

Being a personal assistant



Contents

This guide is for people who want to be, or are already working as, a personal assistant. It explains more about the role, why it's a great job, and how you can find work. It also has useful information about what to expect when you first start and what learning and development you could do.

1. What is a personal assistant?	5
2. What makes being a personal assistant a rewarding job?	6
3. What do personal assistants do?	7
4. Who can be a personal assistant?	8
5. The recruitment process	10
6. Starting work	12
7. Working together	15
8. Getting support	17
9. Sorting out problems	18
10. Learning and development	19
11. Frequently asked questions	20
12. How the personal assistant role fits into the world of social care and health	23
About Skills for Care	25

Acknowledgements

Our thanks goes to the members of these organisations, who worked with Skills for Care to develop this guide.



1. What is a personal assistant?

A personal assistant works directly with one or more individuals, to support them with various aspects of their daily life so that they can live it in a way they choose.

They're usually employed directly by a person who needs care and support, and who manages and pays for this through a personal budget or with their own money. This person is their employer (and are often referred to as an 'individual employer').

They can also be employed by a family member or representative, when the person they're supporting doesn't have the physical or mental capacity to be the employer.

However, a personal assistant always works directly with the individual they're supporting. It's most likely that this should be through an employed arrangement, rather than being self-employed.

As a personal assistant you're likely to be involved in many aspects of your employer's life, and may be asked to provide support in the home, at leisure or at work. The opportunity to focus directly on the needs of an individual, and the diversity of the role, is what often attracts people to this type of work.



I like to see the smile on Anne's face and the difference I can make to her life, making it possible to live her life the way she wants and take part in the things she wants.

Kelly, Personal Assistant



2. What makes being a personal assistant a rewarding job?

Working as a personal assistant has a number of advantages.

Job satisfaction



Because you're employed directly by the individual, you'll support them for the time they need, and tasks can be done well without the need to rush off. This also means you can build a longer term professional relationship with your employer.

Flexible



Individual employers might need support with different parts of their life, at different times of the day, which means you can find a job with hours to suit when you're able to work, around your other commitments. You can also work for more than one person if you want to.

Varied



There are opportunities to provide a wide range of support for different individual employers, who want or need different things. You could also work with someone who has the same interests as yourself.

Attractive pay and employment conditions



As a personal assistant you can often be better paid than working through an agency, and are more likely to have permanent working hours.



There's plenty of times I've left work feeling uplifted. It's very rewarding to help other people and see how you make a difference to their lives.

Elem, Personal Assistant

3. What do personal assistants do?

The role of a personal assistant is extremely varied and no two jobs will ever be the same. This is because the individual employer can choose exactly how they want you to support them.

As a personal assistant you may be supporting an individual employer:

- at their place of work or education
- to maintain relationships with family and friends, including supporting them with childcare
- to meet new people and develop new friendships
- to get about in the community, by providing transport, driving their car or using public transport
- to maintain hobbies and interests, like going to the cinema, gigs, swimming or going on holiday
- by providing personal care, including support to dress, wash and bathe
- to communicate their wants and needs
- by carrying out household tasks like cooking, cleaning, meal preparation, shopping, organising paperwork, and, in some cases, pet care
- by going with them to their hospital and other appointments
- to recover their mental health by helping to manage their anxiety about going out
- to become healthier after a physical illness, for example, through a better diet or more exercise
- to develop a new skill or get a job.

Some personal assistants may carry out, with adequate training, certain health care related tasks.

Not all personal assistants will be employed to carry out all of these tasks – it may be that your employer wants support with just one of these tasks. Quite often the role can be about companionship and having a shared interest in things like music, politics or sport.

You can watch videos about being a personal assistant on the 'Information hub for individual employers and PAs' at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/PA.









[Claire] has such a variety of activities, so one day we could be chilling at home watching movies and having girl time, or other times we could be at the zoo or going to the theatre.

Caroline, Personal Assistant

4. Who can be a personal assistant?

When employing a personal assistant, individual employers often look for someone who is a good personal fit. It's not always about previous experience and qualifications – what's really important is that you have the right values and skills to do the job.

Anyone can be a personal assistant as long as they:

	enjoy helping people to live their life in the way that they choose
	would like to support others to make a real change to their life
	are comfortable working on their own or with other personal assistants as part of a team
	have the ability to develop a strong, trusting relationship with their employer
	understand that they are an employee and not a friend
	understand that they do not direct the work, but that their employer does.



To work as a personal assistant, you don't necessarily need to have any previous experience or qualifications – what's important is having the right values because your employer will rely on you for support.

