

[Home](#) > Workforce innovation in the UK social care sector: an update on our inquiry



Serena Vicario and Nadia Brookes

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# Workforce innovation in the UK social care sector: an update on our inquiry

Serena Vicario and Nadia Brookes share some results of their inquiry on the extent and nature of social care workforce innovation in the UK.

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## Workforce innovation in the UK social care sector: an update on our inquiry

We are glad to share with this post some results of our inquiry on the extent and nature of social care workforce innovation in the UK. In doing this, we would like to thank all those who

contributed to identifying promising activities and initiatives, by providing information and inputs.

## **Tracing the extent and nature of workforce innovation in the UK: what we did**

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# CARE IN A NEW CLIMATE (CINC) WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS IN SOCIAL CARE

**Phase 1** Identifying extent & nature of workforce innovation in the UK

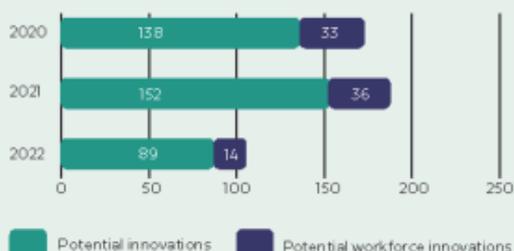
**Phase 2** In-depth study of workforce innovations

**Phase 3** Integrating findings and dissemination

**WHAT IS A 'WORKFORCE INNOVATION'?** Something which **1)** is 'new' to the social care sector; **2)** involves adoption and development of new ideas and **3)** a change in practices; **4)** is both a process and outcome in care delivering; **5)** produces benefits for the stakeholders (e.g., professional and non-professional carers, care recipients, commissioners and providers, the wider community).

## IDENTIFICATION OF INNOVATIONS: WHAT WE DID

**1 LBIOI** (Literature Based Innovation Output Indicator) – we used a bibliographic index to identify innovations reported in journals, reports and other sources (2020-2022).



**2 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION** We discussed with 24 key people representing care workers, providers, people drawing on support and their carers, academics, policy organisations. They were asked for examples of workforce innovations (2018 - to date)

Stakeholders' affiliation	Participant number
Academic institution	8
Organisation operating at policy/strategy level	9
Public body	4
Training provider	1
Providers/employers	1
Organisation representing care workers	1
<b>Total number of innovations retrieved</b>	<b>77</b>

**3 SOCIAL CARE AWARDS** The lists of winners of 11 major social care prizes were consulted considering relevant categories (e.g., "Developing and inspiring the workforce of tomorrow", "Workforce transformation").



**4 INTERNET SEARCH** We consulted an online repository of case studies and learning materials, selecting 16 out of 47 examples. **TO SUM UP**, we retrieved 296 potential innovations and longlisted 75. These may be grouped in:



**What's next?** Innovations will be shortlisted for scope and relevance, involving the Kent Research Partnership Workforce Community of Practice and sector experts. We will select 5-7 examples for analysing the 'innovation journey' stages.

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As the graphic representation illustrates, we located workforce innovations in the sector literature, and examined temporal trends and innovation types. Between 2020 and 2022, 83

potential innovations were retrieved (33 in 2020, 36 in 2021, 14 in 2022).

We also discussed the topic of workforce innovation with 24 key people representing different voices in social care. They were affiliated to 15 national and local organisations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Participants were involved through online or in-person interviews and suggested 77 potential new practices and initiatives. These stakeholders also provided insights into future workforce challenges, and on the role that innovation may play in addressing these. Although the lack of sufficient resources was considered a central issue, innovation was seen as important to meet existing needs differently.

Following the suggestion of a stakeholder, we consulted the lists of winners of 11 major UK-based social care prizes. The search located 92 award-winning individuals or initiatives.

Finally, we conducted an online search of accredited internet websites. Forty-seven projects were examined, considering their innovative elements.

In total, approximately 300 potential innovations were screened, and 75 were longlisted for scope and relevance. Similar innovations were grouped into ten clusters, including for example 'Recruitment and Retention', 'Improvement of working conditions', 'Workforce support and wellbeing', 'Technology-based innovations' and 'Innovation through partnership building'. Further selection rounds have been informed by discussions with key stakeholders, including the Kent Research Partnership Workforce Community of Practice and sector experts. We would particularly like to thank Skills for Care for taking the time to do this with us. This helped us to identify 5 promising innovations for in-depth study.

## **What's next?**

Innovations will be analysed in-depth. We will look at the stages of the innovation 'journey' – from the identification of the initial need, to the development and implementation of the new approaches. In doing this, we will consider the innovations in their contexts, and examine the resources and strategies useful to achieve sustainable and long-term change.

And in the meantime, we will keep you informed on how our work is progressing...

## **About the authors**

**Serena Vicario**

Researcher, University of  
Kent

Serena is a Postdoctoral Researcher Associate affiliated to the ESRC Centre for Care and based at the University of Kent, Centre for Health Services Studies. In her current role of qualitative researcher in the Centre for Care team, Serena is working on the project '[Care workforce change](#)'.

**Nadia Brookes**

Co-Investigator, University  
of Kent

Nadia joined the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the University of Kent in 2008 and moved to the [CHSS](#) in 2020. Prior to joining the university she held senior research roles within central and local government, the health service and the non-profit sector. Nadia has an MSc in social research and evaluation and a doctorate in social policy that focused on the extent, nature and process of innovation in adult social care.

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The Centre for Care is a collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield, Birmingham, Kent and Oxford, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the Office for National Statistics, and three leading charities: Carers UK, the National Children's Bureau and the Social Care Institute for Excellence.



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