

Care Workforce Pathway support programme for systems 2026

Hello, my name is Vic Coe, and I'm one of the Care Workforce Pathway delivery leads at Skills for Care. So, this session is for adult social care system partners who want to understand how the Care Workforce Pathway can support the work that they're already leading, and who may also be considering applying for structured support from us at Skills for Care this year. As you listen to this session, I'd invite you to keep three questions in mind, and those are: Where could this make things clearer for us? Where could this help reduce duplication? Where could this help our system move forward with confidence? So by the end of the session, you should have a clear understanding of what the Care Workforce Pathway is, why it matters for system partners, and what we at Skills for Care and others are learning about how to make progress with the Pathway feel manageable. We'll also look at where your influence can have the greatest impact as system leaders. We'll touch on some practical first steps that you might want to consider taking, and we'll also look at the support available this year for care providers and for system stakeholders as well. So, I'll start by briefly revisiting what the Care Workforce Pathway is, and it may be that you're already very familiar with it, you may have even started to use it locally, so this is just a short shared starting point before we move into that system level role. So the Care Workforce Pathway, it's the first nationally recognised career structure for adult social care, so it gives our sector a shared way to describe roles, expectation, and progression, and it does that through clear role categories. Each of those categories contain skills, knowledge, behaviours, and learning that's all linked directly to those roles. So, it's important to say that the Pathway doesn't require organisations to change job titles, or to redesign structures, or to follow one mandatory model, but it does provide a common reference point that local organisations and systems can use in ways that fit their context. And that shared language, having this shared language now is powerful, because it gives adult social care something that other sectors have just had for a really long time already, and that's a clear structure for describing and developing our workforce. So, this slide shows how the Pathway is structured, and that's from entry roles through to leadership roles, and at the moment eight roles have been published on the Care Workforce Pathway. So each published role category includes universal role values, knowledge and skills, behaviours, and suggested learning and development. So further categories are in development and will be published later this year and you can see them on the right of this slide. So the key point here is that these are role categories and not fixed job titles, so local roles may not use exactly the same names, and one category may cover more than one local role. So, what matters is understanding where a role fits or sits on the Care Workforce Pathway, rather than having to rename everything. So for systems, this means that you don't need to redesign provision wholesale, but your role is more around helping people interpret the Pathway consistently to be able to apply it proportionately within their organisations and create the conditions for providers to be able to use it confidently. So, why does this matter now? In the next few slides, I'll connect the Pathway to the pressures that I suspect you're already managing across adult social care systems, and to the opportunities that it can create for greater alignment. So, across systems, there is a shared reality, rising demand and complexity, workforce instability, at times inconsistent expectations, and at times, fragmented approaches. So, I and we respect that you're also working with your own capacity pressures, scrutiny, inspection requirements, and the day-to-day practical challenges, as well as the strategic challenges of joining up work across different organisations. So the Care Workforce Pathway can't solve all of these issues on its own, but it does give us a national structure that can help stabilise and align how we respond to some of these things. So the pressures I've just described, they can show up in very practical ways, variation in quality, workforce churn, difficulty evidencing capability, and

pressure on just long-term sustainability. So, for system leaders, that can also make commissioning harder.

Quality conversations can be less consistent, and workforce planning can be more fragmented. So, as health and social care become even more integrated, including through neighbourhood working, the need for a shared language around roles and capability becomes even more important, because without it, it's harder to plan coherently across organisations and across sectors. So because the challenges sit across the system, the response needs to sit across the system too. So national policy sets the direction for reform and for change, and the Pathway then gives that consistent framework on which some of that can hang, so that's for roles, skills, and progression. At a local level, systems then bring that framework to life by aligning workforce commissioning and quality activity, and then providers then use it in their day-to-day practices, in their recruitment and their development and their delivery. So when those parts all reinforce each other, we can create stronger consistency, better workforce stability, and better outcomes.

