

Good practice in supporting ancillary staff working in care homes

Cleaning, cooking, housekeeping, and laundry staff (ancillary workers) are a crucial part of the care home workforce. Infection control, preparing meals for people with different dietary needs and preferences, and being able to help and communicate with care home residents, require highly skilled people willing to take on great responsibilities. The Coronavirus pandemic has highlighted their importance as key workers. Yet sometimes their efforts and responsibility are not recognised, and ancillary staff may feel less well supported than other employees. Ideas about how ancillary staff in care homes can be best supported are contained in this 'good practice' document.

How was it created?

From February to July 2021, 63 people (ancillary staff, care home managers, Human Resource (HR) managers, and care home residents and their relatives) told us what good support for ancillary staff workforce looks and feels like. These points were discussed with 13 stakeholders including representatives of the Department of Health and Social Care, Skills for Care, Social Care Institute for Excellence, GMB Union, Unison, Institute of Health and Social Care Management, Care Quality Commission, The National Care Association, The Health Foundation, Race Equality Foundation, family members of care home residents, Director of Care in a care home, and a manager of the 'housekeeping staff' in a care home. With their advice, this "good practice guide" was finalised.

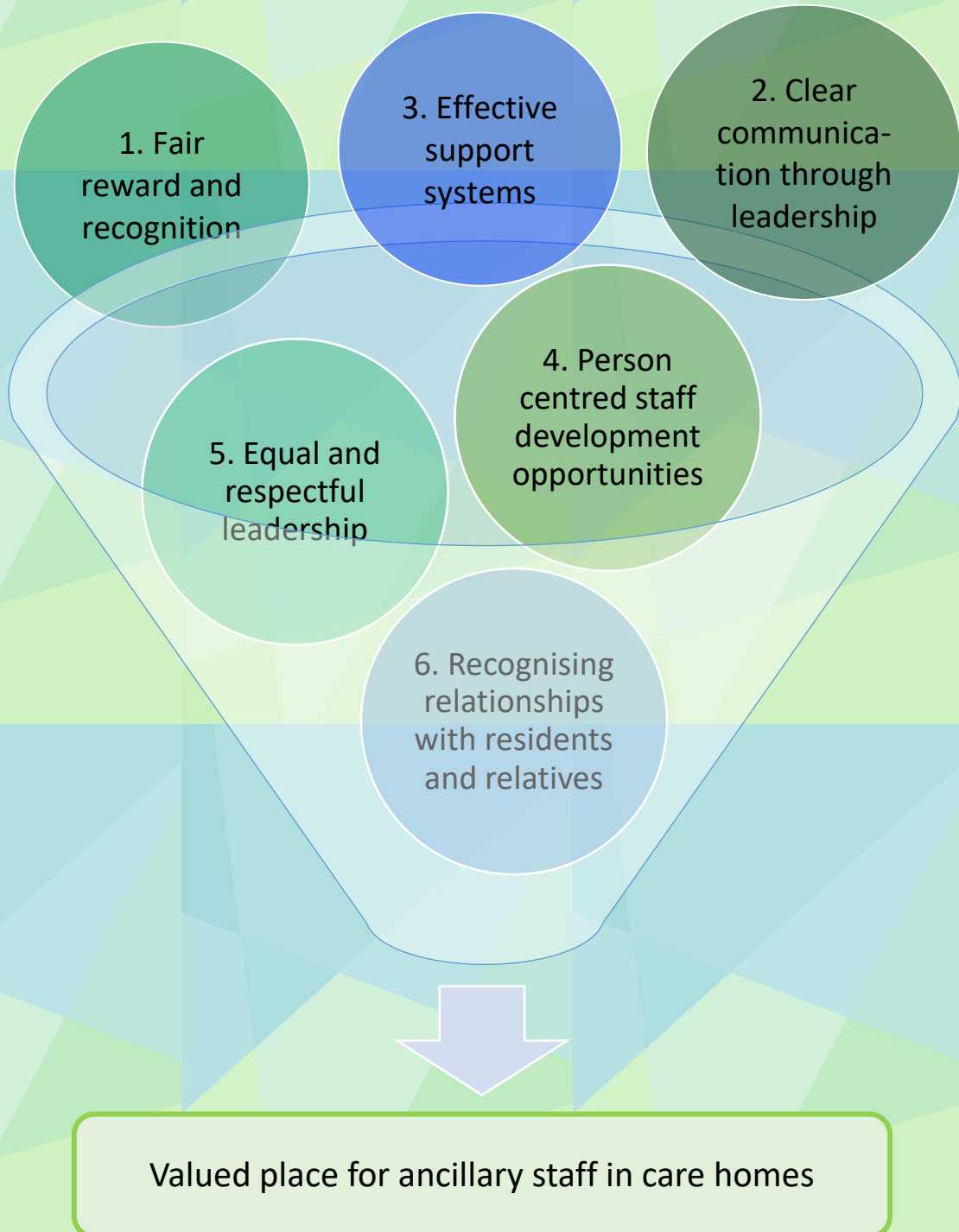
Who is this for?

