

The Link Up

step by step guide



*A story of employers
working together
for mutual benefit.*

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Introduction

The idea of the Link Up initiative came from an individual employer who thought there might be mutual benefit from working in partnership with a larger employer.

What is meant by individual employer?

An individual employer is someone who buys their own care and support, usually by employing one or more personal assistants. They are sometimes called direct employers. Often, an individual employer will have been assessed by social care as eligible to receive funding (often by means of a 'direct payment'), but sometimes they will pay for their own care (known as self-funding). Either way, they have choice and control about how they are supported.





What is meant by a larger employer?

A larger employer is a small, medium or large organisation which employs a range of workers (including people from temp agencies and bank workers) to provide care and support for the people who use their services. This includes home care and domiciliary care agencies and residential care homes in the independent (i.e. private and voluntary) and public sectors.

What is meant by a PA?

PA is short for personal assistant. A PA is someone employed by an individual employer to support them with their day to day needs, from help getting up in the morning to shopping, health and fitness, social activities, IT support or getting around. A PA might also be called a carer, care worker, support worker or enabler.

Over the last year, the idea has been put into practice via an early feasibility study and pilot projects around England, and not only have the individual and larger employers had positive experiences, there have been more wide ranging positive impacts too.

The idea that an individual employer and a larger social care employer might benefit from working in partnership seemed a bit confusing at first. But through a series of workshops and events in Brighton and Hove, the Midlands and the South East with a group of employers who thought there might be some mileage in this, the idea started to come to life.

As with any innovative idea that requires a change of thinking or culture, there were some initial challenges to getting buy-in. However, once employers of all sizes were given the opportunity to really explore the idea and think about it as a new way of working, the enthusiasm and support soon followed.

Link Up started from the premise that all employers have something positive to offer and something new to learn from each other and demonstrated the potential for a wide range of short and long term benefits. These range from increasing business opportunities to enhancing an individual's or organisation's reputation as a good employer. Link Up partnerships promote the value of person-centred care – and demonstrate that a relatively small investment in forging new relationships has the potential to bring about positive, mutually beneficial change. Not only that, but there have already been other, unexpected benefits as a result of the networking opportunities at the Link Up events.

The ultimate aim of the Link Up initiative is that by working in partnership, you benefit from improved recruitment and retention of a good quality workforce. It's about sharing expertise and supporting each other to bring about positive change and is equally applicable to an individual employer and larger employers.

Section 1
Getting involved

*You have
a lot
to offer...*



*...and more
to gain!*

Section 1:

Getting involved

All social care employers have a great deal of skills and knowledge they can share and develop.

Individual employers

As a person who directly employs your own care and support staff, it might be unusual to think of yourself as an employer rather than a recipient of care. But you are an employer, and more than likely, a particularly skilled one. You probably manage rotas, provide on the job training, run recruitment adverts, manage wages, keep records, and understand health and safety law and equality law. Not only that, but you have a deep understanding of your own care and support needs. This experience and expertise is of great value to larger employers because they need to understand as much as possible about their potential clients in order to provide an attractive, relevant and good service.

“The knowledge and experience gained from delivering personalised care is an extremely valuable asset.”

Larger employers

As a larger employer of care staff, your structures and systems, such as recruitment and management, are very portable. Not only that but you probably have a bigger pool of care staff, buildings and other resources which could very usefully provide support to an individual employer. Changes in the care market mean it is likely there will be increasing business opportunities for employers who have an understanding and experience of employing personal assistants who support individuals in their own homes. The knowledge and experience gained from delivering personalised care is an extremely valuable asset, and one which any larger employer should look at acquiring to help them develop future business opportunities.

Changing market place

The number of adult social care jobs is projected to grow and we may need up to a million extra workers by 2025. The Care Bill will require all eligible people to have a personal budget by April 2015. Local authorities will have a legal responsibility to provide a care and support plan, including the cost of support, so individuals have the option to control this money and commission their own support services. Personal health budgets funded from the NHS will also be available across England by April 2014. Providers in the health and social care sector need to develop and change to be able to take part in this new marketplace.

