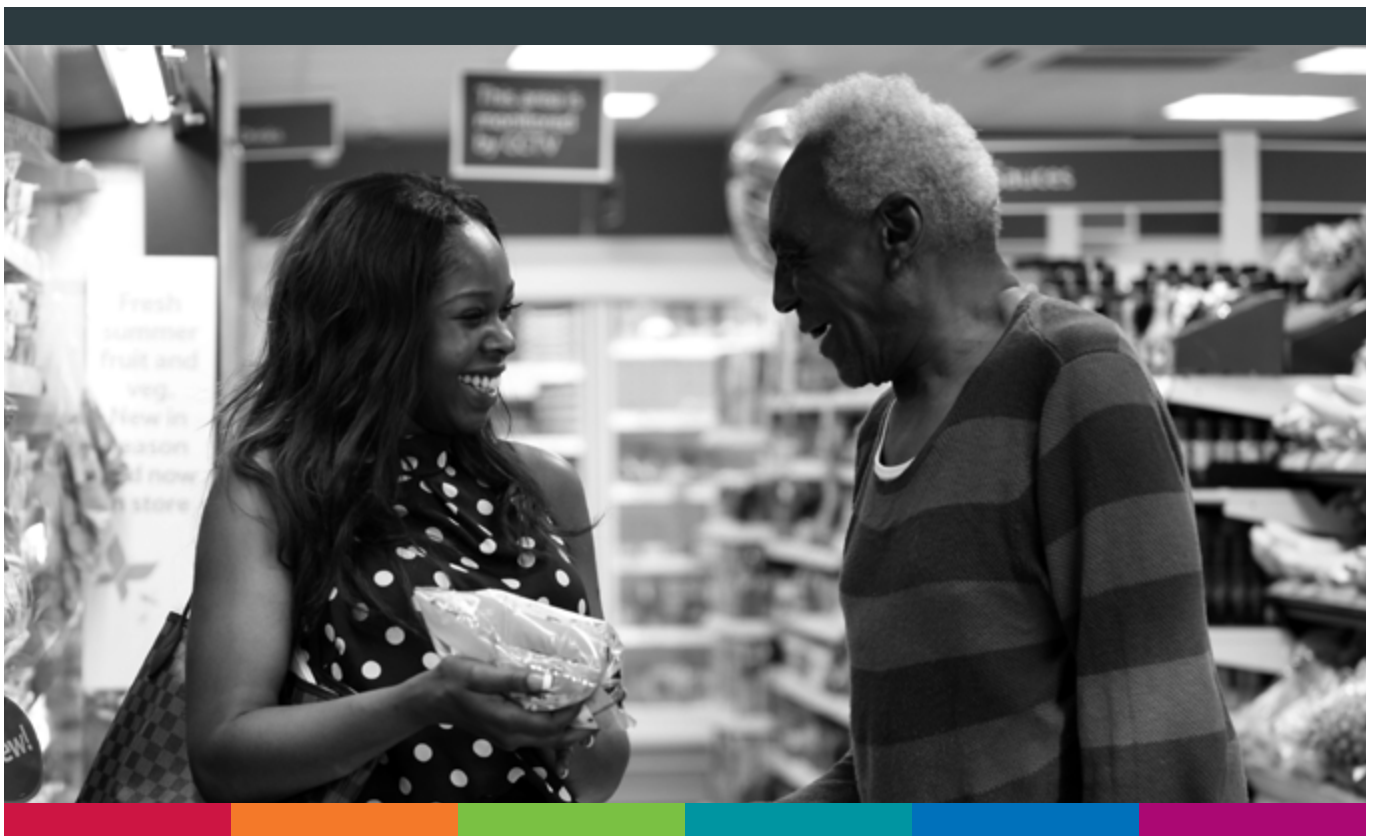


A practical guide to learning and development for personal assistants

This guide is to help you support your employer and grow in your role as a personal assistant.