This good practice guidance has been designed as a reflective tool for care home managers and senior care home staff to help them support their ancillary colleagues. We hope it will also be useful to training providers, policy makers, and staff representative organisations wanting to further understand how ancillary staff can be encouraged, retained, and developed. We also hope it is useful to ancillary staff to ask questions and raise discussion points with their colleagues and managers.

How to use the guide

This document is intended to help thinking and reflection on current support for ancillary staff and how this may be sustained or improved. It sets out 6 Principles. Each principle is described, followed by some reflective questions. We use the words of managers and ancillary staff themselves with some suggestions and prompts. The 6 Principles are linked, and some are context specific, depending on, for example, the size and layout of the care home, number of residents and their health, structure, and make-up of the staff group, and whether the care home is independent or part of a larger group.

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Principle 1: Fair reward and recognition

Ancillary staff are the backbone of care homes. Despite being key to the running of a care home, they reported they sometimes feel forgotten in standard practices of reward and recognition.

What we heard...

"... being a housekeeper, we do get overlooked. Because we've got strict cleaning in place because of this virus so we've got extra work to do. But we never get recognised for it. The carers (care workers), they get all the praise and what have you. I've worked there for three years and I've never won employee of the month. It's always the carers. Because there's about 40 carers and just three housekeepers, we get overlooked every time. It's very unfair."

Housekeeper 1

"Recognition is anything that a team needs to do their job well. We need to listen to their needs and support their resources. So, for example we've been doing, if they make longer hours, we offer them tea, coffee, beverages. The coffee machine is making a different impact; staff feel that they can have lattes any time. They can have food that's offered to them so they can relax and don't need to think about when they go home to cook for the next day. So, we've been giving different ways of recognition, rather than giving direct funding." **Hospitality manager**

Reflective Questions:

- 1) Do ancillary staff feel recognised as valued members of staff; if not, how may this be improved?
- 2) If ancillary staff were rewarded in some new and additional ways during the pandemic, can this be continued? If not specifically rewarded, are there ways of recognising their contributions now?
- 3) How can ancillary staff who are less vocal talk about their needs and can it be ensured that they are met?
- 4) Are ancillary workers paid a fair rate for their work and commitment and does their overall reward package help ensure they will not leave for better paid employment elsewhere?

Tips and prompts

- Regularly speak with ancillary staff to ask if they feel valued and express appreciation.
- Regularly review pay to ensure that it fairly reflects tasks and responsibilities. Consult staff representative groups if they exist, or include questions about pay in surveys or consultations.
- Clarify sick pay arrangements for ancillary staff who take time off sick and ensure these are in job descriptions and employee contracts.
- Organise appreciation events, awarding individual ancillary staff with 'employee of the month' or receiving small gifts can add to their sense of wellbeing and being appreciated.
- Tell people about and celebrate ancillary staff's contributions, for example in newsletters; ensure ancillary staff realise that they are highly skilled, have responsible roles, and that their contributions are valued. Consider highlighting and introducing ancillary staff on the home's website.
- Tell relatives and friends about the contributions made by ancillary staff to individual residents. Assist and support residents with saying 'thank you' to ancillary staff if they are not able to do so themselves.

