

Care Workforce Pathway

Briefing: **system
alignment**

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About this series

This briefing is part of a series designed to support confident, consistent system leadership and practical action on the Care Workforce Pathway.

- **Care Workforce Pathway Briefing: system leadership**
Sets out **why** the Care Workforce Pathway matters as a shared workforce infrastructure and clarifies the role of system partners in enabling proportionate, provider-led use.
- **Care Workforce Pathway Briefing: system alignment**
Explores **how** system partners can align language, expectations, and activity, reducing fragmentation and creating the conditions for confident adoption by care providers.
- **Care Workforce Pathway Briefing: early learning for system leaders**
Shares early insight from local areas and care providers, highlighting what is working, common challenges, and practical lessons for system leaders.



Together, the series provides a clear, progressive offer from shared system purpose, to alignment, to learning.

Purpose of this briefing

The [Care Workforce Pathway](#) provides a national career framework for adult social care roles, describing values, expectations, and progression in a clear and consistent way. It is designed to act as a long-term workforce infrastructure, offering a shared language that supports coherence across the adult social care system.

This briefing draws on learning from systems that are engaging with and using the Pathway. It reflects practical insights from leaders who are navigating how the Pathway plays out across commissioning, quality, skills, and workforce activity, and where alignment (or lack of it) is shaping provider experience on the ground.

It aims to support consistent, confident system-level leadership of the Pathway by focusing on system alignment. It explores how adult social care systems function in practice, how influence and decision making operate across organisations, and how leadership behaviour shapes both provider confidence and the practical use of the Pathway.

Who this briefing is for

This briefing is intended for system leaders and partners who influence workforce strategy, commissioning, quality, skills, and integration. While different organisations hold different levers, sustained alignment depends on shared intent, clear roles, and consistent behaviour across system partners.

Why system alignment matters

As care providers begin to engage with the Pathway, its impact is shaped less by any single organisation and more by how consistently the system acts together.

Early learning from systems already working with the Pathway highlights that even where individual partners are supportive, misalignment can unintentionally create pressure for care providers, for example through:

- mixed or inconsistent messages
- duplicated or uncoordinated requests
- differing interpretations of purpose, expectation, or pace
- unclear or inconsistent Pathway signals
- limited recognition of care providers already using the Pathway.

This briefing exists to support system partners to reflect on and strengthen alignment, by:

- developing a shared understanding of their own system
- examining where influence and decision making sit in practice
- identifying where clearer alignment would reduce fragmentation and build care provider confidence.

It does not introduce new requirements or prescribe a delivery model. Instead, it offers questions, principles, and prompts grounded in real system experience, to help partners think together and align intentionally around the Pathway.

Understanding systems

Why system clarity matters

Adult social care is delivered through a complex system of organisations, roles, and relationships. While partners may share geography, they do not always share governance routes, communication methods, incentives, or the language and assumptions they bring to their work.

A system brings together many organisations with different roles and responsibilities, connected by a shared purpose. Each organisation has its own part to play, its own pressures, and its own way of working, which can look very different from place to place. What links them are the people who move through the system: individuals drawing on care and support, workers starting or developing their careers, and teams that need to work together across organisational boundaries.

A system is not about everyone doing the same thing. It is shaped by the relationships between organisations, the points where responsibilities overlap, and the moments where people and services meet. What matters most is that each part recognises its dependence on the others. When organisations act with this in mind, they help create a clearer, more joined up experience for people who draw on care and for the workforce that supports them.

Early learning from systems suggests that alignment around the Pathway is strengthened when there is a shared understanding of the system itself.

Key questions for systems

Defining the system

- Who and what makes up our adult social care system in practice?
- Which organisations shape workforce decisions, directly or indirectly?
- Where are system boundaries clear and where do they overlap?

Understanding influence

- Who holds formal decision-making authority?
- Who influences behaviour, priorities, or messaging informally?
- Whose voices are most often heard and whose are missing?

Understanding experience

- How do care providers experience the system today?
- How do people moving through the system (learners, new starters, experienced staff) experience consistency or fragmentation?

A shared picture of the system helps prevent assumptions, duplication, and unintended mixed messages.



Shared purpose and intent

From national ambition to local meaning

The Pathway is a national framework, but its meaning is shaped locally. Early learning indicates that systems that align well are explicit about:

- why the Pathway matters locally
- how it supports existing priorities
- what they are (and are not) trying to achieve.

This shared intent becomes the anchor for decision making.