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Introduction

On-going learning and development is important for all social care and health workers, including personal assistants (PAs). This is often referred to as continuing professional development or CPD. This is the process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training. It's a record of what you experience, learn and then apply.

As a personal assistant, thinking about your learning and development and deciding what to do is something you should ideally do with your employer. You will both benefit from increasing your knowledge and skills. Where this isn't possible you can decide to undertake it yourself (self-directed), but you will still need to think about how any learning you do can reflect the needs of your employer.

The skills or qualifications you gain through learning and development can also support you to develop an on-going career in social care or health.

Please note: The term 'employer' used in this guide refers to the person who employs you as their personal assistant. But it could also be someone who acts as your employer's advocate, representative, parent or guardian. For someone with a degenerative condition, it may also include a nurse or healthcare professional who is best placed to say what skills and knowledge may be required as a condition progresses. For the purposes of this guide, we will use the generic term 'employer' for all of those definitions.



Acknowledgements

Our thanks goes to the members of these organisations, who worked with Skills for Care to develop this resource.



In addition we would also like to thank the personal assistants who took the time to review and comment during the development of this resource.

Advantages for you and your employer

Some employers see why learning and development is important more than others, which is why you should always discuss this with your employer.

Advantages for you may include:

- improve the quality of your work
- gain new skills
- increase your knowledge
- improve your ability to carry out more specialised support
- increase your confidence
- give you a sense of achievement
- reduce risk in the workplace
- increase your job satisfaction
- able to pass on your knowledge or perhaps supervise others
- reduce conflict in the workplace
- better working relationship with your employer
- keep up to date with new laws and other ways of doing things
- feel your employer has invested in you.

For your employer, investing in learning and development will result in better support from a more confident and motivated worker. It shows you that your development is important to them, you may feel more valued as an employee and as a result you may be more likely to continue working for them. These points all contribute to a good working relationship.

Nikki is personal assistant to Nina and has completed her Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care, in-house training and self directed learning. Nikki has worked with Nina, who is a self-employed trainer and consultant for two years.

“ Training has given me confidence in my skills and knowledge. Working with one employer who has no formal care training left me concerned that my skills and knowledge were wrong or not widely transferable.

It helped to develop my study skills and confidence to informally research more complex topics when they arise.

Training provides underlying knowledge whether it is formal, employer led or employee led learning. It is important to keep refreshing this along current thinking. This allows practice to be kept up to date and safe.

This doesn't need to be big as long as it is reflective, however it is important to consider how you want to use it, is it just to inform practice or to also boost your cv.

Take any chance you get - you can do it and you won't regret it.”

Nikki, Personal Assistant

“ Training gives staff the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge, building their confidence and widening their experience. It shows employer regard for individual workers and their development.

Nikki is better able to verbalise some aspects of her role which means she is able to pass on learning to others in the team.

She is more confident. It's important to train staff so they feel confident and are able to deliver the support you need. It also helps them to feel valued and supported so can be a big help with retention.”

Nina, Individual Employer

Louise has worked for Ron for about two years, and has worked in the care sector for over seven years. Ron has had Multiple Sclerosis for many years and his care needs have increased in the last couple of years. Louise has experience of caring for people with this condition.

Ron knew that, despite Louise's experience, she is keen to maintain a high standard of professionalism and viewed training as essential.

“ I saw an advert for some training in a local disability magazine. It was promoting training through Bridgwater College so I contacted them about a First Aid course.

I discussed our requirements with a representative from the college and she informed me about the various options, including short course and long-term qualifications as well as the possibility of funding that might be available through Skills for Care.

We decided to undertake three short courses: First Aid at work, Safe Moving and Handling and Hoist Training. Louise is also undertaking a Level 3 Diploma in Reflexology, Anatomy and Physiology. She goes to college one day per week for this course.

