

Top tips for adult social care workforce retention

A guide for providers and councils

Once you have good people working in your organisation, you want to keep and develop them. Having staff who like their jobs and do them well reflects in the quality of care that they provide. It is also good for productivity and ensuring the future sustainability of your organisation.

Recruitment takes precious time and resources, and having high staff turnover can make it harder to attract new people. It is worth investing in staff retention, and paying attention to the different factors that can affect it – including pay, working hours, working culture and environment, career paths, and having line managers who can engage with their teams effectively.

Some of the key areas to focus on in recruiting staff are:

- Creating a positive place to work
- Good leadership and management
- Inclusive and effective workforce planning
- Embed recruitment practices that retain staff in the long-term
- Promoting career development
- Offering positive benefits and terms and conditions
- Promoting staff wellbeing
- Appropriate rewards and recognition

You can better understand these factors and how they impact retention by utilising local workforce data and intelligence, including using the [Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set \(ASC-WDS\)](#), but also, by empowering and acting on the views of your workforce and the people you support. Communication and engagement with your staff in the spirit of co-design and co-production should be the golden thread running through your retention strategy.

This guide has been developed in conjunction with councils and providers of social care and is aimed at senior officers, employers or councillors with an interest in the adult social care workforce or commissioning. It provides top tips, suggestions, and links to resources to support you in implementing staff retention measures.

Creating a positive place to work

Workplace culture is the character and personality of your organisation. It is defined by your organisation's leadership, values, traditions, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of the people in it.

Organisations with a positive culture, who value their workforce and provide a great place to work have much better retention rates¹. A positive culture also supports other areas of focus for retention, such as leadership, management and wellbeing, and inspires many business benefits. It offers a sense of shared identity, loyalty to the organisation, and influences what people think or do. Crucially, a positive workplace culture can impact the quality of care and support you provide. Most employees experience workplace culture through the attitude and behaviours of their line manager, highlighting it is important to equip them to be excellent people managers.

Top tips:

- Consult staff on your organisation's culture and values through as broad a range of engagement methods as possible to ensure you obtain and reflect diverse perspectives and input. Good ways to collate staff input include all-staff meetings, anonymised staff surveys/voting, feedback through line managers and team away days, [Norfolk County Council's 2019 staff engagement survey](#) provides ideas for how to do this. Use this information to understand what your organisation's culture is and where it ought to be by identifying and forming organisational values and behaviours. Be open and transparent throughout this co-designed and co-produced process.
- Consider developing a staff handbook or staff webpage on your intranet that explicitly outlines your workplace culture through its values and behaviours.
- Embed the values and behaviours you want to encourage into organisational policies and processes, such as recruitment initiatives, terms and conditions, wellbeing practices, and leadership and management.
- Ensure that your organisation's culture is underpinned by regular communication and periodically reviewed to avoid remaining static, iterating your approach where necessary.

Links, resources and case studies:

Skills for Care's [Creating a Positive Workplace Culture Toolkit](#)
[Local Government Association's Organisational Culture and Change Management](#)

¹<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Recruitment-support/Retaining-your-staff/Executive-summary-Transform-Research-at-Exeter-University.pdf>

Good leadership and management

Effective leadership and management contribute to the creation of a positive workplace culture and can have a huge impact on employees feeling valued, which is key to retention.² Managers engage with individuals and teams through a number of ways including: the induction process, supervisions, appraisals, performance development plans and reflections on practice. It is also important to use these processes to check your workplace values are understood, being upheld and are having a positive impact.

Top tips:

- Senior management should engage with all leaders and managers to ensure that they have the skills to effectively support staff and manage people, acting on any actions in a timely manner. Urge leaders and managers to do the same with their teams and staff (see more information on learning and development in 'promoting career development').
- Take every opportunity to network with colleagues, working in partnership to achieve common goals or seeking solutions to common challenges. Peer networks, like Skills for Care's '[registered manager network](#)' give managers the chance to network like-minded colleagues who face similar, everyday challenges.
- Model positive workplace culture and provide constructive and respectful feedback to employees.

Links, resources and case studies:

Skills for Care's [Managing People](#)

Skills for Care's [People Performance Management Toolkit](#)

Free leadership and management resources at the [Institute for Leadership and Management](#)

² <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Adult-social-care-workforce-data/Evidence-review-and-consultation-analysis.pdf>

Inclusive and effective workforce planning

Often organisations focus on their immediate people and skills requirements; however, it is important to consider the medium and long-term requirements too. This is just as critical to a small, growing organisation as it is to a larger one. It involves:

- Identifying future workforce needs.
- Considering the people and skills you currently have.
- Assessing the gap.
- Developing a plan to address it.

