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Demand for managers in fast-growing sector

A new graduate trainee scheme will be providing the social care management executives of the future. What does it offer?

Saba Salman

Isn't it every graduate's wish to join a growth industry? Making sure that your first step on to the career ladder is within an expanding sector will provide you with a secure and challenging working life.

Look no further than adult social care. The sector provides services to support people, often disabled or elderly, with their daily needs. Around 1.5 million people work in adult social care in private social care firms and local authorities, and the figure is expected to grow to an estimated 2.5 million by 2025 to meet the demands of an ageing population.

This month, the National Skills Academy for Social Care (NSA), a government-funded but employer-led body to promote excellence in training, has launched the first ever national graduate social care management trainee scheme.

Supported by the Department of Health and described by care minister Phil Hope as "a unique and exciting development for adult social care", the one-year programme is designed to create the sector's executives of the future. Liz McSheehy, NSA director, explains: "The aim is to look at how we can grow future leaders in adult social care. Effective leadership and management has been a common theme in reviews of adult social care for some time."

Usually, social care professionals can rise through the ranks with professional development courses, leading to management level. The NSA scheme, however, gives 20 executives of the future a year of management and leadership experience, hosted by one of 20 employers from across England.

Although details were still being finalised in the run-up to its launch, McSheehy says that a typical employer might be a local authority, a small privately-run care home or a voluntary sector group supporting vulnerable people in their homes. As with any graduate scheme, a job is not

guaranteed at the end, but the salary for a residential care home manager, for example, might start at £32,000.

The first 20 graduates come from a range of disciplines and from all over England, and the programme aims to give each trainee and their host employer a boost, raising the profile of social care and increasing awareness of how rewarding a care career can be. "There will be a wider impact in the boost given to our graduates," explains McSheehy. "The scheme helps people to recognise there are some interesting job opportunities and pathways in social care."

Each of the participants will be paid £20,000 through the academy and, through their host employer, will carry out a variety of roles in order to hone new management and leadership skills. "This isn't a course as such," adds McSheehy, "It's a year of management leadership and experience through a placement. The graduates are not cheap labour - they will have access to appropriate qualifications and training."

The trainees will also have to study for a management-related qualification during their year-long placement - probably an MSc or postgraduate diploma in social work management. The scheme also includes one-to-one mentoring for six months after the 12-month placement ends. This support will help participants find the right job.

So what sort of qualities do you need to make it as a social care manager? For McSheehy, while it is vital to be "emotionally intelligent, perceptive and caring", it is equally crucial to recognise that social care is a business like any other. "We can have the soft skills but must recognise that, if we are training leaders for the future, they have to be quite strong and tough - if you're a local authority director of adult social services you have a lot of

difficult decisions to make."

Spreading the word

There has been some criticism from private care providers that the scheme ignores the need to recruit more frontline, junior staff. Others have suggested the initiative needs to go hand-in-hand with wider improvements to training and accreditation courses for existing junior staff.

However, the NSA hopes the knock-on effect of its graduate scheme will be to spread the word about opportunities in social care and help with general recruitment to the sector, an assertion backed by the British Association of Social Workers.

The NSA also rejects suggestions its approach will create a two-tiered system, with some social care executives working their way up after starting on lower levels, while NSA graduates begin their careers at senior managerial level. The two paths into social care management, says McSheehy, "complement each other". "Frankly, it's about attracting more people into the sector, and that can only be a good thing."

So if you happen to be an arts graduate, says McSheehy, do not dismiss a career in social care. "If you were a history graduate and you heard about this scheme but didn't think your degree was relevant, I'd say, come and talk to us, speak to some employers and get an understanding of what's going on in social care."

Weblinks

National Skills Academy for Social Care:
www.skillsacademyforsocialcare.org.uk
 Social Care Institute for Excellence:
scie.org.uk



Trainee voices **The first intake**



Rachel Downing, 21, has just graduated in law from Kings College, London University

I always had an interest in working in social care and thought the scheme would offer me invaluable hands-on experience in the adult social care sector, as well as the support to allow me to reach my full potential. I was attracted to the unique challenges faced by a social care manager and would like to be involved in shaping social care policy.

I hope to learn management and leadership skills as well as gaining a thorough understanding of the issues facing the social care sector. For me, the most rewarding thing will be enabling people to live as they wish, without

any obstacles to prevent this. I think the biggest challenge might be bridging the gap between cuts to public spending and a growing elderly population, which will inevitably lead to a greater number of services users.



Paul Growney, 23, has a first class psychology degree from Liverpool University

I applied for the scheme because in university I had a quandary – I either wanted an executive career or one helping people, whether in psychological therapies or graduate medicine programmes. I always thought executive roles and caring roles were opposing concepts. However, through researching graduate programmes

I found the management scheme in adult social care could be perfect for me as it allows me to develop into an executive role but also to make a difference to people's lives.

From doing this scheme I can tailor my management career to what suits me and what I enjoy as I will have experience in a wide variety of management roles. I hope to learn what social care managers do, how they operate on a day-to-day basis and what the outcomes of their work are. I also would like to learn about management in general, and the different aspects such as finance, personnel, HR, and customer service.

I think the biggest challenge might be digesting such a vast array of information and management techniques in just a year.

Interviews by Saba Salman

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