Carol Reeves, Project Manager, Skills for Care

As a personal assistant you should:



To find out if you've got what it takes to work as a personal assistant, try the 'A Question of Care' interactive video challenge.

Visit: www.aquestionofcare.org.uk and select the 'personal assistant' scenario.

5. The recruitment process

Where to find a job

There are lots of ways to find a job as a personal assistant, and here are a few examples of where to look. You may also be able to find a job through friends or family.



Understanding the role before you apply

Being a personal assistant can involve different tasks. The individual employer will have an idea of the type of person they're looking for and an outline of what they want them to do. This will usually be set out in a job description.

Before applying for a job, read the advert and job description carefully so that you're clear about the tasks you're going to be asked to do. It's important to make sure you can do them all, because, for example, there would be no point in applying for a job that involves going swimming twice a week if you don't like water.

Your employer's needs could change over time or even day to day, so it's important to review the job description regularly to make sure that everything works well between you and your employer.

As a personal assistant it's important to be flexible, however if you feel you're asked to do anything outside of what you expect, it's vital to have a conversation with your employer to clear up any issues and continue a good working relationship.

Getting the job

When applying for the job, you may be asked to provide a CV (curriculum vitae - a written overview of your skills, experience and qualifications) or fill in an application form, so that the individual employer can find out more about you and your experience. If all goes well, you should be invited to an interview, so that they can meet you and get to know you better.

The interview may be very informal and could be held at a different location to where you'll be actually working. During the interview remember to be yourself, talk about relevant experience and qualities and be prepared to ask questions. The National Careers Service has interview hints and tips on their website.

After the interview you should be contacted to let you know if you were successful or not. If you haven't heard anything after a few weeks, contact the person who interviewed you. If you weren't successful, you may want to ask for feedback to help you with future interviews.

If you're successful, you should then agree a start date, and you may be provided with an employment contract, so that you can be sure of what the job involves.

Checks and references

It's strongly recommended that employers carry out recruitment checks on potential personal assistants before offering a contract. So if you're offered the job, your future employer will likely want to carry out some checks.

These may include references, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (formerly know as CRB) and right to work checks.

You should bear this in mind when applying for jobs and be prepared to give names of former employers and/or character references. You may also need to provide forms of identification as specified by the Disclosure and Barring Service or the Home Office.

6. Starting work

Getting off to a good start with your employer is very important. A way to do this is through a probationary period and a thorough induction.

Probationary period

This is a two-way trial period that gives both you and your new employer a chance to get to know each other, and to make sure that you're suited to the job without committing yourself completely.

Your new employer should set the probationary period, for example three months, and may want to meet with you during that time so you can both talk about what's working well or not going so well. They may also use this an opportunity to talk about any training that you need.

Induction

What is it and when should it take place?

Induction is an introduction to everything related to the job you'll be doing and the environment in which you'll be working. It will usually be carried out by your employer and could be as simple as turning up on your first day and being guided through what to do and what's expected of you. It's about getting to know each other and developing your working relationship.









An induction will help you settle into your role quickly and can also be the start of your ongoing learning and development.

An induction should take place within the first few days and weeks of you starting your new job. If your employer doesn't do an induction, you should ask for one – Skills for Care's 'Employing personal assistants' toolkit provides information about induction for the employer: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/employingpas.



What does it include?

Your induction will be determined by the tasks you'll be expected to do, your working environment and your employer. Use this list as a guide of what should be included.

	Your employer explaining what they want you to do, and showing you around your place of work.
	Your employer explaining what support they require and how they prefer to be supported.
	Key aspects of your employment contract, such as working hours, probation period, holidays, sick pay, maternity and parental leave and responsibilities.
	A discussion about professional and personal boundaries.
	If you're working as part of a team, an introduction to the other personal assistants.
	The house rules, for example, accepting personal calls whilst at work, smoking in the house, leaving the back door open and using tea and coffee in agreed breaks.
	Identifying any specific areas for training, for example, first aid or using specialist equipment.
	Other information that could be valuable, for example, whether there is a back-up plan should you be delayed or are unable to come in, the arrangements to implement the back-up plan and how to report incidents or accidents.

An induction may also involve the opportunity to shadow more experienced personal assistants.

The Care Certificate is designed for staff who are new to care. It's an identified set of standards that social care and health workers adhere to in their daily working lives. Although the Care Certificate is not compulsory for personal assistants, your employer may use the standards to structure your induction. If you successfully complete all the standards, you may be awarded The Care Certificate.

Find out more about the Care Certificate at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/carecertificate.



Employment contract: employment conditions, rights, responsibilities, duties

Your employer should provide you with an employment contract.