All kinds of employers stand to gain if they are open to new ideas, and the pilots have already shown that working together as employers and as equals has resulted in a wide range of benefits for both.



Case study: Simon

“I thought long and hard about whether or not to do the Link Up pilot. My days are already stretched, so committing to something which initially seemed time consuming and requiring hard work was difficult. I made the right decision.

“I had some ideas for support for my PAs, particularly around training and supervision but I wasn’t sure if Link Up could meet my expectations. Not only did it meet them, it exceeded them. My team of PAs has had opportunities for supervision with an experienced external employer and a range of training needs have been identified. I have contributed to and improved my local employer and PA register website too. All of these things directly benefit me but they also have a knock on, long term benefit for PAs and their employers.”

A note about expectations and commitment

As with any new business initiative, getting started in a Link Up relationship will need the investment of time. It may save time and money in the long run, but to begin with, both employers need to be realistic about what they have to give and then commit to it (see section 3). Setting up meetings, looking at how you could work together and developing plans together will help both employers to achieve their targets and get the job done.

Not only do you need to invest in the idea, but you may also need staff in place to cope with any added time Link Up arrangements take. However, partnerships which set themselves realistic objectives and put adequate planning in place to support their relationship will generally be able to work flexibly enough to overcome any temporary setbacks.

Section 2
Getting started

*How to find
each other!*



Section 2: Getting started

The pilot study has shown there are employers who are interested in working together in new, creative and innovative ways. The individuals and agencies that took part were very open minded and keen to try out new things, which have proved useful to them in the long run.

Successful businesses are adept at finding and securing new links and relationships and making the most of networking opportunities to develop and grow. There is no reason why employers in the care sector can't use the same tactics to their advantage.

So the message is this - even if you think it's not for you, or unlikely you'll find a potential partner, it doesn't take very much time to look for someone and introduce yourself; the benefits could be very worthwhile.

Something as simple as this email to a potential partner could open the door to a new and useful relationship:
Hello, I've come across this scheme called Link Up that you might be interested in. It is about how individual employers and larger employers might work together for both their benefit. A number of relationships like this have already been successful, and I wondered if you would be interested in meeting me to find out more and see if we have any potential to work together.

“It doesn't take very much time to look for someone and introduce yourself; the benefits could be very worthwhile.”

You need to be aware that the Data Protection Act prevents organisations from giving out the contact details of people on their database. However you can ask them if they would be prepared to circulate information about Link Up to their contacts. A summary of the Link Up initiative is available at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/linkup



« Successful businesses are adept at finding and securing new links and relationships and making the most of networking opportunities to develop and grow. »

Larger employers seeking individual employers

Centres for independent living

These not for profit organisations are run and controlled by disabled people. Their primary aim is to promote independent living. There is a National Centre for Independent Living and various local centres that provide a range of support and information services.

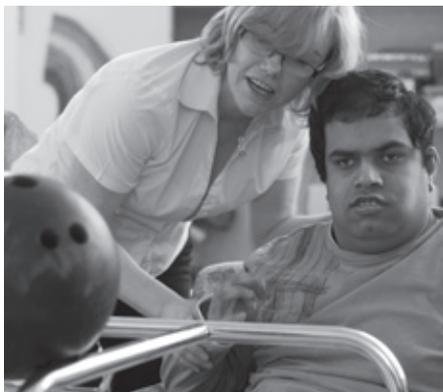
One local user-led organisation which provides direct payment support services to disabled people co-ordinated a Link Up project. They were able to contact all the individual employers that were direct payment recipients on file to explain the idea and ask if they would like to take part. A number of people said yes.

A list of other centres for independent living can be found at www.nhs.uk (put 'centre for independent living' in the search box). Many of them might provide similar direct payment support and may be willing to pass on Link Up information for you.

