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Effective learning environments in health and social care: an umbrella review protocol

Vanessa Abrahamson, Claire Surr, Reena Devi, Nick Smith

Citation

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REVIEW TITLE AND BASIC DETAILS

Review title

Effective learning environments in health and social care: an umbrella review protocol

Condition or domain being studied

Professional education; Healthcare Professional ; Care home resident

Domain: the learning environment for health and social care staff working with adults in any setting.

Rationale for the review

This umbrella review forms part of the first work package of a mixed methods study examining workplace learning environments in care homes and how these influence staff learning and practice. The wider study aims to strengthen the capability of care homes staff to deliver high quality care by developing, implementing and evaluating a toolkit to improve learning environments. Understanding how learning can be better supported, particularly through informal and incidental processes, is essential for helping care homes optimise scarce resources and enhance everyday learning opportunities.

Although care homes employ a large and diverse workforce with varying experience, qualifications and training needs, evidence shows that formal training alone rarely leads to sustained changes in practice. Instead, staff learning is shaped by broader workplace conditions, including supervision, mentoring, peer support, organisational structures, workplace culture and opportunities for reflection. Existing research in care homes is limited in scope, often focusing on specific training activities without examining how different elements of the learning environment interact to influence and support staff learning and competence development.

To inform the development of the toolkit and ensure it draws on the strongest available evidence, there is a need to synthesise literature reviews from across health and social care settings. The findings from this umbrella review will build a clearer understanding of what constitutes and enables an effective learning environment.

Review objectives

Aim: This review aims to identify the processes, components and features that characterise effective learning environments in health and social care settings for adults, and to understand how these influence staff learning and practice.

Research questions

1. What are the components or features of an effective learning environment in adult health and care settings?
2. How do these components and processes interact to create or sustain a supportive learning environment?
3. Which components, or combination of components, have the most influence on staff learning, development and practice?
4. What are the barriers and enablers to implementing an effective learning environment?

Keywords

Health and social care professionals; Teaching and learning; Aged care homes; Quality of care; Learning environment; Continuing professional development; Clinical learning environment; Educational learning environment; Supportive clinical learning environment strategies; Learning environment; Learning environments; Adaptive learning environment; Dynamic learning environments; Collaborative learning environments

Country

United Kingdom

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Population

Included

Health and social care staff supporting adults in any setting. Staff may hold a professional registration (e.g. registered nurse) or not, and have any duration of experience in any health or social care setting, or combination of settings.

Excluded

Medical staff (GMC registered e.g., doctors in training, specialty trainees, and consultants) will be excluded because the structure, regulation, and delivery of their workplace learning environments differ substantially from those experienced by the wider health and social care workforce, meaning their inclusion would introduce considerable heterogeneity.

Undergraduate, masters, or pre-registration programmes are excluded because their learning environments have fundamentally different purposes, structures, and governance mechanisms compared with the workplace learning of employed staff. Undergraduate learning on placement is fundamentally educational compared to staff who are focused on service-delivery and learn

simultaneously whilst delivering services. Including undergraduate learning environments would alter the focus and dilute the applicability of the findings to our target workforce.

Intervention(s) or exposure(s)

Included

Practice-based learning ; Learning Facilitation; Interactive learning; Education

Concept: Learning environments - the process of learning, the component parts (or combination of components), and features that constitute the learning process. This includes (but not limited to) formal training, informal structured learning (shadowing, buddying, mentoring, simulation), incidental learning and learning culture. Reviews must include data about the components, features, and/or processes of learning environments to be eligible for inclusion.

Excluded

The learning environments of medical staff, and learning in the context of undergraduate, masters, or pre-registration programmes.

Comparator(s) or control(s)

This review does not have any comparators

Study design

Both randomized and nonrandomized study types will be included.

Included

Quantitative and qualitative evidence syntheses, mixed methods and scoping reviews.

Excluded

Reviews that do not include data about the methods or process of learning will be excluded as they will not help answer the research questions.