It is important to align workforce planning to your strategic business plan. Workforce planning is fundamentally about making sure you have the roles, people, and skills you need at the right time to enable you to retain your staff, feed into a future pipeline and deliver your organisation's ambitions.

Top tips:

- Use data and information to understand the composition of your workforce, past and future trends, and benchmark with others, in order to inform your workforce plans. Monitor your progress and measure any successes and areas to improve.
- Use various communication methods, such as appraisals, exit interviews and staff surveys, to understand what motivates staff and what makes them more likely to stay or leave your organisation at different stages of their employment cycle. Use this information to focus on areas you need to improve or do more of and what benefits and support should be given at different phases of the employment cycle.
- Retain the workforce within the care system if not the organisation. Where retaining staff is not feasible within the organisation, facilitate movement within adult social care to benefit the sector. This could be via development days, work experience, shadowing, or taster sessions, creating a culture of staff being able to explore other parts of the system. This could be built in to contracted providers' fee structures to enable their staff to have one day a year to explore work experience in another part of the system.

Links, resources and case studies:

[Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set \(ASC-WDS\)](#)

[Skills for Care's Workforce Intelligence Reports](#)

[LG Inform's Health and Care in your area overview](#)

Commission to retain staff

Given the challenges across the social care sector, it is important that all partners understand the role they can play in supporting the workforce and the retention of staff within the sector. This section focuses on how the function of commissioning care and support, and the people involved in that function, can operate in a way that best supports the workforce, and specifically helps with retention. For this to be done well, it is vital that there is:

- A good understanding of how the council's commissioning influences how providers operate and the impact this has on the workforce and retention, and
- A strong commitment from commissioners and providers to work together to improve how commissioning practice and approaches support workforce retention.

When this is done well, it can facilitate much of the good practice recommended throughout this document. However, the influence a council's commissioning actions and decisions can have on how the provider's workforce is employed and deployed can be underestimated and misunderstood. This is because the nature and level of impact may not always be clear and can differ according to the type of service (typically, a stronger link with home care than for care homes), the commissioning approach (the level of certainty and flexibility providers have) and local circumstances (typically, the fewer the self-funders the greater the impact of council commissioning). This section is NOT advocating any specific commissioning actions or approach, but it aims to highlight key connections between commissioning approaches and the workforce, with examples used to illustrate the impact such approaches can have on the workforce.

Terms, conditions and contracts

Where a council offers providers certainty of what they will commission, how and when, the provider will be better able to adopt positive terms and conditions for their staff. As an example, one council may enter a block contract with a care home for x number of beds over y period and another council may commission all beds from 30 care homes on an ad-hoc basis with no guarantees for any of these homes. The first of these situations will give the provider greater clarity and certainty and so is likely to impact the type of contracts and levels of commitment given to staff. With community provision, a council may have 5-year contracts in place with a small number of providers who are guaranteed a set number of hours. Not only is it in these providers' interests to think long term, but they are more able to do so and the likely impact is greater use of permanent contracts and more investment in career pathways.

Type of job roles

Social care providers will be staffed in a way that supports them to operate in the most effective and efficient way. Providers will do this in different ways, but their approach will be influenced by how they are commissioned and how they deliver support to individuals. Across the country, home care is still typically commissioned in a way that means most care is delivered between 8.00 and 10.00 and 17.00 and 20.00 by staff who need to be able to travel quickly between visits. This means care workers must be able to (and perhaps more importantly, must want to) work these hours and be able to drive, which not only narrows the number of people that will fill these roles but then places restrictions on their situation (what if their car breaks down, can they still work?).

Councils are increasingly adopting approaches that will begin to change the current situation. This includes many councils moving towards area-based commissioning where individual providers work in a specific and relatively small geographical area. This reduces the travel distance and time and also creates opportunities for staff to travel in different ways. Councils are also increasingly

involving the care provider and person receiving care in decisions about the exact timing and structure of the care package. This is resulting in greater variety in exactly what support is provided and when and leading to care being provided more evenly across the day and a wider variety of job roles and to offer flexibility to current and future staff.

