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How can we find promising approaches that support the social care workforce and would benefit from research?

An introduction to the Care Work stakeholder consultation



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The aim of the first phase of Care Work is to work closely with people across the social care sector to identify innovations, ideas, and solutions to workforce challenges that can be the focus of research and evaluation. We will then use this as the basis for developing a programme of research that contributes to building an effective, competent and well-supported social care workforce.

Who did we involve?

We invited people to take part in the consultation who could represent the views of: people working as (or on behalf of) care providers, commissioners and managers/directors of adult social care; people with lived experience of care; the social care workforce; and national bodies and policy makers. We also draw on our Partnership members who represent these groups as well as researchers working in this area.



“Photo of Light Bulb” by Eric Anada,
Source: [Pexels](#)

What did we do and why?

The consultation is based around our four overlapping research themes: labour supply, demand, and markets; wellbeing; innovation in work organisation, conditions, and role design; and data and technology.

It involves two rounds of consultation meetings. In total eight meetings with senior level staff with a sector overview (two per theme), four with our lived experience working group and four with our social care workforce working group. We have also supplemented this with smaller group discussions with specific organisations or on a particular topic of focus, for example social work. Between each meeting we have extracted and drawn together the information to inform later discussions.

Most new ways of doing things in social care are small in scale, and there are no obvious ways to share information about this across the wide variety of organisations and staff groups involved in social care. The evidence base for what works is not as highly developed as for health care and so of limited use in identifying what organisations and individuals should do to address workforce challenges. For these reasons we decided to focus on identifying examples of new approaches, practice or initiatives that currently exist, but where there may be limited evidence for how well they are working. This meant we did not approach this as a 'traditional' research priority setting exercise, although we inevitably uncovered some fruitful areas for future research too.





“Notes on Board” by Polina Zimmerman,
Source: [Pexels](#)

Where are we now?

To date over 100 people have been involved in consultation activities. Feedback so far is that people appreciated the opportunity to meet and discuss workforce topics with other people working in the sector, that it provided space to reflect on their own experiences and confirmed the importance of researchers hearing a range of views.

Our first consultation meetings identified over 40 innovations or promising new ways of supporting the social care workforce and 27 potential new solutions or research areas of importance. We identified efforts to address workforce challenges through a variety of ways, for example through leadership programmes, psychological support, changes to pay structures, using Artificial Intelligence and organising work in different ways.

We have been going through a process of reviewing these through a limited look at what evidence is available and assessment of whether they address a major workforce issue. For the innovation examples we also considered how ‘new’ they were, whether they might work in other places and if they could survive the constantly changing social care landscape. As we do this, we have had further discussions and ‘sense-checking’ with people working in or connected to the social care sector.

The consultation process is still on-going and will conclude in March 2026. Over the past few months, we have heard experiences that highlight the diversity of the social care sector and appreciated the value of the expertise of those who are a part of it, highlighting the importance of a research programme grounded in real world issues and needs. We will continue to share updates in future blog posts as the consultation progresses.

Care Work Partners



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