green and Adam, 2011).

### *Use of agencies*

Employers requiring flexibility in meeting their labour requirements may make considerable use of recruitment agencies. (which match up people wanting work with employers with vacancies) and employment agencies (which employ workers and then hire them out to clients) Recruitment and employment agencies became increasingly significant stakeholders in the labour market in the 1970s and their use grew during the 1980s as employers increasingly pursued employment flexibility and developed more lean organisations. The main emphasis here is on recruitment agencies.

There is no definitive information on the number of recruitment agencies in the UK. EMAR (2008) suggested that there were 16,000 recruitment sites (branches and offices), encompassing large well-known agencies and single site agency businesses with between one and five employees. The same research provided an estimate of 1.3 million agency workers, but high turnover, seasonality and the flexibility of agency work means that it is difficult to come to a definitive figure, and different data sources provide differing estimates (reflecting different methodologies used). Nathan (2008) has guesstimated that between 40% and 50% of A8 migrant workers in the UK work for, or through, agencies. Stenning and



Dawley (2009) and Sporton (2013) have also highlighted the importance of agencies in facilitating migration flows, and in directing them to particular destinations. Some commentators point to the use of agencies diminishing over time as migrant flows mature and both they and employers have shifted to greater use of informal networks as recruitment channels (Sumption, 2009; Ryan et al., 2009; McCollum et al., 2013; Findlay and McCollum, 2013). Nevertheless, Sporton (2013) argues that local recruitment agencies continue to play an important role as migration mediators in the context of hyperflexible precarious employment at the local labour market scale. In particular, it helps to identify the concentration of A8 migrants in 'high churn' sectors and occupations identified by Green et al. (2010) in the East Midlands. Atfield et al. (2011), in a study of the impact of student and migrant employment on prospects for low-skilled indigenous workers, found that in keeping with the flexibility they sought, employers were increasingly offering temporary employment, particularly through agencies, and using informal recruitment methods to recruit for lower skilled jobs; albeit this might change in different economic circumstances. They found that migrants, in particular, were likely to be working for, or to have found work through, an agency.

#### *Informal recruitment methods*

In contrast to the Jobcentre, word of mouth recruitment through existing employees was thought by employers to provide good quality applicants because the employee who made the recommendation would feel responsible for the worker recruited, so they would be more likely to recommend reliable people and ensure that they worked hard. This provides the employer with greater self-regulation of the workforce. Migrants (and students) were also found to have better social networks of family and friends to draw upon to help them find employment, or to be more aware of the value of using the networks they had to find employment; indeed, recent research on the use of internet fora and social media by Polish migrants for job searching, advertising and advice has highlighted the role of some migrants as recruitment agents (Janta and Ladkin, 2013). This disadvantaged the less well networked people amongst the lower-skilled group. It also resulted in a self-perpetuation of segmentation in the lower skilled labour market, as similar kinds of people are recruited to those in existing low skilled roles.

#### *Changes and implications*

Anderson and Ruhs (2010) suggest that there seem to be 'path dependencies' in the employment of migrants; for example, once a workforce includes a substantial share of migrant workers, it may be difficult and/or costly for employers to alter the profile. Such jobs can become 'migrant jobs' as supply and demand become mutually constitutive, as specific jobs are associated with specific groups of workers. Once certain jobs – especially at the lower end of the labour market – are associated with certain groups, other groups may be reluctant to apply, so reinforcing existing labour market segmentation.

Employer recruitment practices are changing; partly as a result of the change from more buoyant to more depressed economic conditions. Declining use of the Jobcentre and increased use of social networks as a route to getting good quality reliable employees is evident across a number of studies, and in the case of migrants, in particular, has been found to be combined with the use of agencies to provide flexibility (Dench et al., 2006;

McGovern, 2007). The increased importance of informal methods and agencies was found to represent a change to traditional recruitment methods used for low skilled work (Danson and Gilmore, 2009). The increased use of social networks in recruitment places unemployed job seekers at a disadvantage, both because of the generally weaker nature of their social networks and also because of their greater reliance on formal job search methods.

### **A3.4 The National Minimum Wage and Human Resource Management models**

A recurring theme in studies of low-skilled roles is pay rates being driven by the National Minimum Wage (NMW). In the UK it has been illegal to pay workers below a certain hourly rate since 1998. The NMW operates at a flat rate for all workers (with some carefully defined exceptions) across all industries and geographical locations. There are different hourly wage levels according to the age of the worker. The levels of payment are determined through agreement and negotiation with an independent commission making annual recommendations to Government on the level at which it should be paid.

In a study of room attendants in UK hotels, for example, Dutton et al. (2008) indicate that employment as a hotel room attendant is characterised by low pay, poor working conditions, shift work and unsociable hours, and high labour turnover. The UK is not unusual in this respect: a comparative study comparing the position and experience of UK room attendants with those in the USA, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands found that across all six countries the combination of low union density, poor workforce enforcement, and strong employers' associations meant collective agreements were weak, setting wages near or below the wage floor (Vanselow et al., 2010).

Some employers may use a 'hard' Human Resource Management (HRM) strategy to maintain a competitive advantage based on low labour costs and substitutability of workers, as in a case study of a company in South Yorkshire with a workforce in which migrant workers were predominant (accounting for 90 per cent of the workforce (Forde and MacKenzie, 2009)). Forde and MacKenzie (2009) suggest that 'hard' HRM approaches that are dominant amongst employers using low-skilled migrant workers emphasise the disposability and interchangeability of assumedly homogenous units of labour. Yet at the same time the employers desire attributes of 'commitment' and 'willingness' to work (i.e. expect that migrant workers may work long, unpredictable or variable hours for low wages) which are commonly associated with 'soft' approaches to HRM that involve aligning the goals of the workers and those of the firm and foreground the human resource attributes of the workforce. In the case of migrant workers, however, the expectation is that high 'commitment' and 'willingness' to work long hours will ensue from the motivations of migrant workers to learn English and / or maximize income within a short period of time in the UK (Dench et al., 2006).

In a study focusing on Polish migrant workers in the construction sector in northern England, Fitzgerald (2007) found that some employers were being undercut by firms pursuing low cost competitive strategies reliant upon heavy use of migrant workers, with low wages and poor working conditions, as a 'reserve army' of cheap labour. May et al. (2007) have found similar strategies in other sectors underlying a 'migrant division of labour' in London, with employers capitalising on the high volume and heterogeneity of migrants to segment labour

forces. Similarly, in a study of the hospitality sector, Evans et al. (2007) highlighted that employers were contracting out services to temporary work agencies, and in doing so were pushing down wages and costs. Likewise Holgate (2005) has highlighted how an employer at a sandwich factory in London adopted a 'hard' HRM strategy which emphasised the ease of replacing workers who did not like the working conditions with migrants from all parts of the world.

### **A3.5 Demand side issues: social care**

Research studies focusing on the social care workforce (covering both less and highly skilled occupational groups) have found consistently that migrants are recruited to address existing staff shortages as employers often find it difficult to fill vacancies with UK born workers. Low pay and the working conditions, including the need to work shifts, are cited as key reasons for this (Avista Consulting, 2009; Cangiano et al., 2009, based on a (non-representative) survey of 538 employers and interviews with employers; Skills for Care, 2010, based on perceptions of 307 recruitment agencies; Manthorpe et al. , 2010 and Hussein et al., 2011, based on stakeholder interviews).

On the other hand migrants were perceived to have a 'good work ethic' (Cangiano et al., 2009; Hussein et al., 2011). Interviews with migrants indicate that, in part, this may also indicate a greater willingness to meet employer demands in order to secure or keep the job, particularly if moving on to another employer is restricted or seen as risky (Cangiano et al., 2009; Spencer et al., 2010). Moreover, it was highlighted that migrants deal with older people and other service users respectfully, which was seen as a reflection of the culture in their country of origin. It was also reported that some migrants may be better qualified (e.g. a nurse working as a care assistant) and while this was often seen as a benefit from the employer's perspective; albeit it may also create some tensions at work or, for the person with higher skills, as this may affect job satisfaction negatively (Hussein et al, 2011). While not a key driver for migrant recruitment, some employers argued that migrants can help meet the needs of a diverse local community due to their language skills and/or their cultural awareness (Hussein et al, 2011).

Together, the studies referred to above suggest that challenges associated with the recruitment of migrants can include English language skills, particularly understanding local accents or colloquialisms, the need for extra training and navigating the immigration system. Some employers also reported that tensions can arise between the personalisation agenda (if service users express preferences for some staff groups rather than others) and the allocation of staff without discriminating against some staff members. Overall, older people appreciated the care provided by migrant workers, and employers thought that if anything had changed as a result of migrant recruitment the quality of service has improved. However, lack of proficiencies in English language and lack of cultural awareness can impact on the quality of care so long as it is not rectified through additional training (Cangiano et al, 2009).

Recruitment agencies report that they tend to attract migrant care workers without targeting them directly (Skills for Care, 2010). The care sector is perceived by recruitment agencies as having a particular reliance on migrant labour because the work is considered difficult and poorly rewarded. It has been noted that migrant recruitment in social care can occur "almost

silently” (Manthorpe et al., 2010; 395) compared with the more strategic approach adopted within the NHS. Meanwhile the NHS has strengthened its efforts to increase UK education and training in order to reduce the need for overseas recruitment (Cangiano et al, 2009). Moreover, it attracted some criticism and led to a code of practice to protect vulnerable countries that could ill-afford the migration of professionals. A voluntary arrangement was reported to exist in the social care sector (Manthorpe et al., 2010).

Recruitment takes place against a projected growing demand for the social care workforce (Cangiano et al, 2009; Skills for Care, 2013). The projections by Cangiano et al. (2009) explore the potential scope of migrant employment within the direct care workforce in different scenarios. Set within a scenario that assumes no change in dependency ratios or disability levels and no change in the share of migrants workers within the workforce, projections indicate that the absolute number of migrant care workers providing help and support to older people would need to increase by an average of around 2.5 per cent between 2006 and 2030 to meet the demand. Cangiano et al. (2009) reported a recent limited increase in domestic carers within some segments of the labour force (including unemployed people) and hypothesised that potential increases in labour supply during the recession may not translate into increased recruitment of domestic care workers due to lack of experience in social care.

It has been argued that it would be better to address recruitment and retention issues among care workers by improving status, pay, working conditions and career development opportunities in the care sector rather than having to rely on migrant workers to address staff shortages (e.g. Cangiano et al., 2009; Spencer et al., 2010). However, such a strategy is hampered by constraints in public funding and the under-funding of the care sector (Cangiano et al., 2009). Similar issues exist in other countries, including Ireland, USA and Canada, and similarly, it is argued, that the solution would need to address the underfunding of care for older people in an ageing society as the root cause for migrant employment (Spencer et al., 2010).

### **A3.6 Demand side issues: retail**

#### *Attitudes and attributes sought*

As has been noted in discussion of supply of employees and skills to the retail sector, soft skills are regarded by employers as important for lower skilled roles in the sector, and there is a particular emphasis on interpersonal skills, personality and appearance. Much of the literature on retail employment emphasises the extent to which the aesthetic plays a role in recruitment and progression in retail: the interactive nature of retail work means that employees are expected to ‘look good’ and ‘sound right’, embodying the product they are selling by portraying a particular corporate image (see, for example, Warhurst and Nickson, 2007; Felstead *et al.*, 2002, McDowell, 2000; Warhurst et al., 2000; Lash and Urry, 1994). Various attempts have been made to detail the skills and attributes particularly sought by retail employers. For example, Broadbridge (1991:46) lists “product knowledge, efficiency, patience, submissiveness, pleasantness, friendliness, and an attractive appearance”, Fuller and Smith (1991:3) note “good-natured, helpful and friendly” and Burns (1997:240) identifies “positive, joyful and even playful”. Of these, product knowledge may, in some cases, be considered a hard skill, but the need for this will vary across the retail sector.

However, the picture is more complicated than this, as different types of retailers, with different products, will seek different types of employee to represent their brand. The majority of the literature in this area focuses on higher end fashion retail, which is somewhat atypical in the extent to which physical appearance plays a role in recruitment (Leslie, 2002). There is a limited amount of literature on attributes sought in other parts of the retail sector, particularly the more male dominated DIY sector (for example, Foster, 2004).

### *Recruitment practices*

The emphasis on 'looking good' and 'sounding right' is seen by a number of authors to have had an impact on the recruitment methods used by employers in the retail sector. In particular, employers have been found to favour face-to-face methods, including interviews and speculative in-person approaches, and referrals from other employees.

Face-to-face recruitment allows employers to screen for aesthetic attributes and fit with the company's brand image (Lucas and Ralston, 1997; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Warhurst and Nickson (2007) quote an employee's description of the recruitment process in the shop where they worked,

"If people were coming in to the shop and just asking off hand if there are any jobs available the manager would sort of screen at the first take and then go back and consult with other people: 'Do you think she is Bolero enough?'" (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007:10)

In their survey of employees in fashion retailing, Warhurst and Nickson (2007) found that 89 per cent of employers always emphasised the importance of appearance during the selection process.

Warhurst and Nickson (2007) also note the increasing number of employers asking employees to provide a photograph along with their CV. This has been a somewhat controversial aspect of recruitment and the UK Public Employment Service discourages employers from using photographs as a selection tool.

Referrals have been found to be of particular importance in recruitment in the retail sector. Authors such as Hurrell and Scholarios (2011) and Warhurst and Nickson (2009) have found that employers assumed that the potential recruits referred by their existing employees were likely to be like their existing employees, not just in their skills or work ethic but in their ability to embody the establishment's brand.

These recruitment practices have been found to disadvantage particular groups in the labour market (Nickson et al., 2005; Warhurst and Nickson, 2001). Previous research (for example, Green et al. 2013) has found that young people were generally regarded by employers as representing themselves poorly in interviews, including being inappropriately dressed. Research has also shown that migrants tended to represent themselves better than British job seekers in face-to-face interviews, despite often having relatively low levels of English. Consequently, it may be expected that migrants would gain an advantage over British job seekers as a result of the recruitment methods favoured by employers in the retail sector.

### *Use of migrants in the retail sector*

There has been little research specifically on migrant employment in the retail sector, and much of the literature that exists focuses on ethnic entrepreneurs and ethnic niches, particularly the factors that may push migrants into self-employment and the impact of social capital and social networks on their success or otherwise as self-employed traders (see, for example, Vershinina et al., 2011; Ram et al., 2008; Nee and Sanders, 2001). In part, this reflects the relatively low proportion of migrants working in the retail sector. It is noticeable that in Thompson et al.'s (2013) study of migrants at different points in the supermarket supply chain, the focus is on migrant employment in distribution and packing, with little attention given to migrant workers on the shop floor, presumably because their number was simply too few in the case-study organisations. The reasons for the relatively low proportion of migrant employment in the retail sector is rarely explored in the literature, but it is likely to reflect, in part, the ways in which particular groups of migrants do not meet employers' definitions of 'looking good' and 'sounding right' - lack of English language skills and lack of familiarity with British customs can prevent entry to the sector for recent migrants.

Authors such as Anderson et al. (2006) and Mathews and Ruhs (2007) have examined the experiences of new migrants in the wider service sector, incorporating the hospitality sector within this definition. As with migrant employment in other sectors, they find evidence of under-utilisation of migrants' skills in the retail sector and further evidence to suggest that employers' perceptions about the temporary nature of migrants' stay in the UK inhibits practices that might promote the longer-term integration of migrants into the service sector and their progression into roles that are more commensurate with their qualifications. As a consequence of the higher demand for English language skills in customer-facing roles, the retail sector may not act as an entry point to the labour market for migrants. Instead it may be several steps into the process of labour market integration, undertaken by migrants with greater UK labour market experience and with higher level English language skills.

A small amount of literature exists that looks at the interplay between migration and race. For example, Leslie (2002) and Moss and Tilly (1996), suggest that the skills required by the retail sector are skills that are not only more likely to be found amongst people from particular social classes but are also skills that are more prevalent amongst the white population than particular ethnic minority populations. In this way, migrants from an ethnic minority background may be regarded as being particularly disadvantaged when seeking employment in the retail sector. Similarly, there is a small amount of literature looking at how the impact of taking employment in the UK that is regarded as women's work, including retailing, impacts on male migrants. This work largely focuses on the way different migrant groups are perceived by employers and the interplay between the vulnerability of some groups of migrants and their tendency to meet employers' preferences for being both subservient in their acceptance of poor employment conditions and deferential in their dealings with customers (Anderson et al. 2006; Lupton 2006; Matthews and Ruhs 2007; McIlwaine et al. 2006; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Wills et al. 2009, 2010).

Work has also been done looking at the ways in which employers' perceptions of young immigrants contrasts with their views on young British people; this work is especially relevant to retail given the importance of the sector in offering employment opportunities for young

people. Moriaty et al. (2012) have found that young immigrants may be perceived by employers to be better educated than native young people, even when this is not actually the case and that this provides them with an advantage even when they are seeking lower skilled work for which their perceived education level is largely irrelevant.

## **A4. ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

This final section of the review highlights selected key issues, and associated implications, that are particularly pertinent to the qualitative work presented in Section B.

### **A4.1 The mutually constitutive nature of supply and demand**

The availability of migrants to undertake low-skilled roles impacts on the dynamic between supply and demand. Indeed, Ruhs and Anderson (2010) emphasise that labour supply and demand are mutually conditioning rather than generated independently of one another. Atfield et al. (2011) outline how the willingness of a relatively large pool of people (including migrants and students) to offer the flexibility sought by employers in lower-skilled roles and to work in conditions that lower-skilled indigenous workers are not, enables employers to structure their working practices in a way that utilises this willingness, rather than having to reconsider their employment practices to create jobs that would be more commensurate with the preferences of lower-skilled indigenous workers. This issue was covered in questions to employers in the qualitative research

These dynamics are driven partly by the quantitative and qualitative features of labour supply, but also by developments in labour market policy (notably activation policy and benefit regulations) and changes in labour demand. The issues of activation policy and the operation of the benefits regime was covered in the qualitative research in questions that UK-born job seekers were asked, and the implications of any changes in job search behaviour were highlighted in answers to questions posed to employers about changes in numbers of applications for vacancies.

### **A4.2 Changes over time**

Both the quantity and the quality of migrant workers and of indigenous workers available to fill lower-skilled roles change over time. Drawing on research on A8 migrant workers, McCollum and Findlay (2011) have speculated that the function of A8 migrant labour has changed as follows:

- 1) *2004-5: accession* – high quality A8 migrants were available and they compared very favourably with the local indigenous population for lower-skilled roles;
- 2) *2006-7: the boom years* – high demand for migrant labour continued but some of the early migrants improved their English language skills and UK work experience and moved advanced from lower-skilled to other roles, while the local indigenous population continued to shun some less desirable lower-skilled roles;
- 3) *2008-10: recession* – the inflows of A8 migrants reduced and the calibre of migrants was perceived by employers as deteriorating, while the quantity and quality of local indigenous candidates for lower skilled roles increased.

The case studies presented in Section B asked employers about whether employment of migrant workers had increased, decreased or stayed the same over time, and also about their perceptions of whether the quantity and quality of applicants for vacancies (including migrant workers).

In general, it might be expected on the basis of the speculations outlined above that while the quantity and quality of migrants might have reduced, the quantity and quality of local indigenous candidates prepared to consider lower-skilled roles might have moved in the opposite direction. Consequently, the relative competitiveness of local indigenous candidates vis-à-vis migrants might be expected have improved over time. However all workers have faced a more difficult labour market since the recession. It is also noteworthy that many of the studies of migrant labour in the UK predate the recession. The qualitative work for this project was undertaken in the period from October 2013 to January 2014, which was a more difficult economic context for the UK than the pre-recession studies of the experiences and impact of migrant labour, albeit the UK economy was growing in this period. Hence the qualitative research is able to provide insights into labour market processes and behaviours in a post-recession context.