Principle 2: Clear communication through leadership

Ancillary staff can be prepared for increasingly flexible roles and the extra work they often undertake. Nothing seems to help more than making sure there is good communication between ancillary staff and managers or direct care staff to share understanding and help both in their jobs. Good leaders communicate clearly, directly and regularly with ancillary staff, providing information, seeking their views and responding meaningfully.

What we heard...

*"During that whole process with the pandemic, the care homes could have given training, more instruction around cleaning and more follow up, more meetings with myself to speak to me about my progress. That was very limited. I had to take my own initiative to get in contact with Headquarters and the supervisor. I'd text during midday I'd receive a call the following evening, 'you're expected to come into work tomorrow'. So, I think they did not acknowledge my concerns or issued to me clear instructions about what to do and I felt very disappointed." - **Cleaner 4***

*"Information was coming mainly by bulletins, through meetings that were then distributed via emails. Lots of posters around, especially for those who were [non-IT-literate] and a general newsletter every week. So, yeah, in terms of communication about what's going on and so forth. And you know how we need to react or respond and if a new process came into place, so yes, overall, I think it was managed very well." - **Ancillary staff supervisor***

Reflective Questions:

1. How do managers currently communicate with ancillary staff, and might these channels of communication be extended and improved?
2. Do the care home's communications help ancillary staff feel part of meetings, information events, or one-to-one information sessions? How are evening, overnight or weekend staff included?
3. Are there clear channels of communication for ancillary staff to use if they wish to raise some point or question?
4. Are ancillary staff routinely involved in formal processes such as handovers, settling a new resident into the care home, or feeding in information to care plans and reviews?
5. Would the presence of a staff trade union or representative group help in better communicating with ancillary staff?

Tips and prompts

- Honest feedback and conversations about the workplace can help to make it better for everyone; are these opportunities continuing after the main pandemic period?
- Keep open lines of communication with ancillary staff and make sure that they feel able to speak with someone specific in the home about any queries.
- If there are staff surveys, feedback the findings to all staff groups and respond to their concerns. Undertake exit interviews or email people who are leaving to find out why.
- Regularly talk to ancillary staff to see if they have any ideas on how the running of the care home might be improved. Seek their views to help them feel valued, and include their contribution to team meetings in job role descriptions and contracts.
- Create opportunities to engage with ancillary staff who may struggle with IT or with English language, and ensure they are included in communication and training.
- Involve ancillary staff in staff meetings, where possible; it can give them a sense of recognition and they can add valuable ideas as they are often the eyes and ears of the care home.
- Agree chains of communication from and to ancillary staff and make clear who they can go to with a question or concern, including any staff representative groups or organisations.

Principle 3: Effective Support Systems

Ancillary staff need and will benefit from effective support systems. People say they find great comfort and support from their colleagues through regular chats, team meetings, and WhatsApp groups. Mental health support, if available, may not be accessible to or known about by ancillary staff.

What we heard...

"I've been feeling depressed, like everybody else. We have our down moments, but we've kept each other going. Because we're quite a happy team. It just seems to be going on and on and on. But yeah, hopefully things are looking up. But we've helped lift each other up, basically, just support each other. When they're feeling down, they come and talk to me. I just make sure that everybody's all right. And that's the whole group. It's not just [the kitchen team], it's the carers as well, we've been supporting each other cause we're in our kind of bubble." -

Chef 2

"I think mental health and wellbeing has been a huge issue. We set up a wellness and resilience group as a result of feedback that we'd got from the general workforce, not just the ancillary staff. But there were some heart-breaking stories on the ancillary team; one member of staff was accessing food banks and I think because of her personal circumstances, unfortunately, didn't have the funds. But thankfully, through the wellness and resilience group we were able to signpost and support and give some financial support as well. So, I think the general wellbeing and emotions was actually more challenging, the communication, because everybody dealt with it in a different way." -

Manager 2

Reflective Questions:

1. Do ancillary staff feel supported? How do you know?
2. Are ancillary staff supported by one another and the rest of the care home team? What helps with this and is anyone or any group feeling left out?
3. Supervisors, team managers, and shift leaders in care homes may often supervise care workers and ancillary staff. Do they or their own managers offer sufficient help in the support of ancillary staff?
4. What kind of mental health support is on offer via the care home or elsewhere and is this seen as useful by ancillary staff? How do you know?
5. Are there external sources of support, for example, support groups, trades unions or representative groups, that ancillary workers can be signposted to?