The three short courses were delivered in my home for my two PAs with me present. It was fantastic – and it was all funded by Skills for Care. The tutor was flexible with the dates and times to suit my schedule and our work pattern. And as the tutor came to us, it also meant that Louise did not have to miss work or incur any travel costs. I really cannot fault any of it! ”

Ron, Individual Employer

“ My training has widened my knowledge base, ensured that I have the necessary skills and that these skills meet the required standard. And, I have the certificates that acknowledge this.

Ron has benefited from my training as he has confidence in me, knowing that I am applying recognised standards of care for his safe moving and handling and in an emergency can apply appropriate first aid.

Training in general is required to ensure best practice while at work and I think that it is even more important in the care sector where you are dealing with vulnerable people and therefore should be mandatory. ”

Louise, Personal Assistant/Carer

Ongoing process of learning

This diagram shows how you (ideally with your employer) can think about your learning and development needs and plan how they should be met, before arranging learning or completing training. It also shows that this should be an on-going process.

Click on each of the circles to find out more information.



1. Identify your learning and development need

The best time and place for these discussions will be different for everyone. They could take place when you are interviewed for a new job, during your induction, when you have regular reviews and discussions about how well things are going or perhaps in less formal conversations.

- Think about your existing experience, knowledge and skills.
- Talk about what you need to know and do. Have a look at your job description and see how this matches your employers needs and support plan.
- Your employer may require you to have awareness or training for specific conditions. They might call this “mandatory training” or “things you must know about”.
- If your employer receives a personal health budget (PHB) there may be specific delegated health care tasks in their support/care plan that you need training to perform.
- Talk to your employer about any gaps in your understanding and how these might be filled.
- Think about your employer’s situation and how that might change over time. There may be some learning that could be done now that will prepare both of you for the future.
- You might identify a training need in response to something that has happened at work. For example, if your employer fell and you realised you didn’t know how to deal with this. By attending some training on moving and assisting you will feel more confident and able to deal with this situation if it happens again.
- If you work in a team with other personal assistants, you and your employer may want to consider group learning or each personal assistant attending different training courses to compliment each others strengths.
- Think about your future career and whether obtaining a formal qualification may help you now and in the future.



2. Decide how to meet that

You should discuss with your employer the best way of meeting your learning and development need and at what level any training or qualification is most appropriate. It is important to remember that not all learning and development is about accredited qualifications. You may find that other types of learning or training are equally relevant to your role.

Find out about different ways of learning

People learn in different ways.

- Some like to read about how to do something.
- Others like to be shown, or told how, and so might prefer to go on a practical course.
- Some people like to do the job and learn as they go along.
- Others like to talk and ask questions
- Some people like a mix of the above.

Think about how you prefer to learn and discuss this with your employer so both of you can get the best out of any learning and development.

Short courses

Short courses can be full, half day or a few days and give you, for example, a working knowledge of a particular condition. Some of these short courses may need to be repeated after a certain time frame, for example, a first aid at work certificate is only valid for three years. Examples of short courses may include:

- health and safety
- first aid
- medication awareness
- infection control
- fire safety
- condition specific awareness, for example, diabetes, epilepsy, dementia and so on.

Apprenticeships

In addition to qualifications or short courses, you and your employer may consider that an Apprenticeship is the best option.

- An Apprenticeship is a combination of on and off the job training and learning.
- They are open to people of all ages.
- Apprenticeships aren't just for new staff; you can do one as an experienced personal assistant, already working for someone.
- An Apprenticeship allows you to develop your skills while your employer gets the support they need.

For more information about Apprenticeships, the benefits, different levels, funding and much more go to: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Apprenticeships.

Qualifications

Qualifications can help you and your employer grow your skills and build on your experiences and knowledge through a more formal process of learning and assessment. There are three different sizes of qualification:

- the larger **diplomas** demonstrate professional competence
- the smaller **awards** and **certificates** demonstrate knowledge or competence in specific areas.