Key questions for systems

Purpose

- What problem or opportunity does the Pathway help us address locally?
- How does it support our wider workforce, quality, and integration goals?

Positioning

- Are we clear that the Pathway is long-term infrastructure, not a short-term initiative?
- How do we explain what the Pathway is **not** as clearly as what it is?

Consistency

- Do partners describe the Pathway in the same way?
- Are there differences in tone, emphasis, or expectation that need addressing?

Clear intent reduces confusion and helps partners act with confidence.



Governance and leadership

Placing the Pathway within existing governance

Early learning has indicated that new governance structures for the Pathway may not be necessary. Instead, some system areas have:

- embedded it within existing boards or forums
- clarified reporting routes and accountability
- ensured senior ownership is visible.

Governance provides stability, legitimacy, and continuity, particularly in periods of organisational change.

Core governance principles

Learning suggests that good system governance around the Pathway is:

- clear: roles, routes and responsibilities are understood
- proportionate: aligned to the scale of activity
- embedded: part of existing structures
- shared: not owned by one organisation alone.

Key questions for systems

Ownership

- Where does responsibility for Pathway alignment sit?
- Is there a clear senior lead or sponsor?

Decision making

- Where are decisions about alignment, priorities, or messaging made?
- How are partners brought into those decisions?

Continuity

- How is knowledge maintained during restructure or turnover?
- How are new leaders inducted into Pathway understanding?

Clear governance supports sustained alignment over time.



Ways of working as a system

Alignment through behaviour, not directives

Systems align not just through structure, but through how partners work together day to day. This includes:

- how information is shared
- how differences are surfaced
- how pressure and capacity are acknowledged.

The Pathway works best when it is woven into existing ways of working.

Characteristics of aligned system practice

Early learning indicates that aligned systems tend to:

- use shared language consistently
- co-ordinate communication across partners
- avoid asking care providers to respond to multiple, unaligned requests
- pace activity realistically
- learn and adapt together.

Key questions for systems

Communication

- How do we share information as a system?
- Are key messages consistent across partners?

Co-ordination

- Where do we unknowingly duplicate effort?
- How do we spot and resolve misalignment early?

Trust and learning

- How safe is it for partners to raise concerns or uncertainty?
- How do we use learning from practice to refine our approach?

Alignment is sustained through relationships as much as structures.



Creating the conditions for provider confidence

Why provider experience is central

Care providers are where the Pathway is experienced in practice. Early learning shows that well aligned systems:

- acknowledge and understand provider diversity and pressure
- avoid overwhelming smaller organisations
- recognise emotional and financial realities
- focus on enabling improvement, not compliance alone.

When care providers experience clarity and consistency, confidence grows.

Key questions for systems

Support

- Do we understand the key workforce challenges faced by care providers, and the role the Pathway could play in addressing them?
- Are we offering proportionate, practical support?

Signals

- Are commissioning, quality, skills, and workforce messages aligned?
- Do care providers hear a consistent narrative across the system?

Pacing

- How are we calibrating ambition with capacity?
- Are we allowing time for learning and adaptation?

Provider confidence is a key indicator of effective system alignment.



Maintaining alignment over time

Alignment as an ongoing process

System alignment is not a one-off activity. It requires:

- ongoing reflection
- regular check-ins
- adaptation to policy change
- reinforcement through leadership.

The Pathway can act as a stable anchor during change, if systems return to it consistently.

Key questions for systems

Sustainability

- How do we keep the Pathway visible amidst competing priorities?
- How do we ensure it remains relevant over time?

Learning

- How are insights from delivery fed back into system thinking?
- How do we share learning across partners?

Momentum

- How do we recognise progress and success?
- How do we maintain collective ownership?

Sustained alignment turns early consistency into long term impact.



Looking ahead

Adult social care operates in a context of significant and sustained challenge. Workforce shortages, rising demand, financial pressure, and increasing complexity shape day-to-day decision making across the system. In this landscape, how consistently the system works together matters as much as the actions of any single organisation.

The Pathway offers a shared reference point that can help system partners align their understanding, expectations, and signals to the workforce. Used intentionally, it can support greater coherence across commissioning, quality, skills, and workforce activity.

This matters because people who draw on care and support depend on a workforce that is sustainable, competent, trusted, and grounded in shared values. Creating the right conditions for this workforce is a collective endeavour. It relies on alignment across the system, proportionate leadership, and patterns of behaviour that reinforce confidence.

Systems can help the Pathway fulfil its purpose: supporting clearer career journeys, strengthening capability, and contributing to a workforce that people who draw on care can rely on, now and in the future.

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