

Action in focus

National strategy, local impact



“

We all want to live in the place we call home, with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to us.

- Social Care Future

”

National strategy, local impact

Two years ago, the adult social care sector set out an ambitious vision to build a skilled, valued, and sustainable workforce that enables people to live the lives they choose. Today, that vision is becoming reality.

As we move into a new year, we are capturing how that ambition is turning into action - showcasing the leadership across the system, progress and the difference it is making for people who draw on care and support, communities, and of course the workforce.

The workforce challenge facing adult social care is complex, longstanding, and shared across the whole system. It is shaped by many actors, many factors, and decisions made at local, regional, and national levels - none of which alone can deliver the change required. Recognising this, the Workforce Strategy set out not a single blueprint or quick fix, but a whole system approach grounded in collaboration, shared ownership, and sustained leadership over time. Lasting improvement depends not only on what we do, but on how we work together.

2025 has been a pivotal year. Alongside implementing the Workforce Strategy's recommendations, the sector is playing a key role in landmark developments.

The Employment Rights Act 2025 introduces improvements for all workers and lays the foundation for a Fair Pay Agreement for those working in adult social care, who do a brilliant job day in day out. The Casey Commission is scoping the direction of travel for fundamental reform of adult social care, while the 10 Year Health Plan offers the opportunity to develop a more flexible workforce across social care and health. Our collective response sets out the pivotal contribution adult social care can make to the government's vision for the neighbourhood health service.

As these reforms gather pace, it is increasingly clear that progress depends on more than policy alignment and delivery milestones alone. Some of the most significant advances to date are found in stronger relationships across the



system, greater trust between partners, a growing confidence to act locally, and a willingness to work through differing perspectives rather than around them.

These are not abstract or ‘soft’ achievements; they are the conditions that make sustained change possible in complex systems.

Change of this nature is not linear. While strategic alignment is essential, moments of difference and tension often surface when ambition meets delivery. Creating space to name and work constructively with these differences - rather than allowing them to stall progress or silence voices - is vital if the sector is to move beyond intent to lasting impact. This Strategy recognises that learning, adaptation, and collaboration over time are central to success.

Our shared challenge, and opportunity, is to turn this collective vision into enduring change - ensuring that every action strengthens the workforce and improves outcomes for people who draw on care and support.

The success of the Workforce Strategy continues to rely on the commitment of system leaders - sector partners, Oversight Executive Group members, and policymakers - alongside the thousands of people across adult social care who are leading change in their organisations, networks, and communities every day.

Progress depends on participation, not permission. Our task now is to stay the course: deepening collaboration, sustaining relationships, and resisting simpler answers to a challenge that demands long term, collective stewardship.



**Professor Oonagh Smyth
CBE and Sir David Pearson.**

**Co-chairs of the Workforce
Strategy Oversight
Executive Group.**

Created by the sector, for the sector

The Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England is recognised and valued across the sector. It is more than a set of recommendations. It is the first time the sector has come together, with one voice, to develop the Workforce Strategy we need.

It ensures we have enough of the right people with the right skills to provide the best possible care and support for the people who draw on it.

We recently asked sector leaders from across the [Oversight Executive Group](#), who represent over 30 organisations and the voices of people who draw on care and support, what continues to make this Strategy relevant and effective.

Providers say it brings a clear, strategic approach to planning for population needs – something that has never been done at this scale before.

For local authorities and care system partners, it offers a framework to influence policy, reorganise programmes and engage workforce leaders.

Care workers welcome commitments to fair pay, stronger training pathways and better wellbeing. They want change to happen faster and expect co-production at every stage. That means care workers should have a voice in meetings and decision-making forums.

Regulators and sector bodies see the strategy as central to conversations about workforce priorities. It aligns with efforts to build a sustainable, skilled workforce and tackle inequalities.

“The strategy gives councils a framework to reorganise and engage workforce leaders.”

