



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**  
Social Care **Wales**

# Social work workforce plan: 2022 to 2025

A plan to identify actions to support the social work profession to address the challenges it currently faces, so that it can provide the best possible care and support to people.

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**Our aim:** to build confidence in the workforce, and lead and support improvement in social care.

## Introduction

We've developed this plan in response to a specific action in [\*A Healthier Wales – Our Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care\*](#). Our aim “to build confidence in the workforce and lead and support improvement in social care” is at its heart.

Social work exists for a purpose – to assess the need for care and support services to make sure well-being is in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Social work is changing. It's becoming more complex because people have more demanding social, health and care needs. To respond to this, we need practitioners who stay in the sector for a long time and are dedicated to supporting and improving the everyday lives of the people and families they work with.

This workforce plan builds on our work with the sector to change how we:

- register and regulate, with a greater focus on workforce well-being and positive mental health
- develop skills and knowledge to meet future demand
- use technology better
- build and improve social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce
- give strategic and practical support for the social work profession.

This plan focuses on building and nurturing excellent professional practice. It recognises this needs to include supporting all social workers to:

- feel cared for
- work in a compassionate and inclusive culture
- feel valued for their contribution.

This has been, and is still, a very challenging time for everyone as we adapt to new ways of working. We want to thank everyone who took the time to help us develop this workforce plan. Your input, feedback and support have been very valuable.

We look forward to working with colleagues across Wales and our partners to put this workforce plan into action.

Thank you.

## **How we developed the social work workforce plan**

We developed the social work workforce plan after talking to stakeholders and partners.

Their input and feedback helped us shape the first draft of a document we wrote in spring 2021. This was the start of a long period of working with:

- the social work workforce
- partner agencies
- professional bodies
- trade unions
- employers
- workforce leads and commissioners.

They all helped shape the content of the workforce plan.

We're pleased to report that most people we spoke to supported the ambition, themes, and the actions we're proposing.

To get their views, we:

- received 75 completed online survey responses
- held workshops with 111 people
- carried out 30 interviews with social work stakeholders.

## **Responding to challenges and opportunities**

As the regulator for social work workforce, we're responsible for developing the social care and early years workforce. We also support social care research and help make our services better in Wales.

We want to help make sure everyone who needs care and support can live as independently as possible and they're provided with support to live the life that matters to them.

We'll provide insight, analysis and foresight to help the sector work together to respond to challenges and deal with uncertainties.

We'll develop the specialist skills needed to transform and improve social care services. We'll also work with partners to positively influence the social care and early years system to improve outcomes for children, adults, unpaid carers and families who use care and support. This means we support social workers gain the right skills and experience to provide the best service they can.

The social work workforce continues to meet the ongoing challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. We understand the impact this is having on the social work profession and for people managing and adapting services, as they respond to challenges that are new to us all.

When we developed this workforce plan, we listened to comments on the challenges and workforce implications. Suggested improvements included:

- financial support for people studying for their social work qualification
- a better post-qualifying offer with clear postgraduate professional development pathways that are linked to pay and career progression
- reducing the number of vacancies
- supporting well-being and mental health
- pursuing a Fair Work agenda.

Covid-19 brought into sharp focus the issues of parity of esteem between the health workforce and the social care workforce, and the need to make sure we think about the safety and well-being of social care staff, particularly those on the frontline.

We've long recognised the need for a national approach to address job and income security. We'll continue to work with our partners, including the Social Care Fair Work Forum, to do this. We're also looking at the possibility of a national terms and conditions approach for social work.

We've learned a lot from the changes we made to respond to the pandemic, and it's revealed opportunities to do things differently and better in the future. This is the case for change that underpins this workforce plan.

We're committed to addressing the issues above and have identified actions across seven themes, including:

- recruitment and retention
- regulation
- career development
- staff support and inclusion in the social work workforce.

