



Top tips for retention

A briefing for adult social care providers

1st Edition – July 2021

Introduction

Ongoing workforce pressures have meant that adult social care employers and providers have needed to adopt a range of strategies to help retain and support their workforce. Never has this been more evident than in the past year when faced with an extremely difficult and uncertain financial environment and dealing with the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These top tips capture some of the approaches taken by organisations to reduce staff turnover and help retain people in the care and health workforce. Through sharing these tips, the Care Provider Alliance and Local Government Association invite you to share what successes you have had with retention across the social care workforce or lessons that may help others.

Please email any comments or suggestions to: CHIP@local.gov.uk.

Top tips

Recruit to retain

1. **Recruit from the local community.** Use creative strategies to advertise and recruit local people who are more likely to want to work in their local community. [Guidance from NHS Employers](#) as well as a [resource library](#) share ways to engage with different groups in your communities, including previously marginalised groups who may not have been in work.
2. **Recruit based on values and behaviours**, like kindness, compassion and reliability, life experiences and a willingness to learn. [Evidence suggests that](#)

[these people are more likely to stay in the sector](#). Sustaining the flow of quality applicants with the right values is an on-going task, not something that should be done reactively when a vacancy arises.

3. **Encourage people to find out about social care** by offering taster sessions, involving people who need care and support and their families, friends, or advocates. Have open days that are widely promoted to different community groups, including those who may not have considered social care as a career.
4. **Communicate clearly with applicants** about progress on their application, to help build positive relationships and keep them onboard for the recruitment process. Share information and timeframes early on to ensure eager applicants can start as soon as possible.

Offer good working conditions and remove barriers to working

5. **As far as possible, offer flexible working conditions** to ensure that the job fits around the lives of your staff.
6. **Support staff by providing payment** for things like travel, induction, and DBS certificates. This will reduce the administrative and financial challenges that they might face.
7. **Promote a positive working environment** and inclusive culture that people buy in to. Visible leadership that models the desired behaviours is vital.
8. **Promote person-centred care**. This can remove the burden of task-based approaches, improve job satisfaction, and give staff opportunities to build an understanding of complex care needs. Here are some [comments from managers, staff members and service users](#) on person-centred care and its delivery.
9. **Ensure staff utilise all available benefits**, such as annual leave and sick leave if required. Finding areas where terms and conditions could be developed further across pay, leave and hours, as well as communicating changes to staff, will reinforce their understanding of what benefits they have and should utilise.

Understand your workforce and what motivates them

10. **Encourage an open and ongoing dialogue with staff** to understand what motivates them. Understanding the drivers of staff retention will enable you to develop good working conditions that appeal to your own workforce.
11. **Develop self-managed teams**. This can build trust with your workforce, while allowing them to develop their skills and work on their core strengths and

interests. When coupled with a person-centred approach, this style of management can deliver top quality care. A [community care initiative in West Suffolk](#) provides some further insight into the successes that can be achieved.

12. **Spot the signs of leavers before they go.** The NHS run sessions to get feedback from staff on challenges faced in their roles. These sessions give the employer the opportunity to resolve the issues that may otherwise lead to staff leaving. These sessions are not run by managers but by others within the organisation to facilitate open and transparent feedback. [Skills for Care deliver a commissioned webinar](#) on holding constructive and valuable conversations to address retention.
13. **Understand why staff leave.** Encourage all staff to engage with leaver surveys and / or exit interviews. Use this knowledge to inform retention strategies. Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership had been able to [use this information to prioritise resources](#) to focus on significant issues.

Ensure wellbeing is on everyone's agenda

14. **Embed a culture of wellbeing.** Employee wellbeing has been at greater risk in 2021 than in many other years. Factors such as uncertain job security, financial hardship, a lack of social contact, blurring of work and home lives, as well as experiencing significant loss of life have led to increased stress for the workforce. Organisations need to develop sustainable approaches to ensure the wellbeing and positive mental health of the workforce. These should be the shared responsibility of HR practitioners, senior leaders, line managers and employees themselves. (See [Local Government Association](#) and [Skills for Care resources on wellbeing](#)).
15. **Be visible, encourage staff to talk and share concerns.** Ensure that agendas for meetings leave time to discuss how people are, not just what they are doing. And find support to address challenges where possible, while ensuring it is available in various mediums for staff working in different settings and at different times of the day.
16. **Develop a charter of wellbeing with staff input.** Getting staff collaboration to agree shared commitments to wellbeing will ensure it is a responsibility for all, while reassuring staff their concerns are heard and addressed.

Invest in the workforce and their careers

17. **Invest in staff training and development.** We know from Skills for Care's report - [Secrets of success](#) - that investing in training and qualifications aids retention and those recruited for values are more inclined to take up qualifications and training. Work closely with your training providers to build a

programme that works for your organisation. There may be opportunities to fund this. For example, employers who [pay the apprenticeship levy](#) and have unused apprenticeship funds can find and support other employers who want to receive a transfer. Also consider the [Workforce Development Fund](#) and access to the [eLearning for Health](#) online training opportunities. In Cambridgeshire County Council, their retention strategy covers a [Virtual College of Social Work](#) to support all learning opportunities.

18. **Make career pathways clear** so that people see social care as a long-term career opportunity. Visual career pathways can really support development conversations between line managers and employees. Offer buddying or mentoring to support career development. Organise sessions for teams to share good practice and information across care roles and services, which can also help people identify new areas to develop skills and experience in.
19. **Provide a flexible range of development and progression opportunities.** People will have different ambitions depending on their role, personal circumstances etc, which you can support with flexible learning opportunities. Encourage staff to explore other parts of the system for progression, such as domiciliary care staff exploring a care home role or an administrator moving into a care worker role.

Recognise and reward good work

20. **Recognise and celebrate the efforts of the workforce** in all parts of the system. Managers and staff are encouraged to recognise and reward people for their efforts and achievements through verbal and written means, awards, bonuses or pay progression.
21. **Sharing stories and journeys of senior or long stay staff.** Through the use of social media and other accessible communications, hearing from staff who have been with you for a number of years and their stories of how they progressed may provide inspiration for those early in their careers.
22. **Utilise technology to reach out to people.** Online media provides lots of opportunities to improve communication with people that may be working in different areas and at unsociable times. Closed social media groups and channels can help to build a culture of team working, even when members of the team are working individually and may feel isolated.

Ensure retention features in workforce planning

23. **Develop a retention strategy.** Understanding what the motivations for staying in a role are at different stages of the employment cycle, may help you tailor support for differing challenges. The reasons for leaving in the first three

months are usually different to 12 months or more. Determine what benefits and support are given to staff at each of these stages.

24. **Develop attitudes to retain staff.** All staff, from management to frontline workers, should recognise the skills, experience, and contribution of their colleagues, creating a sense of loyalty to each other, the organisation, and the wider care sector. This would help support retention as people feel shared values are practiced across an organisation.

25. **Retain the workforce within the care system if not the organisation.**

Where retaining staff is not feasible within the organisation, facilitate movement within adult social care to benefit the sector. This could be via development days, work experience, shadowing, or taster sessions, creating a culture of staff being able to explore other parts of the system. This could be built in to contracted providers' fee structures to enable their staff to have one day a year to explore work experience in another part of the system.

And finally, promote the positives of working in social care so that everyone sees it as a rewarding long-term career opportunity!

Useful links and contacts

[Care Provider Alliance](#)

[Local Government Association - Wellbeing](#)

[Skills for Care – Recruitment and retention](#)

[eLearning for Healthcare](#)

Contact your [national trade association](#) or your [local association](#)

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