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Centring Care Workers: A Guide

June 2026 (Updated
Version)



CARE WORKER ADVISORY BOARD AND CHAMPION PROJECT

Introduction from Karolina Gerlich, CEO of The Care Workers' Charity.

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 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 builds on over two years of work with The Care Workers' Charity's Care Worker Advisory Board and Champions Project, which now has 40 members across all four nations.

Our original guide, published in March 2025, followed an initial co-production meeting with the Advisory Board. This updated version reflects the depth of knowledge, experience, and insight that has emerged from that ongoing collaboration and the collective commitment of our members to driving meaningful change in the sector.

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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Co-production 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: Technology designed for use in care settings is too often built without input from the people using it. Care workers can contribute by testing tools before they are rolled out, identifying practical barriers: such as interfaces that are difficult to navigate during a busy shift, or systems that duplicate paperwork rather than reducing it. Their involvement ensures technology works in the real world, not just in a demonstration room. This leads to better adoption rates, fewer workarounds, and tools that genuinely support care delivery rather than adding to the administrative burden.

Ultimately, without co-production, it costs more to organisations and the sector, is less effective and wastes time in improving a system that could have been ready earlier.

Good practice: Involving care workers in developing training materials so that scenarios reflect the real situations they face, rather than case studies that do not resonate with their daily experience.

Bad practice: Rolling out mandatory e-learning modules without asking care workers whether the content reflects their roles or whether they have time and access to complete them during their working day.

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.

What Have We Learned?

After the first year of our Care Worker Advisory Board and Champions Project, we surveyed our members to understand the impact of being listened to and valued. The following statistics are based on the responses of 25 Advisory Board and Champions Members.



92% either strongly agreed or agreed that being listened to and valued has increased their morale and led to them delivering better care.



96% either strongly agreed or agreed that their sense of belonging and/or pride in the care worker community has improved.



88% either strongly agreed or agreed that they are more aware or have greater access to and uptake of training opportunities.



88% either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel better equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge to do their job.



96% either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel part of a supportive community of care workers.



92% either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel their wellbeing has increased.



100% either strongly agreed or agreed that they feel valued and appreciated within the project.

Hear What Our Care Worker Advisory Board and Champions Members Have To Say

I feel if I had not been in this project I would no longer be a care worker. Thank you to The Care Workers' Charity for making me feel valued again in my role.

This project gave me a professional voice and I'm thankful for that.

I feel really privileged to be part of this project. I feel important, heard and seen for the first time in my life.

Being part of the Care Worker Advisory Board has been a source of strength and deep appreciation. It's opened my eyes to the stark differences across the care sector.

Being part of the Advisory Board and Champions Project has given me a valuable platform to share my voice and contribute to meaningful changes for care workers. The experience has been empowering, collaborative, and has helped strengthen connections across the sector.

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.
- Ensure all materials, briefings and communications are written in plain English. Consider language and literacy barriers and offer translation and interpretation support where needed. Never assume that written formats work for everyone.
- 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.
- Co-production can require care workers to share difficult or personal experiences. Ensure emotional support is available, set clear expectations about the nature of discussions in advance, and always provide a debrief or check-in at the close of sessions.

Principle 4: Valuing 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.
- For online events, consider prep time as part of payment. For in person events, include travel costs/time as part of payment.
- 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 report back to care workers on what happened with their contributions - what was taken forward, what wasn't, and why. This demonstrates that engagement was genuine and builds trust for future involvement.
- When their insights inform reports, policies, or published materials, credit should be given, with their consent. Care workers' intellectual contributions have professional value and should be recognised as such.

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
Accessibility & Digital Inclusion: Understand that not everyone has adequate accessibility to reliable technology or may not be confident using digital platforms. Ensure the event platform is user-friendly, mobile-friendly, and offers dial-in options. Provide clear instructions and tech support in advance to help participants join smoothly.	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. Ensure the venue is fully accessible for those with mobility needs and has comfortable facilities.
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. Recognising their contributions and providing opportunities for them to share experiences makes the event more meaningful.	Travel and Accommodation: Offer practical support with booking transport and accommodation. Ensure reimbursement of costs isn't a barrier for inclusion
Scheduling & Flexibility: Care workers often have demanding schedules, including night shifts and unpredictable workloads. Plan events at multiple time slots or offer recordings for those who cannot attend live. Avoid peak working hours and consider shorter, more focused sessions.	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. Offering multiple sessions or drop-in options can help more attendees participate.

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.

Care workers are the backbone of the sector. They are present in the most intimate and significant moments of people's lives, supporting independence, preserving dignity and providing consistent, compassionate care. They hold knowledge that cannot be found in a boardroom or a government consultation. It can only be found in the day-to-day reality of the work itself.

And yet, for too long, that knowledge has been overlooked. Decisions that directly affect care workers have been made without them. The consequences of that exclusion are visible across the sector: high turnover, chronic burnout, a workforce that feels unseen and undervalued, and quality of care that suffers as a result.

We must always remember that care workers are human beings with their own wants, needs and rights and this needs to be considered. When we fail to include them, we do not just lose their insight, we send a message that their experience does not matter and that message has a cost. To build a better care system, decision-makers must listen to those who deliver care every day.

Care workers have been asking to be heard for a long time. The sector cannot afford to keep them waiting.

Come ready to listen and learn!

Want to engage more with care workers?

Contact olivia@thecwc.org.uk.