We'll work with our partners to tackle these issues. We'll also continue to support social workers to fulfil their potential and make a positive difference to the well-being of children, young people and adults across Wales.

## How the workforce plan is structured

The workforce plan is split into seven themes. Each theme has a brief statement about the theme's ambition as set out in *A Healthier Wales: Our Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care*.

Each statement of ambition has a set of "I" statements. Because we've talked to people in the profession, we're confident these statements describe the positive impact we want to have on someone working in or managing social work roles.

The "we" statements are the actions we've committed to over the next three years with our partners. Each one includes a suggested timeline for when we'll complete it. "We" is what we'll do, and "I will feel" is the impact this will have.

Each "we" statement has an action plan, which lists the steps we must take to achieve it. The action plans also set out the resources we need to achieve the goal, the tasks we need to complete and who else needs to be involved.

The workforce plan needs to be flexible, so we can review our progress in each of the next three years.

We'll share a summary of the "we" statements' progress with the social work profession. This will show how we'll work together to achieve our goals under each of the seven themes.

Here's an example of how the social work workforce plan looks under each of the seven themes:

- **Ambition:** "By 2030, the health and social care workforce will feel valued and supported wherever they work." – workforce strategy for health and social care
- **"We" statement:** "We'll launch our employee well-being framework to help your organisation consistently manage and monitor all aspects of your employee well-being at work." – our workforce plan
- **"I" statement:** "I feel happy, healthy and safe at work."

## Social work workforce plan principles

The social work workforce plan has five principles. We want to have a social work workforce that:

- feels valued and is valued
- has the right values, behaviours, knowledge, skills and confidence to assess care and support needs and provide support when needed
- is sustainable and has enough people to provide responsive health and social care that meets the needs of the people of Wales
- works in an environment where supporting employee well-being is essential so that people and organisations can thrive
- reflects the population's diversity, Welsh language and cultural identity.

## Statement of intent

The purpose of this workforce plan is to identify actions to support the social work profession to address the challenges it currently faces, so that it can provide the best possible care and support to people. Social work doesn't exist in a vacuum and the struggles facing social work are the same struggles the entire social care workforce faces.

Social work is unique in the way it works and the level of responsibility and autonomy each worker has. Someone who is suited to social work is someone kind, who cares about the people they work with. Everything else can be taught through the qualifying pathways, placements and the first three years in practice. The agreed definition of a social worker is in appendix one of this plan.

Although this is mainly our workforce plan, all our work is co-produced with the sector. Our partners have contributed to this plan and have been involved in developing and refining the actions. They'll play a key part in achieving the actions. We know there are significant challenges, but there are also opportunities we want to drive forward with our partners.

The Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP) has recently been reviewed and we have substantially increased our social work offer to local authorities. This includes increasing the ability to "grow your own".

We've been carrying out lots of activities to support social work. These include:

- supporting qualifying social workers
- supporting qualifying pathways into social work
- a national approach for social work
- publishing the *post-qualifying framework*
- leadership
- workforce data
- supporting workforce well-being.

We want to build on this work and continue to lead the sector towards a profession that's valued, feels valued, and has all the support to thrive within a positive working culture.

## **How will we measure the impact of this workforce plan?**

There are several ways we can do this. There'll be a new workforce survey in place in the future. This will include social workers, and enable us to capture how effective this plan has been and where there are still gaps that need addressing.

This plan is for all our partners as we'll need their help and support to move it forward. But, first and foremost, it's a plan shaped by the social work profession and it aims to achieve change for all frontline workers.

# Theme 1: An engaged, motivated and healthy workforce

**Ambition: By 2030, the health and social care workforce will feel valued and supported wherever they work.**

## **“I” statements:**

- “I feel happy, healthy and safe at work.”
- “I trust the people I work with, and respect and make use of their skills and specialisms. I know my skills and knowledge are equally valued.”
- “I’m appreciated and valued for my contribution in making a positive difference to people’s lives.”
- “The expectations placed on me are realistic and achievable, and make sure I achieve the best outcomes for the individuals I work with.”
- “I’m treated fairly and am seen as an individual.”
- “I’m motivated, supported and encouraged to perform at my best.”