Local authorities

Your local authority might have a contract with a local organisation to provide direct payment support to individual employers, such as a supported bank account scheme. They will also have records on direct payment recipients and may be willing to send them information about Link Up on your behalf. Look at their website or telephone their adult social care team and ask if they can help.

If you aren't sure who your local authority is, go to www.gov.uk/find-your-local-council and put in your postcode.



Disabled people's organisations

Many areas of the country have local user-led disabled people's organisations and a list of members can be found on the Disability Rights UK website: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/membership/our-members.

You could also try searching for your local council for voluntary services, as they will often have lists of local charities and voluntary groups, and should be able to give you the contact details of disability organisations. You can search their membership at www.navca.org.uk/directory.

Once you have found your local disabled people's organisation or voluntary service, contact them and ask them if they provide support for individual employers, or if they have user groups that you could make contact with to explain the Link Up initiative and look for partners.

Self funded employers of PAs

Some people who employ PAs pay for them themselves. They are known as self funders. Identifying self funders might be quite challenging, but contacting your local disabled people's organisation and asking them if they could raise awareness of the idea through their networks on your behalf is one way. You could also run an advert in your local paper inviting people who pay for their own care to contact you.

Other opportunities

It is likely there will be other local networking events which provide you with an opportunity to talk about Link Up. Your local Chamber of Commerce, business forum meetings and voluntary sector events could all provide the space for you to spread the word about the Link Up initiative so that individual employers might read or hear about it and come to you.



Individual employers seeking larger employers

Larger employers are probably easier to find, as they will make their contact details public. So for an individual employer, it's a case of using the resources below to find employers in your area.

Professional or trade bodies

One approach is to look for professional organisations that support small, medium and larger employers.

Whilst Skills for Care cannot facilitate individual introductions or links we do work with social care employers, people who need care and support, carers and other key stakeholders. We have a network of area teams to support employers across England who can signpost you to information and support. Visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/areas.

The Care Providers Alliance brings together all the main representative bodies for independent adult social care providers, including: Association for Real Change, Care England, Ceretas, Mental Health Providers Forum, National Care Forum (NCF), Registered Nursing Homes Association (RNHA), Shared Lives Plus, United Kingdom Home Care Association (UKHCA) and Voluntary Organisations Disability Group. You will find information on the different bodies and their members at www.careproviders.org.uk.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is an independent organisation that makes sure the care provided by care homes and services in people's own homes meets the national standards of safety and quality. Their website allows you to search for care homes and services in your area that they have recently checked - visit www.cqc.org.uk.

“There are a number of resources to help get you started - visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/linkup”

Service commissioners

Your local authority should be able to tell you the name and contact details for the people in your area who commission adult social care services. They also keep a list of approved home care providers which is publicly available and should be able to send it to you.

Networking events

Your local Chamber of Commerce, business forum or voluntary sector forums will usually hold regular networking events. You could contact them and ask if you could attend their next meeting and publicise the Link Up idea.

Your own networks and peer support groups

Of course, you may be an individual employer working for a larger employer or be active in a network or peer support group. In which case, tell them about the Link Up and persuade them to find out more about how it could benefit them.

There are a number of resources to help you get started - visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/linkup.

Section 3
Getting together



What do you
have to offer?

Section 3: Getting together

The Link Up initiative is all about how you can benefit by swapping something you have for something you don't. This section lists some of the skills and assets you may have to swap; it isn't an exhaustive list and there are probably many different ideas out there.

What do individual employers have to offer?

Training on different approaches to care and business models

You can give a larger employer a unique opportunity to understand a different model of care. The personalised care an individual employer receives can be different from the care given in a residential care home or by some home care agencies. An individual employer will organise their PA(s) to suit the everyday things they want or need to do. That might be help getting ready for the day or support with nutrition and cooking. Whatever it is, it is dictated, organised and paid for by the employer.

