Supporting your personal assistant to gain the skills they need
Introduction

Welcome to Skills for Care’s guide to help you support your personal assistant (PA) to gain the skills they need for their role.

This guide is for anyone:
- interested in employing a PA
- employing a PA and thinking about training and how to develop their skills.

On-going learning and development is important for all social care and health workers, including PAs. As an employer, thinking about the skills you need your PA to have is important whether you are recruiting a new PA or training existing staff.

This guide is designed to be used closely with our:
- Employing a personal assistant toolkit
- Being a personal assistant guide
- A practical guide to learning and development for personal assistants

Funding

Remember that Skills for Care offers the Workforce Development Fund (WDF) for individual employers which can be used to pay for the cost of training, travel and backfill PA time.

To read more or download an application form please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding or email funding@skillsforcare.org.uk.

Please note

The term ‘individual employer’ or ‘employer’ used in this guide refers to the person who employs a PA. This could be a person in need of care and support or someone who acts on their behalf (e.g. an advocate, representative, parent or guardian).

It also includes anyone using either a personal budget from their local authority, a personal health budget (PHB) from the NHS or their own money to employ one or more PAs to meet their social care or health needs.
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What are the benefits of learning and development?

Learning and development for PAs:

- improves the quality of care and support they provide
- helps PAs to meet their responsibilities (and understand yours); this helps you to work safely together and keep up-to-date with new laws and other ways of doing things
- grows a person’s confidence, offers a sense of achievement and increases job satisfaction
- may help you as an employer meet the requirements of your insurer
- reduces conflict in the workplace
- makes PAs better at their job and develops their skills helps employers to keep their PAs; learning and development is one way of rewarding PAs and showing your commitment to them as employees.

There are benefits to training, learning and development even if your PA has worked with you for a long time. It keeps their knowledge current, allows them to reflect on how they do things for you and provides an opportunity to learn about new or better ways of doing things that will improve the quality of care you receive.
What should I know about learning and development for PAs

Your PA’s skills and their learning and development needs are important whether you’re about to employ them or they’ve worked for you for years.

This section will look at:
- how will my personal assistant learn new skills?
- what training does my personal assistant need?
- what sort of courses do PAs regularly do?
- is there anything I should think about if I receive a personal health budget (PHB)?

You can then find out more about learning and development for:
- new personal assistants
- personal assistants who are already working for you
- yourself, as an individual employer.
How will my PA learn new skills?

People learn in different ways:

- some like to read about how to do something
- others like to be shown, or told how, and so might prefer to go on a practical course
- some people like to do the job and learn as they go along
- others like to talk and ask questions
- some people like a mix of the above.

Talk to your PA about what they would prefer. Ask open and honest questions. Think about what approach you would prefer, because you need to be comfortable with the method and approach to be used. You might want to learn and train together.

What training does my PA need?

The best time and place for discussions about learning and development will be different for everyone. They could take place when you interview a PA for the job, during a PA’s induction, when you have regular reviews and discussions about how well things are going or perhaps during less formal conversations.

You can identify learning and development needs by:

- thinking about your PA’s existing knowledge and skills
- talking about what they need to know and do. Have a look at the job description and see how it matches your care and support plan
- considering if you want your PA to have awareness or training for specific conditions
- talking to your PA about any gaps in their understanding and how these might be filled
- thinking about your own situation and how it might change overtime. There may be some learning that could be done now that will prepare both of you for the future
- thinking about something that has happened at work and whether training would change how it was handled if it happened again.

If your PA works in a team with other PAs, consider group learning or each PA attending different training courses to compliment each PA’s strengths.

If you haven’t recruited your PA(s) yet, take a look at the ‘When recruiting’ section of this guide.
What sort of courses to PAs regularly do?

Whilst each PA’s learning needs will be different, there are some courses that we know employer’s regularly send their PAs on.

These include:

- Moving and assisting
- First aid
- Safeguarding
- Fire safety
- Health and safety
- Condition specific awareness, for example diabetes, epilepsy, dementia and autism training
- Infection control

If you receive a budget for your care either from a local authority or NHS organisation they will sometimes ask that your PAs attend specific training as part of the process of setting up your care plan or as your needs change. This might be something like safeguarding or moving and handling.
Is there anything I should think about if I receive a personal health budget (PHB)?