## B. QUALITATIVE CASE STUDIES

This section presents key findings from the case study research conducted in urban and rural areas in the West Midlands involving interviews with employers, representatives from recruitment agencies, migrant workers, UK-born workers in low-skilled roles, UK-born job seekers on out-of-work benefits with no/low qualifications seeking work in the retail and/or social care sectors and stakeholders (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Qualitative case study interviewees from the West Midlands**

<b>Interviewee category</b>	<b>Social care</b>	<b>Retail</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Employers	15	15	30	Social care employers included private, public and voluntary sector employers, and residential and domiciliary providers. Retail employers included independent retailers and establishments that were part of chains; retail establishments catering for particular ethnic/national groups were excluded.
Recruitment agencies			8	These included specialist sector-specific providers and those providing more general services. Interviews focused on the social care and/or retail sectors.
Migrant workers	15 (5 EU) (10 non EEA)	18 (10 EU) (8 non EEA)	33	The EU migrant workers in social care were from Poland and Hungary; the non-EEA migrant workers in social care were from Guyana, Cameroon, Gambia, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The EU migrant workers in retail were from Hungary, Poland, Portugal and Romania; the non-EEA migrant workers in retail were from Afghanistan, India, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tanzania, and a Kurd.
UK-born workers in low-skilled roles	10	8	18	Formal qualifications of interviewees varied. They had in common that they worked in roles not requiring higher level qualifications.
UK-born job seekers with no/low qualifications			17	The UK-born job seekers were searching for work in social care and/or retail sectors; (note that some were considering jobs in other sectors also).
Stakeholders			12	Interviewees including representatives from local authorities, Citizens Advice, migrant organisations, Sector Skills Councils, trade unions, the Public Employment Service and a sector-based work academy.

The interviewees were recruited in a variety of ways. Employers, recruitment agencies and stakeholders were recruited by phone and interviews were conducted by phone or face-to-face. Migrant workers were recruited via employers, migrant associations and via other migrants. UK-born workers were recruited via employers. UK-born job seekers were recruited via local job clubs and jobs fairs. Migrant workers, UK born employees and UK-born job seekers were interviewed face-to-face.

Key topics covered in the interviews were as follows:

**Employers:**

- *Background* – including numbers of employees at the establishment, proportion of migrants, proportion of young people, rates of pay;
- *Recruitment* – methods, whether recruit in languages other than English, selection criteria, satisfaction with quality of applications, whether any vacancies are hard-to-fill;
- *Employing migrants* – benefits, disadvantages, impact if unable to employ migrants, etc.

**Recruitment agencies:**

- *Changing role of recruitment agencies* – whether there are changes in the way employers and job seekers use employment agencies since the recession;
- *Supplying individuals to jobs* – sectors supplying labour to, whether supply migrant labour, whether recruit directly from overseas, changes in attributes sought by employers, awareness of any employers' preferences for migrants; skills levels of migrants vis-à-vis British-born workers.

**Migrants and low-skilled UK-born employees:**

- *Background* – personal characteristics; (when arrived in the UK and intentions re stay for migrants);
- *Current job characteristics and work history* – current sector of employment, last three jobs, current hours of work, geographical issues and travel-to-work;
- *Local labour market*: profile of people currently working with, perception of appropriateness of current job, whether some jobs are associated with migrants;
- *Recruitment*: method(s) used to find current jobs, long-term aspirations; whether any experience of self-employment;
- *Skills, qualifications and training*: highest qualification (for migrants); training undertaken in current job – and whether mandatory or voluntary; perceived training requirements for someone doing current job;
- *Job satisfaction*: satisfaction with different elements of current job; perceptions of opportunities for progression in current job/ with current employer.

**Low-skilled UK-born job seekers:**

- *Background* – personal characteristics;
- *Characteristics of work sought* – occupation, sector, hours of work, temporary/permanent, reservation wage, last three jobs (if appropriate), whether on benefits, impact (if any) of recent changes in benefit regulations/ Government schemes, duration of job seeking to date, job search methods, geographical issues and travel-to-work, perceptions of attributes employers look for in job seekers;
- *Local labour market*: assessment of local employment opportunities, impact of migrant employment on opportunities;
- *Training and skills development*: training undertaken, training required to find work, etc.

## **Stakeholders:**

Questions were tailored according to remit of interviewee, but included:

- *Remit of organisation*
- *Employers' preferences for different groups of workers*
- *The role of skills and training policy*
- *The role of wages and the benefits system*
- *Agency and temporary work.*

This section of the report is structured thematically. Section B1 is concerned with work organisation, conditions and pay, highlighting key issues such as the drive for flexibility, working hours and contracts, fragmentation of hours of work, and low pay. Section B2 explores the employment of migrant workers in the social care and retail sectors, whether employers have a preference for migrant workers, and advantages and disadvantages of employing them. Similar issues are explored with reference to young people in section B3. evolution of human resources models in the context of the economic downturn and the drive for flexibility. Section B4 discusses recruitment and job search methods, highlighting the recruitment channels used by employers (including the role of the internet, informal methods and the use of the Public Employment Service and recruitment agencies), the job search methods used by job seekers and associated (mis)matches. In Section B5 key attributes sought by employers in their recruits are described, along with selection practices and satisfaction with the numbers and quality of applicants. Section B6 focuses on constraints in securing employment and covers issues such as lack of skills and work experience, non-work commitments, geographical (im)mobility and the operation of the benefits system. Finally, section B9 discusses the role of skills and training in enhancing employability and facilitating progression..

## **B1. WORK ORGANISATION, CONDITIONS AND PAY**

Examination of the case study evidence on low skilled work in the social care and retail sectors reveals a situation that may be summarised in four watchwords: *flexibility*, *fragmentation*, *insecurity* and *instability*. This short section introduces key features of the low-skilled labour market in the social care and retail sectors associated with these watchwords. Issues related to these watchwords recur in subsequent sections.

### **B1.1 The drive for flexibility**

The case study evidence suggests that some employers – especially in retail - sought increasing numerical and functional flexibility in order to compete. Strategies to achieve numerical flexibility included the use of zero hours and low hours contracts (as outlined in B1.2), and use of temporary/ seasonal staff to cater for peaks in demand, as opposed to engaging permanent staff. Strategies to achieve functional flexibility included less specific job descriptions and a flattening of organisational hierarchies, involving fewer distinctive roles – especially at the low skilled base. In turn this has implications for labour market segmentation, as there are fewer specific roles that can be colonised by workers with particular characteristics at the intra-organisational level, albeit segmentation might be evident between different employers.

Flexibility may work to the advantage of employers and/ or to the advantage of workers. The case study evidence suggests that employers were the main drivers of flexibility. However, flexible working arrangements suited some students and also some migrant workers seeking to fit work around non-work commitments. Indeed, an interviewee from a recruitment agency indicated that some individuals are interested in agency work because it offers the variety of working for different employers (a strategy that some migrant workers followed on first arriving in the UK). The interviewee also noted that agency workers may be in a position to exert more control over the hours they work than employees. Workers with family commitments valued some aspects of flexibility, but generally valued “*fixed hours*” and “*fixed incomes*” in order to plan non-work aspects of their lives.

While UK-born job seekers on benefits expressed a clear preference for permanent jobs, most of those interviewed indicated a willingness to take a temporary job, recognising that it might well be necessary to do so to get a foothold in employment. The evidence suggests that migrant workers were especially willing to take temporary jobs when they first arrived in the UK, but thereafter most sought permanent contracts.

The drive for flexibility is such that many of the low skilled roles in social care and retail are not offered as permanent full-time jobs with fixed hours and fixed incomes, which would offer the security sought by many job seekers.

## **B1.2 Working hours and contracts**

The case study evidence highlighted the prevalence of low hours and zero hours contracts. These are not new features, but there is indicative evidence that they have become more commonplace. Generally, low hours contracts were a feature of low skilled roles in retail, with employers indicating in interviews that the vast majority of workers in low skilled roles were employed on a part-time basis, albeit with different employees having contracts for different numbers of part-time hours. For instance, one large retail employer reported that contracts varied between a minimum of four hours and a maximum of 16 hours. The rationale for this arrangement was to “*increase flexibility within the store*”. In circumstances when students were employed their contracts were often for between four and eight hours per week. While some retail employers routinely offered contracts for more hours than this and/ or fixed weekly hours (specifically to give their employees stability), workers on low hours wanting to increase the number of hours worked (and so increase their overall earnings) might need to put together two or more jobs with complementary working hours.

From the interviews conducted, zero hours contracts were more common in social care – and specifically in domiciliary care – than in retailing; indeed, one retailer reported being in the process of moving from zero hours to low hours contracts on the grounds that there were no particular benefits to the business from zero hours contracts. By contrast, in domiciliary care employers tended to indicate that zero hours contracts “*worked for the business*”. They often argued that some groups of workers “*like the flexibility*” that zero hours contracts afforded to fit around their other commitments, and although one UK-born employee noted that she could “*take a day off here and there*” to suit herself, this did not really outweigh the ‘risk’ and ‘uncertainty’ that some of the workers and job seekers interviewed felt came with zero hours contracts. Clearly, zero hours contracts work better for individuals and

households in some circumstances, and at some stages of the life course, than at others. There was a general acceptance that residential care establishments seemed to offer greater stability in terms of contracted hours of work than domiciliary care employers.

For domiciliary care workers on zero hours contracts numbers of hours worked could vary markedly. One migrant worker reported working anything between five and 25 hours per week. Others reported working at least 40 hours per week, whilst some employers set a maximum limit of 35 hours per week in order to preserve the standard of care provided. One UK-born worker reported having left her previous job because her employer might expect her to work up to 60 hours per week.

Zero hours contracts might also pose issues for people moving off benefits into work. One UK-born worker interviewee in the retail sector was on a zero hours contract for her first six months with her employer and this created a lot of problems as she was claiming benefit at the same time:

*“I was on Jobseekers Allowance at the same time and I never knew what money was coming in, so I had to do ‘half and half’. When I got my hours I’d sign off Jobseekers Allowance if I was working more than 16 hours that week. And sign back on again the following week. They didn’t like me doing that. It was difficult to administrate, and not what Jobseekers Allowance is meant for.”* (UK-born worker, retail)

### **B1.3 Fragmentation of hours of work**

The fragmentation of hours of work was evident especially in domiciliary care, and with the shift away from residential care to home care and increased employment in the domiciliary care sector vis-à-vis the residential care sector, it has the potential to affect the working lives of a greater share of the workers in the social care sector. Fragmentation encompasses variable hours, both in terms of the number of hours worked (as noted above) and the time slots (typically *“breakfasts, lunches and beds”* in the case of elderly care) at which this work takes place. One migrant worker reported working between 37 and 40 hours in a normal week, with a first appointment at 07.00 and a last appointment at 20.50, with usually between eight and 16 appointments per day.

Several of the workers in domiciliary care felt that 15 minute time slots offered per appointment (which were, in the words of one UK-born worker *“dictated by the local authority”*) were insufficient for doing the job. This same worker complained that she was always *“rushed”* – and commented that what she could provide in that time was *“not care”*. She reported that with her previous employer she did not get sufficient mileage allowance for travelling between calls, especially given that she found she was *“having to do three commuting journeys per day”* – given that she did breakfast, lunch-time and evening slots and went home between these slots because she *“did not want to spend two hours sitting in the car”*. (This particular worker had since moved on to an employer with private work (as opposed to local authority contracts) with longer minimum time slots.) The fragmentation of domiciliary care work, coupled with zero hours contracts, meant that some workers sought to work for more than one employer in order to put together a suite of jobs that fit together to create a full-time working schedule.

For some workers in retail on low hours contracts but wanting to gain extra hours of work, not knowing very far in advance what shifts might be available also led to a fragmented working week, and instability in hours and earnings.

## **B1.4 Pay**

Pay for some low-skilled workers in both the social care and the retail sectors may be characterised as ‘low and uncertain’. These characteristics mean that at least some vacancies in these sectors may be relatively unattractive for those moving off benefits

The case study evidence reveals that the majority of low-skilled jobs in both sectors pay at or slightly above the National Minimum Wage and that the National Minimum Wage has become a reference point for employers when setting wages; as one retail employer reported: *“most jobs are going at that rate now”* – and this was the rate at which most of the job seekers interviewed expected to be paid. If employers are moving down the route of paying people at the same level it makes sense for them to offer the same job descriptions for the same rate of pay, so moving down the route towards functional flexibility. This appeared to be the case especially in the retail sector. In some cases, however, retail workers could earn more through commission/ bonuses for exceeding sales targets. At the more casualised end of the spectrum, a migrant worker working on a market stall reported receiving cash in hand a flat daily rate for variable hours worked; (this worked out at an hourly rate below the National Minimum Wage).

In the social care sector several interviewees reported downward pressures on pay. One social care employer commented that what would encourage more British workers into the sector was higher wages, but this just seemed impossible at the current time:

*“You would have to pay providers more for doing the work – and this is not possible. If you are not getting the money in, you cannot pay it. There is squeezing down at all levels – the money is not there.”* (Social care employer)

Another social care employer at a residential establishment reported that when the company changed hands several years ago there was downward pressure on pay:

*The older company was more generous – more generous for nights and weekends. ... It had an impact – people will move for more [money].”* (Social care employer)

Indeed, an employer from a chain that had taken a deliberate decision to offer higher than average pay in order to attract good quality staff had seen this pay off in terms of lower staff turnover than was formerly the case, so saving on recruitment costs.

Several social care employers interviewed linked rates of pay to qualifications, such that hourly rates rose when an employee achieved a Level 2 qualification, and would rise further when additional qualifications were achieved. In some cases, although wage levels were low, perks and other benefits were used by employers to attract and retain workers. In social care these included items like free uniforms, food at work, and paying for training time and Disclosure and Barring Checks (DBS, formerly CRB checks).

In the domiciliary care sector a key feature of pay is that workers do not get paid for travelling between calls, but they do get a mileage allowance.

## **B1.5 Overview**

The drive for flexibility (both numerically and functionally) shapes the nature of much low skilled work there is in the social care and retail sectors. Many (but not all) employers were seeking flexibility in hours of work, and the case studies revealed indicative evidence that low hours and zero hours contracts, sometimes coupled with fragmentation of hours of work, have become more commonplace. Uncertainty about hours of work in low skilled roles translates into low and uncertain pay, so that for job seekers on out-of-work benefits a move into employment brings difficulty in budgeting.

## **B2. EMPLOYING MIGRANT WORKERS**

This section presents findings from the qualitative research on the employment of migrant workers. It draws on findings from interviews with employers and migrant workers (who came to the UK after 2003).

### **B2.1 Roles in which migrants are employed**

In the retail sector employers interviewed confirmed that the majority of lower-skilled jobs were as customer service assistants, including checkout operatives and merchandise replenishers. There were a small number of migrants working in 'behind-the-scenes' picking and packing roles; (these are the types of roles which migrants with poor English language skills might gravitate towards). In general, however, migrants were employed in the same roles as lower-skilled UK-born workers.

Interviews with employers from social care confirmed that general care assistants predominated, with some migrants working in care homes, usually those for the elderly, and others in domiciliary care, again usually working with elderly people but in their own homes. These jobs usually included a mixture of personal care, cooking, cleaning and some limited medical support, such as delivering medication. As in the case of the retail sector, there was little evidence of segmentation of jobs into 'migrant' and 'British jobs'. Any distinctions between migrants in terms of jobs held tended to be on the basis of language skills, rather than by nationality.

In both sectors, the general lack of occupational and role segmentation, between migrant and British workers on the one hand and between migrants by nationality on the other, can be largely attributed to the interactive nature of the work involved. In contrast to the hospitality sector, in which there were roles that were almost entirely 'behind-the-scenes', for example, kitchen porters and some cleaners (Green et al, 2013), there were few roles in either the retail or social care sector that did not require a good level of English. This has always been the case in the social care sector, albeit on night shifts language skills may be used less intensively than on day shifts, and in the case of one social care employer interviewed there was a preference for migrant workers on night shifts. In the retail sector a higher degree of functional specialisation has, in the past, resulted in some roles where

customer-contact was relatively limited, for example, in dealing with deliveries and night work.<sup>1</sup> However, the interviews with retail employers conducted for the case study indicate that a drive towards functional flexibility (as outlined in section B1.1) has meant that even in cases where the majority of a job is not customer-facing, as in the case of pickers and packers, employees in these roles could be called upon to go onto the shop floor and deal with customers at times of high demand. Consequently, there were few jobs available where a lack of good English skills could be overlooked:

*“If it’s busy, it’s all hands on deck. Everybody has got to be able to go out and serve customers, stock shelves, whatever is necessary, from the managers downwards - I go out there myself if there is a need. There’s not a place for someone to hide out in the back. But by the same token, if we have a delivery in or whatever, people will come off the floor to help with the unpacking. I think it’s a good thing, you get to know how the store works, how it runs, not just your own role, so you appreciate everyone more”* (Retail employer)

Excluding employment in shops with a specifically national/ethnic client-focus (such as ‘Polish shops’), there was only one part of the retail sector where there was evidence of specifically ‘migrant employment’ (i.e. jobs that were predominantly taken by migrants): stall assistants in markets. Workers in these jobs are amongst the most vulnerable and their employment tends to be highly casualised with little job security. Migrants working in these jobs in general had lower levels of English than those working in other parts of the retail sector and they were more likely to come from non-EU countries:

*“This is not a life for me, they give me one day and then nothing for some weeks, then two or maybe three days, but never more at a time. Then they take money from my money, and leave me with very little. It’s not enough, not enough to feed my family”* (Non-EU retail employee)

*“I don’t see many British working like me here, just maybe those who have their own stalls”* (Non-EU retail employee)

In the social care sector, it was the opinion of some employers interviewed that migrant workers may be more likely to be found in domiciliary care rather than working in care homes. This was largely attributed to the high levels of demand for domiciliary care workers and the consequently lower barriers to entry, in terms of relevant qualifications and experience and (to some extent) English language skills, as well as to the willingness of migrant workers to take work that requires greater flexibility and is less attractive to UK-born workers. Similarly, the higher share of hard-to-fill vacancies in mental health care than in other sub-sectors was mentioned as a reason why this particular part of the care sector tended to have a higher proportion of migrant workers than other parts of the sector. Mental health care was mentioned by two employers as being an area in which migrants from Africa, in particular, had found a niche and migrants were able to use their experience in this work to eventually seek employment in more general residential care where there was greater competition for jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Cleaning and security work, which was often outsourced in the retail sector, were excluded from this case study.



A consequence of this incorporation of migrant workers into the general population of retail and social care employees, rather than clustering in particular roles or with particular employers (albeit it should be noted that retailers catering for particular ethnic groups/nationalities were excluded from the case studies), was that their presence was less visible than is the case in sectors like construction or warehousing. As noted in Section C, there was little sense from the interviews with UK-born employees or job seekers that they felt in competition with migrants for employment in either the retail or social care sectors. If anything, there was evidence that migrant workers were increasingly facing competition from UK-born workers in the few niches that had previously been the domain of migrant workers because the work had been unattractive or unsuitable for British workers:

*“Even up to five years ago, there was a big demand in the care sector for migrants. People were desperate for workers, there was a need. Now I don’t see that anymore”* (Social care employer)

This employer attributed this decline in demand firstly to more British people, generally, seeking work in the care sector, but secondly to the closure of care homes as people were increasingly cared for in their own homes. This had resulted in an influx of people who had been made redundant from care homes seeking work in domiciliary care which had previously employed large numbers of migrants and which had been unattractive to British workers due to the lack of fixed hours.

