Dementia Qualification Guide

For awarding organisations who offer qualifications accessed by the adult social care workforce

March 2026

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Dementia training standards in adult social care

Introduction

This 'Dementia Qualification Guide' is for awarding organisations who offer dementia qualifications for the adult social care workforce. It has been developed in response to the comprehensive review of the 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' (the framework), commissioned and funded by the Department of Health and Social Care and carried out by Skills for Care in partnership with NHSE and Skills for Health.

The primary aim of the review was to update the framework, originally developed in 2015, to ensure it remains relevant, reflects current practice, language and expectations, and continues to be fit for purpose across the care and health sectors.

The review spanned several months and drew on the views and expertise of dementia care specialists from both health and social care, people living with dementia, those caring for people living with dementia, and the wider workforce through public consultation.

Key themes included:

- further inclusion of the needs of people living with young-onset dementia
- maintaining independence for people living with dementia for as long as possible
- further expansion of the tiers
- coverage of cultural and spiritual needs of people living with dementia
- additional outcomes around delirium
- updated language.

The updated framework was published in February 2026 and is available on the Skills for Care website.

Aim

The purpose of the 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' is to provide a nationally agreed minimum standard of learning required within the sector. The intention is that employers, educators and practitioners will use the framework to inform learning and qualification development, and to review and align existing learning, whether for adult social care or health, or for the many voluntary organisations that support people living with dementia and their families, carers and supporters.

The aim of this qualification guide is to support awarding organisations to equip learners with the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to perform their role effectively and confidently, in line with the nationally agreed minimum standards set

out in the updated 'Dementia Training Standards Framework'. It supports the development of competent, professional practice and enables learners to apply their learning in real-life situations, ensuring they are prepared with the knowledge and skills required to meet current and future sector needs when supporting people living with dementia.

The guide focuses on the mandatory units within existing level 2 and level 3 award and certificate dementia qualifications and provides direction on updating language, approaches and working practices in line with the updated framework. It is designed to support awarding organisations in ensuring that content reflects current expectations and the latest understanding of best practice in dementia care.

The guide can also be used to inform the review and refinement of specialist dementia-based optional units within the level 3, 4 and 5 diploma qualifications for the adult social care workforce.

When used alongside the framework, this document helps to quality assure qualification content, ensuring it aligns with nationally agreed standards, sector-recognised terminology, and person-led working practices.

Care Workforce Pathway for adult social care

The Care Workforce Pathway is the first universal career structure for the adult social care workforce. It aims to provide clear guidance for progression and development for professionals in the adult social care sector by outlining the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and behaviours they will need in their work/practice. It also sets out how people can develop and progress across a long-term career in adult social care with support and training; attracting people to join and remain in the sector and supporting sustainable workforce growth.

The pathway has been developed in partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care and Skills for Care, informed by extensive engagement with the sector. Eight role categories have been published to date, with further role categories in development and being added through an iterative process.

The pathway supports managers and staff to structure development conversations, identify skills gaps and discuss development needs in the context of their organisation. Employers, leaders and managers across the sector can use the pathway to support workforce planning and career development, helping them to identify the most suitable learning and development opportunities for their workforce.

Dementia practice is embedded throughout the Care Workforce Pathway role categories. This is in recognition that supporting people to live with dementia is an

essential part of adult social care. The role categories describe what people should understand and be able to do when providing dementia care, with expectations for the level of skills increasing as individuals move into more experienced or specialised roles.

Across the pathway, the level of knowledge and skills needed for dementia practice is reflected in the minimum knowledge and skills, and as specific areas of practice that individuals can or should develop, while some of the associated training and development available are set out within the suggested learning opportunities.

The 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' along with existing and new qualifications available for the workforce complement the Care Workforce Pathway by providing a recommended and structured way for the sector to develop the knowledge and skills required in these areas of practice. By using these alongside the Care Workforce Pathway, employers, learning providers and the workforce can take a more consistent and planned approach to developing skills and capability.