Regional Association of Directors of Adult Social Services

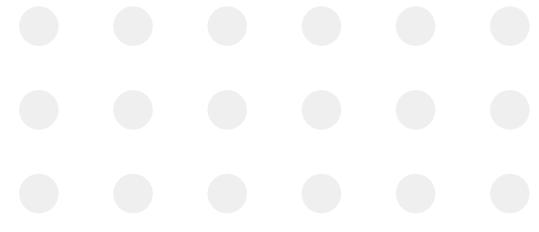
“Workforce remains a top priority for providers and regulators alike.”

Care Quality Commission

“Fair pay, stronger training and wellbeing are essential – and must happen faster.”

Care Workers' Charity

Strategy in action



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Champions in action

More than 480 Workforce Strategy champions are now using the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy to shape policy, influence local decision making and strengthen collaboration across the sector. This expanding network has become a powerful driver of momentum, helping to translate national ambitions into practical action on the ground.

We introduced new resources for champions this year and took the opportunity to find out what they valued about the Strategy and how their role as a champion was making a difference.

Champions describe how the strategy is:

- shaping their day-to-day work
- informing recruitment approaches
- widening routes to attract talent
- prompting new partnerships between providers that might not otherwise have formed

For many, the value lies in having a shared framework that brings consistency to workforce planning and gives them the confidence to act with a clearer sense of direction.

Their motivations for becoming champions also tell a compelling story. Many want to raise the profile of social care as a career of choice, emphasising that the sector offers extensive opportunities but often undersells itself. Others have stepped into leadership roles for the first time and see the strategy as a way to build their understanding, strengthen their voice and help shape a more positive narrative about working in care.

“In the work that I do, I have the strategy in the back of my mind when I am writing policy around workforce for our organisation. It informs our recruitment activity and has helped me broaden our outlets to attract talent. I am working with other providers on recruitment, which may not have come about if we hadn’t started talking about the strategy.”



Why become a champion?

“Because social care is an amazing sector for careers and we don’t shout loudly enough about it.”

“I’m new to the care sector in a leadership role so want to upskill and encourage people to think of the sector as a viable career opportunity.”

Together, these champions are creating a movement: one that is building confidence, connecting organisations, and helping to embed the workforce strategy in real practice across the country. Look out for more practical resources coming from and for champions this year.



Attract and retain

Tackling turnover and improving retention remains one of the biggest opportunities to strengthen the adult social care workforce. Check out the collaborative approach partners are taking.

Working as one

Skills for Care is leading work to design a series of retention pilots alongside five Integrated Care System (ICS) areas.

Testing new ideas at an ICS scale brings partners together across local authorities, care providers, NHS teams and community organisations, helping areas trial local solutions that support genuinely joined up working and reflect how staff move across the wider system.

In addition to these pilots, an exciting research project, based on evidence from providers, is exploring what really makes a difference to recruitment and retention. By learning from providers with low turnover and gathering insight from local and regional leaders, the work is identifying the conditions that help people stay and thrive.

Practical blueprints tailored to different audiences, including a dedicated approach for attracting and retaining young people linked to the 10 year attraction plan will be out later this spring.

Strengthening workforce race equality through the SC-WRES

A stable, skilled workforce cannot be built without addressing the structural inequalities that shape people's everyday experience at work. That is why the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SC-WRES) continuous improvement programme remains one of the sector's most influential and enduring interventions, and why it sits as one of the top Workforce Strategy recommendations for the year ahead.

Now in its third phase, the programme, funded and delivered by Skills for Care, continues to expand at pace. Ninety-nine local authorities are taking part - up from 76 in the previous phase - representing all nine regions and signalling widespread recognition of the need for system-level action.



This growth alone demonstrates a clear message: local authorities see SC-WRES as a vital tool for culture change, workforce stability and fairer outcomes.

This year also marks an important milestone with the appointment of a new learning partner group who will work alongside Skills for Care to focus on deepening insight and help to refine the model even further. Their role brings added rigour to a programme that is a long-term system-wide approach supporting local authorities to become genuinely antiracist workplaces.

For national policymakers, the direction of travel is unmistakable: SC-WRES is not just uncovering inequality - it is providing a proven framework for sustained change. Its expansion, credibility and growing impact make it a critical lever for future workforce policy and a foundation for a fairer, more resilient social care system.