An individual employer is an expert in talking about their service needs as individuals, and in the pilot many of the small, medium and larger employers were very interested in receiving such training for their organisation. It is a very tangible thing for the individual employer to offer and could be instrumental in influencing future business services.





Training on specific impairments

What better way could there be to provide training for your staff about a particular impairment than to engage someone who lives with it as your trainer? As well as improving the knowledge of a staff team, the larger employer might be able to cater to the needs of a different group of people if they have a better understanding of the needs of someone with a specific health condition.

Sharing a lived experience of disability

Engaging an individual employer to talk about what it is like to live with their health condition could be an impactful way of developing the empathy and understanding of a staff team. The knock-on effect for both employers is a staff team better able to support disabled people because they have an understanding of the barriers they deal with. It might also be a useful way of enhancing job satisfaction and improving staff retention rates.

“You can give a larger employer a unique opportunity to understand a different model of care.”

“ A number of larger employers were very interested in including disabled people on their interview panels. ”

Offering PA shadowing

In a developing market, where personalised care is becoming a more familiar feature, the individual employer could offer scope for the staff of a larger employer to shadow their PA. This would give the staff member an opportunity to see first hand how an employer and PA relationship works, including how the PA facilitates the personal and domestic needs of their employer. This is valuable knowledge and insight that can be taken back to the larger employer and shared with a wider staff team.

Taking part in the recruitment process

A number of larger employers were very interested in including disabled people on their interview panels. As well as bringing their lived experiences of disability to the table, there are likely to be disabled people who have expertise in other areas useful to either a residential care home or agency: business skills, events and organisation skills, catering experience and so on.



Case study

Husband and wife, Ken and Tracy, who both have sensory loss, found out about Link Up through Dudley Centre for Independent Living, which they run. They teamed up with Home Instead, an independent UK home care provider who help people to live in their own homes.

They worked together in a number of ways. Ken and Tracy trained Home Instead's care team on living with sensory loss, and on some aspects of being an individual employer. They also sat on interview panels, which gave them valuable experience for when they are interviewing their own staff. In return, Home Instead have given them direct advice to support their own recruitment process.

Ken and Tracy have contributed to the development of Home Instead's Alzheimer's training course. They gained useful information for themselves, while at the same time providing important feedback on the course content for Home Instead.

An unexpected but very welcome benefit of this relationship is the continuing improvement of the local taxi service for people with limited mobility. When Home Instead were asked by the taxi company for feedback about improving their service, they used Ken as their expert consultant and he was able to feedback on what would be a good service. The taxi company were very pleased with the ideas put forward, Home Instead's reputation as a reliable source of expert information was cemented and people with limited mobility benefit from a better taxi service.

Ken and Tracy say: "Link Up has given us the chance to have input from a highly respected, good quality employer of highly personalised care and support, which we can use on an ad hoc basis for visits out and events. They are at the end of the phone or email to support us with recruitment, retention and training of staff. This will continue when the pilot ends."

Home Instead are equally pleased with their Link Up relationship. "Ken attended a recruitment fare with us for people wishing to work in care. Ken talked to a variety of people; he spoke very well about our company to prospective employees. I also think Ken and Tracey can help us understand issues around personal budgets and what it is like to be an individual employer. We feel us, our local centre for independent living and even the community have gained from Link Up, and will continue to do so."

What do larger employers have to offer?

Management support for PA(s)

Small, medium and larger employers are more likely to have structures in place, such as supervision and appraisal or staff development programmes which support and develop their workforce. These kinds of services might be useful to individual employers and their PA(s). One example could be a larger employer offering to provide supervision to the individual employer's PA(s). This is good news for the PA because they are enabled to think about how their job could develop, identify training needs or find extra support, as well as have their skills recognised. Many of the individual employers we spoke to during the feasibility study found the on-going management of staff quite stressful, and anything that would help spread the load was very much welcomed.