## **“We” statements:**

- “We’ll continually update our online resources for employers and social workers about self-care at work, improving working conditions and the changes to social work practice.”  
**Winter 2021 to summer 2022**
- “We’ll do a review of the current terms and conditions for social workers across Wales.”  
**Spring 2022**
- “We, and our partners, will continue to share good practice around offering general support to social workers, such as peer support and supervision and de-briefing sessions.”  
**2022 to 2027**
- “We’ll continue to promote a strengths-based approach and person/child-centred practice at all times.”  
**2022 to 2027**
- “We’ll continue to contribute to Welsh Government’s Social Care Fair Work Forum and work closely with the national Chief Social Care Officer.”  
**2022 to 2023**
- “We’ll work with our partners to prioritise newly-qualified social workers’ well-being and better working conditions. This builds on the practice educator hub we started in 2021.”  
**2022 to 2023**



- “We’ll measure the impact of this workforce plan against the number of social workers and a new national workforce survey that will include social workers.”  
**2022 to 2027**
- “We’ll continue to look at how we can get parity of esteem and terms and conditions between the health and social care workforces and invest in new ways of providing care and support that meets the needs of the people of Wales.”  
**2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**

## Theme 2: Attraction and recruitment

**Ambition: By 2030, health and social care will be well established as a strong and recognisable brand and the sector of choice for our future workforce.**

### “I” statements:

- “I have support to help me understand and work towards getting a role or a career within social work.”
- “I work for an organisation that actively listens and respects my views and experiences about working in the social work profession.”
- “I work for an organisation where the right environment and conditions exist to support excellent social work practice.”
- “I work with people who represent the diversity and values of my local community and who help keep our most vulnerable adults and children safe and well.”

### “We” statements:

- “We’ll aim to make sure all eligible social work students receive a bursary”  
**Winter 2021 to summer 2023**
- “We’ll develop the role of social work ambassadors to help promote the profession, champion the people working in the profession and encourage others to think about a career in social work. We’ll also use the Careersville platform to promote the profession with a marketing campaign aimed at schools and colleges.”  
**Summer 2022**
- “We’ll provide additional support and guidance to our attraction, recruitment and retention programme, WeCare Wales, show different ways of starting a career in social work and the paths available. This includes a jobs portal that’s fit for purpose. We’ll also promote social work wider in the public vie and as a career choice.”

### **Summer to autumn 2022**

- “We’ll develop ways to help employers put values-based recruitment into practice. This will include bilingual, values-based recruitment resources and will give them access to attraction, recruitment and interview tools that have been successful in Wales.”

### **Summer 2022**

- “We’ll continue to work closely with Welsh Government colleagues to review and assess the options in relation to funding for social work training.”

### **2022 to 2023**

- “We recognise that to meet current and future demands, high quality training will equip and support the workforce so they have the right knowledge, skills, understanding and approach to continue to provide good quality care and support services.”

### **2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**

## **Theme 3: Seamless workforce models**

**Ambition: By 2030, multi-professional and multi-agency workforce models will be the norm.**

### **“I” statements:**

- “I understand the level of responsibility and the kind of decision-making required of me when working with other professionals.”
- “I understand the role I can play in working with people with care and support needs so they get the support they need to live as independently as possible.”
- “I respect and understand the distinct contribution of each professional who works alongside me.”
- “I understand the level of accountability and autonomy needed of me in my role as part of a wider team of professionals working with the individual or family.”
- “I’m supported to build effective and trusted working relationships between partnerships and other agencies.”
- “I can rely on healthcare and other professionals to understand my role and responsibilities as a social worker when working with other agencies.”