So, what makes this achievable? Before we look at what we're learning about people's use of the Pathway, it's worth just being clear about scale. So, we're not suggesting that systems start with a full roll out or a large change programme. What we found is that progress often begins much smaller, so using the Pathway in one or certain conversations, aligning one piece of work with the Pathway, or testing the Pathway with a small group of care providers. The question that we can ask ourselves is, how do we make a national framework feel practical and achievable at a local level? So, what we're learning is that progress often starts with system alignment, so that means teams across the system using the same language, the Pathway's language, giving the same messages and connecting the Pathway to activity that either already exists, is already happening, or is already planned. So care providers are more likely to engage when the ask feels manageable, when the message that they receive is consistent, and when their existing efforts are already being recognised. So, the role of system partners is not to drive compliance or implement the Pathway provider by provider, but it is to align, to signal, to enable, and to influence, so that using the Pathway feels just straightforward and it feels really worthwhile. So Early Adopter providers, so those are the organisations who worked with an organisation called PA Consulting in 2024 and then with us at Skills for Care last year. Those organisations have been using the pathway for some time now, and they're already reporting some encouraging results. So, across that Early Adopter cohort, turnover has reduced by 15% and that's compared with 5% for non-adopters, and retention has improved at around three times the rate seen in the wider sector. Within this cohort, there are also examples of improved stakeholder satisfaction, stronger recruitment and workforce growth, higher staff satisfaction with the Pathway, increased uptake of qualifications, and much more structured career conversations. So the important point here is that this isn't just a framework on paper. If used well, it can support real, tangible improvements in workforce stability, development, and quality. So this example is slightly different, so this shows what using the Pathway can look like for an individual provider, but this provider used the Pathway completely independently. So, this is an organisation that didn't access structured support from us at Skills for Care. So, this organisation has seen reduced agency use, growth in staffing, very strong training compliance, high levels of staff pride and support for development, and a significant reduction in agency spend. So, the Pathway can support better structure and alignment, but it can also translate into measurable improvements for providers and the people that they support. So, we've looked at what the Pathway is, and what early use is showing us, but I'll now focus on the role of system partners, and how your leadership can help the Pathway to land effectively. The system leaders, you're already shaping workforce strategy, commissioning expectations, quality assurance, and how partners work together. So that includes the language that you use in your strategies and your contracts, the way quality conversations are framed, and how roles and capability are described in workforce discussions. So the Pathway isn't separate from any of that work, it simply strengthens it by giving you a consistent

language to use across all of those areas. At a system level, your influence can be thought about in four ways.

I touched on this earlier. So, alignment means helping teams use the same language and expectations. Signalling means making it visible and sending signals that the Pathway matters, and that can be done through leadership forums, plans, conversations. Enabling means making engagement manageable for providers by building the Pathway into existing forums, existing quality discussions, or workforce programmes. And influencing means using the levers that you already have, such as commissioning, workforce planning, quality frameworks, to reinforce that same direction. So in short, your role is to shape the system so that providers can move easily in the same direction. So, how can this look? We're already seeing different ways for systems to build momentum, and that's very much based on how the system feels that this should work for them, at this time. So, in one area, partners used an existing workforce and recruitment group to build that shared understanding together, rather than creating a whole new series of new governance. So, in another area, a local authority started internally, so they looked inwards and they mapped roles and tested what the Pathway meant in practice for them, and elsewhere a care provider association worked with commissioners and system partners first, really convened that system together to align, to agree, before then engaging with care providers about the Pathway. So the common thread is that none of these examples started with a full roll out. They started by building understanding, just using existing structures and creating a clearer shared message. So that's the kind of approach we are looking to support; proportionate, practical, and matched to local capacity. So how the Pathway supports you. Used well, the Pathway can help you create more consistent expectations across providers, strengthen confidence and evidence for CQC assurance, align commissioning, workforce, and quality conversations, and reduce duplication or mixed messages. So at its simplest, it gives you a single shared reference point that can make system working clearer and feel more coherent. I'll now move on to the resources and support available, starting with what's available for care providers, and then moving on to what's available for system partners. So, for care providers, there's already a comprehensive set of guidance and resources about the Pathway, all of which are available on Skills for Care website. The aim is to help providers understand the Pathway, support them to plan how to introduce it, support them to understand how to build buy-in internally, and importantly, how to start mapping their roles to the role categories on the Pathway. So systems don't need to create new materials from scratch, unless they want to, and you can signpost care providers to what already exists and use those resources in your own local context. So this slide just aims to give you a flavour of the resources available for care providers. The Pathway's role categories, they sit, they're housed on the gov.uk website and then a diverse range of other resources are all available from the Skills for Care website. I think it's important to add that all of those resources have been created directly based on the experiences of care providers who have been using the Pathway up to this point. Resources include things like 'how to' guides, which explain how the Pathway can be used over time logically and in a staged and incremental sort of approach, and we also offer a range of case studies that we're continually adding to, so that we can give care providers that confidence and assurance from others that using the Pathway leads to positive changes and impacts for the workforce and others, those who draw upon care and support, and for the organisation as a whole. We also encourage all care providers to record their use of the Pathway using the Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set, or ASC-WDS, and that's to give them, you, us, and the government that strategic workforce intelligence data, and it's very simple to add that information to ASC-WDS, and a care provider does not have needed to have fully implemented the Pathway in order to be able to update ASC-WDS, either. So, all of these resources are designed to directly support providers, so we'd encourage you to take a look on our website and become familiar with those yourself.