More information on the Care Workforce Pathway can be found on the Skills for Care website and the GOV.UK website.

General guidance for qualification review and development

Skills for Care encourages awarding organisations to draw on a broad range of evidence and insights as part of their regular qualification review and development activity. The guidance in this section provides best-practice considerations to support high-quality qualifications for the adult social care workforce. In addition to this qualification guide, this should include, but is not limited to:

- **Engagement of subject matter experts, voices of people with lived experience, and development specialists**
  Involving experienced practitioners, people with lived experience, technical experts and development specialists helps ensure that qualifications remain current and reflective of emerging practice across adult social care.

- **Insights and feedback from centres**
  Training providers play a critical role in delivering qualifications and are well placed to highlight what is working well and where there may be challenges. Their feedback can be invaluable when it comes to shaping updates or revisions to qualifications.

- **Learner and employer engagement**
  Direct input from learners and employers helps ensure that qualifications remain relevant, accessible and aligned with the knowledge, skills and behaviours actually needed in the workplace.

- **Standards and framework alignment**
  Qualifications should align with nationally agreed standards and frameworks, including the Care Workforce Pathway, to help support clear progression routes and provide a consistent approach to workforce development.

Qualification assessment

The Skills for Care and Development Assessment Principles establish a consistent approach to the assessment of qualifications in the adult social care sector and support the quality assurance processes of awarding organisations. They set out the minimum expectations and approaches for assessment and internal quality assurance, and we expect awarding organisations to embed these principles across all qualifications accessed by the adult social care workforce.

> **When awarding organisations update existing qualifications, Skills for Care recommends that changes are clearly recorded within the qualification specification using robust version-control processes.**
>
> Version control should be maintained after any amendments and provide a clear reference point for external partners when reviewing the qualification's currency, quality, and alignment with the priorities of the adult social care workforce.

Reviewing existing award and certificate qualifications

The review of the 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' provided a valuable opportunity to ensure that the framework continues to reflect current practice and emerging priorities across health and adult social care. Updates to the framework include:

- revised language and terminology
- additional areas of emerging practice
- enhancements to existing content to reflect shifting sector priorities
- updated further reading and reference materials
- refined content that is accurate, up-to-date and in line with current working practices.

Awarding organisations are strongly encouraged to update their existing dementia qualifications to ensure alignment with the updated 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' and as part of their regular review processes. This will ensure that all dementia qualifications accessed by the social care workforce remain fit for purpose and equip learners with the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to perform their role in supporting people living with dementia effectively and confidently.

While a range of dementia qualifications is currently eligible under the Learning and Development Support Scheme (LDSS), this eligibility will be subject to review as our work continues to progress the capabilities of the adult social care workforce. Over time, it is the Government's ambition that all training, development and qualifications identified or funded through the LDSS for the adult social care workforce will be quality assured by the Quality Assured Care Learning Service. Current and existing dementia qualifications do not need to be approved by Skills for Care; however, a key component of any future approvals process would include checking qualification content for relevance, accuracy and alignment with relevant sector standards.

Updating language and terminology

The updated framework reflects a shift in sector-recognised terminology around dementia care, and existing qualifications should be updated to align with these changes. This will support clarity and consistency in how learners understand their roles within the adult social care workforce.

Key updates to terminology are outlined in the table below. These changes promote person-led language and reflect current best practice in the health and social care sector.

Updated terminology	Replaces
Distressed behaviour	Challenging behaviour
Family, carers and supporters	Carers Family and carers
Life story information	History/biography
Person/people	Individual/individuals *Where it makes sense to do so.*
Person living with dementia **People living with dementia**	Individual(s) with dementia Individual who has dementia Individuals who have dementia
Person living with young-onset dementia **People living with young-onset dementia**	Younger individual(s) with dementia
Person-led care	Person-centred care

Please note that the updated framework uses the term **'advance decision'**. This is also known as an advance directive. Awarding organisations should ensure that learners recognise both terms.

