



Strategy to enable social care placements for student nurses and nursing associates

July 2025



CARE

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Foreword

In 2023/24, around 34,000 registered nurses were working in adult social care, a significant, yet often overlooked, part of the nursing workforce. As our health and care system evolves, we need a future nursing workforce equipped to work across integrated models of care, with a clear understanding of the diverse settings in which people receive support.

That's why we commissioned Skills for Care to develop this strategy, which aims to make opportunities for social care placements for every student nurse. By exposing students to the realities and opportunities in social care, we can build a workforce that is agile, well-rounded, and better prepared to deliver care across the whole system, not just in hospitals, but in communities and people's homes.

We published our 10 Year Health Plan for England on 3 July 2025, and in it set out our 10-year vision for a workforce where every individual is supported to reach their full professional potential. This included our commitment that the Chief Nursing Officer's strategy will ensure that every nursing student spends sufficient time across a range of clinical settings, to create a meaningful placement experience that reflects modern practice, including a requirement for all students to have a high-quality experience in neighbourhood and community settings and social care.

This strategy could not be more timely, and reflects strong collaboration between DHSC, Skills for Care, the Council of Deans of Health, higher education institutions, and care providers. Together, we're laying the groundwork for a generation of nurses who see social care as not only a vital setting for learning, but also a rewarding and impactful career choice.

Stephen Kinnock MP

Minister of State for Care

Introduction

To build a future workforce capable of driving better health outcomes and preventing illness, we must ensure that nursing graduates can lead health and care across the adult population.

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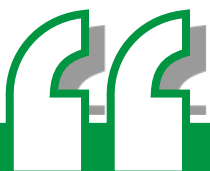
This is the first undergraduate placement strategy for social care. Providing students with interesting placements in social care will help them enhance their knowledge and clinical skills in a supportive environment. It also supports the development of a better informed, skilled, and person-centred nursing workforce for the future, while encouraging consideration of social care as a potential area of specialist practice.

Deborah Sturdy

Chief Nurse Adult Social Care, Department of Health and Social Care

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Nursing is a critical part of our social care workforce and this strategy will offer future graduates into the health and care system a clear understanding of how people drawing on care and support access health and care services. The skill and expertise of care professionals working in people's own homes and communities offers rewarding learning and development opportunities across the breadth of nursing education programmes. This strategy gives much needed recognition of the complexity, professional autonomy and leadership of nursing roles in social care.

Oonagh Smyth,
CEO, Skills for Care





This strategy, developed in collaboration with the Council of Deans of Health (CoDH) and funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) through the Skills for Care grant, aims to create stronger connections between students, universities, colleges, care providers, employers and the social care workforce to provide high quality placement opportunities in social care settings.

Adult social care is a vital and dynamic part of the health and care system. Ensuring student nurses and nursing associates complete practice placements in social care settings will support the 10 Year Health Plan, published on 3 July 2025, and the upcoming Chief Nursing Officer's strategy to "ensure that every nursing student spends sufficient time across a range of clinical settings, to create a meaningful placement experience that reflects modern practice, including a requirement for all students to have a high quality experience in neighbourhood and community settings and social care".

Expanding the diversity of practice placements will not only increase student numbers but more importantly it will enhance learners' experiences. It will provide a broader perspective on care beyond NHS hospital and community settings, resulting in a flexible and skilled workforce of empowered and autonomous practitioners ready to meet future health and care demands.

The growth of student placements will benefit social care providers by driving quality improvement, supporting integration, expanding the knowledge and skills of the workforce and encouraging a culture of learning within their setting. This approach represents a positive step forward, essential to enhancing healthcare education, expanding and enriching student experiences by offering valuable, real-world insights into the evolving landscape of care.

In social care, students will gain first-hand experience of prevention of ill health through early intervention.

They'll learn about:

- effective management of chronic conditions
- acute conditions as they present and develop
- the critical link between physical, emotional, and social support
- person-centredness, championing individuals to maintain choice and control at all stages of life including end of life care.

They'll experience:

- leadership and management skills
- autonomous decision making and advocacy
- leading diverse teams across different disciplines.

They'll see how:

- digital innovations enhance care delivery, from improved communication to the adoption of new technologies that help people stay well at home.