So, care providers can also apply to join our support programme this financial year, and to access our support, care provider leaders will need to make a commitment to taking some form of action, and whilst we've kept that intentionally focused on making a start, that commitment is really important. So,

as part of our support offer, care providers are asked to nominate a Pathway lead, so a senior sponsor, and that's purposeful. That's to drive activity forward and to give the Pathway that visibility and credibility at a strategic senior level within the organisation. They'll also be asked to create a simple plan, and it's just a plan to start introducing the Pathway, not to fully roll out, and they'll also need to have mapped at least one role within their organisation to a role category on the Care Workforce Pathway. But to help them do all of that, they'll be invited to attend a small number of really sort of short, bite-sized sessions. We'll invite them to take part in a checkpoint, so that they can tell us about their experiences. We'll ask them to share with us how they've used the Pathway to change at least one thing that they already do, and so that could be how they recruit to a role, for example. So, we're looking to work with care providers who are willing and able to take action, and this offer will be repeated again for care providers in the next financial year and the financial year after that, so if they're not ready this year, that's absolutely fine, but they can be encouraged to start thinking about how they might like to be involved next year, they can be encouraged to do that right now. So as system leaders, you can help by encouraging providers to use the Pathway and to help to create the conditions that they need to take the first step. So, for system partners, we now have some introductory briefing documents to support local use of the Pathway. So, these are designed to help you build a shared understanding together as a system of the Pathway to align language and expectations across workforce commissioning and quality, and to make provider engagement feel more consistent and proportionate. So, these aren't prescriptive 'how to' guides, they're not blueprints, but they do offer some prompts, some reflections, and some practical insights based on that early learning from others that you can then use and adapt to your own local priorities and ways of working. Again, this slide shows some examples of resources that are available for system partners. So, I've touched on those introductory briefings, but there are strategic workforce planning tools, workforce data and intelligence, local support available from Skills for Care teams, and links to your area's local skills improvement plans. So, together these resources can help you connect the Pathway to wider workforce planning, commissioning, market shape and activity, and you can find them all on the Skills for Care website. So, alongside those resources, we are offering structured support to a small number of system areas this year. So this is a significantly smaller offer than our offer to care providers, and we already expect demand to be far higher than the number of places available, but we expect at this stage that the offer will be repeated in future years. So our support for system partners is designed to build awareness, help create that initial alignment across partners to support some of that early planning, and to help systems enable provider adoption. So it's light touch, it's discussion led. We're not asking systems to implement the Pathway provider by provider, we want to support systems to get started in creating the conditions for the Pathway to land well. Applications will close on the 30th of July, and we aim to let system partners know the outcome of their application by the 7th of August. Sadly, we won't be able to provide feedback based on any unsuccessful applications, but we do aim, or we do hope, to repeat this support offer again next year. So, there should be future opportunities to apply. For those systems who we are able to partner with, we'll be asking for a few practical commitments, again, just as we are with care providers, so they will need to nominate a senior strategic sponsor or Pathway champion, whatever terminology they prefer, again to provide that strategic, visible, credible leadership.

