



Chronic shortage of social workers puts children at risk

Vulnerable children are being put at risk by a chronic shortage of experienced social workers, according to a paper from the think-tank Policy Exchange.

The research report, 'Reforming Social Work', showed that the supply of social workers will not equal demand until 2022, which will have 'tragic implications' for the UK's most vulnerable people.

The shortage has resulted in a huge amount of vacancies across

the country, and many councils are feeling the burden. Of the English councils who

responded to information requests, 13 reported having 15 or more vacancies, four had more than 100 and two had more than 200.

Vacancies left behind by older workers generally require two or more years of experience. Although more students are enrolling onto the appropriate courses, with around 6,000 entrants a year since 2005, over a quarter (27 per cent) of qualified social workers were unemployed in 2011. Employers state that this is

because the applicants lacked relevant work experience, and were seen as being 'too green'.

The recruitment crisis has been exacerbated by the increased number of older workers leaving the profession. Nearly three quarters of those interviewed (70 per cent) considered their caseloads to be 'unmanageable', while another research project conducted by Community Care found that half of all social workers have seen at least one colleague leave their team over the past year due to high caseloads.

Guy Miscampbell, co-author of 'Reforming Social Work', said: 'A

shortage of experienced social workers could have potentially tragic implications, especially for vulnerable children.

'For social services to be effective, they must have skilled, motivated and qualified staff. An increasing demand for adult social care as more people are living longer combined with tighter adult and child social care budgets among local authorities means that simply increasing financial investment is not the answer. We need a root-and-branch structural reform of services and training to deliver better outcomes with limited resources.'