Tips and prompts

- Make it clear that support systems are available to all employees – through case study examples that people can relate to.
- Ensure staff get to know and find support from each other, such as through WhatsApp groups, social activities, and (photo)introductions.
- Consider a buddy system or mentor system for some new staff.
- Proactively ask everyone about their well-being and offer support if needed – this could include job breaks, changes of hours or roles, or signposting to advice agencies.
- Consider if a supervisor specifically for ancillary staff could provide them with avenues of support.

Principle 4: Person-centred Staff Development Opportunities

Individuals may appreciate specific staff development opportunities. Ancillary staff may not know how to develop within or beyond their role. Some want to acquire new skills and capabilities through training, mentoring and other means. A 'person-centred' approach can help understand each individual ancillary worker's aspirations.

What we heard...

*"I started working as a hairdresser and doing residents' hair during lockdown. Well, someone had to do it, because we stopped any external visitors or outside staff from coming into the home. We wanted less staff overall. And I had qualifications for beauty therapy – it was on my C.V., so I was happy to do it. I did haircuts, hair wash, manicure, pedicure, I enjoyed it! And I think the residents enjoyed it too!" – **Cleaner 7***

*"There were lots of positive changes to be honest with you. We've been able to make the housekeeping role more linked in with care and vice versa. So, we've managed to sort of take a little bit of a step sideways where we don't just have housekeepers doing housekeeping work, it's carers doing care work and wellbeing staff doing wellbeing work. We're now doing it where the housekeepers would help do some care and they would also help do some wellbeing. Some of the wellbeing and care staff would do some cleaning and we're making it more like a home. It makes you realise that actually, care is more than just care." - **Manager 2***

Reflective Questions:

1. What development opportunities are there for ancillary staff, including any that emerged in the pandemic?
2. Are there opportunities for one-to-one discussions with ancillary staff members to set out a 'personal development plan' to find out about individual hopes and wishes at work? More generally, is there room to talk about individual training or skills development? Is there a regular way to do this and ensure intentions are realised (for example, helping staff develop their communication and language skills, IT skills or accessing Further or Higher education)?
3. Does the home have the supervisory and mentoring capacity to provide development opportunities for ancillary staff and if not, how might this capacity be increased?
4. Do you know about the sometimes hidden or multiple skills and talents of ancillary staff? Do they know about training opportunities available to them as well as ways to develop confidence, for example – shadowing other care workers, helping with mealtimes or snacks, providing dignity in care?
5. Are ancillary staff informed about job vacancies in their home, and within the wider company or networks? If you have examples of people who moved from ancillary roles to other work are these easy to access?

Tips and prompts

- Consider putting a 'personal development plan' in place for each member of the ancillary workforce staff, which is reviewed regularly, if not already done. Make sure the organisation delivers on these plans where possible. For those happy in their current job, consider in-role development or possible enhancements to their work.
- In the wake of COVID-19, consider if ancillary worker job descriptions need amending to reflect new skill sets or more flexible roles.
- Explore a ring-fenced fund to support training and development of ancillary workers; for example, using the Apprenticeship levy or resources from Skills for Care.
- Assess whether ancillary staff can be given time in their rota for training rather than in their own time or a hybrid model. Explain why training is beneficial to them and possible career pathways.

Principle 5: Equal and Respectful Treatment

The fifth principle relates to the importance of equal, dignified, and respectful relationships between ancillary staff and the rest of the care home team. In some care homes, ancillary staff feel no different from care workers or managers. In other care homes, ancillary staff say that they feel at the bottom of the heap.

What we heard...