The strategy sets out the recommendations to ensure the future workforce has the knowledge and skills to support population health in England. A failure to achieve the recommendations of the strategy would see a catastrophic impact on our ability to deliver the health and care required for the future population. Forecasts predict our workforce must adapt and grow and this means to deliver the 10-year plan for health these recommendations are needed in the immediacy.



We are grateful to have contributed to this strategy, which places a much-needed spotlight on social care nursing – a lifeline for people and communities across the UK. It widens access to high-quality practice learning experiences, where students can build the knowledge and skills needed for 21st-century care.

Learning in varied social care settings gives students valuable insight into the realities of the role and the vital difference social care nursing makes to people's lives.

We look forward to working with our partners to support the implementation of the strategy. Together, we can ensure future nursing professionals are fully equipped to deliver safe, effective, person-centred care, wherever it's needed.

Paul Rees MBE,
NMC Interim Chief Executive and Registrar





Alignment with national policies: This strategy has been developed with direct reference to [10 Year Health Plan](#), [Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England](#), [New reforms and independent commission to transform social care](#), and the [Nursing and Midwifery Council \(NMC\) standards \(The Code, standards for student supervision and assessment, standards of proficiency for registered nurses, standards of proficiency for registered nursing associates\)](#).

Collaboration of stakeholders: Delivery of this strategic ambition will only be possible with the collaboration of those key organisations and people mentioned throughout this document including universities, colleges, the NMC, NHS England (NHSE), integrated care boards (ICBs), planners, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Council of Deans of Health (CoDH), Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Skills for Care, The Queens Institute of Community Nursing (QICN), providers, the health and care workforce, people who draw on care and support and our students. These stakeholders have been a fundamental part of the strategy development.

How to use this strategy

We recognise that universities, colleges, providers, and students are at different stages in exploring opportunities within adult social care to expand student practice learning.

This strategy focuses on four strategic objectives which have been designed to support those who are new to the process understand the benefits of offering placements as well as those looking to develop and expand their existing practice learning provision. It provides key building blocks and top tips to support and inspire you at every step of the journey.

Four strategic objectives:

1. **Understand the opportunities that social care has to offer**
2. **Facilitate access to those opportunities**
3. **Maintain and grow the quality and capacity of social care practice placements**
4. **Increase students' understanding of social care and inspire them to work in the sector**

1. Understand the opportunities that social care has to offer

Social care offers a rich and rewarding environment for practice learning as it provides invaluable hands-on experience in person-centred care. Students can develop diverse skillsets including:

- effective communication
- managing chronic and complex health conditions and equipment
- leading and managing services
- coordinating care often with high acuity within multidisciplinary teams
- leading with nursing professional practice and values across a system to support individuals at home and in communities.

With varied practice placement opportunities across England, students can explore different care settings and gain a deeper understanding of the sector's important role and interaction across health and care systems.

Government policy increasingly prioritises care closer to home and it's essential to recognise and elevate the expertise of the adult social care workforce in meeting this direction. Some examples supporting this approach include:

- neighbourhood health and integrated provision
- building stronger collaboration between social care, primary care and secondary care services.

Now is the time to engage nursing students, as well as the health and education systems, to recognise adult social care practice learning as valuable, dynamic, and enhance career and practice placement opportunities.

Many stakeholders are already embracing these opportunities and seeing the benefits of stronger partnerships, including enhanced learning experiences, improved care outcomes and lived experiences. Ultimately, they're already developing health care professionals who have a strengthened understanding of nursing professional practice across the health and care system.



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My placement has taught me to see beyond the medical model, focusing on enhancing quality of life for individuals and ensuring dignity in both living and dying. These transferable skills - empathy, holistic assessment, and adaptive communication - will shape my future practice and are vital for integrated, person-centred care.

Sean Mahoney

Second year adult and mental health nursing student, University of Exeter

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Student placements in social care settings provide opportunities for students to experience a broader range of care environments to help their development as healthcare professionals and learn different skills. This is hugely beneficial regardless of whether they ultimately choose to work in social care or not. Such opportunities can also serve as an inspiration to encourage more health care students to aspire to a career in social care.

Ed Hughes

CEO, Council of Deans of Health

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Understanding social care learning opportunities

For those new to social care there is a rich landscape of opportunities for learning and development, as well as considerations for future career paths. Social care reaches people across their lifespan and in different settings incorporating all four fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disability and children's nursing.