Updating qualification content

The framework review also identified areas where existing content could be enhanced or updated to reflect new priorities or areas of best practice. By refreshing existing qualifications to incorporate the key changes below, awarding organisations can ensure that their qualifications align with the updated framework, and that they remain current, credible, and valuable for those undertaking them as well as for employers who rely on them to evidence competence and capability.

New or enhanced content	Suggested action
Recognition, consideration and celebration of sociocultural differences and intersectionality *Full definitions of these terms can be found in the framework glossary.*	**Sociocultural differences** is the umbrella term used to describe the variations in social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, practices, and behaviours among different groups of people. **Intersectionality** refers to the way in which different aspects of a person's identity, such as cultural and spiritual values and beliefs, disabilities, race, gender identity and sexual orientation, interact to shape their experiences, behaviours and needs. Awarding organisations should integrate sociocultural and intersectional perspectives, such as the consideration of cultural and spiritual values and beliefs, into existing learning outcomes wherever relevant, particularly where outcomes reference equality, diversity and inclusion or require a holistic view of the person's needs, wishes and preferences.
Neurodiversity and people who are neurodivergent	Awarding organisations should incorporate neurodiversity as a consideration across existing learning outcomes wherever relevant, particularly where content relates to equality, diversity and inclusion, person-led approaches or adapting support to ensure accessible care. Awarding organisations should also update any references to **people with a learning disability** to explicitly include **people who are neurodivergent.** *Please note that neurodiverse/neurodiversity is a collective term and shouldn't be used to describe individuals.*
Recognition and acknowledgment of the wider support network of people living with dementia	Awarding organisations should update their definition of **carer** to include **family carers**, **unpaid carers** and **paid professionals**, and to expand the consideration of those caring for people living with dementia to explicitly include **families** and **supporters** as well as carers.

	Where relevant, outcomes should also be updated to reflect the **wider support network** of people living with dementia, to include anyone who plays a significant role in their life, as they may influence the person's care, wellbeing and decision making.
	Awarding organisations should ensure that learners are required to consider informed consent when sharing information with support networks.
Working to develop partnerships with those involved in the care and support of people living with dementia	Previous versions of the framework put the emphasis on creating professional working relationships with carers of people living with dementia. The updated framework emphasises families, carers and supporters as **partners** in dementia care.
	Relevant learning outcomes should be updated to reflect this shift and embed:
	▪ shared understanding ▪ effective communication ▪ and shared decision-making
	to improve the wellbeing of people living with dementia and promote positive outcomes.
Additional emphasis on supporting people living with dementia to maintain their independence for as long as possible	Awarding organisations should review and update existing learning outcomes to ensure learners are equipped to promote and support independence for people living with dementia as part of a person-led approach. This includes:
	▪ supporting shared decision-making where appropriate ▪ enabling people to maintain an active role in their chosen activities and communities ▪ encouraging people living with dementia to recognise and build on personal strengths to support confidence and wellbeing.

More consideration given to the needs of people living with young-onset dementia	Learning outcomes should be updated to explicitly consider and reflect the needs and experiences of people living with young-onset dementia, including how they may differ from those of people diagnosed later in life.
	This should include consideration of the potential impacts on their families, carers, supporters and wider social networks where relevant.
Additional learning outcomes around delirium	The review identified a gap in the framework relating to the recognition of delirium and how it differs from dementia. Awarding organisations should strengthen existing content in this area and expand relevant learning outcomes beyond a basic awareness level, to ensure that learners can identify, respond to and escalate concerns related to delirium effectively.
A shift from person-centred care to person-led care	The updated framework reflects a shift from person-centred care to person-led care, positioning people living with dementia as active participants in their own care, and enabling them to have ownership, influence and control over what matters most to them.
	Awarding organisations should update existing content to promote person-led approaches, requiring learners to consider how they can support people living with dementia to identify, build on and apply their strengths in ways that promote independence, confidence and wellbeing.
Greater emphasis on the person rather than the condition	Awarding organisations should ensure learning outcomes reflect the importance of understanding not only the clinical signs of dementia but also how the condition is experienced differently by each person.
	Learning outcomes should reflect the need to provide care that reflects a person's emotional, physical and personal needs.

