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# ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES IN UK CARE HOMES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS LINKED TO CQC STANDARDS AND UK POLICY



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# Enrichment Activities in UK Care Homes: A Critical Analysis Linked to CQC Standards and UK Policy

This short paper gives an analysis of enrichment activities happening in UK Care Homes and links to the policy context and evidence to better support the deployment of THE DOMES and our proposed Train the Trainer model of delivery.

## Introduction

Enrichment activities are a fundamental component of holistic care within UK care homes, contributing significantly to residents' physical, psychological, and social wellbeing. These activities include physical exercise, creative engagement, cognitive stimulation, and social interaction, all of which aim to enhance quality of life. While policy and regulation—particularly through the Care Quality Commission (CQC)—strongly emphasise person-centred and meaningful engagement, there remains a notable gap between regulatory expectations and real-world practice.

This short paper critically evaluates enrichment activities in UK care homes, linking them not only to CQC standards but also to recent UK health and social care policy, including (i) NHS Long Term Plan, (ii) Health and Care Act 2022, and (iii) Better Care Fund. It argues that while policy strongly supports person-centred, preventative, and integrated care, structural constraints limit the effective delivery of meaningful enrichment.

## The Role of Enrichment Activities in Care

Enrichment activities support residents beyond physical care by promoting identity, autonomy, and social inclusion. Person-centred approaches emphasise tailoring activities to individual histories and preferences (Kitwood, 1997). Evidence shows that such engagement improves wellbeing, reduces behavioural symptoms in dementia, and enhances quality of life (Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2010).

Importantly, these outcomes align closely with current UK policy priorities, particularly the shift toward prevention and wellbeing, rather than purely medicalised care. The NHS Long Term Plan explicitly promotes moving care away from hospitals and towards community-based, person-centred support. Enrichment activities therefore play a direct role in achieving national health objectives.

## CQC Framework and Regulatory Expectations

The Care Quality Commission assesses care homes across five areas: Safe, Effective, Caring, Responsive, and Well-led (CQC, 2023). Enrichment activities are particularly relevant to:

- **Caring:** Promoting dignity, compassion, and emotional wellbeing
- **Responsive:** Meeting individual needs through personalised engagement
- **Well-led:** Demonstrating leadership that prioritises quality of life

## Alignment with Recent UK Policy

### 1. NHS Long Term Plan and Enhanced Health in Care Homes

The NHS Long Term Plan represents a major shift toward preventative, personalised, and integrated care. A key initiative is the Enhanced Health in Care Homes (EHCH) model, which promotes proactive, multidisciplinary care centred on residents' needs. This policy has direct implications for enrichment activities:

- Emphasis on personalised care planning aligns with tailored activities
- Focus on wellbeing and prevention supports social and cognitive engagement
- Integration of services encourages collaboration with community and voluntary groups

Critically, enrichment activities can be seen as a practical mechanism for delivering EHCH goals, particularly in improving mental wellbeing and reducing hospital admissions.

## 2. Health and Care Act 2022

The Health and Care Act 2022 reinforces integration between health and social care systems and supports the development of Integrated Care Systems (ICSs). This has implications for enrichment:

- Encourages joined-up care, including social and emotional wellbeing
- Recognises that health outcomes are influenced by social factors, not just clinical care
- Supports collaboration that could expand activity provision (e.g. partnerships with organisations such as Community Care Gaming)

However, critics argue that while structural integration is promoted, funding and workforce challenges remain unresolved, limiting real-world impact.

## 3. Better Care Fund and Prevention Agenda

The Better Care Fund supports integration between NHS and local authorities, with a focus on:

- Prevention
- Independence
- Community-based care

Recent policy emphasises helping people “live independently... with dignity and respect. Enrichment activities directly contribute to these goals by:

- Reducing loneliness and deterioration
- Supporting independence and mental health
- Preventing crises that lead to hospitalisation

## 4. Emerging Social Care Reforms

Recent policy discussions highlight ongoing reform challenges, including proposals for a National Care Service and increased investment in community-based support. However, delays and funding uncertainties persist, with concerns that reform timelines are too slow to address urgent needs.

*This reinforces a key issue: Policy ambition is high, but implementation remains inconsistent and under-resourced.*

### Strengths of Enrichment Activities in Policy and Practice

A major strength is the strong alignment between enrichment and national policy goals:

- Person-centred care (CQC, Care Act principles)
- Prevention and wellbeing (NHS Long Term Plan)
- Integration (Health and Care Act 2022)

In practice, many care homes demonstrate innovation through:

- Intergenerational programmes
- Sensory and dementia-friendly activities
- Use of digital tools

These reflect policy ambitions for modern, holistic care which are well suited to Community Care Gaming and our offering.

## Key Issues and Challenges

Despite strong policy support, several barriers limit effectiveness:

**Staffing Constraints:** Workforce shortages reduce time for meaningful engagement (Skills for Care, 2022), undermining both CQC standards and policy goals around personalised care.

**Tokenistic Provision:** Activities may exist but lack depth or personalisation, limiting their impact and failing to meet “Responsive” care standards.

**Funding Pressures:** Although policies like the Better Care Fund aim to support integration, funding remains insufficient relative to demand, leading to inequality between care homes.

**Policy–Practice Gap:** While policies emphasise prevention and wellbeing, care homes often prioritise basic care needs over enrichment due to resource constraints.

**Inequality and Access:** Policy frameworks promote fairness, yet variation in provision suggests unequal implementation across regions and providers.

## Critical Evaluation

There is strong conceptual alignment between enrichment activities and UK policy frameworks. However, a key tension exists:

- Policy promotes holistic, person-centred care, but system pressures prioritise task-based care.
- The NHS Long Term Plan and Health and Care Act 2022 both advocate integration and prevention, yet without sufficient workforce and funding, these goals remain difficult to achieve in practice.
- Furthermore, CQC inspections may not fully capture the quality of lived experience, meaning care homes can meet standards without delivering truly meaningful engagement.

## Conclusion

Enrichment activities are central to delivering high-quality, person-centred care and are strongly supported by both the Care Quality Commission framework and wider UK policy. The NHS Long Term Plan, Health and Care Act 2022, and Better Care Fund all emphasise prevention, integration, and wellbeing principles that enrichment activities directly support. However, systemic challenges including staffing shortages, funding limitations, and inconsistent implementation prevent these policies from being fully realised.

To meet both CQC standards and national policy goals, care homes must:

- Embed enrichment into daily care
- Invest in workforce training
- Strengthen leadership and organisational culture

Ultimately, enrichment activities should be recognised not as optional extras, but as essential to achieving dignity, wellbeing, and quality of life in care. In this context the work of Community Care Gaming can help Care Homes meet both CQC standards and national policy goals as above.

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