There was also evidence in the retail sector of British workers seeking unsociable hours work, for example, in taking deliveries and stocking shelves overnight when shops were closed.

*“British people have been more snobby about the work they want to take on. Having said this since 2008 UK nationals have had to take on any work to make a living, jobs are scarce now”* (Retail employer)

*“It’s much harder getting a job if you are a migrant”* (Non-EU migrant working in the retail sector)

## **B2.2 Attractiveness of the social care and retail sectors for migrants**

In both the retail and social care sectors, there are a large number of jobs for which there are few entry requirements in terms of qualifications, formal skills accreditation or prior experience, which makes these sectors attractive to new entrants to the UK labour market.

*“Poland is lovely, the life there is better actually, the surroundings more appealing, bigger and nice shopping centres than here, and of course it’s more familiar to me. But I can’t earn money over there; I can’t find work which pays me a living wage. [...] I don’t think I’ll be returning to Poland for the foreseeable future. There are no real job prospects for me there, even though I have qualifications”* (A8 migrant working in the retail sector)

Consequently, these sectors are often regarded as providing entry-routes into the labour market for both UK-born and migrant workers. However, in contrast to the UK-born workers, for the majority of migrants interviewed for the case study, their current job in either retail or social care had rarely been their first experience of working in the UK. Instead they had first found work in other sectors, most frequently factory work, warehouse work and cleaning,

and progressed into the retail and social care sectors only when they had acquired the English language skills necessary for more interactive jobs requiring higher levels of communication skills.

While a lack of English language skills represented a barrier to entry for many migrant workers, it was also evident that there were certain features of the retail and social care sectors that made them unattractive to migrant workers.

*“There are not many Eastern Europeans in care, given the number of Eastern Europeans hanging around in [the city]” (Social care employer)*

Primarily, this was related to the relatively few contracted hours in parts of the social care and retail sectors, and was most prevalent amongst A8 migrants. Previous research has shown that migrants from A8 countries in particular aspired to, and often did, work more than 40 hours per week. They were regarded by employers as the most likely to be willing to work flexibly beyond their contracted hours and to take on extra work at short notice, for example, at weekends (Green et al, 2013). However, in both the retail and social care sectors these kind of hours were difficult to achieve. As has been noted in section B1, in the retail sector, and particularly amongst large retail employers, the drive for flexibility, as well as, in some cases, a wish to provide entry to employment for as many people as possible, has resulted in increasing fragmentation of the working day. Employees were offered low hour or zero hour contracts with the expectation that the maximum number of hours they would work, even with overtime, would fall far short of the 40 hours per week desired by migrant workers:

*“I want to own my own shop in five years, so I will save all my money but it will take time. 20 to 30 hours a week is not enough. I can’t save even when I don’t spend, because I am without job for many weeks, and then I get a day again, or maybe two” (Non-EU migrant working in the retail sector)*

A consequence of this was that retail work was infrequently regarded by migrant workers as a sector in which they would establish a long-term career. Migrants were working in the retail sector simply because this was where they could currently find employment:

*“I want work, I enjoy working here - I will do any job” (Non-EU migrant working in the retail sector)*

*“I am willing to try my hand at anything, as its still difficult to make a living back home” (A8 migrant working in the retail sector)*

*“There used to be quite a group of Poles, yes, doing the early morning shift, but they have all moved on now, I don’t know where to. It tends to happen like that” (Retail employer)*

As noted in section B1, in social care, working long hours was regarded by employers as undesirable because of the impact it had on the quality of care. One social care employer commented that they stipulated that carers could work a maximum of 30 to 35 hours per week, but that *“migrants want more hours, at least 40 to 50 hours per week”*. Consequently few migrants sought work with them and they currently employed no migrant workers at all.

Although the case studies tended not to highlight marked differences between migrants by nationality, it was suggested by two employers and three migrants that care work was

particularly unattractive to Polish migrants.

*“Poles don’t tend to go into care work”* (Care sector employer)

*“I was the first Polish person with my company. I know, I was surprised, I thought there were more Polish in care, but no, it was only me. Now, I think there might be one more, I am not sure, but until this time there has been only me. There are others, Indians, I don’t know if they are migrants, but not any other Polish. I don’t know why it is, it is a surprise to me”* (A8 migrant working in the social care sector)

In part, this can be attributed to the unsuitability of the number of hours available, but it was also suggested by two non-EU migrants that the interactive nature of care work and the relative lack of clustering of Polish nationals in the sector makes it unattractive to Polish migrants who prefer to work with co-nationals.

As a result, the social care sector appeared to be attractive to two particular groups of migrant workers. First, there were migrants, as above, who were working in social care simply because they had heard of a job being available and were successfully appointed. As with the migrants in the retail sector, they did not particularly regard their current job as something they would remain in long-term and they aspired either to employment in other sectors or expected to return to their country of origin in the short- or medium-term. This group were in clear contrast to the second group of migrants working in the social care sector. This second group was composed of migrants who had decided that they would make a career in the care sector. A large proportion of migrants in this group had previous employment experience in their country of origin in care or allied jobs, for example, as nurses or social workers, or in other types of interactive work, for example, in hairdressing and beauty therapy:

*“There is no work to be found in Poland – I have tried, believe me. I am a fully trained senior-level nurse!”* (A8 migrant working in the social care sector)

The migrants with previous experience in the care sector were working in jobs that did not make use of their higher level qualifications or skills, but aspired to progress into roles where there was a better fit between their roles and skills:

*“I don’t need to use my training here. I’m not expected to. Dishing out the meds is done by us all, because they are administered by senior staff and we simply hand them out already set out in designated containers”* (A8 migrant previously employed as a nurse, now working in the social care sector)

*“I would like, I think, to get a job in physio, physiotherapy, something like that, in a hospital or still visiting people’s homes. Or perhaps working with children, as an assistant in a school or nursery, actually, that would be best, to use my degree, but I don’t know, the system is different here, so I don’t know how I can do that, but I will try to find out”* (A8 migrant with a degree in education, now working in the social care sector)

### **B2.3 A preference for migrants?**

Perhaps reflecting and enforcing the diffuse nature of migrant employment in both the social care and retail sectors, the majority of employers expressed no preference for employing

migrants. Of course, employers might 'say' one thing and 'do' another, but few migrants or UK-born workers interviewed indicated that employers' recruitment behaviour suggested a preference for migrant workers. As in previous research on the hospitality and construction sectors (Green et al, 2013), there was no evidence that employers were seeking specifically to employ migrants, nor that they would prefer to employ a migrant worker over a UK-born worker because of an *a priori* assumption that the migrant would be a better or more suitable worker. Once a migrant had attained the standard of English necessary for employment in interactive work, most employers interviewed were keen to stress that they were "*just like everybody else*" and an individual would be employed if that particular individual seemed to be the best person for the job, i.e. if they had suitable skills and/or experience, if they presented themselves well in interview and seemed interested in the job, regardless of their nationality. In contrast to the young people discussed in section B3, who employers commented had to perform better in interview because of negative assumptions made about the reliability and work ethic of young people as a group, there was no evidence that an individual migrant would have to meet lower standards in interview because of positive opinions held by employers about the reliability and work ethic of migrants as a group. A migrant would be given a job if they performed best during the recruitment process, but, as will be seen, a young person would not only have to perform best, but they would have to perform significantly better than other candidates. Consequently, employers interviewed attributed their employment of migrant workers to their superior performance during the recruitment process, rather than any specific preference for employing migrants. Several employers commented on how much better prepared than British people, particularly young British people, migrants seemed to be for finding work, both in terms of the application materials they provided, e.g. appropriately presented CVs, and in their understanding of the interview process and how to present themselves (including stressing their personal reliability and work ethic).

Of those employers interviewed who expressed preferences, one employer in the care sector who had employed a large number of migrants stated that they would prefer to employ a migrant because they "*knew what [we] would be getting*", but conversely, two employers in the social care sector and one in the retail sector stated that their preference was to employ British people, although in a few instances they were unable to do this, due to the lack of British applicants for particular roles.

This inability to fill roles was relatively rare in both sectors. As has been noted, until approximately five years ago, demand for migrants was high in the care sector as employers struggled to fill vacancies. This resulted in targeted recruitment of migrants, both in their country of origin and in the UK. While some jobs, particularly in domiciliary care, remain hard-to-fill, demand for migrants has generally fallen and targeted recruitment appears to have virtually ceased in the case study area. The one exception to this was targeted recruitment of speakers of non-English languages to work with elderly people who had a low level of English. As the migrant population ages, it may be that this type of recruitment increases, although other variables, such as the likelihood that elderly migrants will return to their country of origin may mitigate this need.

Most commonly, employers stated that they wanted to have a mix of employees that reflected the ethnic and national make-up of their client base and the wider local community. This was thought to be particularly important in the retail and social care sectors due to the

interactive nature of the work, whether this was serving customers in retail or working with residents in a care home. Having a workforce that was visibly similar to the customers or clients produced a familiar, comfortable environment:

*“Our workforce needs to reflect the diverse nature of the local community. We therefore employ all kinds of people, regardless of their backgrounds. It works well”* (Retail employer)

*“It’s less threatening for our clients if there is this familiarity – they can become anxious very quickly”* (Social care employer)

To achieve this, employers in multi-ethnic areas did not, however, resort to targeted recruitment of people from different ethnic or national backgrounds. Those interviewed commented that this was unnecessary as, on the whole, the profile of applicants they received when recruiting reflected the composition of the local community. Two employers in the retail sector mentioned specific issues in finding candidates for managerial level posts from minority ethnic groups generally, but did not know why this was.

A number of employers spoke favourably of the relatively seamless incorporation of migrant workers into the retail sector in particular. They commented how, particularly in multi-ethnic areas, migrants tended to “*fit in*” and are “*not noticed*” and contrasted this to other sectors they were aware of, where migrants were “*ghettoised*”, a situation they thought was detrimental to migrants, UK-born workers and potential clients.

## **B2.4 Advantages of employing migrants**

Although employers expressed no clear preference for employing migrants holding other factors constant, the majority reported positive experiences of having migrant workers amongst their employees. This section discusses the advantages given by employers interviewed for employing migrants, while the following section outlines the disadvantages of employing migrants they gave for doing so. These advantages and disadvantages refer to their reflections on the migrant workers they have employed, rather than their impression of migrant workers more generally. There were three reasons mentioned for satisfaction with the migrants an employer had employed. First, migrants were regarded as being reliable, trustworthy and hard-working; secondly, they were flexible in the types of work they would do and the timing of the hours they would work; and thirdly, they often had higher levels of skills and qualifications than British people seeking similar types of employment.

### *Work ethic and reliability*

It has been noted above that migrants often wanted to work more hours than was possible in many jobs in the retail or social care sectors, and consequently their desire to work hard often precluded them from employment in these sectors. However, it was clear that employers regarded the work ethic of migrants favourably. While migrants may not work longer hours (because of the way that work in the social care and retail sectors is organised), they were regarded as more likely than some (but not all) UK-born workers to turn up for work and to work hard during their working hours.

*“I do find European people hard working. I just find they are really hard working when they are in, they are committed, they want to get a job done.”*

*They are reliable, they are committed. You know, they send money home or they do whatever with it. Some of the Asian people I have employed, their background, they can be really hard working as well, but more the Europeans more than anything” (Retail employer)*

There was some evidence, particularly from interviews with migrants working for small retail employers, that there were still instances of migrants being willing to work very long hours:

*“I start selling from 8am but am already working before this. I finish every day at 8 or 9pm” (Non-EU migrant working on a market stall)*

UK-born employees also spoke favourably of the work ethic of their migrant worker colleagues, and several, rather than feel a sense of competition with migrant workers for employment, instead expressed the view that migrant workers were deserving of employment, perhaps more so than some British people, precisely because of their hard work:

*“Migrants do work really hard. They work harder than British workers. I think they deserve to get jobs if they are willing to work hard to get them, and not sit about all day” (UK-born worker in the retail sector)*

### *Flexibility*

The willingness of migrants to be flexible both in the type of work they did and in the hours they worked was regarded by employers as an advantage of employing migrants:

*“Migrants take the low-paid jobs and don’t complain doing them” (A8 migrant working in the social care sector)*

This was particularly the case for smaller employers in both the retail and social care sectors where role flexibility and a willingness to help out in an emergency were both characteristics particularly associated with migrant employees.

*“It’s because we are hard-working, reliable, and willing to do different jobs than those we’ve signed up for” (A8 migrant working in the retail sector)*

However, several migrants commented that while they were willing, to an extent, to be flexible in this way, they increasingly felt that they were being asked to do things that their UK-born co-workers were not, and often received little reward for their effort.

*“They took advantage of me because I’m Polish and I needed a job; they really thought that they were doing me a big favour. I used to have to carry all the boxes from the car to the store, unpack and stack the shelves, run the shop, and clean up at the end of the day” (A8 migrant working in the retail sector)*

*“I got fed up, people expect you to do all the jobs and change my hours to suit them – and not me, I don’t mind helping out, but in the end they left me to do all the cleaning and food preparation too” (EU15 migrant working in the retail sector)*

### *Over-qualification*

Finally, the majority of migrant workers interviewed had higher level qualifications than their lower-skilled jobs required. Particularly in the retail sector, this was regarded as being somewhat irrelevant by employers, or relevant only to the extent that it meant that migrants were generally “*brighter*” or had “*a bit more get-up-and-go*”, as there were limited opportunities for migrant workers to use the skills they had acquired while gaining qualifications that were not related to work in the retail sector.

However, in the social care sector, as has been noted above, there were migrants employed in lower skilled roles who had gained higher level qualifications in social care and allied areas in their countries of origin. However, as these qualifications were not recognised in the UK, employers were able to pay these migrants the same rates as an unqualified British person, effectively getting a higher skilled and qualified person to work for less money than they would have to pay a similarly qualified British person. While there may be particular ethical issues related to this, it also raises the question of how migrant workers in social care may be helped to find employment that is more commensurate with their skills and qualifications, particularly as use of higher level skills by those migrants employed in lower skilled jobs appeared to be rather ad hoc and erratic, depending on the needs of the employer on a day-to-day basis.

## **B2.5 Disadvantages of employing migrants**

A lack of English language skills amongst migrants was mentioned by employers and stakeholders interviewed as being a disadvantage for migrants, but this was largely seen to prevent them finding employment in the retail and social care sectors as there was a particular threshold of competency required in speaking, reading and writing English that a migrant had to meet before they could be considered for employment. Once the migrant had reached this threshold, their English language skills were regarded as being adequate to do the job.

Accents and cultural knowledge were more likely to be seen as a disadvantage once the migrant had found employment. Particularly in social care work with elderly people, migrants with heavy accents were seen to have difficulties in communicating with people, especially people who had difficulty hearing or who had conditions like dementia that made very clear communication important. However, several employers pointed out that this could be an issue for people who had very strong local accents, as well as for migrants. Problems related to a lack of cultural understanding and commonality were also particularly raised by employers in the social care sector, with one employer commenting that the way some migrants spoke could be perceived as “*aggressive*” when this was not their intention, and this could be distressing for vulnerable older people. Additionally, older people’s attitudes towards migrants could be upsetting and, in some cases, could be seen as racist. While it was accepted that these were generational issues that could be explained to migrant workers, it placed employers in a difficult situation.

The desire, on the part of migrants, to work long hours, as outlined above, was also seen as a disadvantage to employing migrants. Employers in the social care sector commented that

they found it difficult to deal with requests for more hours from migrants who could become upset if it was suggested that their work may fall below an acceptable standard when they were tired. A related issue, mentioned by employers in both social care and the retail sectors, was that migrants may seek to move on to work where they can find a greater number of hours, or they may decide to return to their country of origin, raising questions for employers of whether their migrant employees would be with them long-term.

Finally, employers in both the social care and retail sectors commented on difficulties in ascertaining who had the right to work in the UK. They commented that a lot of responsibility was placed on employers, and that small employers in particular struggled with understanding the process and were fearful of being fined for inadvertently employing someone who did not have the right to work. Consequently, one employer had decided that he would not employ anyone from Bulgaria, Romania or outside the EU, as it was just too big a risk.

*“You take the line of least resistance. You get piles of applications. You wonder if you will get into difficulties. Will their command of English be poor? So you make for an easy life”* (Retail employer)

## **B2.6 Overview**

It was clear from the case study interviews that the business models of employers in the retail and social care sectors in the West Midlands rely less on migrants than is the case in some other sectors, for example, warehousing and distribution and construction.

Migrant workers appear to be used in some cases to fill gaps, for example, in some parts of the domiciliary care sector, but largely migrants, once they have a reasonable standard of English, compete for work on the same terms as British people, and do the same jobs as UK-born employees in these sectors. There is relatively little case study evidence of clustering into particular occupations or by time of day worked. For many employers, this was regarded as positive, resulting in the smooth integration of migrant workers into their workforce.

There were some specific instances of migrants being needed by employers, particularly the care sector, and three employers in this sector specifically stated that if they were unable to employ migrants their business would be jeopardised, as two of them explained:

*“I cannot see English people filling all the positions vacant in care homes [or the NHS]. In certain areas of the country you would be very, very strapped to run a care home without migrant employees. I know other care homes in X are very reliant on migrant workers”* (Social care employer)

*“The impact would be catastrophic! We would not be able to provide our service to clients. If we tried to get around this by employing someone who can interpret for us, this raises issues of ethics, confidentiality, and further still, the risk that they do not understand the nuances and signs on display by the clients, as well as not understanding what the clients actually mean”* (Social care employer)



However, other employers commented that an increase in the numbers of UK-born workers seeking work in the care sector had made this situation less critical than had been the case in the past.

The advantages of employing migrants were largely those that have been identified in other studies: they are reliable, hard-working, flexibly and often highly qualified. However, in contrast to other sectors, the desire by migrants to work long hours was regarded somewhat unfavourably, and this made the retail and social care sectors somewhat less attractive to migrants.

### **B3. EMPLOYING YOUNG PEOPLE**

This section presents findings from the qualitative research on the employment of young people (primarily UK-born young people, although in some cases, the findings may also be applicable to young migrants) aged 16-24 years.

#### **B3.1 Roles in which young people are employed**

In contrast to migrant workers in general, who tended not to cluster in a particular type of employment in the retail sector, young people working in retail were predominantly employed in shops where the customer base was composed of other young people. This included fashion clothes shops, toy shops and shops selling technology, such as mobile phones and computers. They were also employed in supermarkets. However, it was clear that young people faced particular problems in finding employment in retail outside these particular niches.

Employment of young people in social care was relatively uncommon, which was attributed both to the sector being unattractive to young people and young people often being unsuitable for employment in the sector, as is discussed further below.

#### **B3.2 Attractiveness of the social care and retail sectors for young people**

As in the case of migrant workers (see section B2), it can be hypothesised that the low barriers to entry and general availability of jobs would make the retail and social care sectors attractive to young people with low qualifications in particular. In the case of the retail sector, this appears to be true. Employers commented that they would receive large numbers of applicants from young people (and from older people) and, as is discussed in section B5, few reported problems in finding suitable employees. The retail sector was found to be particularly attractive to young people who had other commitments, for example, studying or caring for young children. In contrast to the migrant workers, the relatively low number of hours offered in the retail sector suited these young people who were not disadvantaged by their inability or unwillingness to take full-time employment.

The role of the retail sector in providing employment for those who temporarily had other commitments did, however, seem to promote a relatively high turnover of staff. Retail jobs were “*for now*”, a way of getting into employment, gaining experience and earning money alongside studying or childcare, but they were not “*forever job[s]*”. Low pay, low hours and

atypical working patterns, particularly weekend work, made retail employment unattractive as a long term career for many young people.