The inclusion of technology and digital tools to support person-led approaches in dementia care	Awarding organisations should integrate digital skills and knowledge requirements throughout existing outcomes wherever relevant. This includes considering how technology and digital tools, including assistive AI, can support person-led approaches to meet the needs of people living with dementia, and enhance their quality of life. Awarding organisations should also consider the digital capabilities that learners need to use a range of digital tools effectively and to support others in their use.

Example updates to learning outcomes

To further support awarding organisations in the reviewing process, we've taken some sample learning outcomes from existing dementia qualifications and provided best-practice examples of how they could be updated and refined to align with the updated framework. We recognise that awarding organisations may choose to word or present their qualifications differently but having looked at a broad range of available qualifications, we believe the examples given reflect common criteria and should be useful to all awarding organisations.

Example outcomes have been taken from the following qualifications:

- Level 2 Award in Awareness of Dementia
- Level 2 Certificate in Dementia Care
- Level 3 Award in Awareness of Dementia
- Level 3 Certificate in Dementia Care.

Level 2 Award in Awareness of Dementia

Learning outcome	Assessment criteria	Suggested update
Understand and appreciate the importance of diversity of individuals with dementia.	Explain the importance of recognising that individuals with dementia have unique needs and preferences.	Explain the importance of recognising that individuals with dementia have unique needs and preferences and how these may be shaped by their cultural and spiritual values and beliefs.
Understand ways of working with a range of individuals who have dementia to ensure diverse needs are met.	Describe how the experience of an older individual with dementia may be different from the experience of a younger individual with dementia.	Describe how the experience of a person living with young-onset dementia may differ from that of an older person living with dementia.
	Describe what knowledge and understanding would be required to work in a person-centred way with an individual with a learning disability and dementia.	Describe what knowledge and understanding would be required to work in a person-led way with an individual with a learning disability, or who is neurodiverse, and is living with dementia.
Understand approaches that enable individuals with dementia to experience wellbeing.	Describe what is meant by a person-centred approach.	Describe what is meant by a person-led approach.
Understand the role of carers in the care and support of individuals with dementia.	Describe the role that carers can have in the care and support of individuals with dementia.	Describe the role that families, carers and supporters can have in the care and support of people living with dementia.

	Explain the value of developing a professional working relationship with carers.	Explain the value of developing partnerships with families, carers and supporters.
Understand what dementia is.	Explain why depression, delirium and age-related memory impairment may be mistaken for dementia.	Explain the differences between depression, delirium and age-related impairment and why these might be mistaken for dementia.
Understand the factors which can affect interactions with individuals with dementia.	Explain how understanding an individual's biography/history can facilitate positive interactions.	Explain how life story information and understanding a person's cultural and spiritual needs can facilitate positive interactions.

Level 2 Certificate in Dementia Care

Learning outcome	Assessment criteria	Suggested update
Know the most common types of dementia and their causes.	List the most common causes of dementia.	List the most common types of dementia and their underlying causes.
	Describe the likely signs and symptoms of the most common causes of dementia.	Describe how to recognise and respond to the needs of those experiencing symptoms of dementia.