Social care includes residential care, some of which is nurse-led, supported living, inclusion health, extra care housing, home care, and complex home care. In these environments, students will work alongside nurses, nursing associates and care professionals, gaining hands-on experience in assessing and coordinating complex person-centred care that enhances quality of life, promotes dignity, and supports independence.

See appendix 1 for a summary of the different care settings.

Social care offers numerous opportunities for learning and development. In 2021 Skills for Care developed [How to make the most of student nurse placements in social care settings](#) which describes the context of different social care placement settings and how the NMC Standards map to these different settings and experiences.

It's important to remember while some people fund their own care, others rely on crucial support from local authorities, integrated care systems (ICS), unpaid care supported by local communities, families and friends, all of which is key to understanding a person-centred approach to care.

Establish clear communication channels

In 2023/24 [The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England](#) reported there were 18,500 different adult social care providers in England working across 40,000 establishments.

To ensure the opportunities to engage in placement activity are successful, a clear channel of communication should be established. Each establishment will have a different process, so collaborating with key stakeholders within the university, local authority, integrated care boards (ICB), and social care providers is essential.

In 2024 Skills for Care developed a guide to support [Developing nursing placement opportunities in social care](#) which consists of case studies to demonstrate the practical steps universities, colleges and providers can take to provide high quality practice placement opportunities.

Recommendations

- **University and college websites** should include a dedicated section for social care providers which includes contact information to discuss opportunities for practice placements. Websites should contain accessible information about the implications of practice placements including, for example, the costs, opportunities and tariff payments system.
- **Integrated care board websites** should have a dedicated section providing information about local universities, colleges and practice placement opportunities accentuating the learning landscape across health and social care.
- **Social care providers website and buildings** should clearly indicate that they offer learning environments for nursing students which could be awarded by universities and colleges upon completion of the education audit.

Identify learning opportunities in social care

Adult social care spans such a range of settings and, whilst has relevance across the curriculum, is a fundamental underpinning element of community and public health modules. It is therefore imperative that the nursing curriculum reflects this in content and experience across its programme delivery.

Recommendations

- **Strengthened relationships between universities and colleges and social care providers** can provide first-hand insight into contemporary social care practice and the learning opportunities available. Working collaboratively will ensure learning highlights the unique skills and proficiencies required in social care but also the transferability of that learning into other settings.
- **Alignment of social care learning opportunities with the nursing curriculum through collaborative working from universities and colleges with social care providers and people who draw on care and support.** This should consider the regulatory requirements, national policy direction, social care experience supporting guest lectures, simulation and practical learning opportunities.
- **Student practice learning based in social care provides excellent experience to embed in the nursing curriculum.** Universities and colleges should, through collaboration with providers, consider the most appropriate points in their programmes where social care practice placement experience would provide the greatest benefit to nursing students and clearly signpost relevant learning outcomes. Consideration of adult social care should be broad but also emphasised in content on the context of care, community nursing, prevention and in policy direction.

2. Facilitate access to practice placement opportunities in social care

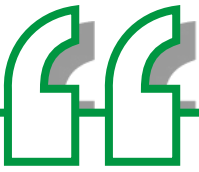
Marketing

Effective marketing that resonates the shared ambition of this strategy requires active participation from all stakeholders. Working together, we can raise awareness of social care as an integral part of the health and care system, highlight its value, and drive greater engagement with social care practice learning opportunities.

This collaborative approach demonstrates that adult social care settings foster a strong learning and development ethos, making them an attractive employment option for student nurses and nursing associates considering a career in the sector.

Recommendations

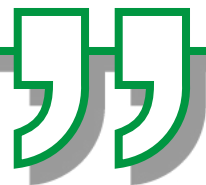
- **Inclusive student recruitment materials** should showcase the diversity of settings in which nursing professionals might work and complete their practice placements in social care.
- **A collaborative approach to student recruitment to promote nursing career opportunities and highlight the benefit of gaining experience in social care.** Universities, colleges and social care providers should work together to support the recruitment process, for example through jointly participating in careers fairs and interview processes.
- **Social care provider websites should, where possible, showcase the learning opportunities for students,** including induction information and main points of contact, showcasing examples of student stories in their practice placement, and people who draw on care and support and relatives' experiences with students.
- **Raising the profile of social care and opportunities for learning is something all stakeholders should get involved with.** For example, through social media campaigns, utilising platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn to share opportunities and success stories.
- **Careers talks and panels about the nursing profession** should ensure the representation of social care professionals to highlight the breadth of nursing and social care work. Key influencing organisations such as ICBs, NMC and RCN should raise awareness where this representation is missing and involve the sector.
- **Social care providers using apprenticeship programmes should work together to develop placement networks to offer reciprocal placements and ensure parity of opportunity for learners.** Since there is no tariff attached to apprenticeship programmes we must seek innovative and collaborative ways to ensure high quality and varied experiences.