They'll also need to bring together the right system partners for focus workshops and to co-ordinate all of the local communications and attendance around those workshops. There'll also be one joint session with care providers, and that will be co-delivered with us, and that's to help a number of providers to identify their own practical first steps as an initial trial group. So, the purpose of that is to help inform the system about what works and how they might want to develop that as a process moving forward. We will ask systems to use their existing networks to reinforce local use of the Pathway and to share any learning as their work develops, and that learning will really matter because we'll be looking to use it to shape future resources, case studies, and national practice. So the workshops we will deliver with our system partners are designed as a coherent sequence, and it's really important that each system leads on the convening of all relevant local system stakeholders, as that really creates a one team approach

to using the Pathway. So the first session, Pathway Essentials, aims to build a shared understanding of what the Pathway is and why it matters. That's about getting everybody on the same page together as a team. The next session, Creating Conditions, looks at the local system. We ask the system to look inwardly at itself, so Who's involved? Where does influence sit? and What might help or hinder progress, specifically with the Pathway. Planning for impact focuses on practical first steps for individual organisations and for the system as a whole. And Supporting Providers then looks at how to help providers get started, and that's including a session that can be co-delivered with us. So, across all of this, our role is to enable systems to pause and come together, because we know how busy our sector is, and that that opportunity isn't always available. So that's really important. By doing so, our role will be to help facilitate conversations on the day. So it's not our role to design anyone's solutions or act as consultants or trainers, but we are here to help system stakeholders begin to think about the Pathway as a team, using existing materials and prompts as a guide. As well as facilitating, we'll also capture all of the key themes, any actions, insights from discussions, and we'll provide that back to the system in a structured write-up, so that the system has something tangible in terms of a product at the end of their time working with us. But all of the direction, all of the decisions remain locally owned. So, if selected, systems will need to commit to a schedule of activity dates, and we'll be aiming to work together for around four to five months. We recognise that the pace is tight and that reflects the size of us as a national team and the wider support that we're providing to a large number of providers across the country. We know from our previous learning that this work is most effective when it is delivered face to face. So, selected systems will need to convene partners and provide suitable meeting spaces and manage practical arrangements locally, so just to be clear, Skills for Care, we can't provide any funding for venue hire or refreshments as part of this process. But the structured support offer from us, it's only one route. Nobody needs to wait to be part of it to start using the Care Workforce Pathway, all of the resources are available now, and many systems and care providers are already beginning just to use it independently. What matters most is visible and consistent local leadership. So, if you are starting independently, we encourage you to share your learning with your local Skills for Care locality manager, so that your experiences can really inform understanding about what works at a national level. There's also some other really good reasons to start now. So, if systems wait until wider reform creates more, potentially more pressure, alignment may need to happen very quickly and in a more challenging environment. So, any changes that may be linked to pay, integration, neighbourhood working, they are all going to require a clear shared understanding and structure around roles, progression, and capability.

So, starting now will give you the chance to build that consistency gradually in a way that fits your local context rather than trying to catch up later under pressure. So what can starting look like? Starting can be really simple, so you might want to get to know the Pathway role categories, it's a great place to start. Compare your values with the Pathway's universal values. Explore the resources that are available. You may wish to choose one area, such as workforce, commissioning, or quality, and begin introducing the Pathway's language just there. You may wish to agree a shared system message to test one practical use with providers, or encourage providers to simply start recording their Pathway use on ASC-WDS, that's enough to begin with. Early, visible, and consistent action is what drives and builds confidence and momentum with the Pathway. So, thank you for your time. I'm just going to close with this. Which is, the Care Workforce Pathway, it's not another new initiative to implement. It really is a shared foundation. It is a framework for bringing greater clarity and consistency to adult social care. So, the opportunity is not to do more, but to bring more coherence to what already exists, so that our workforce feels clearer and more confident, so that providers feel better supported, and importantly, that people drawing on care and support experience greater consistency, quality, and dignity.

So, there are two things I'd encourage you to do next. The first one is take one practical step locally, however small, and if structured support from us at Skills for Care, if you think that would help your

system begin to use the Pathway, then please do consider applying for our support this year. Thank you for your time. I hope you found this session helpful.