



Centring Care Workers: A Guide

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Introduction

Care workers are subject experts, and their insights are invaluable in shaping better workplaces, systems, and policies. They want to be heard and to contribute, fostering stronger working relationships and better care. However, they are often informed about decisions rather than actively consulted or included. When issues are not discussed with them beforehand, problems frequently arise.

Their expertise, insights, and lived experiences are essential to creating effective and meaningful change in the sector. This guide aims to ensure that care workers are actively involved in shaping the policies, systems, and tools that affect their work.

This document is the result of a co-production meeting with the Care Worker Advisory Board. It provides guidance on effective co-production with care workers for various stakeholders, including employers, social workers, local authorities, care sector suppliers (particularly technology suppliers), and policymakers. It highlights the importance of including care workers in decision-making processes, the benefits of meaningful engagement, and practical steps to ensure effective collaboration.

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Coproduction vs Consultation

There is a fundamental difference between informing, consulting, and co-production, but all can play an important role in effective decision-making:

- **Informing:** Care workers should not only be told what decisions have been made but also why they have been made. If informing is the only step taken, it must be done well—clearly, transparently, and in a way that ensures care workers understand the impact on their work.
- **Consultation:** This involves seeking care workers' feedback, but often only after a product, system, or policy has already been designed. While consultation is valuable, it should be meaningful, with care workers' insights genuinely considered and used to refine decisions.
- **Co-production:** The most effective approach is to involve care workers from the outset—working together to design policies, systems, and tools that impact their roles. This approach ensures solutions are practical, relevant, and directly informed by those with lived experience.

Example: Online training modules for care workers are often generic, outdated and non-transferable. Care workers can contribute by identifying real-life challenges they face, ensuring training reflects their daily experiences. For example, they could help develop scenario-based learning using real-world case studies, rather than generic theory-heavy courses. This leads to more relevant and engaging training, improving skills, confidence, retention. It will also improve the ability to transfer their skills and build on their personal and professional development.

Examples of Good and Bad Practice

Good practice: Designing rota and scheduling systems with input from care workers who know how long visits take and when public transport runs in their area.

Bad practice: Announcing the implementation of a new digital system without asking about people's training needs or having systems in place for feedback when the system isn't working for them.

Benefits of including care workers

Care workers are experts in their field, yet their insights are often overlooked. Involving them in decision-making leads to:



Better Quality of Care



Higher Retention & Job Satisfaction



Innovation & Problem-Solving



Stronger Relationships & Person-Centred Care



Better Wellbeing for Care Workers

By including care workers in decision-making, we create a stronger, more effective care system that benefits everyone.

Risks of Not Involving Care Workers

Excluding care workers from decision-making risks



Ineffective Systems & Services



Missed Opportunities for Improvement



Low Morale & Workforce Detachment



Compromised Quality of Care



A Weaker Care Sector

Care workers have a deep understanding of the daily realities of care and are a vital voice in shaping the sector. When they are excluded, the system loses valuable insights, innovative ideas, and practical solutions that could improve efficiency and quality.

Online vs In Person

Both online and in person events offer unique advantages and disadvantages. Here are some things to consider for both in-person and online events:

Online	In-Person
<p>Accessibility & Digital Inclusion: Understand that not everyone has adequate accessibility to reliable technology or may not be confident using digital platforms.</p> <p>Ensure the event platform is user-friendly, mobile-friendly, and offers dial-in options.</p> <p>Provide clear instructions and tech support in advance to help participants join smoothly.</p>	<p>Location & Accessibility: Choose a venue that is easily accessible by public transport and has adequate parking, especially for care workers who may travel from different locations.</p> <p>Ensure the venue is fully accessible for those with mobility needs and has comfortable facilities.</p>
<p>Engagement & Interaction: Online events can feel impersonal, so incorporating interactive elements like Q&A sessions, polls, breakout rooms, and chat discussions helps keep care workers engaged.</p> <p>Recognising their contributions and providing opportunities for them to share experiences makes the event more meaningful.</p>	<p>Travel and Accommodation:</p> <p>Offer practical support with booking transport and accommodation.</p> <p>Ensure reimbursement of costs isn't a barrier for inclusion</p>
<p>Scheduling & Flexibility: Care workers often have demanding schedules, including night shifts and unpredictable workloads.</p> <p>Plan events at multiple time slots or offer recordings for those who cannot attend live.</p> <p>Avoid peak working hours and consider shorter, more focused sessions.</p>	<p>Timing & Shift Considerations: Care workers often work long or unpredictable shifts. Plan events at times that accommodate different schedules, such as late mornings or early afternoons.</p> <p>Offering multiple sessions or drop-in options can help more attendees participate.</p>