The social care sector, in contrast, was regarded by employers as being unattractive to most young people. Employers commented that young people were more likely to be deterred by the low wages typically offered in social care and to consequently consider themselves to be better off on benefits. They also noted that young people regarded social care work as “*not glamorous*” and “*hard work*”, and without higher wages to off-set this impression of the work as unappealing they were unable to attract suitable young people. Furthermore, they found that young people lacked confidence in their ability to deal with elderly people; (in particular caring for young children was regarded by some employers as being more suitable for young people). One employer also commented that social care was seen by young people as a sector where experience was useful or even necessary, and consequently young people would not apply for work, even if they had experience of informally caring for relatives. Consequently, the majority of employers in the care sector reported that they had an ageing workforce, and this further deterred young people from seeking work in the sector as it was not regarded as somewhere for “*people like them*”.

### **B3.3 A preference (or not) for employing young people?**

Demand for young people was highest amongst retail employers whose products were specifically targeted at young people. As has been noted in Section A, ‘embodying the product’ and relating to customers is a key concern for employers, and this resulted in niches where young people were seen as particularly suitable employees. Outside these niches, the picture is much more mixed. Unlike in the case of migrant workers, retail sector employers often made assumptions about the suitability of a young person for a particular role based on a generalised idea of how young people would behave. Employers expected that young people would be unreliable, lacking in confidence and potentially would alienate older customers by their manner, style of dress or simply just because they were not of a similar age and customers could not relate to them. Young people who lacked previous experience they could draw upon to demonstrate that they did not fit this picture were especially disadvantaged. There were also particular issues relating to the employment of under 18s in supermarkets and other shops selling alcohol.

Despite this, there was evidence that some employers in the retail sector made particular efforts to employ young people. This was largely attributed to a sense of social responsibility and a desire to “*give people a chance*” and provide a first step into the labour market. These employers noted that they would, for example, have interview questions specifically for people who had not worked in the past, use more scenario-based, rather than experience-based questions (as outlined in section B5), and generally make more allowances for young people being nervous in interviews. However, even these employers commented that they would be unlikely to make concessions for people who were inappropriately dressed or who communicated poorly in interview, and that these issues were particularly prevalent amongst young people they had interviewed.

In contrast to the retail sector, the primary reason for not employing young people in the social care sector was simply a lack of young people seeking work in the sector. However,

similar negative stereotypes were also evident amongst employers in social care and several mentioned that they saw employing young people as “a risk”:

*“To be perfectly honest, yes, I would be wary. This is, I mean, I have had some very good under 25s working for me, but generally, there is just a higher rate of problems with this group, like I said. I would have to think very carefully about whether I wanted to take that risk, you know, do they know what they are getting into, do they know what the job involves, or are they going to come one day and never come back? [...] I think the bar would be higher for them, I'd want someone to really excel, and some do, in the interview, I'd take more convincing. I would be a lot more strict about having a probationary period, at least three months, and I'd extend it if I wasn't convinced, so I'm giving them a chance, but I'm safeguarding if you like”*  
(Social care employer)

It was also the case that young people were considered to perform particularly poorly in the application process for jobs in social care. One employer commented that young people were more likely to come through Jobcentre Plus and to send standard letters and CVs issued by them, rather than taking the time to produce something that was specific to the job and indicated that they had given some thought to how they were suited to it - “*they are all the same, they don't stand out*”.

Some employers reported that young people also present themselves particularly badly in interviews. One employer commented that young people came to interview dressed “*for a nightclub, totally inappropriate, you can imagine how the residents would take to that*” and several employers noted that if someone was inappropriately dressed for an interview this was indication that they did not particularly want the job (as emphasised in section B5). This reinforced their impression that young people were generally much more likely to prefer to remain on benefits and that were not interested in working. There were also some issues that were specific to the social care sector which acted as a barrier to employing young people. The most frequently mentioned were that young people were less likely to have their own transport (an issue that is discussed further in section B6) and that elderly people were less likely to feel confident in the abilities of a young person.

*“Because of service user requirements, in that we deal with a client base which has mental health issues, having employees who are more mature is of greater benefit to us”* (Social care employer)

Additionally, regulations in the social care sector mean that untrained under 18s are not able to do some types of work without supervision, which placed a burden on employers to provide someone to work alongside them, potentially resulting in two people doing a job that required only one. One of the social care employers interviewed indicated that the costs involved in diverting time of existing staff to supervising young apprentices, especially when the number of “*hands on*” tasks that young apprentices were allowed to do had been reduced as a result of regulatory changes, meant that recruitment of apprentices was not cost effective. In this particular case the result had been recruitment of migrant workers instead of UK-born young apprentices.

### **B3.4 Advantages of employing young people**

The advantages of employing young people mentioned by employers in the retail sector have largely been outlined above. Where the customer-base was predominantly young people, it was regarded as desirable to have young people in customer service roles to create an environment where potential customers could see people like themselves. Specifically in relation to selling technological items, young people were thought to be better and more enthusiastic sellers due to their familiarity with the product and knowledge of what would attract other young people to buy specific products.

Some employers in the retail sector made a specific distinction between young people who were students in higher or further education and young people who were school leavers. In general, young people who were students were regarded more favourably as they were more willing to work flexible or unsociable hours and they were seen as more confident and better communicators. However, they were also unlikely to see retail work as a career and their employment was time-limited, ending when they had finished studying. In contrast, young people who were school leavers were regarded as better long-term prospects, in the sense that they might make a career in the sector, but they were also seen sometimes as poor communicators:

*“If someone came, a school-leaver, and they were enthusiastic, committed, they would be the gold star, because you are looking at someone with their whole career ahead of them. If they are willing to work we can train them up, build their product knowledge, send them round the stores, get them on the management ladder, and then the world is their oyster, really, whatever they want to do in the company, it’s there for them technical, sales, whatever. You get one or two, but it’s hard work”* (Retail employer)

In the social care sector, while employers were able to point to particular young people who had been successful, few employers interviewed mentioned specific advantages in employing young people. One employer suggested that they may have greater stamina, another that residents may find young people fun to be around to *“make them feel young again”* but in general, the primary advantage in employing young people was simply that an ageing workforce was likely to prove problematic in the longer-term and that young people had to start somewhere.

### **B3.5 Disadvantages of employing young people**

In contrast to the relatively limited information provided by employers on the advantages of employing young people, opinions on the disadvantages of employing them were much more forthcoming. In both the retail and social care sectors, employers commented on their negative experiences of employing young people who were *“unreliable”*, *“late, drop shifts”*, *“just don’t turn up”*, *“not interested in working”*, *“rude”*, *“lacking in respect for colleagues or customers”* had *“problems with alcohol and drugs”* and *“get into fights with the customers”*. They were also described as being the group who were most likely to take a job for a few weeks and never turn up again:

*“I don’t see the passion today. I’m not saying the quality is not there, but I don’t think people really have the desire to go out and get jobs. I don’t think it*

*has anything to do with the quality of people, I think people's mind-sets are very different. I don't think people, certainly the younger generation, I don't think they have that respect, that work ethic, anymore"* (Retail employer)

Two employers commented that they believed this to be because young people were more likely to live at home with their parents, so having a job mattered less to them and they were less likely to work hard to keep their job, in contrast to migrants who they thought wanted the job more and as a consequence worked harder because could not fall-back on parental support:

*"A lot of the young, they still live at home, because they can't afford to move out, so there is why should they try to afford, why should they go to work if mum and dad keep them?"* (Retail employer)

### **B3.6 Overview**

This section has examined employer attitudes towards, and experiences of, young people (under 25) in the retail and social care sectors and has highlighted the differences between this group and migrant workers in terms of employer perceptions and their own perceptions of work in these sectors.

In contrast to migrant workers, the retail sector was found to be attractive to young people, but there was evidence that they sometimes struggle to break out of niche roles selling to other young people. The social care sector was shown to face both supply and demand issues in relation to young people. Due to the nature of the work and the prevalence of low pay, the sector was not very attractive to young people, but there were also issues in how young people presented themselves when looking for employment in the care sector. Some of these issues relate to a particular lack of understanding of how to apply for work and others to how to act in and dress for an interview. However, it is also the case that employers in the care sector, as well as in some parts of the retail sector, make certain a priori assumptions about the suitability of young people for work. Negative views about the attitude and work ethic of young people as a group dissuaded employers from employing particular young people, and this, coupled with fears that elderly people, in particular, would react negatively to young people who were so different to themselves, resulted in a high level of exclusion of young people from social care.

## **B4. RECRUITMENT AND JOB SEARCH METHODS**

### **B4.1 Recruitment methods used by employers**

*Use of a variety of recruitment methods*

Although some employers recruited exclusively through one channel – for example, Jobcentre Plus in the case of a social care employer and an organisational website in the case of a retailer, typically employers used a *variety of recruitment methods* for low skilled positions, even if one method was dominant. For example, one retail employer noted that he would: *"use a variety all at the same time"*, including Jobcentre Plus, websites, agencies and a notice in the premises. The rationale for using different recruitment methods varied and

several of the channels used were considered to have shortcomings. The rationale for use of the Jobcentre was that *“it’s free”*. Use of a commercial Web-based jobs board had resulted in *“quite a lot of replies, but most people ignore the criteria; or you get people from too far away”*. He had started to use agencies (despite considering them all to be *“rubbish and expensive”*) on the grounds that *“more people sign on with agencies so you have to use them to get the staff”*. His preferred method remained *“a notice on the counter – that is good: it is free and brings in a bit of custom.”* These and other methods – including jobs fairs (for social care) and banners at the side of the road (for domiciliary care) – were mentioned by a few employers. Amongst the employers interviewed those in domiciliary care tended to be most open to considering a variety of recruitment methods and were proactive in following up any potential interest:

*“I never miss an opportunity to hand out an application [form] when someone comes to our offices. If they are interested enough to come and ask about work, we are certainly interested in considering them! ... I also always take down details of anyone who calls us, and we keep a list of these. If we have a vacancy, we call them up and see whether they are still interested.”* (Social care employer - domiciliary)

The remainder of this sub-section considers first the structural shift in recruitment channels to the internet and away from the local press, and then four key recruitment channels used by employers: organisational (and other) websites, the Public Employment Service (Jobcentre Plus), recruitment agencies and informal recruitment methods.

#### *Increasing use of the internet and the demise (but not death) of the local press*

Across the employers interviewed a shift towards *greater use of the internet was evident*, especially in the retail sector, with greater use of organisations’ own websites than was formerly the case, and also of other commercial internet jobs boards. While two employers interviewed reported using *LinkedIn* to proactively seek recruits for higher skilled roles, this was not the case for lower-skilled positions. Alongside this shift to the internet there was a *decline in the use of the local press*. A social care employer noted that adverts used to be put in the local press – around ten years ago – noting that this was how people were recruited then, but *“it is not the way anymore”*. Likewise, one medium-sized independent retail employer noted: *“I used to advertise in the local paper – but now a waste of time.”* Yet in the pre-Internet era this interviewee considered that the local press had operated very efficiently – in contrast to what was deemed the inefficiency of multiple recruitment and job search methods - because it was the ‘go to’ source for employers and job seekers alike: *“Years ago, if you wanted a job you went to a single source. It worked well.”* Yet despite universal agreement that there were fewer jobs advertised in the local press than formerly, several employers – and especially those in the social care sector – mentioned the local press as one recruitment channel used.

#### *Organisational and other (commercial) websites*

Some employers reported that company policy was to recruit solely via the organisational website. One social care employer (part of a much larger group) reported that there were *“lots of people”* applying through this route. Use of organisational websites was especially prevalent amongst large multi-site retailers, with certain aspects of screening being dealt

with automatically and/or via Head Office. A key rationale for such developments was reported by a retail sector stakeholder to be “*cost savings*” – with developments in technology and the economic downturn both facilitating and prompting the shift to “*internet only recruiting*”.

However, in some instances where recruitment was via the organisational website ‘word of mouth’ applications were encouraged also (on the grounds that “*we know what we are getting*”) – with potential recruits directed to the organisational website to fill in a standard application form. One employer specifically included a question on the application form on whether the applicant knew someone at the store, in order that the employee could comment on the applicant.

Some of the employers also used other commercial websites to advertise vacancies – albeit this was more expensive than advertising on an organisational website.

### *The Public Employment Service*

A key rationale for employers to use Jobcentre Plus was that it was “*free*”. Reported results ranged from “*good*” to “*mixed*” and, often, “*problematic*”. Key issues raised by employers using this method included first, the sheer number of applications generated; secondly, the fact that the ‘process’ of benefit claimants using Universal Jobmatch generated applicants who, in the words of one social care employer, “*don’t want the job*”; thirdly, implications of these first two issues for employers’ time spent on recruitment; and fourthly, the need to stipulate clearly job requirements and person specifications in order to enable suitable candidates to be identified. Hence, one social care employer noted that “*time wasters*” (i.e. those applying only to satisfy benefit requirements without a real interest in the job) had to be sifted out at the interview stage. In an attempt to obviate this, the employer had stipulated to Jobcentre Plus that potential recruits should have good English language skills, NVQ Level 2 in Care, ‘personality’ and ‘disposition’. Another social care employer considered that “*a high proportion [of applicants via Jobcentre Plus] don’t really want to do the job*”; rather they are treating the application as a “*tick box exercise*”.

*“They don’t turn up, they have no intention of getting a job. It’s just a process thing – they have to say they fill in a form and don’t get it [i.e. the job]”. (Social care employer)*

One of the stakeholders interviewed noted that the social care sector, in particular, was “*actively targeted*” by Jobcentre Plus both nationally and locally because of the number of vacancies (including in low skilled roles) in what is a growing employment sector.

In several instances, in both the social care sector and in retail, Jobcentre Plus was one of the recruitment methods used. In the case of chains with vacancies at multiple establishments it might be the case that the vacancies were uploaded onto Universal Jobmatch by Head Office staff; (this uploading was reported to be a difficult task to do in a retail store).

Some large retail employers used the Public Employment Service for “*mass recruitment*” – as in the case of the opening of a new store. In such instances there may be a Service Level Agreement between an employer and Jobcentre Plus, with a certain proportion of

Jobcentre Plus clients being given guaranteed interviews. One interviewee from the retail sector who had been involved in such a mass recruitment reported that the “*calibre of recruits was really low*” overall, albeit “*some good people came through*”; (see further discussion in section B5).

#### *Use of recruitment agencies*

Amongst several employers there was a reluctance to use agencies and evidence from the employers interviewed and from stakeholders suggests a decline in use over recent years. Three key reasons provided by the employers interviewed for reduction in usage were first the greater ease of finding potential applicants for low skilled jobs than formerly; secondly, dissatisfaction with the service provided by some recruitment agencies; and thirdly, considerations of expense. For example, an employer in the social care sector reported using recruitment agencies in the past “*when it was more difficult to recruit staff*”. However, the interviewee had not been satisfied with the service provided, in terms of both quantity and quality of recruits, and moreover considered that it would be “*too expensive*” to use recruitment agencies in the future given the financial pressures on social care. A stakeholder from the social care sector considered that use of recruitment agencies was “*decreasing overall*” – in part because employers had “*become smarter about their recruitment*”, albeit employers with recruitment and retention difficulties might have to turn to agencies, as might those requiring cover at peak times (e.g. at Christmas).

Some employers in the retail sector expressed similar concerns about the expense involved in using recruitment agencies, together with concerns about the quality of service provided. One retail employer justified not using recruitment agencies on the grounds that “*recruitment agencies are driven by economic needs*” and so would not consider it necessary to apply the required ‘store principles/ ideologies’ when checking through applications for prospective workers to interview. Some of the recruitment agencies interviewed reported that they were feeling downward pressures on costs in what was a difficult economic environment, with tougher competition amongst recruitment agencies for the vacancies that employers made available to them. However, some retail employers reported successfully using recruitment agencies – especially to fill seasonal vacancies.

Interviewees from recruitment agencies felt that the advantages to employers of using agencies were four-fold. First, agencies “*can deal with the whole of the recruitment process*”. Secondly, agencies may be particularly useful to employers in handling and sifting a large number of applications. Thirdly, recruitment agencies could handle issues of eligibility to work in the UK; (something that was cited as a particular issue of increasing concern for some of the smaller employers interviewed). Fourthly, they could vet candidates for suitability for the vacancies advertised – something that is particularly important in a sector with high labour turnover (such as social care).

#### *Informal recruitment methods*

Several employers referred to informal recruitment as producing the “*best quality*” recruits. One social care employer incentivised their current employees to recommend friends by making an incentive payment in the wages of the former once the friend who had been



referred had worked for 100 hours for the employer. Other ways of incentivising “*friend recruitment*” were being explored.

In both the social care and retail sector there were instances of jobs being advertised through posting adverts on the premises or in local post offices. An interviewee from a supermarket said:

*“Jobs are advertised on a noticeboard at one of the entrances to the store - it is near the customer service desk so people can see it. Lots of vacancies are filled by word of mouth. There is no shortage of people coming forward. A lot of customers ask every week – a lot of people ask for their children.”* (Retail employer)

Other retail employers were of the view that a lot of recruitment happened informally. One such employer, where Head Office provided posters to local branches to display in windows, specifically emphasised the “*community base*” of the store, with “*local people telling their daughters and friends*” about vacancies. Such informal recruitment methods were felt to reinforce a desired “*community feel*”.

#### *Language of recruitment*

Nearly all employers interviewed recruited solely in English. The rationale for this in the social care sector is that “*good English comprehension*” is essential for the job, both in terms of communicating with clients/ residents and the need to record information in a log book. In retail the reason for posting adverts in English is the importance of communicating with customers; several retail employers reported having a “*strict policy*” on this matter.

One social care employer indicated that they had placed an advert (in English) with Jobcentre Plus stating that a Polish speaker was being sought (to work with a person who only spoke Polish). Another social care employer noted that in the past Asian languages had been used in advertising – again to provide care for specific elderly people who spoke only such languages. A domiciliary care employer, in one of the more diverse part of the West Midlands metropolitan area, was in the process of advertising vacancies in different languages for the very first time. Similarly, one of the retailers interviewed indicated that in some areas with diverse populations vacancy notices in the window may use languages other than English – the rationale being that this reflected the local community.

## **B4.2 Job search methods and job search behaviour**

### *Use of a variety of job search methods*

Just as employers used a variety of recruitment channels to advertise vacancies, so job seekers and migrant workers generally reported using more than one job search method. However, some differences in prevalence and intensity of use of different methods are evident between UK job seekers and migrant workers.

### *Use of the internet for job search*

In general, younger job seekers and younger migrant workers were more confident about using the internet for job search than their older counterparts. Amongst the older UK job seekers interviewed there was one who did not know how to use a computer, and had no intention of learning, and so was reliant on a friend to use the internet to search for jobs and submit for him applications that had to be made electronically. Others bemoaned the changed and less visible way of applying for jobs electronically. A UK job seeker in her 50s indicated that she felt “*more visible*” when she had looked for work in the past (i.e. prior to the rise of the internet and email, and when there had been less competition for jobs):

*“You felt more visible. Now you feel you don’t exist. You don’t get any feedback. There are so many people looking for work as well. ... I feel the world has left me behind. You could write a letter and you could explain why you wanted a job. Now it is just send your CV online.”* (UK-born job seeker)

This point was echoed by another older job seeker who thought that requirements for getting jobs had become more difficult in the internet age. The particular job seeker cited taking 90 minutes to fill in an online questionnaire for a retail job, which contained impersonal scenario-based questions (see section B5) such as ‘if a customer said X, what would your response be?’.