If you receive a PHB, your PA might also need training for delegated health care tasks included in your care plan.

This might include tasks like:

- tracheostomy care
- bowel care
- catheterisation
- management of humidification system or ventilator
- tube feeding.

If your PA is going to perform these tasks they must have received the training that your NHS organisation has specified and been assessed as competent to perform the task. The NHS organisation issuing your budget will either provide this training or the money for it.

If you want to know more about the delegation of tasks, Personal assistants – delegation, training and accountability, by NHS England, is a good introduction.

The staff understand my wife’s condition [Huntington’s Disease] much better thanks to the course and we’ve made a few changes to how she’s cared for as a result.

Husband of an individual employer
It's important that you think about learning and development when recruiting and employing a new PA.

You can break this process down into:

- when recruiting

- what happens when I introduce my personal assistant to the working environment (induction)?

- the first few days.
When recruiting
Before recruiting a PA, it is important to think about what skills or knowledge you may want them to have. This could be formal or informal training, or you may want to look for a PA with no past experience so you can train them in the way you would like them to work.

If your PA will be performing certain health or clinical care tasks, for instance tasks included in your care package agreed as part of a personal health budget (PHB), the organisation issuing your budget may specify certain training and assessment as well.

If you are advertising a PA job, you may want to consider stating in the application pack the skills or knowledge you are looking for. It may also be a good idea to include a statement about on-the-job training and learning and the development that may be available to PAs in your employment.

For anyone recruiting PAs, the Employing personal assistants toolkit includes:
- guidance on the process – from writing a job description to employing someone
- a sample job description and person specification
- sample job adverts and application forms
- examples of letters inviting people to interview
- an example of a contract of employment for a PA.

You can order a paper copy by emailing marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk.

Disabled employer of personal assistants

Ask open and honest questions, it’s the only way to learn.
What happens when I introduce my personal assistant to the working environment (induction)?

Your home, and the place where you are supported, becomes your PA's place of work. An induction will help your PA to settle in quickly.

It also helps to build a successful working relationship. Many individual employers train PAs themselves, on-the-job. They may also involve other PAs, friends and family members.

Remember, how long it takes to cover all the information your PA needs and learn new skills can vary. Sometimes, a PA will have worked elsewhere and have already received an induction. However, it is important to have an induction for each PA to update their knowledge, help them understand your needs and familiarise yourself with their abilities.

Book four of the Employing a personal assistant toolkit includes more information about induction. It includes tips like:

- make a list of things you need to tell your new PA on their first day. What do they need to know about the job, and how do they need to carry out their tasks in the best way for you? Decide what they need to know on their first day and what you will be happy for them to learn bit by bit
- set aside time with your new personal assistant. You could do this before or on their first day
- take time to think how you can best keep control - you are the boss and your personal assistant should work with you and at your pace
- keep a simple record of how your personal assistant was inducted.

Training in general is required to ensure best practice while at work and I think that it is even more important in the care sector where you are dealing with vulnerable people.

Louise, personal assistant

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Louise, personal assistant
The first few days
When starting a new job, the first days are when people learn what the job is about. As an employer of PAs, it is important to use this time to get across to your PA:
- what your needs are
- how you want your needs to be met.

The role of a PA can be an intimate experience due to the nature of the job. It requires some discussion between the employer and employee around respect, dignity, trust and valuing differences of opinion. This, of course, should work both ways, with the employer and the PA having respect for each other.

Introducing new PAs to your home environment needs to be carried out carefully, as it is your home and may be the home of other people including your family, partner, friends and, of course, pets.

Induction
Think about using your PA's job description, their employment contract and your support plan as a basis for their induction. Don’t forget to ask your PA questions to check their understanding. It is important to remember that health and safety legislation must be followed and a risk assessment should be carried out.

Induction varies but could include:
- watching another PA or carer
- explaining what you want your PA to do and how (personalised care)
- introducing them to your home, for example where things are, who supports you, use of assistive technologies, adaptations and where you go in your community
- setting boundaries of what you do, and do not, expect.

Book 3 of the Employing a personal assistant toolkit includes guidance on ensuring that when you hire a PA you include a probationary period at the start of their employment. This is a trial period, when you can find out what your new PA is really like. The probationary period is two-way and so it allows your PA to think about whether they are suited to the job.