Offer training places to individual employers

It is crucial that larger employers have a workforce that is well trained in working methods, legal requirements and specific elements of particular roles. Some larger employers will have an in-house training department, or they might commission external trainers for specific things. Either way, offering training places to the PAs of individual employers (or the individual employers themselves) is something that a larger employer might be able to offer.



“Many of the individual employers we spoke to during the feasibility study found the on-going management of staff quite stressful, and anything that would help spread the load was very much welcomed.”

Provide access to low cost, in-house services

Many larger employers provide a range of health, wellbeing and other services to people using their service. Some of the individual employers in the feasibility study had to wait a long time to access services such as chiropody through the NHS. Hairdressing, holistic therapies and physiotherapy, for example, might be offered to individual employers at care homes or day centres.

Respite/emergency services

For many individual employers, the option of making use of respite care is something which provides peace of mind, as well as a practical alternative in crisis or emergency situations. This is something a residential care home might be able to offer. One of the participants in the feasibility study visits her parents who live in a residential home for people with dementia. While she visited them, she also visited the other residents, using memory cards with them. The time she spends with the other residents is banked as time which she can then put towards respite time in the care home.



Residential care homes as resource centres or community assets

The notion of larger employers having a range of resources which could be more widely available to the community came up at many of the Link Up events. From empty offices and meeting rooms, to the use of IT, handyman, gardens, even meals; all of these things could be offered to an individual employer.

Empty offices provide an ideal, neutral setting for an individual employer who needs to meet with their PA. This might be particularly useful if the meeting is for PA job interviews, supervision, or if it could be difficult (such as for disciplinary matters). No-one likes to deal with difficult situations, especially in their own home. Using a neutral space can be helpful, as well as providing the added security of having other people nearby, should they be needed.

Gardening can be very therapeutic - many individual employers in the pilot enjoyed it, but didn't have a big garden of their own.

Use of equipment such as wheelchairs and other resources

Residential homes often have equipment which they could lend out. Wheelchairs, computers and internet connections are all things which could be offered to an individual employer.



“When things are so tight, any way for employers to support each other, share know-how and resources has got to be a winner.”

INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYER WHO TOOK PART IN THE PILOT

An opportunity to develop the relationship between a user led organisation and a local authority service commissioner has been an added bonus in one of the pilot areas. This enabled some very creative discussions to take place which were in addition to the Link Up idea and very beneficial.

One example is a workshop run with larger employers participating in the project to find out their views on the viability of providing back-up cover for individual employers when their PAs were on holiday. These findings were fed back to the local authority and are helping to shape the development of this service.

Case study

Simon is an individual employer with a number of PAs and Shelley is the Specialist Care Broker at Act for Funding (ACT), an employer-led partnership working to increase opportunities for training, workforce development and staff recruitment to support improved care services. They worked together to develop both a training needs analysis and supervision process for Simon's staff. It was invaluable for Simon to know that his PAs had supervision sessions with an external facilitator, giving them a safe and appropriate environment in which to discuss their work. The PA's individual training needs and expectations were also explored in these sessions.

For Shelley and her agency, Simon has contributed to the development of their local PA register to make sure the information is easily accessible. Simon will continue to review online information for the agency. He will also become a regular contributor to their newsletter.

Simon says: "It has been very beneficial for me to have someone from outside to look at me and my team of PAs as a whole, in the setting in which they work. That outside perspective reminded me of the importance of having a cohesive team to support me. It has also been incredibly useful to have an independent eye to oversee the development of a training and supervision programme for my staff team. It is important for me to feel that I am a good employer, and important for the team to look at how they can develop and train in their role, as well as have independent space to reflect and discuss issues around me. The work Shelley and I have done together has achieved this."

Shelley says: "Simon has given us honest and useful feedback on information important for PAs; he is an expert so very well placed to do so. His continuing involvement in improving our own website is incredibly helpful and our work together on Link Up has given us much food for thought. Not only that, but Simon will be leading an event for us early next year on becoming a PA. The input of Simon and his team of PAs at this event will be a really strong way of encouraging more people to work as PAs. And that is a very good thing for all of us."