### *Use of the Public Employment Service*

Job seekers claiming benefits reported using Universal Jobmatch as one of their job search methods. Typically claimants of Jobseekers Allowance had to apply for three jobs per week. For some job seekers this meant using computers available at a Jobclub (or similar). One job seeker interviewed with long experience as a paid carer (for an individual person) indicated that since he did not know how to use a computer his friend down the road with a computer did the searching for him. He reported that there was never a problem finding three care jobs to apply for, but that a lot of jobs were on commercial job boards, rather than on Universal Jobmatch. He often got his three applications done on a Monday, meaning that he did not need to bother his friend with the computer for the rest of the week. The case study evidence suggests that migrant workers were less likely to use the Public Employment Service than UK-born job seekers for job search.

### *Use of recruitment agencies*

Some of the UK job seekers had signed up with recruitment agencies. Some reported that they had done so at the instigation of the Public Employment Service, while others had done so because of advice from friends that “*you have to go through agencies now*”. However, the use of agencies by UK job seekers seemed much less proactive than that by migrants. Several of the migrants interviewed had found their first job, and often subsequent jobs in the UK, via recruitment agencies. One interviewee from Poland had arrived in the UK in 2004 having secured a four-month contract in a care home in the West Midlands via a recruitment agency which had set up recently in her home town. She said:

*“I would never dream of travelling blind to another country, I’d need to know that there was a job waiting for me. ... I know of many people who just arrived*

*here looking for work and did not find any; they used up their savings and had to return home.” (A8 migrant worker, ex care sector, currently retail sector)*

Some A8 migrant workers used agencies specifically to facilitate job to job moves as part of a strategy to try out different jobs in a range of sectors to see whether they liked them, finding it easy to operationalise such a strategy in the UK (interspersed with periods of a few weeks back in their home country every now and then) through being able to capitalise on the work ethic associated with the ‘good migrant worker’:

*“It’s easier finding work going through the agency, they put you forward because you’re Polish, even if they don’t really know you because you’ve only been on their books a short time. ... I wanted to try different jobs so it suited me; I’d try different and interesting jobs to earn my money. Some were interesting, others were not for me. I want to stay here in the UK, so it’s good to try new things. The job I have now really suits me! ... I’ve worked in so many different places, some cleaning, hotel kitchen, in a bakery, factory work packing electrical goods, and other factories, here and there – all over the place. Some were in X [town in West Midlands], Y [city in West Midlands]. I can’t remember them all. Sorry!” (A8 migrant worker, retail)*

Securing employment through recruitment agencies often involved working with co-nationals, in part because staff at recruitment agencies asked existing migrant workers on their books to recommend their friends to sign up:

*“My friends told me about this agency, and that there were jobs where we could work together, because this agency had requested more Polish workers.” (A8 migrant worker in warehouse serving a retailer)*

Other migrant workers used recruitment agencies only as a “*stop gap*” following redundancy until something better came along – often through recommendations of friends (as discussed below). Another migrant worker (a non-EEA national) had resorted to finding work through friends after having had bad experiences of casualised low paid work through employment agencies:

*“They [the recruitment agency] give me 1 day and then nothing for some weeks, then 2 or maybe 3 days, but never more at a time. Then they take money from my money, and leave me with very little. It’s not enough, not enough to feed my family.” (Non-EEA migrant worker, currently working on markets)*

### *Use of informal methods*

Several UK job seekers reported that they had found previous jobs through informal methods. However, in some instances efforts to ask friends were now half-hearted, partly in recognition that friendship networks may be of limited use from a job search perspective; one long-term unemployed job seeker explained that he did not ask his friends about work because “*some people are not helpful to have around you*”.

By contrast, most of the migrant workers interviewed (and especially those from the EU) used informal job search methods, often via well-developed migrant networks, to secure

work. Migrant networks were utilised for either advising prospective migrant workers to the UK on possibilities for employment or by providing accommodation in the UK for individuals 'scouting out' job opportunities. One migrant worker who arrived in southern England in 2005 explained:

*"I had a very good friend living there [city in southern England], who told me to come over as there would be plenty of work available for me. She said I could stay with her until I sorted myself out. I would do the same for her."* (EU migrant worker)

After five months in the UK this individual returned to her home country, but the following year she returned to the UK – this time to the West Midlands – because a friend had said that there was plenty of work for migrants in city X in the West Midlands.

With the further diffusion of cheap mobile phones and social media (including blogs, mailing lists and Twitter) it was apparent that 'informal networks' have been extended beyond literal 'word of mouth' communication to electronic updates to a wide audience about job openings, etc – especially, but not exclusively – for working in co-ethnic environments.

#### *Direct approaches*

Relatively few interviewees reported having made direct approaches to employers, albeit those who had done so reported some success in securing employment via this route. For instance, a migrant worker in retail had found a position that she thoroughly enjoyed by approaching an employer directly – partly as a result of being 'in the right place at the right time'. Longer-term unemployed job seekers seemed to lack confidence to approach employers directly (even if at some time in the past they had used this approach successfully), while others were also ambivalent, feeling that such approaches were likely to be fruitless. One older job seeker with a long work history remarked:

*"My last employer had a pile of CVs on his desk [that prospective applicants had brought in] and at the end of the week he used to bin them."* (UK job seeker)

### **B4.3 The (mis)fit between employers' recruitment methods and job seekers' search channels**

From the evidence above it seems that both employers and job seekers used a variety of recruitment/ job search methods and that there are not major mismatches between employers' recruitment methods and job seekers' search channels. Some differences are evident, however, in the extent and frequency of use of different job search channels by UK job seekers and migrant workers.

Most employers and migrant workers, and virtually all job seekers (usually directly, but sometimes indirectly), used websites (whether organisational or other commercial) with job seekers in receipt of out-of-work benefits having to record their search activity. Several of the employers interviewed in both the social care and retail sectors used the Public Employment Service to advertise vacancies. UK-born job seekers in receipt of out-of-work benefits used Universal Jobmatch, as did some (but not all) migrant workers. Recruitment

agencies were used by some employers in the social care and retail sectors, and tended to be used fairly extensively by newly arrived migrant workers, albeit in several instances they were usurped by informal job search methods and migrant networks once migrant workers became more established in the UK. Some UK-born job seekers used agencies, but those interviewed appeared less willing to utilise them as a short-term 'stop gap', or to facilitate job to job moves, compared with migrant workers.

Several of the employers interviewed in both the social care and retail sectors made use of, and indeed expressed a preference for, informal recruitment methods. Evidence from migrant worker interviews suggests that many migrant workers were active users of informal networks (a phenomenon referred to as 'hot networking' in the earlier study of the construction and accommodation and food services sectors), with use of social media facilitating speedy response to opportunities. Some of the UK-born employees interviewed reported that they had found jobs through informal means, and likewise some UK-born job seekers indicated that they had found previous positions using such methods, but the longer-term job seekers seemed reluctant to use such methods, feeling that their networks would be unable to provide appropriate connections (as highlighted in B4.2), while at the same time often lacking the confidence to make direct applications to employers in the way that some migrant workers and shorter-term unemployed job seekers might do.

#### **B4.4 Overview**

The internet plays an increasing role in the advertisement of vacancies, in job search and in submitting applications for jobs. While the use of local newspapers – which at one time were a 'go to' source for less skilled vacancies, along with notices in windows/ at premises and networks of friends, family and acquaintances – by employers has declined, informal methods still play an important role in advertising and successful job search. There is some indicative evidence that the use of recruitment agencies in social care and retail sectors has declined, albeit they still play an important role for some employers and job seekers. Overall, there is limited evidence of major mismatches in employers' recruitment methods and job seekers' search channels.

## **B5. WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT: SELECTION PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES**

### **B5.1 Attributes sought and employers' rationale**

#### *Language and communication skills*

In both social care and retail sectors a foremost criterion in selection is communication skills. In retail it was noted that now there are fewer "*behind the scenes*" roles than was formerly the case, with employers increasingly requiring employees to take on a range of tasks (including replenishment, working on check outs, etc.). As highlighted in section B2, shortcomings in communicating in the English language was cited as a disadvantage of employing (some) migrants.

Allied to communication skills is confidence in dealing with people. In the case of retail this means *“being able to talk to anyone”*, including maintaining eye contact with customers. It also means being confident to talk about products on sale and/or knowing where to direct customers for further information, and also having the confidence to refuse to make a sale (e.g. of alcohol to under age customers). Young people may be disadvantaged in this respect, since to some extent communication skills and confidence are seen by some employers as being positively associated with age and maturity.

In social care employers want employees to be confident in communicating with residents/clients that they are caring for, as well as with relatives and friends of the people being cared for, and other members of the staff team. There were examples, however, of social care employers being willing to engage individuals with poorer English language skills, on condition that they attended English language training and their English improved. Social care employers were also concerned about the way in which their staff spoke to individuals being cared for; it was important that staff used terminology that was not demeaning.

### *Appearance*

Appearance is also one of the key criteria in selection in both sectors, with employers looking for clean, well groomed and appropriately dressed workers. In both sectors, turning up to an interview in *“jeans and trainers”* was considered inappropriate, and was taken to signal a lack of interest in the vacancy; appearance at interview *“reflects how much they want the job”*. Particular concerns were expressed by some employers about the lack of knowledge about appropriate standards of dress of some young people (especially UK-born young people) attending interviews (as noted in section B3).

In general, standards of appearance were considered to have deteriorated over time, especially amongst young people. In the retail sector, stakeholders emphasised the importance of employees resembling the customer base. Customers tend to *“want to be served by employees of a similar age”*; hence older workers, whatever their experience, would tend not to get a job in a high fashion store catering for young people. One stakeholder suggested that older job seekers wanting to work in retail may achieve higher success by targeting local independent stores, as opposed to major chains. In part this was attributed to the *“facelessness”* of the internet (when used for application and selection) on the grounds that employers might make assumptions about individuals (especially in terms of their appearance and that they might be *“out of date”*) on the basis of their age. Likewise, tattoos, piercings and unorthodox hair styles may be acceptable for some retail employers, but not for others. One retail employer noted that he would not consider anyone who turned up *“not in shoes”* and *“chewing gum”*. Trainers and agencies spoke of how they were able to *“fit”* young trainees/ job seekers to particular employers (within fashion, supermarkets, etc.), on the basis of individuals’ attributes and key features of retail brands. For instance:

*“A bright young woman, with long hair and long painted nails needs to be in fashion, not a supermarket”.* (Stakeholder).

This meant that it was important for trainers and agencies to meet both job seekers and employers: *“You cannot put people in front of an employer without seeing them”* (Stakeholder).

In social care, the foremost need was for workers to dress in a way that was “*acceptable*” to clients and their families. One social care employer noted that although there was a uniform for employees this could be worn in different ways, and how the uniform was worn was important. In domiciliary care, where possible, there was also an emphasis on “*fit*” of the care worker to the client; (information from stakeholder interviews suggested that individuals with personal care budgets are likely to place increasing emphasis on such “*fit*”, where possible).

### *Experience and employment history*

Relevant previous experience was considered important by some employers in both sectors (albeit in social care this might include experience in a range of different settings – including providing informal care within extended families, and in retail it might be in a different part of the sector – since as one retail employer noted: “*retailing is retailing, it’s not rocket science*”). However, there were also employers in both sectors – and particularly so in retail - who took no account of previous experience. Several retailers noted that the sector was one in which many people found their first job.

A work history with a succession of several short-term jobs and no prolonged stay with a single employer was looked upon unfavourably as being indicative of a lack of commitment. References were important – particularly in the social care sector. People who were over-qualified for the job were also deemed unattractive by some employers, on the grounds that they would be likely to move on fairly quickly, so contributing to problems of retention. Employers in both social care and retail emphasised that career structures tend to be “*very flat*”, with limited opportunity for advancement.

The evidence suggests that there are opportunities for individuals with no previous experience to access employment in the social care and retail sectors, *if* they could demonstrate good communication skills and enthusiasm for the role in question (see the sub-section below on attitude). Indeed, an interviewee from a large retail chain reported that recently there had been a shift away from emphasising previous retail experience in the selection process, towards placing greater onus on “*strengths-based recruitment*” (see B5.2), including a test on the shop floor concerning “*engaging with customers*”.

### *Formal educational qualifications*

Few of the employers interviewed emphasised that formal educational qualifications were important in the selection process. Some employers from the private residential social care sector emphasised that candidates with NVQs (at Levels 2 or 3) would be preferred, and also looked for a willingness to engage in training. Other employers saw advantages of employing people with no previous experience and no sector-specific formal qualifications on the basis that they “*had not learned bad habits*”.

### *The primacy of attitude*

Most stakeholders interviewed emphasised that there is a growing emphasis on “*attitude*” in recruitment, as opposed to qualifications and skills (other than basic skills), and this was corroborated in employer interviews. ‘One stakeholder described ‘attitude’ as “*the number*

*one attribute*". Attitude' can be seen as being closely linked to so-called 'soft skills' such as communication skills, confidence and appearance. These are the skills that retailers and social care providers require, whereas sector-specific skills (such as using a till in the case of retailing) can be taught. The following quotes from employers illustrate the importance of attitude:

*"Knowledge comes after personality."* (Social care employer)

*"A caring attitude."* (Social care employer)

*"I look for good attitude, good personality. You recruit for attitude not for skill sets."* (Retail employer)

*"Outgoing, enthusiastic – that real customer service approach."* (Retail employer)

*"I'm looking for attitude, attitude, attitude. ... I always go for attitude above everything else. ... [At interview] they [the candidates] should look as if they have made an effort, have a sparkle in the eye and ask you questions."* (Independent retailer)

*".. someone who is committed and they are hard-working, turn up on time, punctual, and treat the customers and other colleagues with respect. Those are the kind of elements that you want from people. As a customer yourself, you want to be greeted by someone who is nice, smiley, friendly, bubbly, not someone who is miserable ..."* (Retail employer)

For several of the employers interviewed 'flexibility' was a component of attitude. One interviewee referred to this as a recognition that the needs of the customer (and so the needs of the business) came first, such that it is necessary to work the hours required rather than the hours contracted.

#### *Place of residence*

Several of the employers interviewed expressed a preference for local workers – on the basis of creating links with, and 'fit' to the local community, albeit place of residence was rarely taken into account in a formal way in the selection process. Employers were keen that workers should be able to get to work on time, and one employer noted that the issue of place of residence would be examined if an applicant mentioned that travelling to the workplace might pose a problem. Following selection place of residence would be taken into account in the logistics of planning itineraries for domiciliary care workers.

Access to a car was deemed "essential" in domiciliary care for travelling between appointments. Although workers in residential care and in retail working unsocial shifts might benefit from having a car because of the flexibility this afforded, access to a car was not essential.

#### *Other attributes*

Other attributes mentioned by employers included good physical health (in the social care sector) and commercial focus (in the retail sector). One social care employer noted that the



key selection criterion used was: “*Would I be happy for this person to work with vulnerable members of my family?*”.

## **B5.2 Job seekers’ and migrant workers’ perspectives on attributes sought**

Generally, the job seekers and migrant workers interviewed had a good appreciation of attributes sought by employers.

Job seekers tended to emphasise aspects of reliability, using descriptors such as “*reliable*” and “*trustworthy*”. There was also a recognition of the need to be “*neat and tidy*”.

*“Reliability, look respectable, turn up on time, not be hungover.”* (Job seeker)

*“[Employers are looking for] people who can dress smart. In a shop you’ve got to be nice and polite and try and sell the stuff that you are trying to sell.”*  
(Job seeker)

Several without recent work experience felt that employers were looking for “*experience*” and that employers are “*looking for someone they do not have to train*”. Some job seekers also highlighted that employers were looking for “*local people*” – and while this is borne out to some extent in the evidence presented in section 5.1, it might also be one factor (alongside others such as fragmented/ low working hours and low pay) for not searching for jobs outside the local area.

Migrant workers tended to emphasise communication skills alongside reliability and flexibility (the latter was mentioned more by migrant workers than by UK-born job seekers) when asked what attributes they thought that employers were looking for). Descriptors used included the following:

*“Being able to talk to anyone, cheerful and friendly, hard-working, reliable, someone who will get on with the job. You need some people to train in higher or more specialised work, but you do not need everyone to do this, so willingness to train would not be essential.”* (Migrant worker in social care)

*“Team working skills, flexibility, and wishing to learn and work hard.”* (Migrant worker in social care).

*“Good attitude, good manner of speaking, and approach with customers.”*  
(Migrant worker in retail)

*“People skills, teamwork, time management, reliability, independent worker skills, thoroughness, punctuality, reliability.”* (A8 migrant worker in retail)

Some Polish migrants interviewed recognised that some employers associated such attributes with Polish migrant workers:

*“They [Polish workers] are clean and reliable. They [employers] will hire you if you say you are Polish, and willing to do any work that they need. I said this when I was interviewed.”* (Polish migrant worker)

## **B5.3 Selection practices and procedures**

Selection practices and procedures differed to some extent between sectors, by size of

establishment and also whether the establishment was part of a larger chain. In establishments which were part of a larger chain, particularly in retailing, web-based applications might be dealt with centrally, and then details of candidates who reached a required threshold score on a web-based questionnaire would be notified to the local establishment for interview. Some employers used criteria such as poor written English, not answering questions properly and not providing full employment histories as sift criteria at this initial stage, such that these candidates would not go forward; (one employer described this sifting process as “*ruthless*”).

From two major supermarkets interviewed there was evidence of a shift towards enhanced emphasis being placed on “*strengths*” rather than “*experience*” throughout the selection process. For one of the supermarkets, this meant placing less onus on previous experience in the retail (or related) sectors, and more on “*customer focus*” – asking applicants how they meet the company’s description of “*great customer service strengths*”. If at the initial application stage applicants did not express any interest in working for the company, or for working in retail, they were not invited for interview. The pre-sift also took into account flexibility in hours available for work – and those who have restricted availability were not called for interview. At the interview stage there was a good deal of emphasis on “*body language, expressions, how they come across – chatty or not chatty*”. The employer noted that the new strengths-based selection was more attuned to business requirements than the experience-based one because it enabled identification of “*people persons*”. For another supermarket a good deal of emphasis was placed on behavioural scenarios:

*“There are different behavioural scenarios and you have to agree most with that one and least with that one in terms of what you would do. It is their behaviour and their thought process, how would they react to different situations and that gives them a score. And then in the interview, it is all based on behaviour and situations: If you were on the checkouts and this situation happened, what would you do? If you were working under pressure, how would you deal with it? So we try to get their understanding of how to deal with things and stuff like that. ... It’s all behavioural stuff, so we never take anyone in [name] based on skill. We can teach someone to do a job, but we can’t teach someone how to behave ”* (Retail employer, supermarket)

Interviews with migrant workers and UK-born workers who had been through similar internet screening and then group interviews highlighted that this could be a nerve-wracking experience, and that no account was taken of formal qualifications, albeit soft skills learned through higher education could be helpful:

*“I knew that I had passed the first stage, which is a series of psychometric tests you have to do online. I knew what to expect because of my degree course. The second part of the interview was a group interview; they tested how we reacted, and handled being in a group. I was nervous!”* (EU Migrant worker, retail)

*“Even though I didn’t have any qualifications, I still got the job. I think they liked the way I presented myself. In the group interview it was mainly made up of students and mums. The students only talked about their experiences at college, whereas I talked about what it was like to live in [city], for a 16 year*

*old, and I think they liked that I was able to talk about life.”* (UK-born retail employee)

In independent retail establishments and in social care it was more likely that all selection would be dealt with at establishment level. This was the practice in some retail chains also.