What good looks like – retaining regulated professionals

Retaining social workers, occupational therapists and social care nurses remains a core priority for stabilising the workforce. To support this, Partners in Care and Health (PCH) are creating a new “What Good Looks Like” online resource, showcasing effective approaches from across the sector - including flexible working, career pathways and improved employee experience.

This practical tool will help employers strengthen local retention plans and create working environments where professionals feel supported to stay.

Available March 2026.

New insights into future workforce

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) is exploring what draws people into occupational therapy roles, recognising that understanding motivation is essential for shaping effective workforce strategies.

Early findings show that many learners are mature students and often identify with protected characteristics, bringing valuable diversity and lived experience into the profession.

These insights underline the importance of inclusive recruitment, supportive early career pathways and diverse leadership, so newly qualified occupational therapists can thrive and stay in the sector.
Full findings will be published in March 2026.

Wellbeing drives retention

Wellbeing is at the heart of retention in social care: when staff feel valued, supported and safe, they are far more likely to stay and to thrive in their roles.

The Care Workers' Charity's latest [wellbeing survey](#) offers a stark snapshot of life on the frontline, capturing the experiences of more than 2,000 care workers.

The Workforce Strategy sees the Care Workers Charity working alongside organisations including the Care Provider Alliance, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Local Government Association (LGA), unions and Skills for Care, to support employers with guidance on prioritising staff wellbeing and tackling workplace harassment and violence.

Mental health strain:
Over 40% feel unhappy or depressed, with many saying their role negatively affects their wellbeing and that support isn't strong enough.

Financial insecurity:
More than 70% do not feel financially stable, and nearly a quarter have relied on food banks.

Workplace culture issues:
One in three have witnessed or experienced bullying, harassment or verbal abuse.



In response to the survey results the charity is taking action with these practical tools, which are available to all:

- A new digital signposting tool is being created to help care workers navigate wellbeing support quickly and easily.
- The Care Worker Advisory Board and Champions project are empowering frontline workers to shape decisions, with a new [Centring Care Workers](#) guide offering practical ways to involve them meaningfully.
- A co-produced national guide with the CQC will give care workers clearer information about inspections, rights and raising concerns, with publication due in 2026.

Together, these solutions aim to address the pressures care workers face and build a system where their voices and wellbeing are genuinely prioritised. This of course is not isolated work and examples of other initiatives run as a common thread through much of the Strategy implementation.



Ambition to lead

There is a strength in the relationships and collaborations seen across the sector which are supported by and contribute to the Workforce Strategy.

A recent development event for global majority nurses, co-delivered by the Queen's Institute of Community Nursing (QICN) and Skills for Care, has already led to tangible impact. As an example, one participant was referred to the QICN Ambition to Lead programme and went on to receive a Dame Elizabeth Anionwu scholarship, describing the experience as feeling 'somehow liberated'.

This example of creating a more inclusive work culture shows how proactively identifying and nurturing talent can unlock progression and support future leaders in the sector.

International nursing recruitment

Partners in Care and Health (PCH) continue to support the integration and retention of displaced recruits through their network of regional and subregional partnerships. Meeting monthly, the network brings together local areas, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and UK Visas and Immigration to share effective practice and co-design solutions to shared challenges. ADASS is refreshing its policy position on international recruitment for 2026, helping ensure the sector has clear, up-to-date guidance rooted in collaborative learning.

Adult social care's contribution to the Neighbourhood Health Service

Adult social care provides neighbourhood-based support to boost independence, health and wellbeing, helping people to live well in their homes and reducing need for high-intensity healthcare. It is essential to the shift from 'hospital to community'.

The Oversight Executive Group has set out the pivotal contribution adult social care can make, through the Workforce Strategy, to the government's vision for the Neighbourhood Health Service, set out in the 10-Year Health Plan. There is also a clear call to action for those things which will have the most impact.

It recognises that:

- social care professionals have essential expertise
- social care prevents health needs
- social care is a partner in healthcare

Integrated care and support maximise the value and effectiveness of public spending. Good community healthcare reduces the need for social care, good social care reduces the need for healthcare, and good housing and housing-related support reduces the need for both.

