



Step 3

# Prioritise

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### What do we know about job quality in the aged care sector?

There are some aspects of job quality that are particularly important in the aged care sector. We identified key areas of job quality that are challenging for aged care organisations using data from the 2012 National Aged Care Workforce Census and Survey.

Aged care workers gave the lowest ratings to:

- level of pay
- having enough time to provide good quality care
- freedom to decide how to do the work (autonomy)
- being under pressure at work
- feeling stressed at work.

**If we were valued as care workers we'd be earning a little bit more pay I think, than what we're earning now and people would come up and know who you are when you walk down the street.**

Care workers interviewed during the Quality Jobs Quality Care project emphasised a range of factors that impacted on their job quality:

- having enough time to provide good quality care
- manageable workloads without excessive time pressure
- having a good fit between actual and preferred hours (neither too few or too many hours)
- access to predictable and steady work hours
- rosters that are predictable, avoiding broken shifts and having some flexibility
- being respected by clients and their families, management and co-workers
- having some autonomy and discretion in how to deliver care to best meet a client's needs and circumstances
- access to regular, comprehensive and timely training delivered in a range of ways
- access to a more experienced worker as a mentor or 'buddy' for informal training and assistance
- regular communication and feedback from supervisors, managers and co-workers
- a safe working environment in which workers' physical and mental health is protected.

**More often than not we need more hours.  
We need continuity of work. We need security.**

Quality jobs result in good outcomes for workers and the organisation.

There are a range of factors you can target to improve job quality. We've developed a worksheet to help you better understand, reflect on and analyse issues in your organisation. You can use the worksheet to prioritise job quality issues; gain a deeper understanding of key aspects of job quality, including key issues or concerns to consider for each aspect of job quality; identify a specific aspect of job quality that will become the focus of your small scale change; and generate an idea or proposal for a small scale change.

You can also use the issues, concerns, questions and change ideas in this worksheet to guide engagement with other workers and stakeholders. For example, if:

- feedback from a staff survey shows that workers are not satisfied with their work hours. Use the worksheet tools on this issue to guide focus groups discussions with workers and explore possible ideas for small scale change to improve workers' satisfaction.
- you have limited information about workers' views and experiences of job quality. Invite workers to discuss how they view the quality of their jobs and priority areas for improvement using the diagram of job quality aspect and the detailed descriptions.



**Prioritise Tool 1:** Identifying and assessing job quality priorities for change in your organisation

**After completing a job quality worksheet you'll be able to:**

- review how each aspect of job quality is described to better understand job quality issues in the aged care sector
- [focus your organisation's attention](#) on a few aspects of job quality that you'd like to understand better and come up with some priority ideas for a small scale change
- discuss the selected aspects of job quality [with your stakeholders](#) and complete the worksheets in full to guide your understanding of job quality within your organisation.

## Additional resources

The report '[Developing Job Quality Benchmarks in Australian Aged Care Services](#)' describes key job quality measures in Aged Care and provides data on Australian workplaces.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has a range of resources on job quality based on the [Job Quality Framework](#)<sup>32</sup> (earnings quality, labour market insecurity, job strain). These include a database of country level data on job quality and reports on various topics including measures of job quality based on the OECD framework and the relationship between job quality and wellbeing.

The National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction has developed a workforce development toolkit ([Workforce Development TIPS \(Theory into practice strategies\): A resource kit for the Alcohol and other drugs field](#)<sup>36</sup>) for the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) workforce that contains information that may be useful for workplace small scale changes in aged care, health and other industries. The NCETA toolkit includes resources on retention, wellbeing and workplace support that may provide useful information for small scale changes addressing these aspects of job quality and worker wellbeing.

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# Case study: Learning shifts

## The challenge

To increase residential care worker participation in education and training to update relevant skills.

## The response

Learning time was scheduled into paid work hours using short learning shifts (most <1 hour duration) and enabled by backfill staffing.

**...the idea is to provide a resource to replace an individual to come out of a shift to participate in micro-training sessions. The plan is to incorporate these learning shifts into the roster...**



## How was it planned?

Learning shifts were to be conducted at one residential site. The planning process involved the Site Manager, Director for Workforce Development, Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC) and the Quality Care Quality Jobs Project researchers.

The organisation developed a planning worksheet outlining the learning shift design, the expected benefits for job and care quality and how these would be evaluated.



## Who was consulted and how?

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with staff likely to be involved with the learning shifts, including care workers, managers and other staff.

Care workers thought the short learning shifts were a good idea and worth trialling. Some adjustments were made to the design based on their feedback. These included making sure that the backfill workers who replaced care workers on learning shifts were experienced and known to clients, and strengthening the handover process as workers left and returned from learning shifts.

**Because I'm on long shift I miss out on all the training ... there is nobody to go on the floor so I can come off. I think it would be fantastic.**



## What was done?

On one day per fortnight over a six month period, up to 10 care workers each day engaged in individual consecutive learning shifts. Half of the sessions were e-learning sessions in a resource room with a computer, information sheets and a library. E-learning content included some mandatory training topics and topics chosen by individual workers or recommended by the organisation. Other learning shifts involved in-house assessment of competencies and individual coaching sessions which focused on practical hands-on skills taught by an experienced mentor. Learning achievements were recognised with certificates.

## How was it done?

Initially, care workers were invited to schedule themselves on learning shifts by responding to a promotional flyer. The CNC then scheduled the learning shifts and worked to improve uptake rates. Regular emails were also sent to care workers about the activities, timing, and learning resources available on the scheduled learning shift.

A number of staff were involved in running the learning shifts:

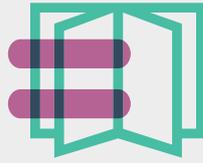
- The Clinical Nurse Consultant identified relevant learning topics and rostered backfill workers.
- An administration assistant distributed information and instructions about the learning shifts, managed resource room bookings and conducted evaluation surveys.
- A RN oversaw the shift roster and coordinated backfill workers and handover processes.



## Did it work?

Workers and managers agreed that learning shifts increased worker participation in education and training. Organisational data showed good participation in the learning shifts with 48 individual care workers attending 128 learning shift sessions.

Learning shifts were well received by care workers who reported that the learning topics were important, they learnt new skills and were confident to apply them, and that care quality had improved. In addition, care workers reported reduced time pressure, improved work-life balance and increased job satisfaction as a result of the opportunity to do training in paid work time (rather than in unpaid personal time).



**My job satisfaction is better because when you are learning new things, it stays fresh and that helps me to feel more positive about my job and I think that flows onto the residents.**

**What we learn on the learning shifts helps to improve the residents' care because you don't just learn it, you try to do it. Learning skills helps me to apply them on the floor.**

**The learning shifts have been saving time for me because I have not been doing my e-learning at home.**

### **What we learnt**

Care workers and managers identified some key areas to improve the e-learning experience and its impact on practice. Whilst e-learning was positively received by care workers, they emphasised a preference for learning using a range of formats, including face-to-face, individual and group work. Managers recognised the need for a more individualised and tailored approach to learning, including providing more support for care workers to develop individualised learning goals. The organisation recognised the value of offering a range of approaches to learning, and intended to undertake ongoing staff consultation, engagement and promotion to sustain a shared vision of learning

### **Learning Shifts are (not) the be all and end all, they're just one part of a whole range of different learning models...**

The organisation will continue refining their approach education and training, building on the lessons learned from the learning shifts, including plans to:

- improve staff rewards and recognition for ongoing learning activities
- increase available resources to support individualised learning goals and formats to recognise learning preferences.