For one employer providing domiciliary care the first stage for any carer expressing interest in a job would be an invitation *“for an informal chat – sitting in comfortable chairs with a cup of coffee and a biscuit”*. Characteristics looked for at this initial stage were a *“caring attitude”, “compassion”* and *“communication”* and responses to the question: *“Why do you want to care?”*. Candidates who seemed suitable at this stage were then invited to fill in an application form and references and checks were made. The individual one-to-one interview was the most important stage of the selection process for most social care employers. Some employers used more formal interview scoring systems based on attitudes, values and commitment to caring, whereas in other instances such attributes were judged on a more informal basis. If the establishment was a residential care one, the interviewee would normally be taken on a tour of (part of) the establishment. One social care employer at a large residential establishment indicated that the best way to see if interviewees are *“interested”* is to take them round the building and look for *“whether they acknowledge staff and patients”* or *“whether they just look out of the window”*. Similarly another social care employer noted that interviewees meet residents and are observed in terms of how they interact with residents, how they react and speak, their ability to care, to listen, and their patience.

In some retail establishments store managers had prime responsibility for selection. In some instances they built on previous experience. Hence, one manager of a medium-sized store who had previously worked for a large supermarket chain used an agency to arrange group interview sessions (as used by his previous employer) for seasonal vacancies so that he could judge how applicants interacted with each other and worked as a team. Once he had decided who to appoint he would then look at their CVs for their interests and so best ‘fit’ them to a department within the store. Other retail establishments used one-to-one interviews, and sometimes tours of the premises, as was the case for several of the social care employers interviewed.

One retail employer interviewed tested the flexibility/ punctuality of candidates by sometimes holding interviews at 06.00, on the grounds that some staff would need to have early morning starts to deal with stock. This aspect of the selection process sifted out some applicants on the basis of time-keeping.

#### **B5.4 Satisfaction with the quantity and quality of candidates**

In retail especially, but also in residential social care, most employers reported that there were large numbers of candidates for vacancies. The situation was described as *“too many people looking”*, but most of these *“not wanting to do the job”*. One stakeholder suggested that in the case of retail, in some instances online job applications are used as a training exercise in some schools; (this had been revealed when a follow up study had been undertaken of why applicants had not turned up for interviews, and applicants had *“no idea”*

that they had applied for a job). Large numbers of applicants meant that the recruitment process was “*difficult to manage*”, and as noted in section B4, this might be one reason for turning to agencies for help. In both sectors employers identified that a key driver of the large numbers of applicants was Jobcentre Plus “*applying sanctions*” if benefit claimants did not apply for sufficient vacancies. The result was too many applicants who were not interested in the job and often too many invitees not turning up for interview. This state of affairs posed more of a burden on employers with high staff turnover than on those with higher rates of staff retention. In the case of residential care, the situation of large numbers of applications was felt to have been exacerbated by some care homes closing, leading former staff to seek similar employment in remaining homes.

In domiciliary care it was less clear that the quantity of applicants coming forward was sufficient. Several employers indicated that they could “*do with more*” applicants and there were references to recruitment being a “*challenge in a growing sector*”. Again staff turnover, as workers sought slightly higher rates of pay and/or an organisational structure within which they felt that they could offer a better standard of care, exacerbated the need for more candidates.

In terms of quality of applicants, employers’ judgements varied, so providing a mixed picture in both the social care and retail sectors. For instance, one employer from a residential care home noted that she was ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of people coming forward. Another social care employer made a judgement of ‘quite satisfied’ with the candidates that had been appointed (this was attributed to the rigour of the internal selection processes adopted). Another ‘quite satisfied’ social care employer suggested that candidates were “*not as good as they used to be*”, and attributed this to low pay in the sector and slightly higher wages elsewhere. This contrasts with the view of another employer that “*the calibre*” of people had increased, while another made a distinction between a greater proportion of people with qualifications coming forward, but that the overall ‘quality’ of candidates (taking into account the overall mix of attributes desired) had fallen. Yet another social care employer deemed the quality of applicants to be “*dreadful*” – on the grounds that they received disproportionately large proportions of total applications from people (often on benefits) who did not really want the job (as signalled in various ways including inappropriate dress and sheer lack of interest in the job) and from applicants who just wanted a job to earn money (a motivation that, on its own, was not considered desirable).

Retail employers also provided a mixed picture in terms of quality of applicants, and sometimes in the quality of applicants in different interview rounds. One retail employer indicated that he was ‘quite satisfied’, but went on to say that the quality had reduced slightly lately, attributing this to low pay levels making the jobs less attractive: “*We are offering the minimum wage; some might go elsewhere*”. A retailer who had been involved recently in a ‘mass recruitment’ to a new store, highlighted that the calibre of applicants was “*very poor*”, with lots having criminal records or having been out of work for a long time. This “*lack of routine*” had emerged as a problem when some long-term unemployed people had been recruited to the new store and had found time keeping very difficult.

An interviewee from a charity shop, with some employees and also volunteers, reported a contrary view:

*“Our employment policy and approach seems to fly in the face of current thinking about the lazy British worker. We are wholly reliant on people giving up their time, and we have a constant source of British workers willing to work here only as volunteers! ... For many of our staff, it’s a way in to the labour market. For us, the risks are greatly reduced, in a sense – it’s like operating a long-term internship. We provide transferable skills – both practical and formal, and the opportunity to become paid staff.”* (Retailer)

A key issue here seems to be that workers were self-selecting to come and work at the store, often seeing it as a stepping stone to paid employment.

Overall, generally employers faced continuing problems with ‘poor quality’ applicants (partly as a result of benefit claimants who were not interested ‘having to’ apply for jobs), but there were also some ‘better quality’ applicants since the recession – as more people who had not considered working in retail and social care formerly were now doing so.

## **B5.5 Overview**

In both social care and retail sectors a good deal of emphasis is placed on communication skills. Appearance is important – underlying the visual element of the selection process, as are ‘soft skills’ – including reliability, flexibility, trustworthiness, punctuality, etc. Formal qualifications tend to be afforded less weight. This was reflected in selection practices and procedures, which may involve an internet-based pre-sift of responses to standard electronic application forms followed by a group interview, or a more conventional one-to-one face-to-face interview. In general, UK-born job seekers and migrant workers demonstrated a good awareness of the attributes that employers were looking for in low skilled roles in social care and retail, albeit the migrant workers tended to place more emphasis on flexibility than the UK-born workers. Except in domiciliary care there was general satisfaction with the quantity of applications (albeit in some cases there were too many), but satisfaction with the quality of job applicants was variable across both sectors.

## **B6. CONSTRAINTS ON SECURING EMPLOYMENT**

### **B6.1 Lack of skills and work experience**

#### *English language skills*

Given the importance of English language skills in both the social care and retail sectors, individuals with poor English language skills (oral, reading and writing) are disadvantaged in securing employment. This is a particular issue for migrant workers, as the following comments from social care employers illustrate:

*“If they have not got a good grounding in English it is rather hopeless really.”*  
(Social care employer)

*“We have had many Poles and other migrants ... applying, but their language skills have often been of insufficient quality for us to consider taking them on.”*  
(Social care employer)

Likewise because of the emphasis on communication in the retail sector migrant workers with poor English were disadvantaged in gaining employment:

*“If someone’s first language was not English and they really struggled to understand anything they would not be accepted.”* (Retail employer)

This employer felt that within retailing some migrant workers may gravitate to “*back departments*” and “*warehouse jobs*” because of poor English language skills. As another employer from the retail sector explained:

*“In stores a certain level of English is required. ... In the warehouse we have translators should it be needed.”* (Retail employer)

Several of the migrant workers interviewed recognised and commented that shortcomings in their English language skills limited the numbers and types of jobs that they could access.

#### *Other functional skills: literacy, numeracy and IT*

Employers and stakeholders interviewed noted that there was a lack of jobs in the social care and retail sectors that could accommodate individuals lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills. One stakeholder noted that some of the jobs in manufacturing that previously “*mopped up*” some of the people lacking basic skills no longer existed. In social care jobs individuals needed to be able to read instructions and record activities, while one retail employer emphasised the importance of numeracy skills – and bemoaned shortcomings of some applicants:

*“All applicants are given a Maths test – even if they have a GCSE in Maths.”*  
(The rationale for this was to work out the area of a room in order to work out requirements for floor coverings, tiles, etc.) *“Most people haven’t got a clue.”*  
(Retail employer)

A lack of IT skills is an important constraint on access to vacancies given the growing importance of organisational websites and other web-based job boards in the job search and application process (as outlined in section B4). A job club leader noted that this was a particular problem amongst the “*older demographic*”:

*“Searches now have to be logged online with the Universal Job Match software. Some [job seekers] struggle with the IT element of this, but there is little support from Jobcentre Plus, who seem to assume that everyone can do this. ... Lack of IT skill is effectively excluding a large proportion of job seekers from being able to participate effectively in the labour market; even though these skills may not actually be required for the types of jobs which the job club attendees are seeking.”* (Stakeholder)

Another stakeholder noted that there had been an increase in the number of computers available at the Jobcentre for job search, but that “*digital support and access*” remained a key issue. This interviewee felt that:

*“Key issues for job seekers are whether they know how to use a website and apply for a job online, and whether they have access to a computer/ mobile phone.”* (Stakeholder)

Mastery of technical IT skills seemed to be much less of an issue for younger people, although issues of access to hardware and optimal use of websites might be issues for them. Most of the younger migrant workers interviewed may be described as 'digitally savvy'.

#### *Lack of (UK) qualifications and (UK) work experience*

Some of the migrant workers interviewed indicated that they were constrained in accessing jobs commensurate with their non-UK qualifications due to issues of lack of recognition of, and uncertainty about the equivalence of, such qualifications. One non-EEA migrant worker with a College qualification in Business Management reported that he had been told by the recruitment agency through which he had found a job:

*"You have to take these exams again, here in the UK, as your qualifications are not valid here."* (non-EEA migrant worker)

It was possible for some social care employers to appoint a higher qualified migrant worker and pay them at the non-qualified starting rate because of a lack of UK qualifications. As one such employer explained:

*"Some [migrant workers] have acquired a higher level qualification in their native country but as long as they do not have the UK level 2 qualification they are paid the unqualified rate."* (Social care employer)

Several of the migrant workers also recognised that they were working below their qualification levels, and while some were trying to work their way up through a series of jobs to meet their longer-term goals, others saw their current job as a short-term means to an end (of earning more money than they could in their home country). Lack of UK work experience did not emerge as a key constraint on securing employment for migrant workers.

Generally the UK job seekers interviewed felt that their lack of formal qualifications meant that they were disadvantaged in finding work. As one job seeker in his fifties noted:

*"I think everyone in my position wishes that they'd got some sort of A levels or O levels or degree at the time, but when I was a kid, you was at school and out of school and into a job. Now you need qualifications."* (Job seeker)

Some struggled to see how previous work (and non-work) experience might be presented in such a way as to be attractive to employers and relevant to job applications. Lack of (recent) work experience was also an issue of some job seekers. One interviewee, who had recently moved onto Jobseekers Allowance from Income Support, who had spent most of the years that she had been of working age caring for a large family commented that she had only had one job in the formal labour market and said: *"You need experience which I have not got – so I don't apply."* She was of the firm view that people with experience and better work histories, as well as younger people who had more potential, would stand a better chance of gaining employment.

Those with relevant experience but lacking qualifications also sometimes felt that they were constrained in accessing employment. For instance, one man with previous experience of care, but with no formal qualifications, was concerned about having to do training in a new job because he had been told that if you failed a particular course twice you had to do it a

third time and pay for it yourself. This illustrates how lack of confidence and fear of failure may be barriers to employment for some individuals.

Some large retail employers when doing mass recruitments set aside some jobs for local long-term unemployed people and/ or offer guaranteed interviews. While this offers opportunities for some long-term unemployed people, two employers interviewed also noted some of the difficulties faced in employing some people from this group for whom: *“it had been a very long time since many had worked”*. One highlighted the difficulties of *“getting them to understand respect and work ethic”* and went on to say:

*“Some of them only come to work through the partnership [i.e. special arrangements for specific jobs to be set aside for the long-term unemployed] because they have been selected, they have to and they lose their benefits if they don’t take the job. You have some people who don’t want to be there because they can earn more from benefits.”* (Retail employer).

Some of these employees were dismissed for reasons including poor time-keeping, performance, conduct, absence (attributed to not enjoying being at work and not earning enough money), swearing and poor service for customers, and not declaring criminal convictions. However, others welcomed the opportunity to have a job and progress:

*“But then you have some really shiny superstars, people who even got signed on to our management programme in three months.”* (Retail employer)

#### *Lack of soft skills*

Confidence was a key attribute mentioned by employers – especially in the retail sector – and lack of confidence/ timidity was a constraint for some job applicants. If given the chance, it could be possible for a lack of confidence to be overcome. For instance, one social care employer noted that some migrant workers require *“more support”* because they *“do tend to lack confidence in a new country”*, but with appropriate support they could soon perform well in the job.

Lack of confidence, especially when accompanied by lack of interest, emerged as a key constraint on securing employment. As noted in sections B4 and B5, applicants who do not really want the job or just want a job to earn money, are unlikely to succeed in reaching, or getting through, employers’ selection processes unless special arrangements are in place. Pre-employment courses are designed to boost confidence through positive feedback and address other barriers in soft skills. As one stakeholder engaged in such activity explained:

*“We are trying to make them employable - polishing them off. If I had a group of 15 – five I could get a job for tomorrow, five I could get a job for if they wanted it, and five I could not get a job for – because of other barriers.”* (Stakeholder)

Some (usually shorter-term unemployed) UK job seekers were scathing about the attitude of some other benefit claimants, and clearly saw themselves as ‘different’ from them. One unemployed job seeker who had done many different jobs in his career (including social care work) and who was currently looking for work in the social care sector, felt that there were no barriers to finding work if you had a positive attitude and were willing to do anything. He felt



that the job market was such that there was no excuse for people to be unemployed for longer than six months, and often *“people hold themselves back”*.

As noted in section B5, appearance plays an important role in securing employment in the retail and social care sectors and is often equated with interest in the role in the eyes of employers. As one stakeholder at a Jobs Fair noted:

*“Recruitment is a very visual thing. ... [At the Jobs Fair] “as the day went on the standard of dress got worse”.* (Stakeholder)

The implication is that the keener and more motivated candidates attended earlier in the day. From the comments of another stakeholder it appears that some job seekers (and especially young job seekers) lacked understanding of what might be appropriate to wear at an interview. The example was given of a young man attending an interview in his *“best tracksuit”*, on the grounds that this would also be appropriate for an activity he was going on to afterwards. Yet, as the stakeholder noted, an employer would be unaware that the tracksuit in question was a ‘best’ tracksuit, and the applicant may inadvertently fall foul of employers’ dress codes for interviews – as it would in the case of the retail employer commenting below:

*“Trackie bottoms, trainers... We need to be professional, the way we look and our image, we are portraying the company. Someone can still look smart with jeans and a shirt on, but if they come in in trackie bottoms, a hoodie, trainers.... I think people should be presented well, it doesn’t have to be proper suit and booted, it depends on the job, but it’s around what is smart and what’s not.”* (Retail employer)

#### *Lack of adviser skills*

Lack of knowledge amongst advisers about jobs available and what those jobs involved – especially in the social care sector – was identified as an issue by one stakeholder. This interviewee felt that there was a need to up-skill advisers at Jobcentres (and similar) in order to better advise job seekers. This suggests that sub-optimal advice received might be one factor placing constraints on securing employment.

## **B6.2 Fitting around non-work commitments**

#### *A lack of non-work commitments*

Some employers emphasised the attraction of staff with no/ few non-work commitments as being able to best fit in with flexible working requirements. In this category were students working in the retail sector; they were often willing to work at the weekend, and also migrant workers without other family members in the UK. In this context one retail employer interpreted this as *“migrants want[ing] the job more and work[ing] harder.”*

#### *Single parents and families with young children*

Individuals with young children to care for, and especially single parents, were less able to fit in with some employers’ requirements for flexible working and associated variations in take

home pay. As one stakeholder explained with regard to the social care sector:

*“Having a young family makes working unsocial/irregular hours difficult. Coping with fluctuations in income is hard with a young family.”* (Stakeholder)

These challenges seemed to be exacerbated for single parent job seekers, several of whom were seeking part-time permanent work. One woman on Jobseekers Allowance who was returning to work after a break of eleven years caring for her children, and who had recently had a temporary job, said that she was constrained in terms of hours of work and location of a job, and wanted a fixed income, all because of her children. Another single parent with primary school age children cited having a fixed income, a set number of hours, the same working patterns week to week, a permanent contract and working 9-5 or similar all as ‘very important’ considerations in job search. Similarly, a highly motivated job seeker with prior experience of domiciliary care (in a part-time capacity – including during her university studies and alongside other jobs) went to a Care Fair in search of permanent part-time day-time work in care that fitted around her childcare responsibilities. She had experienced difficulty in find these working hours in domiciliary care. Of the ten organisations she spoke to at the Care Fair eight were upfront and said such a working pattern would not be possible (as they are looking for people who could work 06.00 to 20.00 or longer hours) and two said it might be possible and encouraged her to put in an application, while noting that day time shifts were very much in demand from other mothers.

One of the retail employers interviewed noted the attraction of night time shifts (at large stores with 24 hour opening) for mothers:

*“It fits in with Mums that can work nights because hubby is at home and then they get home, drop the kids off to school, sleep, do whatever and then pick them up again. So we do have a high population of females that work nights. And they get paid well because they get the premium and stuff.”* (Retail employer)

The important consideration here is ‘fitting in’ with the availability of other family members – in the case above the availability of a partner to perform childcare. Being able to share some time together with family members was also an issue for some job seekers, with one job seeker explaining that although she wanted to work in retail she had turned down a job in one shop because it involved working on a Sunday - the only day that her partner had off.

### **B6.3 Geographical (im)mobility**

#### *Constraints on those reliant on public transport*

Lack of a car and a reliance on public transport was a key barrier for many of the job seekers interviewed, especially those seeking work in social care (as explained below). Those living by train stations and on bus routes felt that this gave “*more scope*”, but nevertheless public transport routes and service times dictated locations of work beyond walking or cycling distance.

Several of the employers interviewed expressed a preference for ‘local workers’; an employer from one retail chain noted that most customer assistants “*live within a mile*” of the store, and this helped provide a positive “*community feel*”. In some instances being ‘local’ was equated with ‘reliability’ (in terms of being able to get to work easily). This suggests that

geographical immobility need not necessarily be a problem – especially in ‘job rich’ areas. In ‘job poor’ areas and areas less well served by public transport, reliance on such services poses a greater challenge for physically accessing employment.

#### *Access to a car increases flexibility*

In general, access to a car increases the spatial and temporal reach of an individual from any given geographical location, so extending the number of jobs that are physically accessible. As a stakeholder working with long-term unemployed job seekers noted:

*“It is really good for us if we know that someone’s mobile – it gives them more flexibility.”* (Stakeholder)

As noted previously, the requirement for access to a car was emphasised by several domiciliary care employers and stakeholders as “*essential*” for carers to travel between appointments. ‘A driving licence is required’ posed a barrier to work in this sector, especially for job seekers on benefits (many of whom did not have a car) and to young people (who might not have a driving licence). A job seeker in his early fifties, who had experience of being a carer but who did not drive, noted that although “*there are lots of vacancies in social care*” about half of the ones he saw specified a requirement for ‘own transport’. While in very densely populated urban areas an individual might be able to go between appointments without a car, this was cited by the employers interviewed as an unusual occurrence. Two of the migrant workers interviewed who worked in domiciliary care felt that it was possible to do the job without driving, but that an individual would be limited in the number of appointments it was possible to walk to, and so it would not be possible to work as many hours – so making such an individual a less attractive employee. One of the EU migrants interviewed travelled between clients by bike, and in the case of one or two hour gaps between some appointments he cycled home. He had exhausted his savings and on low pay did not have spare income to save for a car.