Context

All health and social care settings, including hospitals, outpatient clinics, community facilities, hospices, care homes (residential or nursing).

TIMELINE OF THE REVIEW

Date of first submission to PROSPERO

30 March 2026

Review timeline

Start date: 13 February 2026. End date: 13 August 2026.

Date of registration in PROSPERO

31 March 2026

AVAILABILITY OF FULL PROTOCOL

Availability of full protocol

A full protocol has been written and uploaded to PROSPERO. The protocol may be accessed through this link

<https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPEROFILES/e7ff6a19f81dd9ded05c68fe53f3f110.pdf>.

SEARCHING AND SCREENING

Search for unpublished studies

Only published studies will be sought.

Main bibliographic databases that will be searched

The main databases to be searched are *CINAHL - Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature*, *MEDLINE* and *PsycInfo*.

Other important or specialist databases that will be searched

ERIC

Cochrane library

EPPI Centre

JBI systematic reviews register

PROSPERO register of review of reviews

NIHR Library

Search language restrictions

The review will only include studies published in English.

Search date restrictions

Databases will be searched for articles published from 1 January 2015, there are no search end date restrictions.

Other methods of identifying studies

No other methods will be used.

Link to search strategy

A full search strategy is available in the full protocol as described in the *Availability of full protocol* section

Selection process

Studies will be screened by one person (or a machine) and checked by at least one other person (or machine).

DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Data extraction from published articles and reports

Data will be extracted by one person (or a machine) and checked by at least one other person (or machine).

Authors will not be contacted for further information.

Study risk of bias or quality assessment

Risk of bias/study quality will not be assessed.

Reporting bias assessment

Risk of bias due to missing results will not be assessed

Certainty assessment

Certainty of findings will not be assessed

OUTCOMES TO BE ANALYSED

Main outcomes

Details about the effective learning environment e.g. the processes, features, and/or components of the effective learning environment studied.

Additional outcomes

There are no additional outcomes.

PLANNED DATA SYNTHESIS

Strategy for data synthesis

The characteristics of included reviews, review methods, and details of the population and setting studied will be summarised using narrative text and tables.

Coded data will be brought together to create themes and sub-themes, and the findings will be synthesised narratively (and with tables). The narrative will include examples from the data to help illustrate key points and will also highlight where there may be convergence and divergence between reviews.

The narrative synthesis will include a summary around the Learning to Care model (Latham et al., 2024) and Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research constructs (Damschroder et al., 2022) present within effective learning environments.

Data coding and synthesis will be carried out by two reviewers working closely together. The wider team (which includes care home sector stakeholders) will be involved in discussing and refining the preliminary findings. The wider study team will also discuss the implications for care home practice and future research. Alongside, we will also sense check findings and implications with the study advisory groups: the Staff Experience (made up of direct/frontline care staff) and the Lived Experience (made up of people with personal experience of care homes) advisory groups.

Damschroder LJ, Reardon CM, Widerquist MAO, Lowery J. The updated Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research based on user feedback. *Implementation Science*. 2022;17(1):75.

Latham I, de Vries K, Brooker D. How do care workers learn to care for people with dementia living in care homes? A model of informal learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*. 2024. 36(8), pp.746-769. <https://www.emerald.com/jwl/article-pdf/36/8/746/9517288/jwl-04-2024-0080.pdf>

CURRENT REVIEW STAGE

Stage of the review at this submission

Review stage	Started	Completed
Pilot work	✓	✓
Formal searching/study identification		
Screening search results against inclusion criteria		
Data extraction or receipt of IPD		
Risk of bias/quality assessment		
Data synthesis		

Review status

The review is currently planned or ongoing.

Publication of review results

Results of the review will be published in English.

REVIEW AFFILIATION, FUNDING AND PEER REVIEW

Review team members

Dr Vanessa Abrahamson (review guarantor and contact) ORCID: 0000-0002-1169-9457.
University of Kent. England.

