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# Skills and Innovation for Adult Social Care

## DEVELOPING WORK-BASED LEARNING IN THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE SECTOR: A GUIDE FOR CARE MANAGERS

COLLATION OF GOOD PRACTICE IN WORK-BASED LEARNING

LAPIS RESEARCH PROJECT  
LEARNING FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE INNOVATIONS AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT  
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## Professional training experiences:

Adult social care is a vital sector that provides support and care to vulnerable individuals who require assistance with daily living activities, including older adults, people with disabilities, and those with mental health needs. Working in this sector can be immensely rewarding, but it can also be challenging, demanding and require continual professional development. Adult social care is a vital and rewarding sector that requires a commitment to ongoing learning and development. There are several different pathways for professional growth in this sector, including further education and qualifications, specialisation, leadership and management, continuing professional development, and mentoring and coaching. By investing in professional growth, individuals in adult social care can improve their knowledge and skills, take on new challenges, and advance their careers while providing vital support and care to vulnerable individuals in their communities. Professional training experiences in adult social care training can vary depending on the specific role and responsibilities of the individual. Working in adult social care requires a commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable individuals and a willingness to work collaboratively with other professionals to provide person-centred care. The key to professional growth in adult social care is to remain committed to ongoing learning and development, and to seek out opportunities for advancement and new challenges.

Working in adult social care requires a combination of technical skills and soft skills, as it involves providing support and care to vulnerable individuals with a range of needs. Soft skills are personal attributes and traits that are essential for success in any career, including adult social care. Developing soft skills is critical for success in adult social care. Soft skills such as communication, empathy, teamwork, time management, and flexibility are essential for building relationships with clients, providing effective care and support, and working collaboratively with colleagues. Developing these skills requires a commitment to ongoing learning and development, as well as a willingness to practice and refine them over time. By developing strong soft skills, individuals in adult social care can provide the highest quality care and support to vulnerable individuals in their communities. One of the critical ways in which soft skills develop in social care is through training and development. Training

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programs in social care focus not only on the technical skills required for the job but also on the soft skills necessary to provide effective care and support. For example, training programs may include modules on communication, empathy, teamwork, time management, and flexibility. These modules may involve role-playing exercises, group discussions, and real-life scenarios to help individuals develop and practice their soft skills. Another way in which soft skills develop in social care is through on-the-job experience. Social care workers often work with individuals with a range of needs and backgrounds, which requires them to develop strong interpersonal skills. Working in social care provides individuals with opportunities to learn from their experiences, reflect on their interactions with clients, and refine their soft skills over time. For example, an individual may learn how to communicate effectively with clients with dementia or develop empathy by understanding a client's cultural background.

Mentoring and coaching can also be a valuable way to grow professionally in adult social care, and can also help in the development of soft skills. Seeking out mentors and coaches who can provide guidance and support, share their own experiences, and offer advice on career development can help individuals to develop the confidence and skills they need to take on new challenges and advance their careers. Mentors and coaches may also model effective soft skills in their own practice, providing individuals with examples to learn from and emulate. Finally, self-reflection and self-awareness are critical for developing soft skills in social care. Social care workers must be aware of their own emotions, biases, and attitudes, as these can impact their interactions with clients. By reflecting on their own practice, individuals can identify areas where they need to develop their soft skills, set goals for improvement, and monitor their progress over time. Soft skills are critical for success in social care, and they develop through a range of experiences and opportunities. Training and development, on-the-job experience, mentoring and coaching, and self-reflection and self-awareness are all essential for developing strong soft skills in social care. By developing these skills, individuals in social care can provide the highest quality care and support to individuals in their communities.

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One pathway for professional growth in adult social care is further education and qualifications. There are several different courses available for individuals who want to expand their knowledge and skills, ranging from short courses and certificates to diplomas and degrees. For example, obtaining a degree in social work, nursing, or occupational therapy could provide opportunities for career advancement, as well as an increase in salary. This kind of qualification is essential for those who want to work in leadership and management positions, as well as those who want to specialise in a particular area of adult social care. Another pathway for professional growth is specialisation. Specialising in a particular area of adult social care can also be a pathway for career advancement. For example, individuals may choose to specialise in working with older adults, individuals with disabilities, or those with mental health needs. Specialising in a particular area of adult social care can provide a deeper understanding of the unique needs of the population and lead to increased opportunities for professional development.