*"They're not all young, 23 and quite fit. We have two flights of stairs at work, and you have to clean the bed. And you have to go up and down, you know. A lot of them are like me, getting a bit old now. And you know, you thought you were just cleaning and stuff, but a bit more -- not leeway, a bit more flexibility for as you're getting older... Say about crawling around on the beds, maybe say, 'because of your age, you don't need to clean around under there; we'll get somebody to do if they don't mind.' You know a bit more support because of your age." - **Cleaner 2***

*"I've been very lucky to work for this company where I have got a really good support management system. We have got weekly calls where we can pitch in, give our ideas, you know, and share our things that we've been doing within the homes. Clinical side, hospitality side as well as the residents' experience. We do walk around very often and our presence within the team, within the communities, is seen by many. And it feels like for us and for them and for the team that we are working together. So, I've been very lucky to be a part of this team, to be honest." - **Hospitality manager***

Reflective Questions:

1. Are ancillary staff treated as well as other staff? How do you know, especially about staff whose first language is not English?
2. Who, if anyone, tells ancillary staff about their rights, such as sick pay, when they first start and are staff updated as rules change?
3. What is the best way to ensure ancillary staff are included in a positive care home culture? What makes this happen?
4. Is there any bullying or discrimination? If so, what form does it take and how can it be tackled?
5. Do ancillary staff trust their managers and do managers trust the ancillary staff – what encourages such relationships? Are there any signs of cliques or negative feelings that some groups are favoured more than others?

Tips and prompts

- Ensure that ancillary staff feel treated equally and with dignity: asking them if they feel this way and if not, what needs to happen.
- Develop a sense of trust, so staff feel safe to disclose potentially private information, such as family history or medical records, for risk assessments or similar procedures.
- Routinely invite ancillary staff to outings, care home events, and discussions of residents' care plans. Can they take the lead in organising social activities and cultural celebrations? Consider whether job descriptions require amending.
- Ensure that ancillary staff know their rights and contractual entitlements, such as sick pay and pensions, and that anti-bullying and other policies are working.

Principle 6: Recognising Relationships with Residents and Relatives

Ancillary staff value relationships with care home residents and their relatives or friends. These can range from small welcomes or greetings to deeper meaningful interactions such as at mealtimes and during the night. Often these improve residents' wellbeing, but they are not always known about by relatives or the wider care home community.

What we heard...

"The senior cook asked me, I went in the one day and he said 'can I have a quick word?' And 'I went yeah, what's up?' And he said 'I'm very worried. Your Mum seems not to be eating as much. I think she's struggling to eat. Do you think we can get somebody to see her so that maybe we can soften her food?' That was the cook. Not a carer, not the manager. So, I had her reviewed and she then was put onto a soft diet and her intake has improved. She eats very well now with pureed food. You know, it was him who had actually picked up that her tray wasn't being emptied and that she wasn't eating everything." -

Relative 5

"I think in the office there are schemes thought out and plans thought out. But what you have to do if you're running something, is to acknowledge how rare a really good worker is. The actual personal element and you have all the schemes in the world, but it's a fatal mistake not to acknowledge when you've got a really good person. We care, we as residents can see how good they are. Do they really appreciate how good they are in the office?" -

Resident 4

Reflective Questions:

1. How are ancillary staff helped to create or maintain meaningful relationships with residents (for example, do they work with the same groups or individuals, do they need any emotional support if a resident is distressed, are they told when a resident moves, sickens, or dies)?
2. Is there space for people to be more flexible in their roles (for example, a cleaner might want to help with meals or organise activities)? If so, who can help with reviewing this new way of working and identify any skills gaps?
3. How can ancillary staff be helped to communicate effectively with residents and make sure that what they are doing is welcome (for example, a resident wanting their laundry to be folded in a certain way)?
4. How can residents be supported to communicate with ancillary staff about their needs and preferences?

Tips and prompts

- Include ancillary staff in care home social activities so that meaningful relationships between them and residents and their relatives are fostered.
- Help residents communicate with ancillary staff about their wishes and needs regarding their rooms and other parts of their life.
- Ensure that relatives are aware of meaningful relationships with different staff members and introduce relatives to ancillary staff where possible. Feature ancillary staff (with photographs) if they would like on the care home website, newsletters, or noticeboard.
- Regularly update relatives and friends of residents about the contributions made by ancillary staff to the well-being of their relative.

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