At Exemplar Health Care, we are passionate about shaping the future of social care nursing by fostering a dynamic, forward-thinking learning environment. We actively collaborate with local universities and colleges, co-delivering immersive social care simulations, enriching curriculum content, and championing the rewarding career opportunities within the sector at recruitment fairs.

Paul Moore

Clinical Director, Exemplar Health Care Services Limited



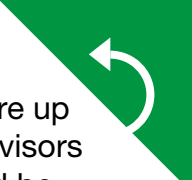
Starting practice placement opportunities in social care

Ensuring high-quality learning experiences for nursing students requires a structured and well-supported approach to practice placement management. This involves aligning practice placement opportunities with students' learning needs, maintaining compliance with NMC regulatory standards and fostering a high-quality supportive environment within social care settings.

Implementation of the following recommendations will enhance the educational quality and operational effectiveness of nursing practice placements.

Recommendations

- **Early preparation for practice placements should encourage nursing students to engage with the practice placement prior to start date.** Students should feel able to share if they require any adjustments to support their learning to enable care providers sufficient time to risk assess.
- **There should be a comprehensive induction programme in all practice learning settings developed by care providers, with support from universities and colleges if needed, to help integrate them into the practice placement.** This should include information about the organisation's values, regulatory requirements (for example, Care Quality Commission), expected behaviour, and the learning outcomes of the practice placement. Additionally, students should be allocated protected time during working hours to reflect on their practice and engage in quality improvement projects. The induction should also cover how to escalate concerns and seek support within the practice placement setting, both internally and externally.

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- **Effective coordination of practice placements by social care providers** should ensure up to date information on lead contact details and records of practice assessors and supervisors evidencing their staff remain compliant with NMC standards. Where appropriate it would be useful to consider supporting students and learners as an expectation of job descriptions of nurses and nursing associates in the care setting.
 - **Engaging staff, people drawing on care and support and their relatives and carers in the student practice placement process is essential.** Care providers' discussions with staff should focus on identifying any support or training they require to facilitate student learning or with others co-producing resources to support the learning experience.
 - **Social care facilitators responsible for student supervision need access to on-going, comprehensive and high-quality support and development** to ensure they are equipped to assess and support students effectively. This should be available through universities, colleges and local systems and be relevant to the setting and individual learning needs.
 - **Registered managers who are not registered nurses or nursing associates should have access to appropriate resources to support the understanding and implementation of NMC standards for student supervision and assessment.** The NMC and other influencing partners should develop case studies and raise awareness of the role of registered managers as practice supervisors.
 - **Working in partnership to evaluate staffing levels universities, colleges and care providers** should ensure that student practice placements can be accommodated without disrupting care delivery and that students have access to a broad range of learning experiences.
 - **Effective and mutually respectful communication between universities, colleges and social care providers is essential to successful practice learning.** Together, they should establish structured communication channels to share information such as the number of students per placement, start and end dates, the student's progress in the education programme, and contact details for both the student and the academic assessor.

Practice placement information should be shared with students in a timely manner, allowing them sufficient time to contact the provider and make all necessary practical arrangements for a successful placement.
 - **Financial and administrative processes for practice placements through tariffs must be accessible and HEIs must be transparent to social care providers** including information about approval, payment structures, schedule of payments, and clear points of contact. Where issues are raised, tariff budget holders, HEIs, universities and colleges should work with all providers of all sizes to resolve in a timely way.

3. Maintain and grow the quality and capacity of social care practice placements

Raising the profile of social care and the nursing workforce through this work will continue to grow practice placement capacity and with collaborative approaches ensure the quality of the practice placement experience is maintained.