Staff Wellbeing

Many of the things described so far in this section will result in increased staff wellbeing (e.g. more commitment and better contracts), but there is further specific support a commissioner may provide. For community-based care, some councils commission 'care rounds' which are groups of care packages where the location and timing of each visit allows for an efficient and manageable care delivery routine for staff. There are other examples of what a council can do, such as agreeing processes with care providers to understand and address situations where the delivery of care is creating additional pressures for care staff due to how packages are set up or the specific situation with people receiving care. The details of this will vary but could include where care rounds are clearly not deliverable and it is necessary to look to change or hand back some care packages, through to practical difficulties such as parking permits/availability/restrictions and at a personal level where the relationship between the care worker, person receiving care and their family is creating challenges. These are examples of factors that currently happen across the country and can influence if people remain in their current role in the social care sector.

Payment

This is of course a key issue. This document is not the right place for a detailed discussion about local government or care provider finances, but clearly the sector would benefit from greater funding and if received, the consensus is that much of it should go to increasing the pay for key areas of the workforce. However, aside from the council fee rate there are aspects of a council's approach that affect retention. Councils will typically pay providers in arrears but the length of this will vary, councils may pay providers weekly or monthly and will differ in exactly how they pay for care (may be on what is commissioned, what is actually delivered or something similar). Councils will also have specific terms in relation to cancelled home care visits or periods where the person needing care may be in hospital. The systems and processes council's use will also affect the accuracy and promptness of payment. As with the other situations described in this section, commissioners are encouraged to consider all of these factors and how they can improve them to support retention.

It was stated earlier but it is worth repeating that this section does NOT attempt to state what approaches are better or worse. Instead, it aims to highlight the importance of commissioners and providers working together to understand the impact current practice has and how this can be improved. Given the workforce challenges in the sector it seems incumbent on all partners to take the actions they believe will best support retention, no matter how small they may appear.

Recruit to retain

Being deliberate and taking the time to consider how you recruit is crucial to reducing staff turnover and reducing future recruitment demands. You should communicate clearly with applicants about progress on their application, to not only keep them on board for the recruitment process but to help build positive relationships from the start. Share information and timeframes early on to ensure eager applicants can start as soon as possible.

Values-based recruitment is a way of getting to know people, their motivations, passions, interests and whether they will be a good fit for your organisation and the roles you are recruiting to, ensuring you make the best possible recruitment choices for those who you provide care and support to. Values-based recruitment gives organisations the ability to look wider than the usual pool of recruits to find people who may not have any previous experience in care but who have exactly the sorts of values and behaviours that would make them an asset to any care organisation.

Crucially, research has found that a values-based approach to recruitment has resulted in lower recruitment costs, positive return on investment, increased staff retention, and better staff performance.³

Top tips:

- Use your workplace culture development to decide what values and behaviours you want to embed in your organisation and map these to job adverts.
- Support managers to implement values-based recruitment through effective training and development.
- Support candidates throughout values-based recruitment by being upfront about the style of interview in the job advert, and what values and behaviours you are seeking.
- Buddy up new employees with another staff member on arrival, so they have a clear advice and support route immediately.
- Continuously review your values and behaviours as your culture evolves and ensure that your interview methods reflect this. Review your interview methods to see if it is boosting retainment and bringing in the right skills, values and attributes.

Links, resources and case studies:

Manchester Metropolitan University's [value-based recruitment resources](#)

Skills for Care's [Workshop and Seminars on values-based recruitment](#)

Skills for Care's [Attracting People](#)

³ <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Values-Based%20Recruitment.pdf>

Recruiting and retaining staff from overseas

Taking advantage of overseas recruitment widens the field from which many employers traditionally draw. Providers who have recruited from overseas have said that this approach can offer access to high quality candidates, improved retention rates and a strong future supply chain as overseas employees recommend you to other people they know from their country of origin.⁴

Planning for international recruitment involves:

1. Checking your organisation is eligible and you have capacity to undertake this form of recruitment
2. Checking your job is suitable for sponsorship
3. Deciding who will manage sponsorship within your business
4. Applying for a sponsorship licence
5. Ensuring you are recruiting ethically

To fully support staff and increase retention rates, you should support recruits with a comprehensive induction and settling in, and ensure they have full pastoral support.