#### *Real and perceived barriers to mobility*

Some stakeholders considered that “*lots of people put up their own barriers to get into work*” by unnecessarily constraining their geographical job search areas. One interviewee stated that “*people from the Black Country will not travel to Birmingham*”, even though “*it’s not that far*”. Another stakeholder noted:

*“The Jobseekers Agreement says they must be able to travel 90 minutes. [The] chances of placing people that far away are zero. People want their local area – the end of the road. ... Often they have very fixed ideas about what they can and can’t do.”* (Stakeholder)

The latter point relates to some extent to ‘no go’ areas. Amongst some young people it was reported that:

*“ ... they won’t travel to area [X] because they see it as ‘gang-related’. Others feel that area [Y] is ‘racist’, so they want to stay in their own areas.”* (Stakeholder)

### *It is not worth travelling far for low pay*

Amongst job seekers there was some recognition that increased spatial mobility might help in accessing employment, but there were also constraints in travelling far for low paid, especially part-time, work - as illustrated by statements such as:

*"I would not go far for a part-time job – it is not worth your while."* (Job seeker)

*"If it's too far and it is only a few hours per day I think it is not worth it."* (Job seeker)

The issue here is that the earnings from low-skilled part-time work (especially if for only a few hours on several days) are insufficient to compensate for travel costs incurred.

### *Migrant workers and geographical mobility*

Issues of geographical immobility did not emerge in the same way in interviews with migrant workers as with UK-born job seekers, albeit in some instances comments were made about the convenience of walking to a local workplace. There were instances in migrant workers' recent work histories of moving within the West Midlands, and from and to other parts of the UK, for job purposes. These moves were eased by being in the private rented sector (as opposed to being in the social rented sector or in owner-occupation). Some had aspirations to move (either within the UK or elsewhere) but were constrained by not wanting to interrupt their children's education:

*"I would like to go somewhere else from here, once my children have finished their education, but I am not sure at this stage where exactly."* (EU migrant worker)

Of course the migrant workers already had experience of geographical mobility through their move to the UK. Amongst A8 workers there was some evidence of people moving to and from and back to the UK in accordance with employment opportunities in the UK and other considerations. For example, a Polish migrant worker who had a job as a care assistant at the time of the interview reported that on her first visit to the UK her daughter (already in the UK) found her a packing job, but: *"It didn't suit me at all! I returned back to Poland after just two months."* She returned to the UK later that year because her daughter had secured her a job (word of mouth) at care home as a cleaner. Still living with her daughter (to save money for everyone involved), she had since moved from a cleaning to a care assistant role. She had returned to Poland in interim to re-register as a nurse (her occupation in Poland) in order to be eligible for work in Poland, and intended to return there in due course. One of the stakeholders interviewed reported that such mobility patterns were not uncommon, and also indicated that as well as the UK, migrant workers were now looking at other EU destinations (such as Germany).

## **B6.4 Features of low-skilled employment in the social care and retail sectors**

Several features of employment in these sectors were considered by some interviewees to constrain access to work and also to impede employment retention. One feature was zero hours and low hours contracts, sometimes involving working at what might be considered unsocial times. A second issue was requirements for flexibility – which may be difficult for

employees to co-ordinate with non-work commitments. A third issue was low pay and variable pay, often coupled with relatively 'flat' employment structures with (sometimes) limited opportunities for advancement (as discussed in section B1). This could mean that employees might be tempted to move from job to job in search of slightly higher rates of pay.

#### *The number and pattern of hours worked*

In social care patterns of hours worked varied between employers. For example, a domiciliary care provider working mainly with privately funded clients stipulated that care assistants should work for no longer than 30-35 hours per week on the basis that the standard of staff performance declined when carers work more hours than this. This model of imposition of a maximum number of hours meant that there were few migrants employed simply because "*migrants want to work more hours*". Other employers also reported that "*migrants want to work a lot of hours*". To some extent this meant that migrant workers tended to gravitate to employers not stipulating such maximum thresholds of hours worked, thus leading to segmentation of migrant workers within the social care sector, with migrant workers tending to concentrate in roles within the care sector associated with longer working hours, and also with employers not specifying such maximum hours criteria. In turn some interviewees associated those employers with larger shares of migrant workers with poorer standards of care.

In the retail sector stakeholders reported that employers are recruiting increasingly on 'low hours' (and in some cases on 'zero hours') contracts. Yet they felt that in practice it was the case the "*you will never do 8 hour contracts*"; rather they suggested that hours actually worked would be more than this – hence the requirement for flexibility (see below). This meant that employers could employ more people:

*"Whereas previously an employer might have had 10 people on 30 hour contracts, now they want 30 people on zero hours contracts". (Stakeholder)*

*"Store X wants more part-time workers. It's easier, and it looks as though it employs many more people, but they work less hours." (Migrant worker in retail)*

The fact that retail jobs are "*always part-time*", and that in some instances could fluctuate from week to week, was identified by stakeholders as a "*big problem*" for Jobcentre Plus customers who especially valued "*certainty*" from a financial planning perspective and also served to increase competition from students and labour market returners. One independent retailer interviewed had taken a strategic decision that "*fixed weekly hours is better than a slightly higher hourly [pay] rate*" on the grounds that people "*want to be sure of their hours*" (i.e. to have certainty rather than uncertainty).

An employer in the social care sector noted that fixed weekly hours are easier to implement in a residential care home than it is in some other types of care because there is a fairly fixed number of residents.

#### *The requirement for flexibility*

For some jobs the requirement for flexibility was built into the role. One retail employer

reported that there was a section on the application form for candidates to fill in when they were available; those deemed inflexible on the grounds of how they filled in the form were not considered for a job.

Flexibility was also a requirement in part of the social care sector. Some migrant workers interviewed from the domiciliary care sector said that although they were on zero hours contracts it is “*never, never*” the case that they have no hours; (they could work many more hours). However, not all migrant workers in domiciliary care were in this position; one reported that he was sometimes called late at night to do an early morning call the next day, and that his hours fluctuated from week to week.

Moving to a zero hours contract from a fixed hours contract could be a big step for job changers. One UK-born worker in the social care sector who had previously worked nights in a residential care establishment (gaining a pay premium at that time) when her children were young and her partner could look after them at night, wanted to move on when the establishment changed hands and the pay premium for the work she was doing was withdrawn. She wanted to move to domiciliary care, but felt it was a risk to do so, especially as her partner was self-employed in the building industry; (she was fearful of them both having no work in the winter and being unable to pay the mortgage). However, she decided to take the risk and at the time of the interview was pleased to have done so.

#### *Low pay*

As noted in section B1, most of the workers interviewed worked at rates of pay at, or just above, the National Minimum Wage. In the social care sector, in particular, there were downward pressures on pay and employers reported simply not being able to afford to pay more. While expectations of nearly all of the job seekers interviewed was for work at around the National Minimum Wage, low rates of pay coupled with features of the numbers and patterns of working hours, meant that some did not find the jobs particularly attractive.

#### *The nature of the work*

A further constraint on securing employment felt by some job seekers was the nature of some of the work. This was a particular issue for some men looking for care work who expressed concerns that due to cost savings in domiciliary care carers are no longer sent in teams of two but instead go out alone. They worried about having to undertake personal care for women, and the possibility of accusations being made about inappropriate behaviour. This meant that some men would consider driving and cooking roles only in the social care sector.

### **B6.5 The operation of the benefits system**

#### *Lack of incentive to take low paid work*

Some of the employers interviewed felt that the current structure of the benefits system constrained some potential applicants from applying for work, while not incentivising others. An employer in the social care sector felt that it was difficult for single parents, in particular,

to come off benefits, and (in some cases), find sufficient hours of work at times that suited their other commitments. A single parent job seeker interviewed wanted to find part-time work and said that she thought it would need to be above 16 hours per week to qualify for Working Tax Credit, but was struggling to find that many hours.

There is a mismatch between what job seekers may need in order to move from benefits into work, and what employers are prepared to or are able to offer. Even though a job may provide more than 16 hours per week in practice, the contract could well be for fewer hours. Job seekers repeated time and again the need for prior knowledge about number of hours that they would be working, and hence level of pay, which is so important for budgeting. Universal Credit may sort out some of these issues if it is able to be responsive to individuals' varying work patterns; (however it may mean that employers will be more likely to operate 'flexible' contracting arrangements).

Several job seekers reported that they would need to work a certain number of fixed hours to make it worthwhile to come off benefits. Taking into account travel time and cost (and often job seekers would have access only to public transport), a pattern of work involving a journey beyond the locality for only a couple of hours a day was not considered feasible.

#### *Sanctions, fear and confusion regarding the changing operation of the benefits system*

Several interviewees (stakeholders and job seekers) made reference to sanctions, indicating that they have risen up the agenda. As one stakeholder, who had many years of experience in assisting job seekers explained, it used to be the case that if sanctions were applied then this was for a clear-cut breach of the rules (such as doing cash in hand work while signing on). He went on to say that sanctions are applied increasingly for administrative reasons and that this leaves people confused and fearful. One UK-born job seeker had been sanctioned for not applying for enough jobs in a designated period. His view was that it was unrealistic to apply for jobs that he would never get and/or which were below his expectations. In some instances increasing numbers of people on sanctions created knock-on implications elsewhere, as exemplified by an interviewee involved in a pre-employment training course who reported that mandating certain individuals who had been sanctioned to attend sometimes had a disruptive influence on other course members.

Others confessed that they did not understand the benefits system and constrained the number and types (in terms of number of hours) of work they applied for through fear of falling foul of the system. There was general agreement amongst interviewees that the complexity of the benefits system was not helpful. One job seeker looking for work in the care sector to supplement teaching work said that she had previously been "*a benefit person in the summer*" and whereas this had been straightforward to operationalise in the past this was no longer the case, and because of delays in the process she had fallen into rent arrears for the first time ever. Some of the UK-born job seekers interviewed had been affected by what they termed the 'bedroom tax' and had either moved or were looking to work more hours.

The activation of the benefits regime has clearly created problems for employers. Job seekers on out-of-work benefits are mandated to apply for a certain number of jobs, typically six per fortnight, otherwise they risk sanction. As noted in section B4, employers interviewed

expressed some concerns about the numbers and quality of applications in response to adverts, with “*time wasters*” getting in the way of genuine applicants.

### *Reluctance to claim benefits*

There was a clear reluctance on the part of migrant workers interviewed to claim benefits. In part this was associated with pride about making a success of a move to a new country and not wanting to be seen to have failed (in either their own eyes or those of others). But, in some instances, it also appeared to be associated with a cultural expectation of not claiming benefits and of taking virtually any job so as not to do so. Comments illustrating these perspectives include:

*“I don’t need any benefits; as long as I am able to work I’ll get a job”* (non-EEA migrant worker)

*“If there is money available from the State week in and week out, people become very lazy, and don’t want to work. I have my own personal ambitions, and I want to success and do something with my life. We didn’t come here to get a few free pounds every week.”* (non-EEA migrant worker)

*“I came here to earn good money. I heard this was so in England and wanted to try my luck, and was not interested in claiming State money here.”* (A8 migrant worker)

*“It certainly does help those people who have nothing to have money from the government. We [Poles] manage to find work – don’t we, somehow.”* (A8 migrant worker)

*“I have nothing really against people taking welfare, but I do think it’s too easy to get it in this country [the UK]. Back home in Portugal it is not that straightforward – here you can get it, and stop, and back again, and stop. I come from a culture where you don’t automatically think of getting welfare aid of some kind if you lose your job. You try hard to get work, however you can. If it’s not going so well, you try harder – look at me.”* (EU15 migrant worker)

## **B6.6 Overview**

It is clear that job seekers often face several constraints on securing employment. These can include shortcomings in basic functional skills, factors such as lack of soft skills – including lack of confidence, lack of work experience and lack of interest. Some job seekers are constrained by the need to find a job that fits in with their non-work commitments. While there were some variations between individuals, the interviews with UK-born job seekers revealed that their foremost desires for fixed hours and permanent contracts and the certainty and security that these implied were at odds with some of the key characteristics of low paid work in the social care and retails sectors which are characterised by flexibility and insecurity. Taking into account the findings presented in section B4, this suggests that there is more mismatch in terms of the characteristics of available low-skilled jobs and the characteristics of jobs that job seekers value, than in job search methods.

With a different frame of reference, migrant workers (who are themselves self-selected and



so not direct comparators with the UK-born job seekers interviewed), in general appeared more tenacious in their search for work, tended to be reluctant to claim benefits and were more geographically mobile.

## **B7. SKILLS, TRAINING AND PROGRESSION**

### **B7.1 Mandatory and non-mandatory training**

Training in both the retail and social care sectors took two main forms: training to do the job an employee already had; and training to progress to higher level work. This section looks at the first category of training: training in the skills an employee required to do the job they were currently employed to do.

In both sectors health and safety training was conducted by all employers and was usually refreshed regularly. Alongside this, the majority of employers provided some form of induction training designed to equip employees with particular skills and to provide them with information about the wider company.

As has been noted, employers in the retail sector primarily attempted to recruit people who they thought had the necessary portfolio of soft skills, particularly communication skills, and consequently, job-specific skills training tended to focus on hard skills, such as how to use a till. There was some evidence of training to enhance soft skills, particularly amongst large retail sector employers, who reported using scenario-based training to improve customer service skills and to ensure that staff members were aware of company values.

Similarly, employers in the social care sector tended to focus training on the acquisition of hard skills, such as how to lift people safely, as they had focused in recruitment on finding employees with already good levels of soft skills.

Where the two sectors diverge is in attitudes to accreditation of training. In the retail sector, a small number of employers made provision for employees to undertake NVQ qualifications in retail, but generally, skills training was company-specific *“designed by HO [Head Office] and delivered locally in store”*. Take-up of NVQ qualifications was relatively low in the sector. Some employers attributed this to the small number of their employees who saw retail as a long-term career, but they also noted that the NVQ qualification was *“a lot of hard work”*, *“time-consuming”* and that the need to produce a written portfolio of work was off-putting to people who may not have high levels of literacy or who had negative experiences at school. However, some retail chains were prioritising training, in a way that smaller independent retailers lacked the resources to do.

In contrast, nationally accredited training, primarily NVQ Level 2 and 3, was very common in the social care sector, particularly in residential care. The majority of residential care employers reported that it was made clear at interview that employees would be expected to do at least an NVQ Level 2 in Health and Social Care and some stated that employees would be expected to train to NVQ Level 3 thereafter. A small number of employers would not consider employing someone who did not already have at least a Level 2 NVQ, which represented a barrier to entry for many people. Consequently, take-up of training was high

in the care sector, as it was essentially a mandatory requirement for the job. Additionally, some employers explicitly linked pay progression to training, which further encouraged take-up. It also helped to obviate concerns about the lack of career progression routes in social care, which is discussed further below. Employers in the social care sector were generally positive about the NVQs in social care, noting that as they largely involved work-based observation and assessment and little formal study or time away from work in college; they fitted well around the work employees were doing as part of their current job. This positivity was reflected in employees' general support of the need for training in social care, and indeed some interviewees (both employers and employees) expressed concern about employers, particularly those in domiciliary care, who they felt provided little training (albeit not all would have had a complete picture of training provision) and allowed carers to work with vulnerable people after watching "a few DVDs".

In general, younger employees were more likely to receive accredited training in both sectors, simply because there was financial support for their training, which was not the case for older workers. A few employers in both sectors had taken on apprentices, although this was relatively uncommon; (indeed, one social care employer said that young apprentices were not allowed to do any 'hands on' work, and so did not take any on). In part this was because young people who were the right age to do apprenticeship were, as has been noted, not particularly sought by employers in the sector. There were also concerns that although apprentices may be relatively cheap, they took up a lot of other staff members' time, making engagement with formal apprenticeship programmes a costly experience overall.

## **B7.2 Training for progression**

Although in general employers were supportive of training and recognised the value it could play in increasing the skills of their employees, some employers expressed concerns about the benefits employees might derive from training. A particular problem, especially for small employers in both the retail and social care sectors, was the relatively 'flat' employment structure in these sectors. Employment in both sectors is heavily dominated by lower-skilled entry-level work, with relatively few positions for managers or skilled technical workers. Even in the largest retail establishments where interviews were conducted, general lower-skilled positions outnumbered supervisory and managerial positions by a ratio of at least 10:1. This meant that people could undertake training, and potentially become better at their job, but this would not necessarily result in career progression because there were very few higher level jobs for them to progress into. This had two consequences. First, some employers were unwilling to offer any training beyond that which was necessary for employees to do their current job, or they would provide this training only to a selected employee because they were aware of a higher level role becoming vacant. In social care, a number of employees expressed a desire to gain an NVQ Level 3 qualification, but stated that their employer had told them that they must pay for this themselves as the employer would gain no benefit from them having such a qualification; (however, this was not the case for all social care employers). Secondly, it was clear that some employees were unwilling to undertake additional training if they could see no personal benefit to doing so.

*“We used to have a retail course that ran in the store but we got little value from it. They were working towards an NVQ. But the members of staff said they did not think it was beneficial”* (Retail employer)

### **B7.3 Progression routes**

Although the flat employment structure acted as a barrier to progression for some employees in the retail sector, it was evident that there were some progression routes, particularly for employees seeking to progress with their current employer, and particularly if their employer was sufficiently large that there were various roles at different levels (often at different stores) and a clear pathway for progression. The majority of the retail sector employers interviewed commented that they strongly favoured internal candidates: “we recruit from within”; and some had policies of offering vacancies internally prior to opening them to wider recruitment. The reasons given for this by employers were that people would know the company and that the company would know them. Despite this, barriers existed for particular groups. When a retail employer was part of a chain, it was common for employees aspiring to progress to be sent to work in other stores in the chain, which was difficult for those who lacked transport or had other constraints on their mobility. However, smaller, non-chain employers in the retail sector often simply lacked higher level roles for employees to progress into. Employees were limited in their ability to seek work in other parts of the retail sector because their training had been company specific and did not come with a recognised qualification, hence was non-portable, meaning that they would have to start at the bottom again in a new organisation. As a consequence, retail employers reported that it was difficult to encourage their employees to see retail as a career, unless there were other ‘specialist’ job roles available (as in pharmacies).

Progression in the social care sector was also found to be hindered by the flat employment structure of the sector: “*you could be working as a care assistant for 40 years*”. However, the focus on nationally recognised training meant that inter-organisational movement was somewhat more common than in the retail sector. This was particularly seen amongst employees who had entered the care sector as domiciliary carers with no fixed hours and then used this experience to move into residential care with guaranteed hours. There was some evidence, however, that this route was becoming closed as residential care homes were no longer recruiting and some were reducing their staff numbers due to lack of demand for places in private sector care homes.

In both sectors, there was evidence that the economic climate had depressed ambition, and consequently demand for training and progression. In relation to progression, many employees comments focused on “*just be[ing] grateful to have a job*” and “*not thinking about the future, just happy to be in work now*”. This raises two particular issues of concern. First, if sufficient numbers of people at the lower end of the labour market do not seek progression or find that they are unable to achieve it, they block a route into the labour market for lower skilled unemployed people as jobs are not freed up by people vacating their current role. Secondly, it raises questions about how and whether expectations and ambitions may recover as the economy improves. Concern about a ‘lost generation’ that never finds stable employment is common in the literature, but less attention has been given to a generation that has employment but does not progress into work that is stable, rewarding and well-paid.

Some migrants and young people expressed dissatisfaction with the progression routes available to them. Migrants attributed this largely to discrimination.

*“The chances for foreigners progressing into management are not very good at all. I’ve never seen a migrant supervisor or manager [...] When they have to choose between a migrant and a British worker, they always choose the British one”* (EU15 migrant working in the retail sector)

*“It wasn’t right for me, I wasn’t getting anywhere. Other people seemed to be moved up and made supervisors; but not us Poles though”* (A8 migrant working in the retail sector)

In contrast, younger workers suggested that they were often overlooked for progression, and training associated with it, because employers did not take them seriously and felt that they lacked the authority to take on more supervisory roles. This represented a further barrier to these employees considering the retail and social care sectors as providing long-term careers.