Recommendations

- **Collaborate with stakeholders on marketing approaches** to co-produce diverse marketing materials, including podcasts, videos and social media content to raise awareness and attract students to social care practice placements.
- **Develop student ambassadors who have had positive learning experiences in social care settings** and support them to mentor peers and share their insights, fostering enthusiasm and interest in social care nursing.
- **Nursing degree programmes** should have social care nursing principles embedded throughout, ensuring students gain a comprehensive understanding of the sector, including its clinical, multiprofessional, and leadership dimensions, advancing opportunities through simulation-based learning and the integration of health and care.
- **Nursing degree programmes should have relevant educational content delivered through universities, colleges and social care providers** working together to develop social care nurses and nursing associate lecturers and engage in co-production with people who draw on care and support.
- **Social care practice placements should be evaluated and have mechanisms for feedback to providers.** This will enhance the quality of practice placements as well as foster a culture of continual professional development, including nurse led quality improvements, research, and reflective practice. Engaging students in these processes not only enriches their learning but also empowers them to contribute to service improvements, ultimately strengthening the overall quality of care.
- **Adult social care stakeholders should support “reforms to clinical placement tariffs for undergraduate and postgraduate medicine, as well as a targeted expansion of clinical educator capacity” as per the 10 Year Health Plan.**
- **Development of the social care workforce should be a shared concern for all stakeholders** driving forward initiatives that enhance the social care workforce pipeline and boost retention, including apprenticeship programmes for student nurses and nursing associates. This will ensure a skilled, supported, and sustainable workforce promoting social care and cross sector career pathways.

By adopting this comprehensive approach, universities, colleges, social care providers and policymakers can collectively enhance the quality, visibility and capacity of social care practice placements, ensuring they remain an integral and well-supported component of nursing education.

4. Increase students' understanding of social care and inspire them to work in the sector

Increasing students' understanding of social care is essential in encouraging empathy, awareness, and appreciation for the important role it plays in society.

By giving student nurses and nursing associates practice learning experiences in adult social care, they gain first-hand insight into the challenges and rewards of supporting people as close to their own home and as independently as possible.

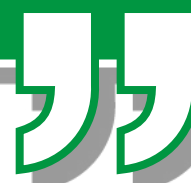
This experience helps them develop essential skills, enhances their confidence in working with diverse populations, and broadens their career perspectives. It can also inspire student nurses to consider careers in the sector, addressing workforce shortages and ensuring that compassionate, skilled professionals are available to provide high-quality care.



Whilst being a student the perception towards social care learning experiences were often criticised and overlooked. However, social care is far from it, the complexities and diverse nature of the role creates an opportunity for vast learning experiences and personal development.

Ryan Allen

Early Career Registered Social Care Nurse Learning Disabilities, Landermeads



Recommendations

- **Investing in career pathways leading to adult social care** should be of importance to all stakeholders. This might include supporting work experience, T Levels, practice learning, training and education, apprenticeships, and internships, as well as, reaching out into schools and colleges and ensuring social care is present.
- **A united and inclusive nursing profession should work together across the system** to meet the needs of learners and people drawing on care and support, breaking down stereotypes and valuing and respecting the varied roles of the profession.
- **Social care expertise should be integrated into nursing degree programmes (including foundation degree programmes for nursing associates), with local universities, colleges and providers collaborating** to support lectures and career talks as guest speakers. Providers should offer students structured learning opportunities, including quality improvement projects aligned with assignments, whilst ensuring a balanced workload.
- **Academic faculties within universities and colleges** should work towards a strong understanding of the theory of nursing in social care settings, supporting students to understand their profession in this context and consider as a viable career opportunity.
- **Academic faculties within universities and colleges should** increase students' understanding of social care practice and inspire them to work in the sector and support conversations about social care as a career.
- **Simulated learning experiences** should ensure that they can replicate social care environments allowing for realistic scenarios and hands-on learning experiences.
- **All newly registered nurses and nursing associates** should have access to high-quality preceptorship programmes offered by the care provider to ensure a supported transition from student to newly qualified.



Implementation

The success of this strategy will be achieved through the ambition of stakeholders to deliver the recommendations.

Universities, colleges and social care providers can use **these checklists** to demonstrate how they're achieving the ambitions of the strategy.

[Checklist for higher education institutions and colleges](#)

[Checklist for social care providers](#)

Concluding statements



This strategy aims to establish and sustain high-quality practice placements in social care by strengthening collaboration between universities, colleges, students, providers (or employers), and the nursing workforce. It seeks to enhance understanding, visibility, and engagement with social care settings, ensuring that nursing students and newly qualified professionals are well-prepared for the unique demands of the sector.