Section 4
Staying together

Making it work



Section 4: Staying together

A successful Link Up relationship needs time investing in it at the start.

A successful Link Up relationship needs time investing in it at the start. Even if you and your partner employer get on famously, you need to be mindful of the different ways in which you both work, the time pressures you might regularly be under and so on. It is vital that at the start you talk about your expectations of the relationship, and are both honest about the length of time you feel you want to work together and the time you can commit. Doing the ground work early on will save you time in the long run.

A check list of things to help you is included later in the section.



Case study

Individual employer Nina and registered care employer Anne developed a Link Up relationship in which they both looked at their recruitment and retention processes, each making improvements. An important part of their work was the careful planning they did at the start of the relationship. They worked out what each of them could bring to the table and looked at the information and documents they each used, which could be shared. This was an important element of negotiating and agreeing their Link Up relationship.

An assessment of Anne's recruitment and selection process focused on the extent to which they promoted equality and enabled care workers to meet the needs of service users. Nina will provide on-going support to Anne so her processes are as good as they possibly can be.

Nina's PAs will attend an induction and training programme for Anne's new recruits, and it is possible that both sets of care workers will shadow each other. All this will help them have more information about delivering personal care, which will help them in their jobs and ultimately be of benefit to service users.

Both Nina and Anne found working together useful. They have a better understanding of the issues faced by the other employer, having had an opportunity to share different perspectives on employment themes. They also learned new things about the legal aspects of employment. Nina continues to be happy to provide a service user's perspective for Anne's staff, and a new network of potential support has been created for both them and their teams.

Nina says: "We both felt the partnership made sound business sense, and we intend to maintain a working relationship. It might be shaped by the changing needs we have at a given time, with one party perhaps deriving more benefit at times, but we will take care to ensure our relationship doesn't become exploitative. I welcome having someone to run things by if necessary, while Anne has made important links to the service user community."

A check list of things to consider

- Agree times and frequencies that are suitable for both of you to meet. First thing in the morning might be tricky for an individual employer if they need to wait for their PA to support them getting ready and going out. A larger employer might also have times in their week which are not practical for meetings either, so establish this at the start.
- Some individual employers might have had little interaction with larger employers, so it is important that they aren't put off from taking part because it seems too formal, complicated, or confusing. Similarly, some larger employers might be unfamiliar with the language and jargon familiar to individual employers. A glossary is available on the website which should help, but both employers should be sensitive to the language and conventions of each other.
- Some of the practical things that both employers should commit to in order to help develop a relationship include:
 - putting dates into diaries as soon as possible
 - keeping appointments and not cancelling them
 - understanding that the individual employer's place of work is likely to be their home, so larger employers should be prepared to go into someone else's home
 - agreeing how you will plan and record the work you are doing, and stick to this agreement
 - respecting each other's privacy and agreeing about confidentiality.
- You should establish the ways in which you both prefer to communicate, and make sure you both have up to date, correct contact details. Some people will prefer to communicate by telephone, for some people email or texting will be their preference. Agreeing this at the start will help to prevent any misunderstandings caused by miscommunication.



- It will be important that both employers feel they have something to gain from their Link Up relationship. Planning activities together so the mutual benefits can be identified early on should help.
- Any cost implications, such as travel costs, should be identified and shared. It might be useful to remember that not all employers will have the same resources available to them so some negotiation might be needed.
- Both employers might need to check they share a similar ethos or principles about the delivery of care; if this is important to you, you need to be clear about it from the start.
- The differences between working in a regulated and unregulated setting (a person's own home for example) might need to be noted by both employers.
- The individual employer and where appropriate their PA would both need to feel comfortable with the larger employer they work with; it is important for the individual employer to consider their PA's point of view where applicable.
- Both employers might need to check they have adequate insurance cover if they are to work in a different way.
- Both employers might need to agree protocols around sharing sensitive or confidential information. If information about the individual employer is shared, both parties will need to agree protocols on confidentiality and data protection.