An employment contract is important because it's an agreement between you and your employer, and sets out your employment conditions, rights, responsibilities, duties and things like holidays, notice period, how to deal with a grievance, disciplinary procedures and sick pay.

If your employer doesn't provide you with a contract, you should ask them for one.

Skills for Care's 'Employing personal assistants' toolkit shows you the information that your employer should provide, and there's a template that you could show your employer if they need further information.

The contract can be a useful tool for sorting out any disagreements or disputes, as it's a record of what you and your employer have agreed and can be used to clear up any misunderstandings.

7. Working together



Managing your working relationship

As a personal assistant you'll have a unique relationship with your employer. You're supporting them to do the things they're not able to do and although this can feel like a personal relationship, it's not. Remember you're the employee and you need to remain independent and professional.

It's important to understand the impact that certain circumstances may have on your employer, for example, if you don't or can't turn up to work.

There are times when being a personal assistant could be personally difficult or emotional, particularly if it involves working with a person at the end of their life. It may feel like you're supporting your employer's family as well.

As such, there may, from time to time, be problems with the relationship between you and your employer.

Any problems should be addressed properly and as laid out within the terms of your employment contract.

You should discuss how issues can be addressed early on in your relationship with your employer.

Performance appraisal or supervision

Your employer may want to meet with you regularly (for example, once a month) to talk about how you're doing in your job.

It's a two way discussion and gives your employer a chance to assess whether you're working in a way they want, to give constructive feedback and it gives you both time to address any problems and find solutions. It may also include discussions around your learning and development.

Your employer should keep a record of your discussions.

Health and safety

Because your employer's home will be your place of work, it's their responsibility to ensure you have a safe place to work, and they may carry out a risk assessment. You should speak with your employer about any risks or hazards that you've noticed.

It's also your responsibility to make your employer aware of anything that may impact on your health and safety, for example, pregnancy in a job that requires heavy lifting.

Your employer should keep a record of your discussion, especially in relation to risks and hazards.

It's good to keep an accident/incident book, so that anything out of the ordinary can be noted down.

Lone working

Being a personal assistant may mean you work alone with your employer, which is often referred to as 'lone working'. It's important to be aware of your safety and that of your employer.

It's advisable for your employer (or someone supporting them) to carry out a lone working risk assessment to identify any risks, and ensure that actions are put in place to minimise/mitigate these risks. You should make sure that somebody knows when and where you're working at all times, and that you have an emergency contact.

Safeguarding

You may need to attend safeguarding training so that you're able to identify when your employer may be at risk or suffering any type of abuse. If you think that your employer is being abused, you have a duty to contact your local council's safeguarding board.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is important for both you and your employer. Your employer will hold confidential information about you and you'll have access to personal information about your employer.

You should discuss, with your employer, who you can share information with, for example, their doctor, and under what circumstances.

No information should be shared with anyone against your employer's wishes. This includes sharing personal information about your employer on social media, such as Facebook or Twitter.

However, in extreme circumstances, for example a medical emergency, or if you feel there's a safeguarding issue, then you may have to share personal information without your employer's consent.

Confidential information should always be kept securely so that other people aren't able to access it.

8. Getting support

Your working environment is a unique one. You might often work alone with your employer and have very few colleagues that you see regularly to share issues/concerns with or get support from.

Sometimes this can feel very isolating, however, there are ways to overcome this. You might value talking about what you do and here are some ways you can do this.

Peer support

Peer support is when people share their knowledge and experience, and provide emotional, social or practical help to each other. It can take different forms, for example through a personal assistant network, support group or forum. These may be online, or in face to face groups that meet regularly. It's a great way to share experiences and speak with other personal assistants who understand the unique nature of the role. If you can't find a network in your area, you may want to consider starting one.

Support organisations

There are a number of organisations that support individual employers and personal assistants. There may be one in your area that can offer advice and guidance.

Visit the 'In your area' section of the 'Information hub for individual employers and PAs' at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iepahub.

Unions

Unions can help their members resolve problems or issues related to work and can offer confidential advice, support and guidance. There's usually a fee for joining a union and in return you'll receive a number of benefits. For example, Unison has a personal assistant support network.

Enrol on a training course

Training courses can be an excellent way of meeting people who do a similar job to yourself. It's also an opportunity to seek advice from the person carrying out the training.

Speak to your employer or local support organisation about training.



9. Sorting out problems

Be clear from the start

At the start of your employment, you and your employer should establish boundaries about how you'll relate to each other, and discuss how you'll deal with any problems, for example, if boundaries have become blurred or if either of you are unhappy with something.

Talk to your employer

Just as your employer will expect you to fulfil your employment duties, you have a right to expect your employer won't do anything which puts you in danger or ask you to break the law.