Working together they all build wellbeing, independence and good health, by focusing resources on early and ongoing support over acute or crisis intervention. In recent years this has been recognised through the Better Care Fund, which pools resources from the NHS and adult social care to deliver integrated, prevention-focused services. It is an important pre-cursor to the Neighbourhood Health Service.

But taxpayer-funded adult social care faces significant challenges at present: tightly rationed funding, workforce pressures, fragmentation and inequality. Unequal access results in unmet and under-met need and services that are insufficiently tailored to people's diverse identities, backgrounds, preferences and requirements.



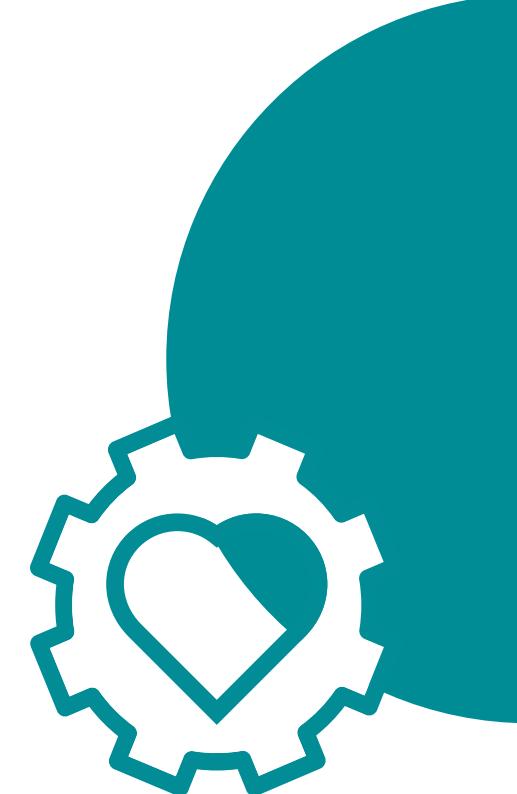


For adult social care to play its full role in the neighbourhood health service, further action is needed with respect to the care workforce:

1. **Local people and skills strategies** should be developed to cover recruitment, retention and training and development in health and care together, including the local independent sector.
2. **The care workforce pathway** should be adopted by all social care providers to evaluate each role, shape job expectations and support development and training.
3. **Nursing careers in social care** should be promoted and supported, with initial training routinely including social care settings and local NHS responsibility for continuing professional development.
4. **Training for neighbourhood health teams** should take place across professions and organisations and include employees from independent providers.
5. **Training and qualifications** in social care and community healthcare should evolve to reflect the changing demographics (such as increasing dementia prevalence) and the key skills required for integrated, holistic care with government funding for key qualifications.
6. **'Skills passports' for care workers** should be introduced to track qualifications and accreditation across providers, building on harmonised workforce data records.
7. **Commissioning and support arrangements for delegated health activities** should be agreed locally across health and social care, with appropriate NHS funding and training
8. **Social worker training and development** should embed joined-up neighbourhood working and the effective use of local data and intelligence.
9. **Local leaders should work and train together** across the NHS and local government, at the level of neighbourhood, local authority and ICB.
10. **The proposed Fair Pay Agreement** should be developed to reflect the changing roles and responsibilities of the care workforce, the importance of high-quality training, and improved, consistent pay and benefits should be fully funded.

How local partners can maximise adult social care's contribution

1. **Jointly commission** integrated community health and home care services, building on existing models including joint mental health provision and intermediate care arrangements under the Better Care Fund, with budgets allocated across institutional boundaries to where they will make the biggest difference.
2. **Co-locate and integrate teams** from different organisations within neighbourhoods, including voluntary organisations and independent care providers.
3. **Align boundaries and operational footprints** between the NHS and local government as much as possible to improve integration and collaboration across local government, primary care and community healthcare at neighbourhood and local authority level.
4. **Define care homes** as key parts of neighbourhood multi-disciplinary teams and 'virtual wards', providing them with specialist healthcare support.
5. **Connect support workers, care workers and personal assistants** who work in people's homes into neighbourhood multi-disciplinary teams and 'virtual wards', including those supporting self-funders and people with personal budgets.
6. **Adopt shared health and care records and data analysis** across the local NHS and adult social care system.
7. **Maximise use of Personal Health Budgets and Direct Payments** including for people who wish to use them alongside each other.
8. **Create local joint registers of unpaid carers** and develop integrated support and services for carers.
9. **Put housing at the heart of neighbourhood health service plans**, working with housing teams and social landlords providing general purpose, adapted and specialist housing.
10. **Strategically shape the local market for adult social care** to align with the requirements of neighbourhood working and integrated provision and reflect this in commissioning practice and the design of provider contracts (e.g. outcome-based contracts, minimum employment standards).