For more information about qualifications www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications

Practical things for your employer to consider

- How the learning will take place: in a classroom, online e-learning or whether it should take place within your employer's home. If, as part of your learning, someone will watch you do something or assess you, you will need to understand what you might need to do and how this might impact your employer.
- How much time it will take to complete your learning: this can range from a few hours, weeks or longer if it is a qualification.
- Whether someone will need to cover your shift whilst you are learning.
- How much the learning will cost (including hidden costs for things like workbooks). If you are attending a training course for example, the price of training differs greatly depending on the learning provider. However, you may be also able to find free training provided by a local authority.
- Whether or not your employer will pay you whilst you are learning.
- Consider whether your employer could apply for funding to cover the cost of a training course and other things like, travel or a replacement personal assistant (www.skillsforcare.org.uk/individualemployerfunding).

3. Complete the learning needs form

Using a learning needs form is one way of recording your thoughts and any discussions with your employer. It should be used to record what activities would help your learning, who will arrange the learning and when and where it will take place.

Write down the decisions made following the discussion with your employer and make sure you include what you will do and when.

A blank learning needs form template can be found in appendix 1.

Here are some examples of how some sections of the form may be completed.

Objectives What needs to be achieved and why? (List each objective in a separate box)	Agreed learning and development activities to help achieve objectives	Who will arrange this?	When and where will the learning and development take place?
To confidently deal with emergency situations involving asthma	Attend emergency first aid at work	Employer	Training course provided by local learning provider in a classroom
To understand epilepsy and support employer when experiencing a seizure	Epilepsy awareness and seizure management	Employer	Half day course in the home
Understand how infections might occur and how good practice can reduce their likelihood and prevent their spread	Infection prevention and control	Personal assistant	2 hour online e-learning module

4. Arrange learning and attend training

Discuss with your employer who is going to arrange the learning and record it on your learning needs form. If it is decided that you need to attend training, a suitable learning provider will need to be found.

Choosing a learning provider

It would be better to choose a training provider who understands the unique relationship and challenges of individual employers and personal assistants.

If you are looking for other training (including short courses), we would recommend that you search online or contact local training companies to see what they offer.

Local authorities, unions, direct payment support organisations (www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub), and other local organisations may be able to support you and your employer to find a suitable training provider or training course. Some might offer training that is provided free of charge.

If your employer has a personal health budget the NHS organisation issuing this budget may be able to offer either support to find training or places on their own training. Funding for any training identified in the care planning process should be included in an employers budget.

Attend and complete your training

Once a learning provider has been selected and all the necessary arrangements have been made, the next stage is to attend and complete your training as agreed with your employer.

Once you have completed your training or qualification you should receive an attendance or completion certificate for your records.

10 top tips for choosing a learning provider:

These tips have been developed for employers and give suggestions about what they should find out before committing to choosing a provider.

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Check the provider understands the social care and health sector | 6 Check you are happy with the level of support you (the learner) will receive |
| 2 Check the experience and quality of the provider | 7 Check how assessment will be undertaken |
| 3 Check the design and delivery of the learning offered | 8 Check the quality of the tutors, mentors and assessors |
| 4 Check whether the learning is accredited or nationally recognised | 9 Check the costs and any possible funding available |
| 5 Check you are happy with how the learning programme is monitored | 10 Your employer is in control. Your employer should make sure they get what they want |

These top ten tips are available in a small set of cards. For a free set, email marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk

For more information about choosing a learning provider (or workforce learning) go to www.skillsforcare.org.uk/learningproviders email info@skillsforcare.org.uk or call 0113 241 1275.



5. Discuss progress and update your learning record

A learning record is something you fill in as your different learning activities (training courses, reading, e-learning modules, qualifications etc) are completed.

You and your employer should both have copies of this record. It may be something you can show any future employers.

Think about how what you have learned has changed how you do things; ideally talk to your employer about this. It is important to recognise the impact of the training and why it has changed things. Remember to talk through any issues with your employer that your learning has not resolved.

A learning plan template can be found in appendix 2.