If you feel that your employer is asking you to do something that's risky or goes against what you've been trained to do, you should speak with them. If this doesn't sort out the issues, then speak to others, for example the employer's family, friends or professionals working with them.

Communication is vital to sorting out any problems. The quicker it's talked about the faster it can be sorted, and it stops small issues becoming larger problems.

Getting help and advice

In all cases, it's recommended that you raise any concerns with your employer sooner rather than later, so that any issues/concerns can be sorted out amicably.

However, if you're unable to resolve the issue directly and need employment advice you can contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). Find out more on their website at: www.acas.org.uk.

You can also get advice from your union (if you're a member) or local support organisations, for example peer groups.



10. Learning and development



Learning and development will help you to do your job better and safer.

There are lots of different ways you can learn. This may be shadowing a more experienced colleague, being trained by your employer, doing an apprenticeship, gaining knowledge through reading or more formal training where you gain a recognised qualification.

Speak to your employer about your learning and development and how it can help to meet their needs.

Money for training

Completing a training course does take time and usually costs money.

Your employer can apply for funding from Skills for Care to cover the full cost (including travel and personal assistant cover expenses) of care related training. The funding can be used for short courses and full qualifications.

As a personal assistant, you could highlight this funding to your employer and, if necessary, support them to complete an application form. For more information about the funding visit:

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/iefunding.

If your employer is receiving funding from their local authority or from the NHS (usually a direct payment), they may pay for training or offer free training.

If your employer pays for your training, they may ask you to sign an agreement that states you'll pay back the cost of the training if you leave their employment before the training is completed, or within a certain time period after you've completed the training.

Further career options

Adult social care is a growing sector which offers a range of rewarding careers, with many different job roles and lots of opportunities for progression. For more information about health and social care careers visit:

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/carecareers or www.nhscareers.nhs.uk.

11. Frequently asked questions

Are there any standards or codes of practices for PAs?

There are no standards or codes of practice for personal assistants, but it may be relevant for your role to follow the 'Dignity in Care' advice (available at: www.dignityincare.org.uk) and the 'Code of Practice for social care workers' (available at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/codeofpractice). You should discuss this with your employer.

Can a personal assistant be self-employed rather than being an employee?

Personal assistants, under HMRC rules, usually work under an employed arrangement.

Skills for Care's 'Understanding the employment status of personal assistants' guide may be helpful, and you can download it at: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/PAemploymentstatus.

You can also check any employment arrangement directly with HMRC, by using their 'Check employment status for tax' tool at: www.gov.uk/guidance/check-employment-status-for-tax.

Do I have to have my own insurance?

It's the responsibility of your employer to have insurance. The types of insurance they're likely to have are public and employer's liability insurance. If you're using your car in relation to your employment, you'll need to ensure it's insured for business use.

What happens if I'm ill?

As an employee you're entitled to statutory sick pay, and the details should be included in your employment contract. Your employer should have a plan in place if you're unable to work and for when you're on holiday. You should speak to your employer if you're not sure about this. Find out more at: www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay/overview.

Do I get help with childcare?

It's unlikely that individual employers will run a child care voucher scheme, but you may be entitled to Tax Credits and free pre-school child care. For more information visit: www.gov.co.uk.

A previous employer told me that health and safety issues were his responsibility, and if he decided it was safe to do something, then I had to do it. Is this correct?

This may not always be the case. All workers are entitled to work in environments where risks to their health and safety are properly controlled. Under health and safety law, the primary responsibility for this is down to your employer.

You also have a duty to take care of your own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by your actions at work. You must co-operate with your employer and co-workers to help everyone meet their legal requirements.

If you have specific queries or concerns relating to health and safety in your workplace, talk to your employer.

If you think your employer is exposing you to risks or is not carrying out their legal duties in regards to health and safety, and this has been pointed this out to them and no satisfactory response has been received, you can make a complaint to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Will I get travel to work costs?

No, you would not normally get travel to work costs.

Can I work with more than one person? If so, do I have to tell my current employer?

Yes, you can be employed by more than one person. You should tell your current employer if you plan to do a second job, so that they can make sure they follow any regulations, like The Working Time Directive.

My employer finds it difficult to give me holidays, can I find cover for them?

That depends on what your employer wants to do. Sometimes employers could ask you to find cover but it's not your responsibility. You can, and should, say no if you're not able to do this.

If you do know of someone who would cover holidays, it remains your employer's responsibility to ensure that this person is interviewed, suitable for the work and has a contract.

What hours can I expect to work?

