

# The Mental Health Officer role in Scotland: current capacity and landscape

Neil Macleod, Policy Co-ordinator,  
SSSC

## Aim of study and context

To develop a better understanding of:

- supply and demand challenges for local authorities
- data on the workforce and information gaps
- impact of policy changes
- extent to which economic climate impacts on MHO role

Report developed as part of secondment to the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government.

## Methodology

1. Literature review
  - demand data
  - workforce data
  - reports
  
2. Discussions with key stakeholders
  - national and policy representatives
  - managers and MHOs
  
3. Local authority survey

## MHO staffing shortfall

**Table: No. of local authorities with a shortfall, 2008-2013**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>March 2012</b>	<b>Nov 2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>LAs</b>	14	16	12	15	16	14	20

Source: SSSC (2014) Mental Health Officers (Scotland) Report 2013

## Summary of findings

1. MHO shortfall: why?
  - terms and conditions, salary, recruitment issues
  - increasing demand for services (guardianships)
  - challenges around completing SCRs
  
2. The role of workforce planning
  - yes, within wider social work plans
  - yes, within local authority-wide workforce plans
  - not yet

## Summary of findings (continued)

### 3. The role of agency MHOs

- majority of LAs do not employ agency MHOs
- inability to recruit
- cover short-term or long-term illness
- deal with backlog (guardianships, Social Circumstances Reports)

### 4. Determining service priorities

- statutory work
- supervision
- lower priority: SCRs, adult support and case protection conferences, attendance at forums

## Summary of findings (continued)

5. Views around integration of health and social care
  - unlikely to have negative impact (majority)
  - some anxieties / fears around clinical governance
  
6. Emergency Detention Certificates (EDCs)
  - challenges around ensuring MHO consent
  - ‘consent’ and ‘consult’
  - drop in numbers of out of hours services workers
  
7. Social Circumstances Reports (SCRs)
  - actions to address completion rates
  - lack of a strategic approach to completing SCRs?

## MHO pay, image and value

- Differing approaches to
  - salary levels,
  - enhancements
  - payments for out of hours work
  - ‘senior practitioner’ role
- mixed views around a link between pay / retention
- extent to which MHOs are ‘poached’ by LAs is unclear
- promote wider MHO role

## Next steps and possible actions

- share learning: how to reduce EDCs granted without MHO consent
- a better understanding of approaches taken by local authorities to improve SCR completion rates
- data on numbers of agency MHOs
- better understanding of link between remuneration and ability to recruit / retain MHOs
- develop resources which promote MHO role and wider contribution

Final report will be available in due course.

## LA views: career promotion, training and workforce solutions

- “an annual session for staff who want to find out more about the course and the role of the MHO”
- “a mental health co-ordinator post... clear and easy contact for staff with queries about training”
- “forged links with LN West.... reference group allows further participation in discussion around changes and improvements to course”
- longer term plans: “re-draft job descriptions and include requirement for all social workers in adult team to undertake the MHO award at an appropriate time in their professional development and in line with service need”

## LA views: workforce planning

- “...we have a workforce plan for recruitment. We offer quarterly forum meetings for trained MHOs and have a steering group which meets 8-weekly. There are peer support groups for MHOs. They meet every 8 weeks”
- “Yes – we have a workforce plan which also supports retention and development of MHOs”
- “We do not have a workforce plan yet but colleagues in HR are working on this as a Council-wide document and we will include it in our ongoing service plans”

## LA views: Emergency Detention Certificates and Social Circumstances Reports

### **Emergency Detention Certificates**

- “we have robust systems in place.....we review systems regularly to ensure all medical practitioners have access to up to date phone numbers and MHO services.”

### **Social Circumstances Reports**

- “...developing robust performance and quality assurance systems which will allow sampling, monitoring and reviewing documentation, including SCR peer review”
- “We are.....auditing the number of audited SCRs. This will form a learning and development plan”

## Contact details

Neil Macleod  
Policy Co-ordinator  
Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)

[Neil.Macleod@sssc.uk.com](mailto:Neil.Macleod@sssc.uk.com)

07798 66 55 63

[www.sssc.uk.com](http://www.sssc.uk.com)

## Areas to consider.....

- The extent to which these findings match your perspective
- The approaches employed by your local authority to address these challenges
- Role of agency MHOs