

Personal assistants and self-directed support: considering the role of a personal assistant?

This short booklet provides information and guidance for people who are working as or considering a career as a personal assistant (PA).

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The role of a PA

The Scottish Government defines a PA as:

An employee of a person needing care or support. If the person is under 16 or has an appointed decision maker, the parent or guardian/person with power of attorney is the employer.

The role of a PA can be varied, challenging and rewarding.

The objective of the PA is to provide practical support and assistance to their employer (the person with a disability, impairment or long-term condition) to live a full and active life at home and as part of their community.

The role of the PA is varied and may include elements of both care and support.

Who is my employer?

The employer of a PA is the person who is in receipt of a direct payment. This is normally the person needing care and support or someone acting on their behalf.

For children and young adults, this will normally be their parent or guardian.

Some people may have a family member or appointed person to manage their direct payment and take on the role of employer on their behalf.

Your contract of employment or statement of main terms will name your employer.

What can I expect from the role?

The role of PA is unique in that every supported person will require different levels and types of support.

This can vary from straightforward tasks such as assisting the person to get up, washed and dressed, prepare meals and support the person to achieve a more active and fulfilling social life.

PAs may also need to provide medical support such as making sure the supported person is able to and, regularly takes, any prescribed medication, assisting with basic physiotherapy and exercise.

No two roles will be the same as each job will be specific to the needs of the supported person.

Your PA employer will work closely with you to identify any training needs and secure suitable training to ensure you are able to fulfill your duties.

Your objective is to make sure the person you support remains healthy and happy and with this, comes a sense of real personal achievement and satisfaction.

What rights do I have as a PA?

PAs have the same statutory (legal) rights as any other employee in the UK, this includes the right to:

- statutory holiday pay
- statutory maternity/paternity/adoption leave (if applicable)
- statutory sick pay
- statutory redundancy pay
- a statement of main terms or contract of employment
- access your employer's pension scheme
- not be unfairly dismissed
- join a trade union
- work in a safe environment.

Within various aspects of employment and related laws, your employer has the flexibility to offer additional benefits such as enhanced rates of pay for overtime and public holidays and funding for job specific training.

Hourly rate of pay

Most PA employers will pay their employees an hourly rate of pay rather than an

annual salary.

From 1 April 2016 all employers in the UK must pay at least the national living wage and many PA employers pay more than this.

The hourly rate of pay will be determined by your employer based on the level of funding provided by the funding body and amount of support they require.

Your hourly rate of pay will be contained in the statement of main terms along with any enhancements such as rate of remuneration for using your own vehicle (if this is required), any enhanced rate of pay for overtime worked or time worked on recognised public holidays.

If you are unsure or unclear on any part of your contract of employment you should speak with your PA employer in the first instance.

What will the hours of work be?

The hours of work will be determined by the employer and will be contained in the statement of main terms. This may be in the form of a basic number of hours of work per week or set shifts each week.

PA employment can be very flexible and contracts can range from a few hours each week to full-time equivalent roles depending on the needs of the supported person.

You should be careful not to overcommit yourself as it is important to remember your employer will be depending on you being reliable and punctual.

What skills do I need?

What you should remember is that your goal is to help the supported person achieve the objectives and aspirations set out in their support plan and your role is to enable that.

Skills such as flexibility, creativity and empathy will usually be helpful.

If the supported person has specific needs, such as assistance in moving or taking medication, your PA employer should make sure you receive proper training to do these duties.

Where can I find vacancies?

Currently, there is no single place for potential PA employers to advertise their vacancies but you can ask any locally based support organisation if they are aware of people seeking PAs as they often support the PA employers and may have knowledge of local vacancies.

Many PA employers advertise their vacancies in the local job centre and local newspapers.

Often PAs find work with people they already know or through mutual friends. While you and the employer may have known each other for a long period of time, you should be aware that your employer should and is entitled to ask you to join the PVG Scheme and provide references from previous employers.

You should not be offended by such requests. This is normal recruitment and selection practice and protects both you and your employer.

If you are considering being employed by a friend or family member, you should consider how your role as an employee may impact on your relationship as a friend/relative.

There are guidelines on when it is appropriate to employ a family member and this can only be done where the local authority agrees to the arrangement.

This may be the role for me

We know from other PAs that this can be a very rewarding and fulfilling job and can often lead to other careers in social care or provide the kind of flexible, enjoyable role that fits in with your personal life.

If you think this may be the role for you, we have a useful online tool [A Question of Care](http://www.sssc.uk.com/your-career-in-care/are-you-thinking-of-care-as-a-career/a-question-of-care) (www.sssc.uk.com/your-career-in-care/are-you-thinking-of-care-as-a-career/a-question-of-care) that may help you think about the personal attributes that would assist you in the role of PA.

Support resources

Unison and the Worker's Educational Association (WEA) have a joint project to support PAs across Scotland. Visit their website www.panetworkscotland.org.uk or find them on Facebook (Personal Assistants Project Scotland).

The SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Services Workers and Employers will help you think about the core values of a role in social care. You can download the Codes here www.sssc.uk.com/about-the-sssc/codes-of-practice/what-are-the-codes-of-practice

What other PAs say about the role

'A very rewarding, worthwhile job.'

'This job is very rewarding to know that you are making a difference between someone being in care or being able to live a reasonably independent life in their own home is immeasurable.'

'I enjoy my role as a PA and find the work challenging as well as rewarding.'

'It is a very good experience indeed, my skills from working in a care home has helped me but what I like best is that as a PA, I focus completely on one individual, supporting them to remain at home where they feel relaxed and have their family around them.'

Helpful resources

[Scottish Government Personal Assistant Employer's Handbook](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00447315.pdf)

www.gov.scot/Resource/0044/00447315.pdf

[Self Directed Support](http://www.selfdirectedsupportscotland.org.uk)

www.selfdirectedsupportscotland.org.uk

[Scottish Social Services Council \(SSSC\)](http://www.sssc.uk.com)

www.sssc.uk.com

[ACAS](http://www.acas.org.uk)

www.acas.org.uk

[Personal Assistant Network Scotland](http://www.panetworkscotland.org.uk)

www.panetworkscotland.org.uk

[Self-Directed Support Scotland \(SDSS\)](http://www.sdsscotland.org.uk)

www.sdsscotland.org.uk