Top Tips:

- Consider whether you have capacity to undertake the recruitment yourself or if you need to use a recruitment agency.
- Understand what steps you need to take to recruit internationally – see resources below.
- Be clear to candidates on the expectations of the role and the location to reduce the likelihood of them leaving the organisation early. After you have made a job offer, stay in contact until they arrive and arrange for any specific professional training, education and support that can help them to adjust to new systems and ways of working.
- Ensure that you fully support new recruits with the same learning and development opportunities as the rest of your workforce, and clarify the support options available from the relevant professional regulators, professional associations and trade unions.

Links, resources and case studies:

Local Government Association's [bite-sized guide to overseas recruitment](#)

National Care Forum's [pastoral care guide for international recruitment in social care](#)

The UK Government's [code of practice for international recruitment in health and social care](#)

Case studies of good practice from [Banbury Heights Nursing Home](#) and [BMB International](#)

⁴ <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sector-support-offer/care-and-health-improvement/adult-social-care-workforce/overseas-recruitment>

Supporting a diverse workforce

There may be specific issues or barriers that staff with protected characteristics can face which could impact retention.⁵ Promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace can help everyone feel valued for their unique contributions. Taking steps to become more inclusive may mean addressing outdated policies and committing to real support for diversity and inclusion.

Communication issues can be somewhat common on diverse teams, and for a variety of reasons. There may be language barriers, different communication styles or preferences, or people with hearing loss on your team. It's important to address these challenges before they become problematic.

Misunderstandings can also be common when you bring people from different cultures together. As you diversify your team, it's possible you could see more biases, discrimination, and harassment.

Top tips:

- Ensure that there are clear organisational policies and mechanisms to deal with complaints, including bullying, harassment and discrimination that all staff are made aware of when they join the organisation.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of their employment rights upon being onboarding and know where to find out this information.
- Seek to collect workforce data on equalities from all staff to help improve the organisation's understanding of racism and discrimination which can help to understand and address issues.
- Consider appointing equality/diversity champions across the organisation. The NHS are doing this at some Trusts: [Diversity Champions - Kingston Hospital](#)
- Pro-actively engage with relevant staff networks to ensure their voice is heard in decision-making processes.
- Consider recruitment and promotion practises to ensure that panels better reflect the diversity of local communities to increase minority ethnic representation at senior levels.

Links, resources and case studies:

Local Government Association's [Equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce](#)

⁵ https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/inquiry-experiences-and-treatment-of-lower-paid-ethnic-minority-workers-in-health-and-social-care-report_0.pdf

Promoting career development

Our workforce need ongoing development to help them undertake their current role more effectively and to prepare them to take on new tasks or move into their next role. Skills for Care's [Secrets to Success](#) report also found that staff learning was one of the most important aspects for staff retention. Therefore, consider career pathways that align with your business plan and suit the various aspirations of your workforce. Flexible learning opportunities should be central to support varied career pathways.

Top tips:

- Continue to use various communication methods to engage and encourage staff to consider what they are looking for in their career. In particular, encourage managers to use induction sessions, appraisals, one-on-one meetings and reflections on past work to understand this better.
- Build relationships with training providers and [health and social care career academies](#) to build a learning and development programme aligned to your staff's feedback and aspirations. Clearly communicate this with aligned career pathways so staff see your organisation as a long-term career opportunity. Ensure you take advantage of all external opportunities to help fund staff development. For example, the [Workforce Development Fund](#) and for those who pay the [apprenticeship levy](#) and have unused apprenticeship funds can find and support other employers who want to receive a transfer.
- Motivate and encourage people inside and outside of social care to consider it as a career opportunity with good career development by celebrating and sharing your staff's outstanding work and development externally. Encourage staff to become [I Care Ambassadors](#) and involve them in engaging with the local community through local recruitment fairs, recruitment drives, social media and videos to demonstrate their professional learning and development as well as recognise staff achievements.

Links, resources and case studies:

Skills for Care's [Developing your Workforce](#)

Free health and wellbeing courses from [e-learning for Health](#) and [online recovery college](#)

Cambridgeshire County Councils' retention strategy includes a [Virtual College of Social Care](#) to support all learning opportunities.

Positive benefits, terms and conditions

As well as career development, research has affirmed that everyone is different with different motivations and ambitions and that meeting these often-personal drivers is central to retention.⁶ Findings from Secrets of Success shows that employees want good working conditions, such as guaranteed working hours, fair wages, flexibility, input into rotas and help with childcare costs, all of which can be incorporated into your terms and conditions and benefits package.