Hear from Philip, an individual employer, who carries out employer-led inductions for his PAs.
What is the Care Certificate?
The Care Certificate was introduced in April 2015 and is intended to be one part of the induction for staff who are employed as health care assistants, assistant practitioners, care support workers and those giving support to clinical roles in the NHS where there is any direct contact with patients.

The Care Certificate is made up of 15 standards and sets out the learning outcomes, competences and standards of care that are expected of you when providing compassionate and quality care.

A PA working for someone with care and support needs met via a social care budget, personal health budget (PHB) or self-funding does not have to have completed the Care Certificate. However they can be supported to complete some or all of the Care Certificate standards; not all of the standards will always be relevant to a PAs role.

If you are considering asking your PA to complete the Care Certificate you should speak to your local authority, NHS organisation or a local support organisation like a user-led organisation (ULO). You can find a list of local support organisations here.

It’s important to train staff so they feel confident and are able to deliver the support you need.

Nina, individual employer
Learning and development for personal assistants who already work for you

It is important to support your PAs to develop their skills.

How can I offer additional training?
Skills for Care has funding available for employers to cover the full costs of learning and development for themselves and their PAs.

It can be used to pay for the cost of training, as well as the cost of cover (that is, to pay for a replacement PA) and any travel costs. There is no limit to the number of times employers can apply for funding.

Visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding for more information.

Alternatively you may wish to think about:

- support organisations who may offer training: the information hub for individual employers and PAs is a collection of materials from a selection of sources and links to local organisations. For a list of organisations visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/localregisters

- training from your local authority or NHS organisation: if you receive a personal budget, then the organisation which issues this may offer training for you or your PA; if you self-fund your own care some local authorities will offer the support they give to budget holders to you as well

- Apprenticeships: being an apprentice gives your PA the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification and develop professional skills, while earning a salary. Use book five of the Employing a PA toolkit or visit www.apprenticeships.org.uk to find more information.
Remember that training takes different forms.

- Personalised training is designed specifically to meet your requirements. It can be delivered in different ways. Many individual employers train their PAs themselves on the support tasks they need assistance with. They may also ask a new PA to watch another PA or family carer who is experienced.

- Some employers design the training and have it delivered by a learning provider. A support organisation or network, group of individual employers and/or other supporters can work together with the employer and learning provider. This can help the employer to find high quality, cost-effective learning.

- Informal training helps you learn new skills but does not lead to a recognised qualification. It may be a short course with a certificate for learners who have successfully completed it.

- Formal training leads to a qualification, for example a Level 2 Diploma in health and social care. The training will take place at a college or with a training provider. These are called accredited qualifications. Formal training for PA may take place in the employer’s home.

- Internet-based training is sometimes called e-learning and usually consists of exercises or instructions available via the internet. Sometimes CDs and DVDs are used with this type of training. You can do this when it suits you and can fit it around your day. Internet-based training needs to be assessed by the individuals using it to make sure it meets any access needs. The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) provides free Social Care TV videos on a range of subjects.
Are there any qualifications for a personal assistant?

There are three types of qualifications available:

- award
- certificate
- health and social care diploma (these have replaced NVQs)

For more information on adult social care qualifications visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications

A PA who is less experienced and wishes to undertake a social care qualification would be most likely to complete a level 2 qualification. An experienced PA, or one supervising other PAs, may complete a level 3 qualification.

The diplomas are used to assess someone’s ability to do a job. Assessment includes asking questions, watching a PA do their job, marking what they have written and talking about what they do.

Diplomas are made up of different units. Some are compulsory as part of the diploma and others you can choose. They include subjects such as diabetes, dementia, stroke, and food safety.

If you need help choosing accredited qualifications try the Skill Selector on the Skills for Care website. This tool helps you to build a qualification in simple steps.

Completing the qualifications has given me more confidence in my role so I can provide better care.

Elem, personal assistant
Short courses
Of course, learning doesn’t have to mean an accredited qualification. Short courses can be full, half day or a few days and give PAs, for example, a working knowledge of a particular subject or condition.

Some of these short courses may need to be repeated after a certain time frame, for example a first aid at work certificate is only valid for three years.

Examples of these sorts of courses include:
- health and safety
- moving and handling
- emergency first aid
- health and safety introduction
- infection control
- fire safety.

