

# Care Market Shaping and Sustainability guidance

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# 1. Introduction

Sustainable market shaping in adult social care requires a data-driven, collaborative, and future-focused workforce strategy. Building on discussions within the WMADASS Workforce Network, organisational learning, and evidence across local authorities, this guidance outlines the conditions required to stabilise and grow the adult social care workforce. It integrates data from the WMADASS Knowledge Hub, insights from regional programmes, and national developments to support councils in creating resilient, skilled, and responsive labour markets.

This strengthened version incorporates learning from ongoing WMADASS collaborations, regional research activity, and recent policy dialogues — including engagement with DHSC, Skills for Care, Health-Connect, and the Skills for Care Impact Project with Hartree. It also reflects workforce intelligence gaps raised in recent WMADASS work on the occupational therapy and social work pipeline, alongside challenges identified through leadership, EDI, and system improvement networks.

## 1. Understanding Market Position and Direction

### 1.1 Market Position Statements (MPS)

Councils are encouraged to maintain up-to-date Market Position Statements aligned with local and national priorities. This includes planning for:

- Population changes
- Shifts in care models (e.g., expansion of home-based care)
- Provider landscape changes
- Anticipated demand for specialist skills

### 1.2 Using the WMADASS Knowledge Hub for Market Intelligence

The WMADASS Knowledge Hub hosts regional datasets, market reports, workforce trends, and thematic analyses essential for market shaping. Councils should draw routinely on:

- WMADASS Data Hub
- Skills for Care regional intelligence
- Local demographic observatories
- Provider performance and capacity data

Better integration of these sources allows for anticipatory planning, modelling of future labour requirements, and early identification of fragility in local markets.

## 2. Workforce Capacity, Recruitment & Future Planning

## 2.1 Current and Future Workforce Needs

Councils must analyse:

- Existing workforce sufficiency
- Forecasted workforce shifts
- Labour market availability (school leavers, returners, older workers)
- Cross-sector competition (retail, logistics, health)

For example, we discussed a planned shift of 10% toward home care, requiring enhanced modelling of home-care-specific skills, travel patterns, and recruitment pools.

## 2.2 Strengthening Recruitment Pipelines

Effective strategies include:

- Engaging colleges, universities, community groups
- Expanding apprenticeships (linked to the updated WMADASS Apprenticeships in Social Care report)
- Integrating social care into local skills improvement plans
- Partnering with employability programmes and Jobcentre Plus
- Exploring the potential of AI to improve joined-up workforce pathways across sectors

## 2.3 Future Collaboration: Hartree & the Skills for Care Impact Project

The upcoming collaboration with Hartree presents an opportunity to develop:

- Advanced workforce modelling
- Predictive analytics on workforce churn, supply, and demand
- Scenario planning for local labour markets
- More accurate modelling of non-regulated workforce roles, which are currently under-represented in national datasets
- It is anticipated that our collaboration with University of Birmingham can strengthen our Client Level Data with multivariate analysis of individual heterogeneity.

## 3. Workforce Diversity, Skills, Engagement & Professional Identity

Workforce analysis should include intersectional factors:

- Gender, ethnicity, social class, age
- Digital skills, driving ability
- Career progression barriers

Targeted interventions may include:

- Funding driving lessons for under-represented groups
- Supporting Personal Assistants
- Ensuring support pathways for internationally recruited staff

This aligns with ongoing EDI-led insights raised through WMADASS PSW and other networks.

## 4. Quality, Training & Professional Development

### 4.1 Strengthening Quality Feedback Loops

Continuous engagement with:

- Provider forums
- Quality assurance teams
- Principal Social Workers
- Principal Occupational Therapists

...ensures both service quality and workforce voice are strongly linked to commissioning decisions.

### 4.2 Occupational Therapy Workforce Development

The WMADASS Memorandum of Commitment has enabled several councils to embed permanent occupational therapy roles, strengthening professional capacity and reducing reliance on temporary staffing arrangements.

This is complemented by regional work on *Realising the Potential of Social Care OTs*, which highlights:

- A lack of granular workforce data
- Inconsistent role definitions across councils
- Limited national datasets on social care-based OTs

## 5. The Increasing Importance of Social Care Nursing Workforce Data

There is growing recognition of the critical role of:

- Registered nurses in care homes
- Community-based nursing in integrated pathways
- Nursing associates and emerging roles

However, nursing workforce intelligence for social care remains fragmented, with significant gaps in:

- Registrant numbers in local areas

- Age profiles
- Training capacity

Integration of nursing data into WMADASS regional dashboards is essential for improved commissioning and market sustainability.

## 6. Responding to Market & Sector Changes

Practical solutions identified:

- Electric mopeds for care workers
- Commissioning along travel corridors
- Strong partnerships with planning and transport teams

Councils should also consider:

- Market fragility early-warning systems
- Cross-sector workforce attraction campaigns
- Collaboration with system and wider partners to support fluid movement across health and care roles

## 7. Legislative & Procurement Developments

New procurement flexibilities enable councils to:

- Prioritise quality over price
- Require workforce-related quality measures
- Conduct mid-contract market reviews

These mechanisms can stabilise local markets by rewarding providers who demonstrate workforce investment and retention.

## 8. Workforce Data Challenges & Opportunities

### 8.1 Skills for Care – Strengths and Limitations

While Skills for Care provides robust regulated workforce intelligence, it does not capture the full picture, particularly:

- Non-regulated workers
- Social work and wider students and pipeline intelligence (as recently discussed with DHSC)
- OTs and other professional groups working in non-traditional settings or fixed term funded roles.

## 8.2 Evidence of Data Gaps from WMADASS Work

The *Realising the Potential of Social Care OTs* work and recent DHSC discussions underline the need for:

- Improved granularity
- Better role coding
- Consistent cross-sector workforce definitions (The DHSC care Workforce pathway will be published shortly).
- Clearer visibility of training capacity and deployment

## 9. Recommendations

1. Use WMADASS Knowledge Hub data to strengthen MPS, planning cycles, and commissioning.
2. Embed insights from the Hartree project to enhance workforce modelling.
3. Develop partnership opportunities with Health-Connect around person-centred care and future workforce pathways.
4. Strengthen professional pipelines for OTs, nurses, social workers, and non-regulated roles.
5. Enhance engagement mechanisms through PSWs, Principal OTs, and frontline workers.
6. Prioritise quality-driven procurement to reward providers who invest in their workforce.
7. Improve workforce data granularity through local authority data integration, WMADASS projects, and regional dashboards.

## Conclusion

A sustainable adult social care market depends on a resilient, skilled, and diverse workforce, supported by high-quality data, collaborative leadership, and innovative models. By drawing together intelligence from WMADASS regional work, national programmes, and ongoing partnerships, councils can develop a workforce strategy that is adaptive, equitable, and future-ready. One that strengthens market sustainability and supports people, providers, and communities across the West Midlands.