National enablers

The reforms introduced in the 10 Year Health Plan will enable the NHS and adult social care to work together to deliver the Neighbourhood Health Service. The Oversight Executive Group has significant reach across and into the sector – their insights and endorsement of these additional policy measures highlight what is needed to further accelerate the speed and depth of change:

1. **The 10 year health workforce plan** should cover healthcare professionals working in social care settings within its purview – and possibly also regulated social care professions.
2. **This should be complemented by a national workforce plan for the rest of adult social care**, developed collaboratively by DHSC and the sector with NHS England, building on and informed by the sector's Workforce Strategy.
3. **The 'modern service framework' for frailty and dementia** should be developed and implemented jointly across the NHS and adult social care (and a similar approach should be followed for learning disabilities).
4. **Approaches to measurement and performance** should be integrated or aligned, building on the experience of the Better Care Fund and CQC assessments, with areas held account for a limited number of strategic outcomes that reflect excellent experiences of care.
5. **Democratic accountability and oversight** should be built into the NHS at the level of ICBs, Health and Wellbeing Boards and neighbourhoods, as well as the proposed new local delivery structures led by GPs and foundation trusts.
6. **The NHS digital strategy** should include adult care, with a joint approach to the development of the NHS App, the single care record and adoption of care technologies. Localities should be required to have joint digital plans and shared care records should be fully open to adult social care.
7. **High-quality housing with care developments** should be significantly expanded nationwide, by revising planning and funding policies.
8. **Update legislation and policy on joint commissioning and pooled budgets** including examining VAT issues and the current review of 'Section 75' arrangements.
9. **A cross-government carers strategy** that joins-up support and protections for carers across NHS, adult social care, social security and employment.

[Read the collective response in full.](#)

Train

Everyone working in social care should have the chance to develop, learn and grow in their role. Learning and development supports good quality social care and retention.

There have been significant moves forward this year on the priority actions needed to support the provision of quality learning and development. Here's a snapshot of some of those milestones.

Care workforce pathway to expand role categories

The [care workforce pathway](#) continues to move at pace. The eight role categories, from new-to-care to registered manager, will expand this year with additional role categories currently in development: nominated individual, activities coordinator, and care/digital technologist.

These new roles have been welcomed across the sector and will help the sector to recruit and retain talent by showing the diversity a career in care can offer.

In addition to these additional roles, new resources are coming in spring 2026 to support employers to adopt the pathway.

Work is underway to map routes into adult social care regulated professions, which will support the growth in people moving into these roles. This will be showcased through people's experiences of being a care worker progressing into regulated professional careers helping people to see what the journey into the careers might look like, as well as how you move around the pathway.



First undergraduate placement strategy for social care

It was a significant milestone to see the Strategy to enable social care placements for student nurses and nursing associates launched in 2025.

This is the first undergraduate placement strategy for social care. Providing students with interesting placements in social care will help them enhance their knowledge and clinical skills in a supportive environment. It also supports the development of a better informed, skilled, and person-centred nursing workforce for the future, while encouraging consideration of social care as a potential area of specialist practice.

It will create stronger connections between students, universities, colleges, care providers, employers and the social care workforce to provide high quality placement opportunities in social care settings.

“Hosting student nurses and nursing associates has proved to be beneficial for our service. We can evidence best practice as the student nurses and nursing associates are given opportunities by their supervisors to demonstrate their acquired knowledge. This has brought about change within our service and quality care has been evidenced in all care domains.”