Other suggested subject areas are:
- nutrition
- dementia
- autism
- learning disability
- mental health
- communication skills for cultural awareness
- disability equality
What training is there for me to become a better employer?

You may have some learning and development needs as an employer, particularly if you are new to employing staff. Your PA is working for you and you are their manager. You will direct what they do and when they do it. The employee listens and learns from the employer and vice versa.

It is important that you are able to access information, advice and guidance that can help you to be a good and successful employer. A lot of this can be found on the internet. However, you may also be able access training by applying funding from Skills for Care’s individual employer fund or via your local authority, NHS organisation or support service.

What subjects might help me?

- Employment law
- Recruitment and selection
- Managing and supervising a personal assistant
- Conflict and dispute management
- Time management
- Boundaries and expectations
- Assertiveness
- Stress management
- Building self-confidence
- Health and safety/risk assessment

These sorts of courses might also be useful if you have a large team of PAs and one or more of them has a supervisory, senior or manager role.

Some local authorities, NHS organisations, support organisations and networks will provide training and/or advice, forms and support groups for you as an employer.
Further information

We have lots of information to help you support the learning and development of your PA, and in your role as an employer.

- How can I find a learning provider?
- What questions should I ask a learning provider?
- Where can I get money towards the cost of training
- What templates are there to help me think about my PAs learning or my own training needs?

Other useful resources:

Information hub for individual employers and personal assistants
This hub has lots of information to help you be a good employer. It includes information about finding PAs, induction, insurance, pensions and learning and development. Visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub)

Employing a personal assistant toolkit
This toolkit guides you through the process of employing a PA and explains your responsibilities as an employer. It can be accessed online [www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk](http://www.employingpersonalassistants.co.uk) Or you can request a paper copy by emailing [marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk)

Individual employer funding
Skills for Care distribute funding to individual employers for training for themselves and their PAs. Find out more and download an application form [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding)
How can I find a learning provider?
It would be better to choose a training provider who understands the unique relationship and challenges of individual employers and personal assistants.

If you are looking for training, we would recommend that you search online or contact your local training companies to see what they can offer.

Local authorities, NHS PHB teams, unions, direct payment support organisations and other local organisations may be able to support you and your PA to find a suitable training provider or training course. Some might offer training that is provided free of charge.

Skills for Care also publishes a list of learning and development providers who have demonstrated their commitment to quality, via our endorsement framework www.skillsforcare.org.uk/endorsement.

For more information about choosing a learning provider go to www.skillsforcare.org.uk/learningproviders.

What questions should I ask a learning provider?
1. Check the provider understands the social care and health sector
2. Check the experience and quality of the provider
3. Check the design and delivery of the learning offered
4. Check whether the learning is accredited or nationally recognised
5. Check you are happy with how the learning programme is monitored
6. Check you are happy with the level of support you (the learner) will receive
7. Check how assessment will be undertaken
8. Check the quality of the tutors, mentors and assessors
9. Check the cost and any possible funding available
10. You are in control; make sure you get what you want.

These top ten tips are available in a small set of cards. For a free set, email marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk.
Where can I get money towards the cost of training?

If you employ your own care and support staff using a personal health budget (PHB), a social care budget or your own money you can apply to Skills for Care to get money for training for you and your personal assistant. The money that is available is called individual employer funding.

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding) or call 0113 245 1716.

What templates are there to help me think about by PAs learning or my own training needs?

We have included an example learning needs form and an example learning record at the back of this guide.

The information in [Being a personal assistant](#) will help you and your PA to get the most from these.
Appendix 1:
Learning needs form for a personal assistant

To be completed during discussions with your employer to determine your learning needs and how they will be met.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Agreed learning and development activities to help achieve objectives</th>
<th>Who will arrange this?</th>
<th>When and where will the learning and development take place?</th>
<th>Date started</th>
<th>Date complete</th>
<th>Comments (if any)</th>
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Name of personal assistant

Start date of plan

Review date of plan
# Appendix 2:
Learning record for a personal assistant

To be completed as different learning is completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My objectives</th>
<th>I will</th>
<th>To do this I will involve</th>
<th>Date learning completed</th>
<th>Did the learning achieve my objectives?</th>
<th>Comments or further action needed</th>
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