“It will be important that both employers feel they have something to gain from their Link Up relationship.”

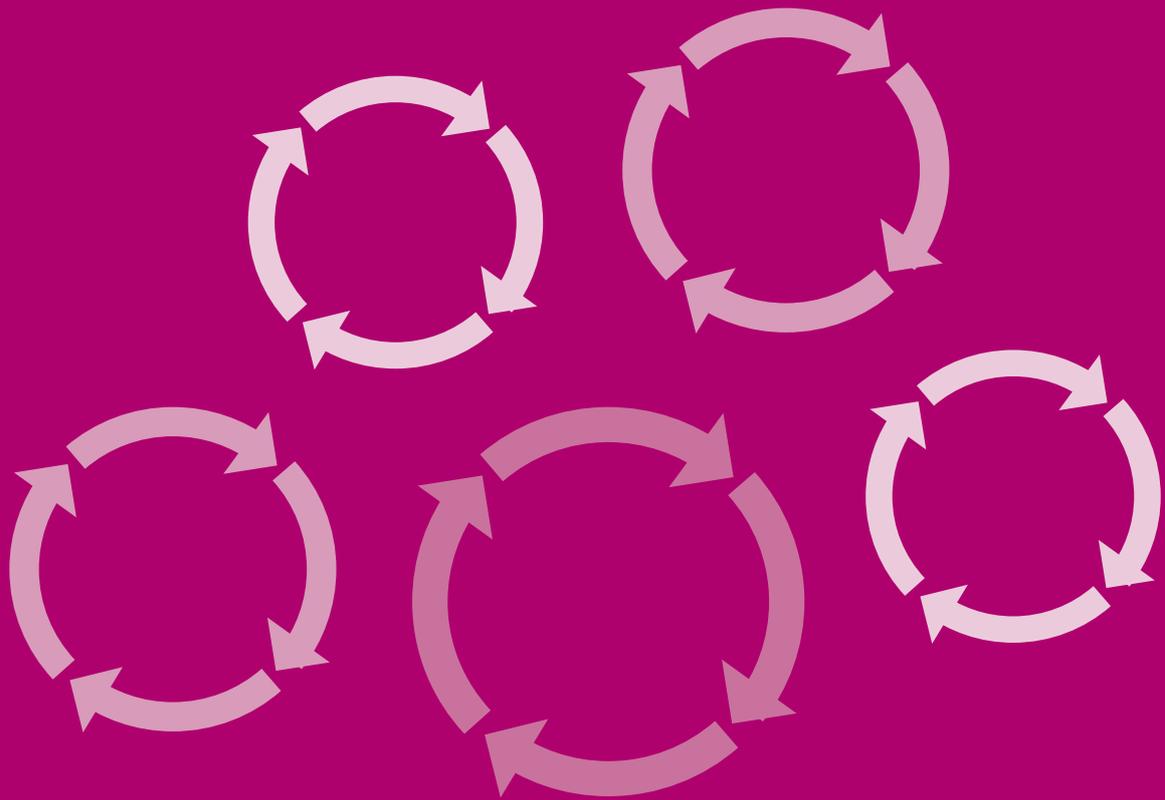


- Check if an employer meets a minimum standard in things like induction programmes or staff supervision if this is an area you are interested in. The Investors in People quality mark is an example of such a standard.
- A Link Up partnership isn't an opportunity for one employer to take on or recruit staff from the other. It will be important that the individual employer does not feel worried about the larger employer taking their PA, and this is something the two employers will need to talk about.
- A larger employer will need to make sure it can safeguard any of its vulnerable service users if it has different people coming into its premises. Individuals and their PAs may need to be checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) have merged into one and CRB checks are now called DBS checks).
- A DBS check may be needed for certain jobs or voluntary work. Go to <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice> where you can download a free information sheet aimed at volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.
- Where a service, such as emergency or respite care is to be provided, both employers will need to negotiate whether any fees will apply or whether the service can be exchanged for something else.
- Skills for Care specialises in supporting the adult social care workforce to have the right skills. Our website has lots of useful information: www.skillsforcare.org.uk. Especially useful might be the section on standards that help to ensure that those working in the sector meet a level of quality when providing care and support. This includes the Common Induction Standards.