Lyn Mataranyika Registered Manager, RGN, Springbank Nursing Home, Stoke on Trent.

This strategy, commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and developed by Skills for Care in collaboration with the Council of Deans of Health (CoDH), will ensure student nurses and nursing associates complete practice placements in social care settings supporting the 10 Year Health Plan.

New dementia training research and resources

Alzheimer's Society has commissioned Leeds Beckett University and IFF Research to carry out a national audit of dementia training for care workers. This will highlight the quality of current training and reveal how many workers have received it. The Workforce Strategy was a catalyst for this work by exposing significant data gaps. The findings are expected early 2026.

Alongside this, Alzheimer's Society and Skills for Care are updating the 2018 dementia training framework to ensure it reflects the needs of modern social care and keeps person centred practice at its core. A lived experience group – including young people with dementia – is shaping the framework advising on culturally competent and sensitive care, with an equity lens.

The Society is also working closely with DHSC on the Modern Service Framework for Frailty and Dementia. Recent lived experience discussions reinforced that guaranteed post-diagnostic support and access to skilled professionals are vital for better outcomes. These insights further underline the need to strengthen the quality and uptake of dementia training.

Resources make a difference

Skills for Care is also supporting the work to expand dementia care skills and has recently launched a range of dementia resources designed to support people living with dementia and those who care for them.

Developed for the adult social care workforce - including home care workers, care home staff, community teams, and family carers - these brand-new resources make dementia information accessible, person centred, and practical.

With the right skills and knowledge, we can ensure a good quality of life at every stage of dementia, helping individuals remain active and engaged for as long as possible.

The [new resources](#) cover:

- Prevention
- Before and after diagnosis
- Support
- Family carers
- End of life care



Adult social care roadmap to implement Messenger recommendations

One of the key steps forward this year in leadership and management will be the roll out of the recommendations in the Workforce Strategy which came out of the Messenger review.

Published in 2022, the review aims to strengthen leadership and management within adult social care and the NHS. The recommendations seek to create a more inclusive, efficient, and supportive leadership, ultimately improving the quality of care provided.

Messenger highlighted that strong, consistent leadership is essential to improving the quality of health and social care.

Skills for Care has collaborated across the sector to align the key levers - funding, commissioning and support - to create a clear leadership development roadmap for adult social care. This includes updating the **Leadership Qualities Framework (LQF)**, launching a shared **Management and Leadership Code**, and introducing an **online diagnostic tool**.

The refreshed LQF, leadership code and diagnostic tool will be published in spring. Messenger's recommendations are also being built into new **commissioner induction standards** and a **New Manager's Handbook**, which will be published this year.

Apprenticeships in nursing

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) is refreshing its **advanced practice standards**, first published in 2022, to ensure they continue to reflect the high level of expertise required across health and social care. The **level 7 masters programme for adult social care nursing** is already closely aligned with these standards, helping to build a highly skilled workforce equipped to support people with complex needs.

A current opportunity is to strengthen how the programme is funded. The apprenticeship levy does not yet cover this intensive one-year academic route, despite its role in developing experienced practitioners and advancing specialist capability in adult social care. Addressing this would unlock even greater access to advanced training for talented professionals committed to working with people with complex needs.



Preceptorship provides a clear way forward

Preceptorship programmes are a vital part of the support required to recruit and retain registered nurses and nursing associates who are new to the NMC register and is one of the central recommendations in the Workforce Strategy.

Since the start of the first new national [preceptorship in social care](#) support programme in 2025, there are now 89 trained preceptorship leads and 131 trained preceptors with the community of practice sustaining that work, starting in early 2026.

The workshops, designed to empower and support care providers in embedding preceptorship programmes within their organisation, made a real impact on those taking part, with 100% of attendees rating the workshop as valuable.

“It’s given me a clear plan on how to support new nurses.”

“I’ll be reviewing our current documentation and making sure it aligns with the Skills for Care guidance. This will give us the confidence that what we have in place is based on best practice.”

“This is a new endeavour for my organisation as we’ve never had a newly qualified nurse before. Hopefully this will go well, and we’ll employ more NQN’s.”