No conflict of interest declared.

Professor Claire Surr. ORCID: 0000-0002-4312-6661. Leeds Beckett University. England.

Conflict of interest

Prof Claire Surr may have authored papers that will be included. This will be made clear and to minimise bias, screening, data extraction, and quality appraisal for these reviews will be undertaken independently by researchers who were not involved in the original papers.

Associate Professor Reena Devi. ORCID: 0000-0003-2834-8597. University of Leeds. England.

Conflict of interest

Assoc Prof R Devi may have authored papers that will be included. This will be made clear and to minimise bias, screening, data extraction, and quality appraisal for these reviews will be undertaken independently by researchers who were not involved in the original papers.

Mr Nick Smith. ORCID: 0000-0001-9793-6988. University of Kent. England.

No conflict of interest declared.

Named contact

Dr Vanessa Abrahamson (v.j.abrahamson@kent.ac.uk). ORCID: 0000-0002-1169-9457.
University of Kent. England.

Review affiliation

Leeds Beckett University

Funding source

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR).

Grant number

NIHR164416

Additional information about funding

This study is funded by the NIHR [Health and Social Care Delivery Research (NIHR164416)]. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

Peer review

There has been no peer review of this planned review.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Review conflict of interest

Declared individual interests are recorded under team member details. Two review team members have declared a potential conflict of interest. No additional interests are recorded for this review.

Medical Subject Headings

Allied Health Personnel; Social Workers; Nurses; Midwifery; Systematic Review; Learning; Mentoring; Staff Development

SIMILAR REVIEWS

Check for similar records already in PROSPERO

PROSPERO identified a number of existing PROSPERO records that were similar to this one (last check made on 26 March 2026). These are shown below along with the reasons given by that the review team for the reviews being different and/or proceeding.

- A realist review of interventions and approaches to promote good communication for adults with learning disabilities using social care [published 2 February 2024] [CRD42024501147]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Examining the effectiveness of the processes of learning implementation and change management, based on recommendations from serious adverse incident investigations, following patient suicide within the mental health system [published 22 July 2019] [CRD42019141441]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Effective Case-Based Learning Platforms of Community and Global Health Approaches: A Systematic Review [published 7 November 2020] [CRD42020213288]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Towards effective online education for health care students and professionals: an overview of systematic reviews [published 12 February 2017] [CRD42017057178]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Engagement and progression in learning and wellbeing for 16-24 year olds: a systematic review protocol [published 14 August 2017] [CRD42017073211]. The review was judged **not to be similar**

- What is a Learning Health System: A Systematic Review of Key Components and Implementation Barriers and Facilitators [published 27 June 2025] [CRD420251026695]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Wellbeing in health and social care practice: a systematic review [published 18 December 2024] [CRD42024624041]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Multi-user extended reality simulation-based learning and training: a systematic review [published 9 April 2022] [CRD42022315494]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Planning for death and dying for people with learning disabilities: a protocol for a mixed-methods evidence synthesis [published 14 August 2025] [CRD420251109237]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Effects of Generative Artificial Intelligence on Students' Self-Regulated Learning and Metacognition: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis [published 31 January 2026] [CRD420261295434]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Effective methods and models for ensuring quality of the clinical learning environment in nursing education – A systematic review [published 14 February 2026] [CRD420251266883]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Using a meta-ethnographic approach to explore the role of interprofessional education in inclusion health for health and care staff [published 12 June 2020] [CRD42020169107]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Is simulation an effective tool for interprofessional learning on end-of-life topics in the paediatric palliative care setting? A systematic review. [published 15 January 2024] [CRD42024497193]. The review was judged **not to be similar**
- Machine learning for assessing mental health using social media data: a systematic review [published 10 July 2020] [CRD42020166421]. The review was judged **not to be similar**

PROSPERO version history

- [Version 1.0, published 31 Mar 2026](#)

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