Here is an example of how some sections of the form may be completed

My objectives	I will	To do this I will involve	Date learning completed	Did the learning achieve my objectives?
To confidently deal with emergency situations involving asthma	Attend and complete a 3 day training course in emergency first aid at work	My employer and a suitable learning provider	June	Yes, I now feel confident that I would be able to deal with an emergency situation involving asthma



6. Regularly review learning and development needs

As part of regular informal discussions or arranged reviews between you and your employer, there should be an opportunity to review and talk about your on-going learning and development.

Update your learning record (or other written record) following reviews and share this with your employer. You and your employer should both have copies of this.

Remember to keep your learning needs form and/or record in a secure place.

Resources to help you

For paper copies of any of the resources listed here, contact info@skillsforcare.org.uk or call 0113 241 1275.

Funding

Skills for Care has funding available for individual employers to cover the full costs of learning and development for themselves and their personal assistants. It can pay not only for the cost of the training itself, but also for the cost of cover (that is to pay for a replacement personal assistant) and any travel costs. There is no limit to the number of times employers can apply for funding. www.skillsforcare.org.uk/individualemployerfunding

Apprenticeships

Skills for Care has produced an Apprenticeships guide specifically for employers and personal assistants. This guide includes information about Apprenticeship schemes and details of the funding available for an Apprenticeship. www.skillsforcare.org.uk/individualemployers

National Apprenticeship Service

Being an apprentice gives you the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification and develop professional skills, while earning a salary. www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Interactive guide to support Personal assistants to gain the skills they need

This might be helpful to you and your employer. It is written from the point of view of the employer and can help with discussions around continuing professional development. It provides information about how your employer can support you to learn and develop new skills. www.skillsforcare.org.uk/individualemployers

Guide to qualifications and standards in adult social care

You can find out more about what is available from Skills for Care's guide. www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications

Skill Selector

Helps you to look at the content of qualifications and choose those that will best meet your needs and those of your employer. When you have chosen what is appropriate, you can contact training companies with this information. <http://skillselector.skillsforcare.org.uk/>

List of support organisations who may offer training

The information hub for individual employers and personal assistants is a collection of materials from a selection of sources and links to local organisations. For a list of organisations go to the 'in your area' section of www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub

About Skills for Care

Choosing workforce learning

Skills for Care's *Choosing workforce learning guide* provides tips of what to ask training companies to help you to choose a good one that suits your and your employers needs. www.skillsforcare.org.uk/qualifications-and-apprenticeships

Top ten tips

Skills for Care's top ten tips packs are a small set of cards that include the key things you need to think about when trying to find a suitable learning provider. The cards, which can easily be used in and about the workplace, give suggestions about what you need to find out before you commit to choosing a provider. For a free set, email marketing@skillsforcare.org.uk

Further information and support for personal assistants is available at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub



Skills for Care is the employer-led workforce development body for adult social care in England. We work with employers across England to make sure their people have the right skills and values to deliver high quality care.

Home of the National Skills Academy for Social Care, we offer workforce learning and development support and practical resources from entry level right through to those in leadership and management roles.

By working with employers and sharing best practice, we help raise quality and standards across the whole sector and ensure dignity and respect are at the heart of service delivery.

For more detailed information about what we do and how we can help please visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk
Telephone 0113 245 1716
(9am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Further information and support for personal assistants is available at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub

Appendix 1:

Learning needs form for a personal assistant

To be completed during discussions with your employer to determine your learning needs and how they will be met.

Name of personal assistant
Start date of plan
Review date of plan

Objectives What needs to be achieved and why? <i>(List each objective in a separate box)</i>	Agreed learning and development activities to help achieve objectives	Who will arrange this?	When and where will the learning and development take place?	Date started	Date complete	Comments (if any)

Appendix 2:

Learning record for a personal assistant

To be completed as different learning is completed.

Name of personal assistant
Start date of plan
Review date of plan

My objectives	I will	To do this I will involve	Date learning completed	Did the learning achieve my objectives?	Comments or further action needed

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