How preceptorship programmes support students transition into becoming newly qualified nurses

Chantelle Meehan-Hardman, Senior Nurse Practitioner and Majida Tahir Registered Mental Health Nurse.

Describe your role

Maj: I'm a Registered Mental Health Nurse at Alternative Futures Group. My role involves support with medication, risk assessments and care planning. I also lead infection control which involves completing regular audits, and of course spending time with people who draw on care and support.

Chantelle: Nurses work very autonomously in this setting and provide management and leadership to the unit through ward rounds, multidisciplinary team meetings as well as managing my own caseload of patients. As mental health nurses we have specialist knowledge of the Mental Health Act which we need to utilise regularly.

Describe your setting

Maj: We're a 12-bed independent, rehabilitation unit supporting adults 18-65 with a diagnosis of severe and enduring mental illness. We're a charitable organisation although we often receive health funding. Individuals transition from hospital bed environment into bedsits which we have on site to support people to move forward with their lives. We support people to develop social skills utilising a holistic approach, supporting with medication, community integration and fostering relationships with family members.

How did it feel transitioning from a student to a newly qualified nurse?

Maj: I had a placement at Alternative Futures in my first year of study and this was my first ever placement. I really enjoyed it and took employment with them as part of their bank of support workers whilst I continued studying for my nursing degree. When I was nearing the end of my studies, I had found alternative employment but my Practice Assessor encouraged me to apply to work for Alternative Futures instead which was the best thing that I did. Because I'd had a placement with Alternative Futures, I already knew what to expect and I loved the working environment and found the staff really supportive.

Delegated healthcare in action

Work continues to ensure there is the right support for person-centred, safe and effective delegated healthcare activities to recognise increasing expectations of care work.

Autumn 2025 saw a series of regional events capturing [real stories](#) of delegation unlocking better outcomes.

Short, highly practical guides will launch this spring to sit alongside the delegation principles and help providers take the next step with confidence.

To strengthen clarity and consistency, Skills for Care is working with CQC to update guidance on treatment of disease, disorder or injury (TDDI) registration so providers, commissioners and system leaders have a shared understanding of what's required.

Two round tables early in the year - one for allied health professionals and one for personal assistants and individual employers - will bring national voices together to shape a common approach. And coming soon, learning from the ICS deep dives, including the potential for an ICS blueprint, will help the whole sector move faster and with more alignment.

Delegated healthcare remains a top priority in the Workforce Strategy and is providing an opportunity to tackle some of the sector's biggest challenges together.



Leadership and management support and succession planning

A survey in May 2025 revealed a striking insight: 38% of Directors of Adult Social Services (DASS) are planning to retire or move roles within the next five years. This has brought renewed focus to the importance of building a strong, confident pipeline of future leaders. Principal Social Workers and other senior practitioners need targeted training, support and mentorship to step into these strategic, system shaping roles. Investing now strengthens succession planning and helps attract talented people who want to influence the future of adult social care.

Together, these developments present a moment of real possibility - to design leadership pathways that are fit for the future, rooted in social care expertise, and capable of inspiring the next generation of DASS.

Partners in Care and Health (PCH), who work with and through councils to support them in co-developing strategic workforce plans for a place, also identified a gap in support for council employed middle leaders and managers. PCH is working with the Institute for Public Care to support the development of a [Learning and Development Hub](#) which is a curated, quality checked, publicly available set of resources across eight key themes.

This year PCH are also collaborating with Skills for Care to pilot joint support to local areas.

Transform

The sector has been heavily involved in contributing to the first phase of the Casey Commission. The Workforce Strategy has provided a significant opportunity to focus the conversations across the sector, either as a whole or in part.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) gathered their evidence through roundtables, delivered in partnership with The Access Group. These will provide insights for the report and the development of a framework for national social care standards, informed by themes such as person-centred care, equity, prevention and integration.

Workforce implications (capacity and capability) have been discussed at the roundtables in the context of data and technology, integrated care and accountability for care standards. The formal report will be launched by SCIE in early 2026.

SCIE's planned report to the Casey Commission reinforces the relevance of the Workforce Strategy's focus on training, equity, and a more sustainable and skilled workforce.