### **“We” statements:**

- “With our partners, we’ll develop a national set of safeguarding training standards. This will improve consistency and quality of safeguarding training and resources. It will also

make it easier for agencies to understand their own and others' safeguarding duties when working together."

#### **Autumn 2022**

- "We'll work with our mental health partner agencies to develop a multi-professional mental health workforce plan."

#### **2022 to 2023**

- "We'll implement a values-based, common induction programme for everyone in our workforce who delivers health and social care in primary and community settings and that works in partnership with other professionals."

#### **Summer 2022**

- "We recognise the need to change our education and training provision to a more multi-agency approach to improve seamless working and make it more accessible for the most underrepresented groups in our workforce."

#### **2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**

## **Theme 4: Building a digitally ready workforce**

**Ambition: By 2030, the digital and technological capabilities of the workforce will be well developed and used to optimise the way we work, to help us provide the best possible care for people.**

#### **"I" statements:**

- "I can manage and monitor my professional development using digital tools and technologies."
- "I have access to reliable, effective and safe technology."
- "I have the choice to find innovative, digital ways to support my personal and professional learning and development."
- "I feel that my day-to-day working life is made better by user-friendly technology that saves time and has a positive impact on the people I support."
- "I'm confident, competent and capable of making the most of digital technology in my role and to use its potential to improve the quality and efficiency of the care I provide."

#### **"We" statements:**

- "We'll work with partners to increase the availability and range of virtual learning solutions."

### **Winter 2021 to summer 2023**

- “We'll continue to work with our colleagues to make sure we fully understand the impact of improving digital skills, so we're best placed to develop innovative learning resources to address your learning needs.”

### **Autumn 2022**

- “We'll develop a ‘Social work digital capabilities framework’ that sets out the digital knowledge and skills needed to help with judgements and decision-making.”

### **Autumn 2022**

- “We'll work with the Centre for Digital Public Services Wales and our higher and further education providers to commission a revised digital skills element of the social work curriculum for all undergraduate programmes.”

### **Winter 2022 to summer 2023**

- “We recognise the rapid advances in technology mean that now is the right time to look at the reflective and responsive element of high-quality research, data and other forms of evidence.”

### **2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**

## **Theme 5: Excellent education and learning**

**Ambition: By 2030, the investment in education and learning for health and social care professionals will provide the skills and capabilities needed to meet the needs of the people of Wales.**

### **“I” statements:**

- “I have access to education and training programmes that support my professional development as I progress through my career and take on new social work functions or roles.”
- “I'm given protected time to carry out learning programmes to develop myself.”
- “I have access to quality training that's flexible in how I access it, complements the way I learn best and improves my skills, knowledge and confidence.”
- “I have flexible opportunities to access training and funding for a qualification (degree) in social work that's sustainable and fair.”
- “I have access to a flexible approach in gaining additional social work qualifications to develop my knowledge and experience in helping people take charge of their own

futures and realise their aspirations.”

**“We” statements:**

- “We’ll publish a report looking at the qualifying pathways into social work and the challenges and opportunities presented. We recognise the need for a range of entry roles into social work.”

**Summer 2022**

- “We’ll launch our new *Post-qualifying framework for social work*. This will allow career progression in the role and the ability to specialise in one or more areas. It will also count towards a recognisable qualification across professions.”

**2022 to 2023**

- “We’ll introduce a learning and development framework to support the implementation of the new Liberty Protection Safeguards that will replace the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.”

**2022 to 2023**

- “We’ll publish a mental health workforce plan. We’ll also do a review to see if we can include a higher level of mental health knowledge as part of the social work degree and master’s qualification.”

**2022 to 2023**

- “We’ll support access to high quality learning resources, including community development and promote social cohesion and make anti-racist, cultural competence inclusion and diversity education mandatory for all social workers.”

**Summer 2022**

- “We’ll launch the delivery method for the Level 4 Social Services Practitioner Award qualification, recognising it as a way into professional social work training.”