Leadership and management positions are another potential pathway for professional growth in adult social care. Many adult social care organisations have leadership and management roles that individuals can aspire to. Pursuing additional training or education in management and leadership can help individuals prepare for these roles. This can include courses in strategic planning, project management, and change management, as well as developing key interpersonal skills such as leadership, communication, and negotiation. Continuing professional development (CPD) is a vital pathway for professional growth in adult social care. Participating in CPD opportunities is important for staying up-to-date with the latest developments and best practices in adult social care. This can include attending conferences, workshops, and training sessions. CPD also provides opportunities for individuals to learn from others in the sector, develop new skills, and stay abreast of emerging trends.

### Changes needed in workforce training:

The adult social care sector in the UK is facing significant challenges due to an ageing population, rising demand for services, and a shortage of qualified staff. To address these challenges, changes are needed in adult social care training to ensure that workers are

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equipped with the skills and knowledge required to provide high-quality care and support to vulnerable individuals.

One of the most significant changes needed in adult social care training is to move towards a more person-centred approach. Person-centred care focuses on the individual's needs, preferences, and goals, rather than the needs of the service provider. This approach requires workers to have strong communication skills, empathy, and an ability to work collaboratively with clients and their families. Adult social care training programs need to include modules on person-centred care, including strategies for assessing client needs and preferences, developing care plans, and evaluating outcomes. Another change needed in adult social care training is to increase the focus on mental health and wellbeing. Many individuals receiving social care support have mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, or dementia. Adult social care workers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge required to support individuals with mental health issues effectively. This includes training on recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health issues, developing therapeutic relationships with clients, and working collaboratively with mental health professionals.

Technology is also playing an increasingly significant role in adult social care, and training programs need to reflect this. Technology can help workers to provide more efficient and effective care, such as through the use of electronic care plans, assistive technologies, and telecare. Adult social care training needs to include modules on the use of technology in care, including training on how to use technology to support client needs, maintain confidentiality, and keep accurate records.

Finally, there is a need to increase the focus on professional development and career progression in adult social care training. Many individuals working in social care depart the sector due to a lack of career progression opportunities or the ability to develop new skills. Adult social care training programs need to provide opportunities for professional development, including mentoring, coaching, and access to higher education courses. This

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can help to attract and retain a skilled workforce in the sector, leading to better outcomes for clients.

### Recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector:

The recognition of both formal and informal learning in the care sector is essential to support the ongoing development and career progression of care workers. However, there are several barriers that can prevent the recognition of both types of learning, these barriers can result in a lack of recognition and underutilisation of workers' knowledge and skills, which can lead to a disengaged workforce and reduced quality of care. These barriers include: a lack of understanding, limited resources, and a lack of consistent standards. The barriers identified by the LAPIS project are outlined below:

- **Lack of awareness:** Care sector employers may not be aware of the knowledge and skills that workers have gained through informal learning, such as on-the-job training, self-directed learning, or community involvement.
- **Limited recognition:** Some employers may not recognise the value of informal learning, and therefore, may not offer opportunities for workers to demonstrate or utilise their knowledge and skills.
- **Lack of documentation:** Informal learning is often not documented, making it difficult for workers to provide evidence of their knowledge and skills to employers or external credentialing bodies.
- **Limited access to formal education:** Workers in the care sector may face barriers to accessing formal education, such as financial constraints, work schedule conflicts, or lack of educational institutions in their area.
- **Limited recognition of non-traditional qualifications:** Employers may not recognise non-traditional qualifications, such as online courses or micro-credentials, which can make it difficult for workers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- **Credentialing barriers:** The credentialing process can be complex and costly, requiring workers to meet specific criteria or complete certain requirements that may not align with their informal learning experiences.

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One of the main barriers to the recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector is a lack of understanding among employers and training providers. Many employers may not be aware of the different types of learning that their staff may have undertaken outside of formal training courses. Similarly, training providers may not always recognise the value of informal learning and may not provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Limited resources can also be a barrier to the recognition of both types of learning. Employers may not have the financial resources or time to provide formal training courses or to support staff in undertaking additional learning. This can be particularly challenging for those working in smaller care settings or in areas with limited access to training and development opportunities. A lack of consistent standards can also hinder the recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector. There may be variation in the quality and content of training courses, which can make it difficult to assess the level of knowledge and skills that learners have acquired. Additionally, there may be differences in the way that different care settings and regions recognise and value different types of learning, which can make it challenging for care workers to progress in their careers.

Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that involves increasing awareness of the value of informal learning, creating pathways for workers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and developing more flexible and accessible credentialing options. Additionally, employers can implement strategies such as mentoring and coaching to support workers in developing their knowledge and skills through informal learning opportunities. To address these barriers, there are several steps that can be taken. First, there needs to be a greater focus on raising awareness and understanding of the value of informal and formal learning in the care sector. This can be achieved through training and development for both employers and training providers, as well as through public campaigns and advocacy efforts. Second, there needs to be greater investment in resources to support the recognition of informal and formal learning. This could include funding for training and development programs, as well as support for care workers to undertake additional learning in their own time. There may also be opportunities to harness technology, such as e-learning platforms, to provide more flexible and accessible learning

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options for care workers. Finally, there needs to be greater consistency in the recognition of both types of learning across the care sector. This could involve the development of national standards for training and development, as well as greater collaboration between care settings and regions to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the value of different types of learning.

### Strategies to overcome barriers to the recognition of learning:

Addressing the barriers to recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector requires a collaborative effort from employers, workers, educators, and policymakers. The LAPIS project has identified some strategies which could help overcome these barriers, through the implementation of these strategies, workers can gain recognition for their skills and knowledge, which can increase their career prospects and contribute to improving the quality of care in the sector:

- **Increase awareness:** Care sector employers and workers should be made aware of the value of informal learning, and how it can contribute to their professional development and quality of care. This can be achieved through training and awareness-raising campaigns.
- **Create pathways for recognition:** Employers can develop mechanisms to identify and recognise informal learning, such as creating portfolios, self-assessment tools, or recognition of prior learning programmes. This can help workers to demonstrate their skills and knowledge and increase their career prospects.
- **Develop flexible and accessible credentialing options:** Employers and policymakers can work together to develop flexible and accessible credentialing options that align with the skills and knowledge gained through informal learning. This can include micro-credentials, badges, or stackable credentials that recognise specific skills and competencies.
- **Encourage mentoring and coaching:** Employers can encourage mentoring and coaching programs to support workers in developing their skills and knowledge through informal learning opportunities. This can help workers to gain confidence and increase their career prospects.

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- **Address financial and logistical barriers:** Employers and policymakers can work together to address financial and logistical barriers that prevent workers from accessing formal education or credentialing opportunities. This can include providing financial support, flexible work schedules, or online learning options.
- **Engage with external credentialing bodies:** Employers can engage with external credentialing bodies to understand their requirements and develop pathways for recognition of informal learning. This can include engaging with professional associations or regulatory bodies to understand their credentialing requirements.

### Conclusion:

Changes are needed in adult social care training to address the challenges facing the sector and ensure that workers are equipped with the skills and knowledge required to provide high-quality care and support. Person-centred care, mental health and wellbeing, technology, and professional development are all areas that need to be prioritised in adult social care training programs. By making these changes, we can ensure that the sector is better equipped to provide high-quality care and support to vulnerable individuals in our communities.

The recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector is essential to support the ongoing development and career progression of care workers. However, there are several barriers that can prevent this recognition, including a lack of understanding, limited resources, and a lack of consistent standards. Addressing these barriers will require a collaborative effort from employers, training providers, and policymakers to ensure that care workers are able to access the support and recognition that they need to develop their skills and progress in their careers.

Recognising informal and formal learning in the care sector is an important step towards improving the quality of care provided to individuals. Further research is needed in several areas to support this recognition, including:

- **Developing clear guidelines:** There is a need for clear guidelines that define what constitutes informal and formal learning in the care sector, as well as the standards

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that need to be met for recognition. Research is needed to develop these guidelines, which should be informed by the perspectives of care providers, patients, and other stakeholders.

- **Identifying existing learning pathways:** Research is needed to identify the existing learning pathways that exist in the care sector, including formal educational programs, on-the-job training, and informal learning opportunities. This will help to identify where recognition of prior learning can be applied to support recognition of informal and non-formal learning.
- **Developing assessment tools:** There is a need for assessment tools that can be used to evaluate the knowledge and skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning. These tools should be designed to assess competencies rather than qualifications, and should be accessible to all care providers, regardless of their background.
- **Evaluating the impact:** Research is needed to evaluate the impact of recognising informal and non-formal learning on the quality of care provided to patients. This will involve measuring outcomes such as patient satisfaction, safety, and health outcomes.
- **Supporting equity:** Research is also needed to identify and address any barriers to recognising informal and non-formal learning in the care sector. This will involve identifying any systemic biases that may be present and developing strategies to address them to ensure equity and fairness for all care providers.

This is an under-explored area, further research is needed to support the recognition of informal and formal learning in the care sector, which can help to improve the quality of care provided to patients while also recognising the valuable contributions of care providers.