Your working hours will be decided by your employer and will be set out in your contract of employment. This can range from a few hours a week to a full working week. Quite often, employers are looking for some flexibility within an agreed number of hours, for example, working Monday and Tuesday one week, Thursday and Friday the next, but this should be explained at interview. If you also work for someone else and your hours clash, you may be able to negotiate with a new employer. However, it's your employer who ultimately decides your working week.

Can I do my own shopping at the same time as doing the employer's shopping?

It wouldn't be usual for most employment situations to allow employees to do their shopping at work. However, because of the nature of this work, if you're going shopping with your employer, it might be ok with them if you pick up a few bits. It's up to them, but never assume this is ok.

Do personal assistants maintain contact with social care or health services?

An individual employer may or may not have ongoing support from social services or health services. Either way, you, as a personal assistant, should not be expected to have direct contact with social care or health services unless your employer has asked you to do this on their behalf or you're supporting them at appointments.

What do I do if I think someone is being mistreated?

Each local authority has a policy that helps people know what to do if they suspect that an adult or a child is being mistreated. This is usually called a safeguarding policy.

It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with what safeguarding is about and who to contact, by looking on your local council's website.

Speak Up provide free, independent, confidential advice. Visit the website at: <https://speakup.direct>.

Will I have to sort out my own tax and national insurance?

No. You will be employed directly by your employer who will sort out your pay, tax, national insurance and pension contributions. Some employers use a wages/payroll agency/bureau to sort out your pay every month.

How easy is it to find work?

You may be able to find work as a personal assistant through word of mouth and by being aware of where jobs are advertised. Being confident in your skills and letting people know about the way you work opens up opportunities.

Who is my employer?

The employer is the person that recruits you to support them. All employment responsibility lies with the individual, and not with the local authority, health service or any introductory services.

What do I get paid?

Your employer will agree with you the rate of pay and how often you'll be paid (for example, monthly or weekly). However, the employer will be made aware of minimum wage requirements by the local authority, health service or direct payment support organisation.

Who pays me?

Your employer will be responsible for paying you, however they can choose to do that through a payroll service.

Will I get a payslip?

Yes, by law you must receive a payslip.

How much holiday pay am I eligible to?

The amount of holiday pay that you're entitled to depends on the number of hours you work. Use a holiday calculator to work out what you should expect, for example you can access one at: www.gov.uk/calculate-your-holiday-entitlement.

12. How the personal assistant role fits into the world of social care and health

The social model of disability and person-centred practice

The social model is a way of understanding disability. It says that disability is created by barriers in society which generally falls into three categories:

- the environment - including inaccessible buildings and services
- people's attitudes - stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice
- organisations - inflexible policies, practices and procedures.

Using the social model helps identify solutions to the barriers that disabled people experience. It encourages the removal of these barriers within society, or the reduction of their effects, rather than trying to fix an individual's impairment or health condition.

The social model is the preferred model for disabled people, and encourages society to be more inclusive.

Personalisation and person-centred care is about individuals being in control of building a system of care and support that's designed with their full involvement, and tailored to meet their own unique needs.

Direct payments

Individuals choose to employ their own personal assistants, rather than having care and support arranged for them, because it gives them more control of where and when they have support, as well as control over deciding who will provide this support.

Most individuals who employ a personal assistant have something called a 'direct payment'. They receive this direct payment after having an assessment of their needs by either a social services department or the local health service. This money is for individuals to buy their own care and support from care organisations, specialist equipment and/or employ their own personal assistants. Not everyone who employs a personal assistant will have a personal budget. People who are able to, can fund their own care and support needs - they may be called 'self-funders'.

Direct payments have been in existence for many years, but their use has increased in recent years.

About Skills for Care

Skills for Care helps create a well-led, skilled and valued adult social care workforce.

We do this by helping employers to get the best from their most valuable resource - their people. Our practical support helps employers **recruit**, **develop** and **lead** their staff - and retain them.

We're a trusted independent charity with over 18 years' experience, working as a delivery partner for the Department of Health and Social Care. We also work closely with related services such as health and housing.

Our local area teams provide information on our tools, offer tailored support and can put you in touch with local networks, initiatives and opportunities.

Find out more by taking a look at our website: www.skillsforcare.org.uk.

West Gate
6 Grace Street
Leeds
LS1 2RP
Tel: 0113 245 1716
www.skillsforcare.org.uk





twitter.com/skillsforcare

facebook.com/skillsforcare

linkedin.com/company/skills-for-care

Skills for Care
West Gate
6 Grace Street
Leeds
LS1 2RP

T: 0113 245 1716

E: info@skillsforcare.org.uk

skillsforcare.org.uk