Be able to involve the individual with dementia in planning and implementing their care and support using a person-centred approach.	Communicate with an individual with dementia using a range of methods that meet the individual's abilities and needs.	Communicate with people living with dementia using a range of techniques, including the use of digital and assistive technologies, to meet their needs and abilities.
	Involve an individual with dementia in identifying and managing risks for their care and support plan.	Work with people living with dementia to recognise their strengths and make shared decisions that support their care plans.
	Involve an individual with dementia in opportunities that meet their agreed abilities, needs and preferences.	Support people living with dementia to engage in activities that stimulate their senses and meet their daily living needs and preferences.
Be able to involve carers and others in the care and support of individuals with dementia.	Demonstrate how to involve carers and others in the support of an individual with dementia.	Demonstrate effective partnership working with families, carers, supporters and others to support people living with dementia.
Be able to work with a range of individuals who have dementia to ensure diverse needs are met.	Demonstrate how to work in ways that ensure that the needs and preferences of individuals with dementia from a diverse range of backgrounds are met.	Demonstrate ways of working that ensure the needs, preferences, and cultural and spiritual values and beliefs of people living with dementia from diverse backgrounds are recognised, supported and met.
	Describe how to use a person-centred approach with an individual with a learning disability and dementia.	Describe how to use a person-led approach when caring for people with a learning disability or who are

		neurodivergent and are also living with dementia.
Be able to apply interaction and communication approaches with individuals in dementia.	List different techniques that can be used to facilitate positive interactions with an individual with dementia.	List different techniques, including digital and assistive technologies, that support positive interactions with people living with dementia.
	Use an individual's biography/history to facilitate positive interactions.	Use life story information and an understanding of a person's cultural and spiritual needs to facilitate positive interactions.

Level 3 Award in Awareness of Dementia

Learning outcome	Assessment criteria	Suggested update
Understand and appreciate the importance of diversity of individuals with dementia.	Explain how values, beliefs and misunderstandings about dementia can affect attitudes towards individuals.	Explain how cultural values, beliefs and misunderstandings about dementia can affect attitudes towards people living with dementia.
Understand ways of working with a range of individuals who have dementia to ensure diverse needs are met.	Describe what knowledge and understanding would be required to work in a person-centred way with an individual with a learning disability and dementia.	Describe the knowledge and understanding required to work in a person-led way with a person who has a learning disability or is neurodivergent and is also living with dementia.

Understand approaches that enable individuals with dementia to experience wellbeing.	Describe what is meant by a person-centred approach.	Describe the principles of person-led approaches in dementia care.
Understand what dementia is.	Explain why depression, delirium and age-related memory impairment may be mistaken for dementia.	Explain the differences between depression, delirium and age-related impairment and why these may be mistaken for dementia.
Know the most common types of dementia and their causes.	Describe the likely signs and symptoms of the most common causes of dementia.	Describe how to recognise and respond to the needs of those experiencing symptoms of dementia.
Understand factors relating to an individual's experience of dementia.	Outline the impact that the attitudes and behaviours of others may have on an individual with dementia.	Outline how unconscious bias can impact the attitudes, decisions and behaviours of others towards people living with dementia.
Understand how a person-centred approach may be used to encourage positive communication with individuals with dementia.	Describe how to adapt the style of communication to meet the needs, strengths and abilities of an individual with dementia.	Describe how to adapt communication styles and techniques according to the strengths, needs and abilities of people living with dementia.
Understand the factors which can affect interactions with individuals with dementia.	List different techniques that can be used to facilitate positive interactions with an individual with dementia.	Compare different techniques, including digital and assistive technologies, that support positive interactions with people living with dementia.

Level 3 Certificate in Dementia Care

Learning outcome	Assessment criteria	Suggested update
Be able to maximise the rights and choices of individuals with dementia.	Demonstrate that the best interests of an individual with dementia are considered when planning and delivering care and support.	Demonstrate that the best interests of a person living with dementia are considered when planning and delivering care and support.
Understand that each individual's experience of dementia is unique.	Compare the experience of dementia for an individual who has acquired it as an older person with the experience of an individual who has acquired it as a younger person.	Compare the different experiences and challenges faced by people living with young-onset dementia with those faced by older people living with dementia.
	Describe how the experience of dementia may be different for: ■ individuals who have a learning disability ■ who are from different ethnic backgrounds ■ who are at the end of life.	Describe how dementia may be experienced differently by: ■ people with learning disabilities ■ people who are neurodiverse ■ people from ethnic minoritised backgrounds ■ people who are at the end of life.
Understand the neurology of dementia.	Describe a range of causes of dementia syndrome.	Describe the different types of dementia, and their underlying causes.
Be able to communicate with an individual with dementia using a range of verbal and non-verbal techniques.	Demonstrate how to use different communication techniques with an individual who has dementia.	Demonstrate how to make reasonable adjustments to communication styles to support the needs of people living with dementia.