Top Tips for Effective Co-Production with Care Workers

Principle 1: Inclusion and Representation Matter

- Recognise care workers as key stakeholders in the Adult Social Care sector—they deserve a seat at the table.
- Actively seek out diverse voices. Every care worker brings unique perspectives, value, and expertise.
- Representation matters—ensure inclusivity across different backgrounds, roles, and experiences.
- Consider shift patterns – Have you ensured night workers can participate?
- Acknowledge challenges faced by migrant care workers – They may experience additional risks, including exploitation and job insecurity, making it harder to raise concerns. Thoughtful approaches to engagement and assurances of protection are essential to fostering trust and inclusion.
- Encourage different ways of thinking—co-production is about engaging, debating, and learning, not just tokenistic inclusion.
- Offer anonymous feedback options, such as an online forum, to ensure care workers feel safe speaking out.
- Before an event, ask care workers if they wish to remain anonymous or be named publicly.

Principle 2: Communication and Relationships

- Treat care workers as experts and respect their professional knowledge.
- Approach challenges with openness and a willingness to learn rather than defensiveness.
- Provide accessible, timely briefings to allow care workers to prepare effectively.
- Never coach or control what care workers say—value their authentic voices, experiences, and perspectives.
- Show respect in language and presentation:
- Never refer to them as “just a care worker.”
- Introduce them as professionals with expertise in their field.
- Communicate after events to gather feedback and demonstrate that their contributions are valued.
- Build long-term relationships with care workers, not just one-off engagements.

Principle 3: Practical Considerations for Events

- Plan ahead—care workers often need to take unpaid time off to attend events.
- Provide at least four weeks' notice where possible, as care workers' rotas are typically published in advance.
- Consider personal responsibilities such as childcare, ensuring support where needed.
- Offer flexible participation options, such as virtual attendance, to accommodate different schedules.

Principle 4: Value Care Workers—Payment and Recognition

- Follow NIHR Guidelines on payments for care workers' contributions. Learn more here: <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/payment-guidance-researchers-and-professionals>.
- Pay care workers for their time—it recognises their knowledge, expertise, and the value of their contributions.
- Talk to care workers about whether direct payments or vouchers are preferred. Don't make assumptions.
- Budget for additional costs such as preparation time, travel, accommodation, and meals.
- Ensure payments are made promptly and efficiently to respect care workers' time.

Principle 5: Provide Both Care Worker-Only Spaces and Mixed Stakeholder Spaces

- Care Worker-Only Spaces: These create a safe environment where care workers can share honest feedback without fear of repercussions. Separate from employers and managers, these spaces encourage open discussion about challenges, solutions, and lived experiences.
 - Consider hosting external events facilitated by independent organisations to further ensure confidentiality and trust.
- Mixed Stakeholder Spaces: These allow care workers to contribute to broader debates, ensuring their expertise shapes sector-wide decisions. Engaging alongside policymakers, employers, and sector leaders provides care workers with the opportunity to influence meaningful change and gain new perspectives.
 - When hosting mixed spaces, be mindful of power dynamics—structures should be in place to ensure care workers feel confident speaking up and that their voices are genuinely valued.

Principle 6: Protecting Care Workers and Enabling Honest Feedback

- Ensure care workers feel safe sharing their experiences without fear of repercussions.
- If an employer is hosting an event, consider involving an independent organisation to allow care workers to speak freely.
- Offer assurances that feedback—positive or negative—will not lead to negative consequences.
- Provide confidential feedback mechanisms where needed.
- Always ask care workers whether they wish to be named or remain anonymous when sharing insights publicly.

Closing Remarks

Co-production with care workers is a necessity for the sustainability of the adult social care sector. By valuing their expertise, improving job satisfaction, fostering innovation, and strengthening relationships, co-production ensures that care services are effective, not only for those who draw on care, but those that deliver it too. We must always remember that care workers are human beings with their own wants, needs and rights and this needs to be considered. To build a better care system, decision-makers must listen to those who deliver care every day.

Come ready to listen and learn!

Want to engage more with care workers? Contact olivia@thecwc.org.uk.