Employers who have a lower staff turnover go beyond the minimum requirements which means it's worthwhile enhancing the benefits package on offer if you want to retain staff.⁷

Top tips:

- Involve staff in developing shift patterns and rotas to increase the flexibility of working patterns. Be conscious of the double-edged sword of zero-hour contracts in that they can provide flexibility for some and uncertainty for others.
- Engage your staff to understand what benefits and improvements in terms and conditions would support them and make them want to stay and use this to tailor benefits package.
- Consider offering staff free meals, if your organisation provides meals and consider introducing [salary sacrifice schemes](#) where non-cash benefits like childcare vouchers, payments into pension schemes, bicycles and cycling safety equipment are provided.
- Introduce '[refer a friend](#)' schemes to reward existing employees while boosting recruitment.

Links, resources and case studies:

[Government guidelines on working conditions, policies and procedures](#)

[Skills for Care's Attracting People](#)

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/views-on-the-ageing-society-survey-of-older-people>
<https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-12/What-do-older-workers-value.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-03/closing-the-gap-health-care-workforce-full-report.pdf#page=33>

Promoting staff wellbeing

Organisations should look after staff wellbeing, including supporting a good work/life balance as well as addressing stress at work and increasing staff resilience. Improving resilience contributes to better wellbeing by helping staff to cope better under pressure which protects their mental and physical health, increasing staff retention and reducing sickness absences.⁸

Positive wellbeing is crucial in ensuring that staff feel supported and remain with the organisation, enabling them to focus on providing good quality care and support. Organisations need to develop sustainable approaches to enable the positive wellbeing and mental health of the workforce, ensuring that there is a positive workplace culture of wellbeing. This should be organisation-wide and be a shared responsibility of HR practitioners, senior leaders, line managers and employees themselves.

Top tips:

- Provide visible leadership and encourage staff to talk and share concerns within their team and beyond, creating an open and ongoing dialogue within and across all levels of the organisation. Supporting managers to provide this leadership and to fully embrace their role in positively influencing their team's wellbeing culture is crucial. [Devon County Council's wellbeing plan for Adult Social Care](#) will give you some ideas to apply in your context.
- Consider the role of wellbeing in the values and behaviours you want your organisation to embody.
- Use ongoing conversations to better understand the wellbeing support needs of staff, involving all people in developing your wellbeing strategies and programmes. You should consider what free resources you can share to support staff in taking care of their own wellbeing.
- Consider implementing [wellbeing champions](#), who support the mental health and wellbeing of their colleagues according to the context of your organisation.
- Develop a wellbeing charter based on staff input and your organisational culture and values.

Links, resources and case studies:

Local Government Association's [Top Tips for Embedding a Wellbeing Culture](#)

Skills for Care's [Creating a Positive Workplace Culture](#)

[Local Government Association's Workforce and HR Support on Wellbeing](#)

Samaritan's [Frontline](#)

Mind's [wellbeing resources including five ways to wellbeing](#)

[Isle of Wight's multi-agency response to enhance care provider staff wellbeing](#)

[Devon County Council's Wellbeing Plan for Adult Social Care](#)

Federation of Small Businesses' [Guide for Small Businesses to mental health in the workplace](#)

⁸ https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-2019-public-sector-summary_tcm18-55945.pdf
<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Adult-social-care-workforce-data/Evidence-review-and-consultation-analysis.pdf>

Appropriate rewards and recognition

[Secrets of success](#) found that celebrating achievements can go a long way to improving staff retention, increasing staff satisfaction and performance.

Whether giving out praise, or implementing reward and recognition schemes, it is important to consider what can be done to make employees feel respected and valued for their contribution.

External celebration of staff's achievements also has the added bonus of improving perceptions of social care by attracting more people with a positive view of the sector who are consequently more likely to remain in social care.

- Involve people who need care and support to give feedback and share and celebrate positive feedback with staff.
- Recognise when staff do something well through sharing it within your team and organisation. You can share this good practice through various methods including social media, inviting staff to share their work with colleagues and the staff intranet.
- Involve your staff in engaging with the local community through local recruitment fairs, recruitment drives, social media and videos.
- Take part in local and/or national recognition awards and annual awareness days, such as Accolades and Professional Care Workers week respectively.

Links, resources and case studies:

[Made with Care Campaign](#)

Skills for Care's recognition awards - [Accolades](#)

[Cumbria County Council - Together we can say... Thank You! | Local Government Association](#)

recruit develop lead

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