Caron Sanders Crook

Registered Nurse, Canford Healthcare and Social Care Nursing Advisory Council Co-Chair



This strategy, led by Skills for Care and the CoDH, is a collaboration of the recommendations core stakeholders have identified as the catalyst for change. Realisation of the ambition of the strategy would see social care take its rightful place in nursing education programmes addressing the missed opportunities and lack of understanding of the contemporary landscape of social care.

Achieving the recommendations will ensure we have a future workforce with the right knowledge and skills to meet the health and wellbeing needs of our population. It will be a conduit in the integration of health and social care, bringing the nursing profession together with mutual respect for the wide range of roles nursing plays across the lifespan.

Appendix 1

Residential nursing care

Nursing homes are a nurse led service in the community. Nurses and care staff provide 24-hour care. They support residents with complex medical and psychosocial needs, delivering person-centred care tailored to individual requirements, which can include rehabilitation, palliative care, mental health and learning disabilities and severe physical disabilities. Nurses work in partnership with residents, families and the multidisciplinary team to support residents live the life they want, and their needs are met at all stages of their life.

Residential care

Residential homes offer 24-hour care provided by highly skilled care staff who support residents' physical and psychosocial needs. While district nurses may visit to provide medical care such as insulin administration or wound care, in some areas, these tasks are delegated to care staff. Across England, there are many specialists' residential homes catering to individuals with learning disabilities and complex mental health needs. Often registered nurses may work within these settings as the registered manager.

Supported living

Supported living arrangements can be solo or shared housing, typically in houses or flats, with individuals holding their own tenancy agreements. Nurses and care staff assist with personal care, daily living activities, and accessing community services and social activities. They may also provide support with shopping and cooking. Some supported living settings offer 24-hour wrap around care and support. These accommodations primarily serve individuals with learning disabilities, behaviour that challenges and complex mental health needs. Supported living now enables people to leave hospital sooner and be supported in the community. (Only providers that offer personal care are regulated by the Care Quality Commission [CQC].)

Extra care

Extra care housing consists of self-contained flats with private front doors. Care staff are available 24 hours a day to provide tailored support, including personal care, medication management, household tasks (e.g., shopping, cleaning, and laundry), and sometimes meal services in communal areas. This type of setting can support people with a learning disability and mental health. The minimum age for extra care housing is typically 55 years old. Individuals can buy or rent these properties privately, or they may be provided by the local council following a care needs assessment. Each individual will have their own housing tenancy.

Home care (domiciliary care)

Home care services provide support to individuals in their own homes. Care staff assist with personal care, medication, household tasks, and social support. Nurses do work in home care, either as registered managers, trainers or providing front line care. Individuals do pay for this service privately, though local councils may contribute to the cost in some cases.



Complex home care (domiciliary care)

Complex home care delivers person-centred support to individuals living with chronic or long-term health conditions, helping them manage symptoms and daily tasks. This may include individuals with brain injuries, neurological conditions, strokes, spinal cord injuries, and learning disabilities. Many of these individuals require 24-hour care provided by registered nurses and care staff. The cost of this care may be covered privately, or through contributions from local councils or integrated care boards (ICBs).

Shared Lives

This is a social care service that provides people who draw on care and support the opportunity to live with a trained carer who supports them in their daily lives.

Appendix 2

Resources to support implementation of the strategy

Activity/resource	Summary
<u>Developing nursing placement opportunities in social care</u>	Guide to support the development of placement opportunities in social care for providers, approved educational institutions (AEI), supervisors and assessors.
<u>How to make the most of student nurse placements in social care settings</u>	Guide to develop understanding of the practice experience opportunities available to students in social care and to support AEIs and providers to make the most of them.
<u>Guidance: indemnity insurance and clinical negligence cover for nursing placements in social care</u>	Guidance to overcome barriers to placement activity due to insurance and liability concerns
<u>Social care nursing education forum</u>	New in 2025 for AEIs and providers of social care to come together to explore best practice, discuss and debate the value and contribution of social care to nursing education
<u>NMC guidance on registered managers as practice supervisors</u>	The NMC updated its guidance in 2024 to include “registered care home managers as suitable for being practice supervisors, as they are registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England”

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