Reviewing specialist optional units within diploma qualifications

The updated 'Dementia Training Standards Framework' highlights the need to review and update specialist optional units related to dementia care within core diploma qualifications to ensure they continue to meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider sector. This review should include checking that all terminology used within the units is accurate, up to date, and consistent with current policy, legislation, and recognised sector language. It should also involve identifying any emerging themes, practices, or areas of knowledge that were not previously included but are now recognised within the framework as essential for effective practice.

Updating optional units in this way will help maintain their alignment with the nationally agreed updated framework. This alignment supports quality assurance and promotes a consistent and standardised approach to learning across health and adult social care. By refreshing these units to reflect current practice, awarding organisations can ensure that diploma qualifications remain current, credible and valuable for learners, as well as for employers who rely on them to evidence competence and capability.

Updating existing optional units

Skills for Care recommends that awarding organisations undertake a structured and holistic review of optional units to ensure they remain fit for purpose, reflect current practice and maintain alignment with the nationally agreed framework. This should include:

1. **Reviewing terminology in titles, descriptors and learning outcomes**
   The framework review process identified that some of the terminology used within optional units has become outdated or is no longer commonly used across the sector. Awarding organisations should therefore review and update the language used across all optional unit content as a starting point to improve clarity, sector alignment and overall consistency across their qualifications.

2. **Reviewing content alignment alongside the updated framework**
   Awarding organisations should review the content of all relevant optional units alongside the updated framework to ensure clear alignment with key themes, core capabilities and priority areas. This includes checking that units appropriately reflect the knowledge, skills and behaviours outlined in the framework. Where key topics, updated practices or policy areas are included in the framework but are missing or only partially covered within existing optional units, these should be integrated or strengthened.

   Ensuring clear content alignment in this way will help maintain the relevance and quality of optional units, so that they continue to provide meaningful choice and contribute to the capability development the framework is designed to support.

Approval requirements

Optional units within core diploma qualifications, such as the Level 3 Diploma in Adult Care, are included in the approval process; however, they are reviewed using a sampling approach that focuses on whether suggested topics are represented and if the range of units available demonstrates appropriate stretch and progression. Due to the wide number and variety of optional units across specialist areas, individual optional units are not reviewed in full during approval. We therefore rely on awarding organisations applying robust quality assurance processes during development and throughout ongoing reviews.

Many optional units currently available are legacy units carried forward from previous versions of sector qualifications. The review of the updated framework provides an important opportunity for awarding organisations to ensure that these units reflect current knowledge, skills and sector expectations, and that they meet the needs of learners and employers when supporting people in specialist areas such as dementia care.

Awarding organisations do not need to notify Skills for Care when making updates to optional units following qualification approval. We recognise that optional units will be subject to regular review and revision as part of awarding organisations' internal quality assurance arrangements.

Supporting resources

Further resources on other standards, qualifications and dementia can be found on the Skills for Care website, offering a wide range of guidance, tools and materials to support learning and good practice.

Additional detailed information is also available within the appendices of the 'Dementia Training Standards Framework', which provides a glossary of terms used in the framework and further evidence sources and practical support for those developing or delivering dementia related training.

There are also newly developed dementia resources available on the Skills for Care website. These resources cover a broad range of topics including prevention, before and after diagnosis, support, family carers and end of life. In addition, short videos are available to give practical guidance on adapting communication styles to better support people living with dementia and their families, carers and supporters.

The relevant Skills for Care links are provided below.

- Dementia resources
- Developing your workforce
- Dementia training standards framework
- Other standards and frameworks
- Awarding organisations