Technology drives transformation

The landscape is changing fast, and in the real world of care, what matters most is making technology work for people – not the other way around. That's where care technologists and digital leaders come in and that's why the National Care Forum (NCF) are proud to offer training that is co-designed by the sector and people who draw upon care and support.

The National Care Forum is leading the creation of a [new care technologist](#) pilot programme, shaped directly by the voices of leaders, frontline workers and people who draw on care. Their insights have helped define what the role needs to look like in practice and how it fits within the care workforce pathway to support a more confident, tech enabled workforce.

Although a full evaluation will run to the end of the two-year programme, early learning is already surfacing. There are strong signals that a modular approach may be needed to reflect the diverse needs of different parts of the sector - including adults of working age, people with learning disabilities and people living with dementia.

There is also early consideration of two potential qualifications:

- A level 2 qualification to support level 3 workers doing the initial person centred and market assessments with implementation, follow-up and troubleshooting.
- A level 5 qualification to lead on large scale implementation at an organisational level.



Skills development tool designed for real-time learning

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) is developing [Scooter](#), a mobile app designed to build core skills among care workers. It provides trusted, bite-sized digital information and support for frontline care staff.

Aligned to the requirements of the care certificate, its curated content meets real-time learning needs at the point of care. The app is grounded in SCIE's best practice, evidence and guidance, with subject matter experts ensuring content is reliable and safe. It represents an opportunity to shape and influence training for frontline workers at scale, with a longer-term ambition to develop an AI-driven system trained on SCIE's existing materials.

Social Care Equity Evidence Hub established

SCIE has established the Social Care Equity Evidence Hub, funded by the DHSC.

The Hub, which we will launch in early 2026, consolidates research, data and case studies to understand how people from different backgrounds experience access to care, highlighting patterns of unmet need, postcode variation and the inequalities shaping people's experiences and outcomes.

Key topics of the hub include workforce pressures, diversity and capacity (including unpaid carers), which will offer a valuable resource in informing the Workforce Strategy, local commissioning and potentially providing evidence to support policy and practice discussions around equity in social care.

AI transforming how we work

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming how we work across every profession.

As the technology continues to advance this is one area where the adult social care sector is working at pace to understand the benefits and risk, shape national standards and embed ethical and safe approaches to its use.

The Care Workers' Charity is working with Oxford University to shape national standards for the ethical use of AI in adult social care, ensuring care worker insight is embedded throughout. This partnership includes the co-development of an ethical framework, practical guidance for employers and workers, and ongoing involvement from their advisory board members to examine the implications of emerging technologies on the care workforce. Workshops and consultations will run throughout 2026.

Momentum matters – next steps

The Workforce Strategy was created by and for the sector. That is why over half of the 56 recommendations and commitments are well underway. The progress to date should not be underestimated in what is a large and complex sector.

Implementing the 15-year strategy takes many forms, from individual care providers developing their approach to the care workforce pathway for example, right through to collective action on national policies and plans.

It is important that we use our combined focus and efforts to see the transformational change outlined in the Strategy. The Strategy Oversight Executive Group has identified six recommendations for additional focus over the next 12 months, ensuring momentum and alignment across partners.

Work on the other recommendations continues to move forward. The added value of this collaborative approach is that we can combine our influence and expertise to accelerate delivery and move both the strategy and the wider sector forward.

The six recommendations for additional focus over the next 12 months:

- 10-year attraction plan
- Workforce race equality
- Government-led joined up, consistent action on pay
- Expand skills
- Delegated healthcare activities
- Workforce planning
 - Mandate workforce planning and strategy
 - Implement workforce planning
 - Support ICS workforce planning

The success of the Workforce Strategy continues to rely on the commitment of system leaders - sector partners, Oversight Executive Group members, and policymakers - alongside the thousands of people across adult social care who are leading change in their organisations, networks, and communities every day.

Progress depends on participation, not permission. Our task now is to stay the course: deepening collaboration, sustaining relationships, and resisting simpler answers to a challenge that demands longterm, collective stewardship.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this review. www.ascworkforcestrategy.co.uk 2026