Section 5

Keeping it going in the long run



Sustainability

Section 5: Keeping it going in the long run

The Link Up initiative is all about finding ways employers can be better off by working together without money being involved. Swapping skills and support has been very beneficial for all the participants of the pilot. They all gained something they needed or wanted at no or minimal financial cost.

There have also been some surprising knock on effects for both individual and larger employers which make the Link Up initiative a really exciting and worthwhile idea to try out. However there are some small money matters that should be identified and agreed early on in your relationship.

If emergency cover arrangements are part of the plan, any costs should be agreed at the start, including where in kind care provision is provided in return for an individual's service. The partnership will need to agree how they work out a value for each other's time, or whether they negotiate a discounted rate for emergency cover.

An individual employer should not be disproportionately out of pocket. Transport costs, meeting room hire, meals and other expenses should be checked, negotiated and agreed before they are spent.



Case study

Shana and Loretta met when the Link Up initiative was just an idea. Shana is an individual employer and Loretta has a small home care agency. They hit it off as soon as they met and both were enthusiastic about the rewards each might find if they worked together. Eighteen months on, they are still working together and benefiting from their relationship.

Shana has provided 'lived experience' training sessions for Loretta's team, which has given them a personal insight into the things that make a good carer. In return, Shana was able to experience a range of treatments from Loretta's beauty therapist. Their relationship has developed a high degree of mutual respect and trust, and on the occasions when Shana has needed last minute support, Loretta's company have stepped in.

Shana says: "When I needed help to attend a funeral, I turned to Loretta. I trust her and her team, so I didn't worry about the logistics or being late, and I was able to count on a reliable, friendly and emotionally supportive person."

From Loretta's point of view, she has a new client whose needs she understands well, and can provide a responsive and appropriate service, which she knows helps ease some of the stresses associated with looking for last minute cover. Not only that, but Shana's contribution to her employees training is extremely valuable.

Shana has also recommended one of her PAs to Loretta.

Although developing a Link Up relationship might cost you a bit of time in the beginning, the rewards are worth it.

For the larger employers, the opportunity to learn and understand more about delivering a personalised care service might be a departure from your current way of working, but it is very likely to become much more common in the next few years.

If you are able to offer a personalised service to people in their own homes, you immediately have a new set of potential clients. This is good news for your business.

“Working in partnership with individual employers demonstrates sound social care values and should help businesses build respect with both services users and potential staff.”

INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYER WHO TOOK PART IN THE PILOT

Employers who open the doors to buildings and premises that they own or manage, such as residential care homes or day centres, are opening their doors to people who may well be their clients in the future. Having an opportunity to welcome new people and nurture their relationship makes good business sense in the long run.

The Link Up initiative might also have a positive impact on the pockets of individual employers. Many larger employers who took part in the study said they would be pleased to offer any last minute training places to individual employers. They also offered to put forward individual employers for training courses organised externally, such as those run by the local authority.

There may also be benefits for a third party such as a centre for independent living or user led organisation as a result of involvement in facilitating Link Up relationships. Based on the findings from the pilot pairs, these could include forging better strategic links with private care sector providers and creating opportunities to talk to the private sector about personalisation. In the longer term, organisations may be able to help increase the choices for direct payment recipients, as care providers consider the services they offer.

“Although developing a Link Up relationship might cost you a bit of time in the beginning, the rewards are worth it.”



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