*“Being able to progress upwards is where it starts to become hard. In reality getting a job is the easy bit”* (British worker in the retail sector)

#### **B7.4 Occupational mobility without progression**

A notable feature of the employment history of migrants and UK-born employees and job seekers was the extent to which people made horizontal moves at the lower end of the labour market, and how rarely these moves resulted in better paid or more highly skilled employment. Cooks and cleaners became care workers, but these carer workers sometimes envisaged a time when they may return to being cooks or cleaners, depending on their preference at any given time. Similarly, retail workers had moved in and out of the sector over the course of their careers. Some regarded retail or care work as somewhat higher status or more secure or attractive than cooking or cleaning, but for others their current employment was simply ‘another job’ in which they would not progress and they would ultimately leave. For the majority in this situation, this reflected a general lack of confidence in the stability of their job and in the labour market as a whole, they were grateful simply to have a job – especially when lacking a permanent contract and often working low numbers of hours workers saw themselves as expendable.

#### **B7.5 Overview**

This section has shown that while training was undertaken in both the social care and retail sectors, employers in the two sectors take very different approaches to the accreditation of training, and this has resulted in different opportunities for progression in the two sectors. In the retail sector, the relative lack of accredited training (albeit there are exceptions) potentially ‘traps’ employees in a role with a single employer that might offer no opportunity for progression, in part due to the occupational structure of the sector. In social care, accredited training provides greater portability of qualifications, but upward movements are limited both by the occupational structure in the sector and by the declining number of jobs in the more secure residential care sector.

This has resulted in little career progression for many employees working in social care and retail and a depression of ambition as employees see few opportunities to find higher skilled, better paid or more stable employment; indeed, many of those interviewed were relieved to have a job, and were waiting to see if the economic situation improved.

## C. CONCLUSIONS

This final section presents sets out evidence from the qualitative case studies in the social care and retail sectors (i.e. interviews in the West Midlands with 30 employers, eight representatives from recruitment agencies, 33 migrant workers (from both the EU and from outside the EEA), 18 UK-born workers in low-skilled roles), 17 UK-born job seekers on out-of-work benefits with no/ low qualifications, and 12 stakeholders) that corroborates (section C1) and contradicts (or is contrary to the main thrust of) the literature review (section C2). Section C3 identifies issues that are worthy of further research.

### C1. CASE STUDY EVIDENCE CORROBORATING FINDINGS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- *Employer requirements for flexibility:* The case study evidence supports the findings of the literature review that jobs in the service sector are associated with requirements for flexibility, sometimes at the expense of job security for workers. In the retail sector low hours part-time working is used to provide numerical flexibility, so that the number of workers is matched to the numbers of customers. This means that staffing levels are low at quiet times. Job descriptions tend to be written in such a way as to promote functional flexibility – with workers fulfilling a variety of functions as required, rather than a single specific job role. There is also some evidence from the case study interviews that employers in the social care sector have strategies involving numerical flexibility.
- *Zero hours contracts and flexibility:* The literature review pointed to zero hours contracts (i.e. contracts under which an employer is not required to offer an employee any defined numbers of working hours and an employee is neither guaranteed any set number of working hours nor obliged to take any hours offered) offering maximum flexibility for employers but being a source of insecurity for workers. The case study evidence indicated that zero hours are commonplace in some roles – particularly in the domiciliary care sector. The evidence also suggested that many workers are concerned about the insecurity inherence in such contractual arrangements. In turn the nature of these contracts means that it is difficult for workers to find sustainable progression routes from low-skilled jobs.
- *Highly qualified migrants in low skilled roles:* As highlighted in the literature review, quite a few of the migrant workers (both EU and non EEA migrants) interviewed in the case studies had high level qualifications, but were working in low skilled roles. Sometimes this was because of difficulties in them establishing the equivalence of their qualifications gained elsewhere to UK qualifications and sometimes if reflected reluctance of UK employers to accept non-UK qualifications. In other instances migrant workers accepted that in the short-term they would work in jobs below their qualification levels because their main priority was to earn money. For others, especially EU migrants and non EEA migrants whose first language was not English, shortcomings in English language skills were a barrier to finding employment in roles commensurate with their skills.

- *The role of different 'frames of reference' in helping understand the willingness of different groups of workers to take on different jobs and to claim benefits:* While not necessarily desiring temporary employment, the case study evidence suggests that migrants (whether or not from EU countries) may be somewhat more willing than UK-born workers to take on temporary jobs and to see them as a 'way in' to the UK labour market and as a stepping stone to subsequent upward mobility. This is not to say that UK-born workers would not take temporary jobs, but rather that they might be more reluctant than migrant workers to do so. It was very clear from the case study interviews conducted that the majority of migrant workers (from all countries) would be loath to claim benefits – partly as a matter of pride but also because they had come to the UK to work. Often in their origin countries it was more difficult to find a job than in the UK, wages were much lower and benefits less generous; this frame of reference helps to explain their behaviour. Without such a comparative perspective, UK-born job seekers' 'frames of reference' and behaviour were different in several respects.
- *Mobility, transience and short-term perspectives:* Related to the point above on 'frames of reference', on arrival in the UK most migrant workers needed to find employment immediately and so would take low paid temporary jobs (often via recruitment agencies or informal networking), sometimes involving unsociable hours. Given that some migrant workers expected to stay in the UK for a short period only their decisions would be prompted by short-term gains, and so they may be willing to work long hours, and to move (sectorally, occupationally and geographically) to maximise income – often using recruitment agencies and/or informal networks to facilitate such mobility. In accordance with the literature review, the case study evidence suggests that some EU workers would return home if life and work in the UK was not going well, only to return to the UK later when new opportunities (which were often referred to them via social networks) arose, so leading to a pattern of job-to-job (and sometimes geographical moves) within the UK, interspersed with short-term return migration.
- *Targeting of training and reasons for not training:* The case study evidence supports the findings of the literature review that employers may identify employees as being most likely to benefit from training and support them accordingly. There is also evidence that some employees are reluctant to take up training even when it is available, for reasons such as fear of failure (based on negative experiences of education and training in the past), lack of financial support, lack of time and lack of interest.
- *Greater entrenchment of training in social care than in the retail sector.* In accordance with the findings of the literature review, the case study evidence suggests that training is less entrenched in the retail sector than in social care. Although NVQs in customer service are available, what training there was in retail might be organisationally-specific – and hence there are limits to its portability, whereas in the social care sector often workers would be encouraged to study for NVQs in social care and attainment of qualifications was often linked to increases in pay.
- *Lack of English language skills as a clear disadvantage in the labour market:* The case study evidence pointed very clearly to the need for passable/ good spoken English, and also competence in reading and writing English, in many low-skilled roles in the social

care and retail sectors, since they involve contact with customers/ clients/ residents. Migrant workers with proficiency in the English language were at an advantage, while those with poor English skills might tend to gravitate to cooking and cleaning jobs in social care and to warehouse rather than to shop-floor retail jobs. The case study evidence pointed to employers not considering migrant workers for many mainstream roles on the grounds of their poor English, (albeit there were a very few exceptions where the 'work ethic' of migrant workers was an over-riding factor).

- *A surfeit of inappropriate applicants:* The literature review pointed to some parts of the retail sector and some residential care establishments receiving large numbers of applicants for vacancies, but that a high proportion of these might be inappropriate. It was clear from the case study evidence that, in most instances (and domiciliary care is an exception here) there were large numbers of applicants for vacancies, but that there were shortcomings in quality. At least in part employers attributed this to a process involving benefit claimants 'having to' apply for jobs. Individuals applying for jobs that they do not want (which seems to be a particular issue in retail given widespread awareness and familiarity of this sector) both frustrates and places an administrative burden on employers in dealing with applications.
- *The importance of soft skills - 'attitude, attitude, attitude':* The case study evidence supports the findings of the literature review that greater emphasis is placed on soft skills – including attitude and personality – than on formal qualifications in many low-skilled roles, especially in the retail sector. This means 'who you are' – including 'looking good and sounding right' - might be more important than 'what you know'. Personality and attitude are also important in social care, albeit previous experience of caring is often an advantage also.
- *Out of work too long:* In keeping with the importance placed on soft skills in recruitment, the literature review points to a reluctance on the part of some employers to recruit long-term unemployed people, using duration of unemployment as an indicator of lack of motivation or desire to work. This was borne out by the case study evidence, and where long-term people were recruited under the auspices of special schemes in the retail sector in which some supermarkets set aside a proportion of jobs for the long-term unemployed at mass recruitments for new stores employers often experienced problems associated with a lack of work ethic, including poor time keeping, inappropriate behaviour, etc.
- *Differential attractiveness of jobs with particular characteristics:* Requirements for flexibility, part-time working and low pay which are features of low-skilled jobs in the social care and retail sectors make them unattractive for some groups of job seekers (including many benefit claimants wanting permanent, full-time jobs with fixed hours), but attractive to others (such as students, for whom such features satisfy short-term needs).
- *Informal recruitment methods yield good results:* The literature review pointed to the importance of 'free' recruitment methods and the role of informal recruitment methods in providing 'good quality' recruits. The case study evidence revealed that most (but not all) employers used informal recruitment methods as one amongst several recruitment



channels, and that informal recruitment was often identified as yielding good quality applicants.

- *The differential strength of informal methods/ social networks for job search:* The case study evidence corroborates the findings of the literature review which point to increased use of social networks in recruitment placing long-term unemployed UK-born job seekers at a disadvantage because of the generally weaker nature of their social networks that could be utilised for such a purpose. By contrast, the case study evidence showed that migrants' social networks for job search are both denser and more active.
- *The stability and strategic capability provided by migrant networks:* Related to the point above, the importance of migrant networks in facilitating information flows about available vacancies is highlighted in the literature, yet the case study evidence suggests that the literature understates the depth and extent of support provided by migrant networks. Especially for A8 migrants, the existence of strong friendship and family networks in the UK provided a stable base (in terms of provision of housing and other support) from which prospective migrants could scout out possibilities in the UK labour market prior to taking up a job. This enabled them to act more strategically, if they wished to do so, rather than arriving in the UK 'on spec'. The case study evidence also suggests that the existence of such support bases might facilitate short-term movements to and from the UK, enabling migrant workers to investigate and weigh up employment opportunities in the UK, in their home countries and in other destinations.
- *The uneven distribution of migrant workers within the social care and retail sectors:* According to the literature review migrant workers tend to be concentrated in the hardest-to-fill vacancies in the social care sector, which are often associated with the lowest pay and poorest working conditions. There is some evidence from the case studies that domiciliary care agencies face the greatest retention issues, and where there are possibilities to work the longest hours, have higher shares of migrant workers amongst their workforces. In the social care sector interviewees made particular reference to migrants of African origin gravitating towards the hardest-to-fill vacancies and employment associated with the lowest pay and poorest working conditions. Likewise in the retail sector the case study evidence revealed that budget retailers were likely to have higher shares of migrant workers (from all countries) than other retailers.
- *Funding constraints in the care sector:* The literature review noted that strategies of enhancing recruitment and retention in the care sector by improving status, pay, working conditions and career opportunities are hampered by public funding constraints and under-funding of the care sector. Several employers in the care sector bemoaned these downward pressures on costs and the lack of money to enable them to organise work differently and/or raise wages.

## C2. CASE STUDY EVIDENCE THAT IS CONTRARY TO THE FINDINGS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines findings from the qualitative case studies that are contrary to what might have been expected based on a review of the existing literature. It should be noted that the case study evidence presented here is from qualitative research focusing on the social care and retail sectors in the West Midlands, whereas some of the literature relates to other sectors of the economy, other locations and other time periods. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the findings from the qualitative case study evidence are indicative rather than statistically representative.

- *Social care as a career for migrant workers:* The literature review suggests that migrant workers (from all countries, but especially non EEA countries) may find their way into social care sector because there are plenty of vacancies (some of which may be hard-to-fill) not requiring formal qualifications, and that later they might move on to other sectors. While the case study evidence indicates that social care employment does not suit all migrant workers and that some move on to other sectors, it also suggests that some migrant workers see themselves as forging a career in the social care sector – perhaps moving from a cleaning role, to a care assistant, a senior care assistant and then a management role.
- *Lack of specific ‘migrant jobs’ in the social care and retail sectors:* The literature suggests that migrant workers are often concentrated in specific niches in these sectors, which might then come to be thought of as ‘migrant jobs’. It also suggests that migrant workers might be used as complements, substitutes or supplements to the existing workforce. Yet there was no particular case study evidence that employers were using migrant workers in these distinctive/ separate ways. In the retail sector the case study evidence revealed that the drive for increased functional flexibility meant that there were fewer ‘behind the scenes’ roles in which migrants with poor English skills might have concentrated than was formerly the case. While migrant workers might be concentrated in warehouses handling goods for retail stores, they tended not to be specifically concentrated in particular jobs, or be working at particular times, within stores, since there are increasing numbers of UK-born workers working at nights (whereas previously there might have been relatively high proportions of migrant workers on night-time shifts). This meant that migrant workers were not visibly concentrated in specific ‘migrant jobs’. Similarly, in the social care sector, migrant care assistants would perform the same roles as UK-born care assistants, and some interviewees in those areas of the West Midlands with a more diverse population commented that migrants were not noticed within a diverse workforce.
- *Competition for low-skilled jobs:* Related to the point above regarding the relative lack of a visible concentration of migrant workers in particular roles in the social care and retail sectors, there was little if any evidence from the case studies in the West Midlands that UK-born job seekers saw migrant workers as major competitors for low-skilled jobs in these sectors, or that migrant workers exerted downward pressure on wages in these sectors. Rather they saw the sheer number of other job seekers as their competitors, while older benefit claimants lacking formal qualifications tended to see younger people

(who were more likely to have qualifications) as their major competitors. Some UK-born workers in low-skilled roles and job seekers commented that migrants 'worked hard', so 'good for them'. If they identified any 'migrant jobs' these tended to be associated with factory, warehouse or agricultural work – sometimes because of their own observations, but sometimes solely because of media coverage of migration issues.

- *A migrant-local hiring queue at the bottom end of the labour market?:* Literature building on research in the food industry suggests that a clear migrant-local hiring queue has emerged at the bottom end of the labour market with low-wage employers expressing a preference for newly arrived migrant workers at the expense of local workers. No such clear preference is apparent in the case of the social care and retail sectors. It seems likely that the apparent lack of such a hiring queue for most of the employers interviewed reflects first, the general primacy of English language skills in selection of workers in the social care and retail sectors (except perhaps in small niches), as well as some other specific attributes related to the interactive nature of work in the retail and social care sectors, and secondly the recruitment processes operating in both these sectors which focus heavily on using interviews to assess attitude and appearance, which migrants, particularly those with higher-level skills and more experience, appear to be better prepared for.
- *A declining role for recruitment agencies?:* The literature review underscores the important role played by recruitment agencies in facilitating migrants' entry to the labour market in the UK. While recruitment agencies were used by some migrant workers (especially those from the central and eastern European countries which joined the EU in 2004) for inter-job moves, the case study evidence afforded a less prominent role for recruitment agencies than the literature suggests. In particular, several employers reported reduced use or reluctant use of agencies, while migrant workers also made use of the internet and informal methods to access employment, seeing the latter especially as yielding better results.
- *Internet only recruitment:* The case study evidence highlighted the importance of recruitment solely through organisational websites for some of the larger retail chains. Stakeholders pointed to this trend having become more prominent in the last two years and it is not reflected in the literature to the same extent as it exists in reality.
- *Acceptance that pay would be at the level of the National Minimum Wage:* The case study evidence showed that for low-skilled roles in the social care and retail sectors pay levels were at, or just above, the National Minimum Wage. There was little, if any, evidence from the case studies that for UK-born job seekers were expecting to earn more than this for such jobs.
- *The complexity of the situation regarding training provision:* The case study evidence shows that training in retail is not necessarily targeted at workers who will benefit most. In large retail chains training tends to be company-specific, such that it might facilitate inter-store moves with the same employer, but otherwise might have limited portability. In social care training is more geared towards nationally-recognised qualifications, but

there are issues concerning access to funding for training for older people who already have qualifications related to other sectors.

### **C3. ISSUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Reflecting on the case study evidence from the social care and retail sectors, the following issues are identified as worthy of further research:

- *The integration of migrants and the importance of English language skills:* There is indicative evidence from the case studies that many migrant workers in the social care and retail sectors are increasingly integrated into the labour market, and in some cases are moving into better jobs, rather than being entrenched in separate migrant dense niches. It is clear that having adequate English language skills is essential for this integration to be accomplished (and this was emphasised by those migrant workers with children who were being educated in the UK), and that those lacking such skills have limited options. This suggests that there is scope for further research on the work trajectories of migrants with different levels of English language skills, and also on how provision of English language training might best be facilitated for the advantage of individuals, employers and society.
- *Geographical mobility and immobility:* The case study evidence revealed that UK-born job seekers were less geographically mobile in search of work than migrant workers (especially migrant workers from the EU). Spatial mobility is seen increasingly as an essential component of employability, and there is scope for further research on barriers to geographical mobility (encompassing both commuting and migration), how they might be overcome and the likely consequences of overcoming them.
- *Addressing poverty of aspirations:* The case study evidence paints a picture of low wages, fragmented working hours (in some instances), uncertainty about working hours and earnings and limited opportunities for progression in instances of flat organisational structures. Together these factors engender short-term outlooks. Many job seekers accepted that if they found work it would be at or around the level of the National Minimum Wage and though they often aspired to full-time fixed hours contracts there was some recognition that the reality of available jobs was likely to be different. This raises the issue of whether and how such poverty of aspiration might limit the likelihood that some individuals will be in a position to take advantage of opportunities as the economy recovers, and how UK-born workers in low-skilled roles and UK-born job seekers will fare vis-à-vis migrant workers.
- *Implications of part-time and temporary working for training and skills development:* Key features of employment in the social care and retail sectors are low hours and zero hours contracts and part-time working. Generally, there are more opportunities for training and skills development for full-time workers and those on permanent contracts than for those working part-time or in temporary positions. This poses a challenge for employers and workers going forward in terms of provision of and funding for training and ensuring that workers have the necessary skills to undertake their roles. What models are appropriate

for promoting, operationalising and funding training and skills development in such circumstances is one possible issue for further research.

- *The operation of large national chains outside the formal public vacancy system:* The case study evidence pointed to large employers making greater use of organisational websites for recruitment and directing informal enquiries about vacancies to them. Consequently job seekers searching solely on the Universal Jobmatch website and neglecting organisational websites miss out on large numbers of vacancies. This suggests a need for research monitoring trends on use of organisational websites in recruitment and selection, and what the implications of a greater use of such websites are, for different groups in the labour market.
- *The implications of poor digital literacy and the possibilities afforded by social media:* Individuals lacking functional IT skills are increasingly disadvantaged in a job search environment in which there is increasing emphasis on advertising of vacancies online and use of online application forms. Navigating websites, filling in forms online and sending emails are not high level skills, and will not be required in all jobs, but they have become essential for job seekers. The case study evidence suggests that some stakeholders are concerned about a lack of digital literacy (particularly amongst some older job seekers). There is scope for further research on changes in the skills required for job seeking, on the numbers and characteristics of people lacking such skills and what support they need to acquire them. The case study evidence also highlighted the important role of social media in alerting job seekers to opportunities. This was evident especially amongst some of the migrant workers interviewed who were active and efficient users of social media, and who used such media to facilitate short-term international and intra-national mobility and job search. Further investigation of how such media are used by different groups of the population in the job search process is an issue for future research.

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