**Autumn 2022**

- “We’ll review our approach and process for recording ongoing continuing professional development (CPD), so social workers can record it easily and access it in a positive way.”

**Winter 2022**

- “We’ll use knowledge and evidence from regulation to inform and drive the workforce’s improvement and development to enhance the experience and outcomes for people using care and support services.”

**2022 to 2027 (Our strategic plan)**

## **Theme 6: Leadership and succession**

**Ambition: By 2030, leaders in the health and social care system will show collective and compassionate leadership.**

**“I” Statements:**

- “I have a trusting, respectful and valued working relationship with my manager and my manager is consistent, fair and approachable.”
- “I work for an organisation where leaders aim to understand and respect other cultures and are able to lead a diverse group of people.”
- “As a leader, I have access to leadership and management programmes that support me to create and sustain the conditions to empower others in improving the quality of service delivery.”
- “I can access meaningful leadership development opportunities that make a significant difference in enabling me to support colleagues and teams to adapt to new ways of working.”
- “I can access pathway opportunities that are fit for purpose to support my development as an aspiring manager.”
- “I work for an organisation that develops inclusive leaders at all levels in the social care sector.”

**“We” statements:**

- “We’ll continue to produce learning and engagement content and opportunities to support leaders to improve personal well-being and help protect the resilience of leaders and social workers.”

**Summer 2022**

- “We’ll use the *Leadership Principles for Health and Social Care in Wales* to design a leadership qualities framework that provides support and guidance for managers that explains what compassionate leadership is and what it looks like in practice in the workplace.”

**Winter 2022**

- “We’ll develop a webpage with information about resources, masterclasses and webinars to support collective and compassionate leadership that are based on the *Leadership Principles for Health and Social Care in Wales*.”

**2022 to 2023**

- “We’ll develop a leadership programme for aspiring colleagues from minority groups who work in the social work profession that bridges the gap between where applicants are

and where they need to be, to progress into more senior roles.”

### **Spring 2023**

- “We’ll promote the increasing and compelling evidence that shows that compassionate leadership can impact directly on the workforce’s ability to provide high quality care and support.”

**2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**

## **Theme 7: Workforce shape and supply**

**Ambition: By 2030, we will have a sustainable workforce with enough people to meet the health and social care needs of our population.**

### **“I” statements:**

- “I’m listened to about understanding the complexity and value of social work and the skills required to provide culturally relevant support to people in my local community.”
- “I work with colleagues who have the skills, knowledge, values and behaviours so we’re best places to identify and provide increasingly higher standards of care and support.”
- “I work in a setting that welcomes Welsh speakers, is proud to provide the active offer and strives to represent the community it serves as part of providing truly person-centred care.”
- “I respect and value the crucial long-term role of unpaid carers, voluntary and community organisations in supporting the health and well-being of children, families and adults in my local community.”

### **“We” statements:**

- “We’ll analyse the jobs portal and its data to look at workforce supply and demand. We’ll use this data to work with the social work profession so we can review our approach to workforce planning. This will tell us which skills, abilities, types of roles and numbers we need over the next five years.”

### **Spring 2023**

- “We’ll review how we carry out workforce planning and look at Welsh language population and community profiles. We’ll use these to assess the current and future workforce’s Welsh language skills. We’ll also consider the workforce’s awareness of the Welsh language and its impact on the people we support.”

**Winter 2022 to spring 2023**

- “We’ll provide learning resources and evidence to support a national approach for improving outcomes for children and young people to influence the planning of future services.”

**Autumn 2022**

- “We’ll develop and launch an improved data portal and projections platform that provides better data and insights, which will allow local authorities and regional partnership boards to better understand their local population needs.”

**Summer 2022 to spring 2023**

- “We continue to have an important public protection function making sure the workforce is registered and fit to practise.”
- “We need to be proactive in targeting specific shortages and supporting staff throughout their careers.”

**2022 to 2027 (our strategic plan)**