

A Healthier Wales - A workforce strategy for health and social care

Our annual report summarises the main areas of progress achieved in the second full year of the strategy.

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Social Care Wales annual report 2022 to 2023

In October 2020, together with Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) we launched [Our Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care](#), to support the implementation of [A Healthier Wales](#).

2022 to 2023 was our second full year of delivering the strategy and it continued to be a challenging period for the sector. We entered a new phase of the pandemic that eventually saw a reduction in restrictions, but coincided with a cost of living crisis and the impact of Brexit leading to acute problems with recruitment and retention.

The social care and health sectors are still feeling the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and it will continue to have a lasting impact for years to come. In response, we'll continue to put in place the support that the workforce and employers need, by working quickly to implement the commitments set out in the strategy.

Progress despite difficulties

Despite the significant challenges of the last three years we've made progress and we need to celebrate this and the improvements made to the sector. But, social care is facing major workforce challenges and it's difficult to attract people into the sector, recruit enough staff, and retain the existing workforce.

Terms and conditions

When we carried out engagement and consultation work on the revised actions for the workforce strategy, we consistently heard that terms and conditions need to be improved. This includes pay and wider terms and conditions such as flexible working, consistent policies for areas such as travel, training, sickness and maternity leave.

The people we spoke to told us they want the status of the sector to improve and for it to be held in the same regard as health. There needs to be a collective voice at all levels on this. The issues of pay and wider terms and conditions may need to be looked at separately, but both must be worked on quickly. Parity of esteem between the health and social care workforces is linked to this and there's work being carried out to address some of the challenges.

Workforce well-being

We must protect the workforce's safety and well-being and increase our focus on diversity. Building and developing a compassionate leadership approach will help, as it creates an inclusive and diverse culture that reflects our local communities. Staff well-being is paramount, and every member of the health and social care professional community should feel valued and supported.

Our themes and actions

The golden threads of well-being, Welsh language and inclusion run through all our themes and actions. They continue to play an essential part in the culture change we need to provide modern and vital services for the people of Wales.

This report summarises the main areas of progress achieved during 2022 to 2023 in our programmes of work, and also in our work in partnership with HEIW.

The workforce strategy provides actions across all services and settings, but this report also specifically mentions the activities and progress against each of the workforce plans we've developed since we launched the strategy in October 2020.

These are:

- [Social work workforce plan](#)
- [Direct care workforce plan](#)
- [Strategic mental health workforce plan](#)

We've made this progress at the same time as we've started considering the next phase of the implementation of the strategy, from 2023 onwards. We've carried out significant engagement to shape the actions and content of the next stage of implementation, and we're due to publish a new delivery plan in October 2023. This is in line with our first formal review period, as promised in the original strategy.

Our progress in 2022 to 2023

An engaged, motivated and healthy workforce

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- shared good practice and resources between health and social care to drive improvement, and between us we reciprocated places on health and well-being networks
- contributed to the launch of the new mental health support service '[Canopi](#)'.

We:

- published and continue to monitor our achievements against our strategic equality plan
- contributed to the implementation of the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan
- continued to run a social care well-being network for partners and stakeholders
- launched our health and well-being framework, setting out the commitments expected of both employers and our people, to drive positive employee experiences and improve quality
- continued to support the sector to work bilingually, with targeted resources to support the current and future workforce as part of our commitment to *Mwy na geiriau*
- continued to support the Community Resourcefulness Partnership to help it establish itself as a national, multi-sector forum for organisations that develop and promote local activities and actions to help improve well-being in communities all over Wales
- continued to support the promotion of a care worker card, moving to a single digital solution and partnering with two major discount providers to increase the retail benefits, bringing it in-line with the offer available in the NHS
- piloted an all-sector employee survey that focused on well-being
- strengthened our support for employers by introducing an employer support service
- held the Accolades awards ceremony to recognise the exceptional contribution of teams and individuals in providing social care
- introduced a category at the Accolades to recognise the work of supporting unpaid carers
- continued to support the provision of a range of communities, including:
 - practice educators
 - approved mental health professionals
 - best interest assessors
 - newly qualified social workers.

- implemented a well-being service for those going through the fitness to practice process.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to support peer support groups that improve resilience and well-being in their workforce
- supported the well-being of managers by offering more learning and development resilience events
- continued to contribute to the Welsh Government-led [Social Care Fair Work Forum](#) that aims to improve working conditions in social care.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- supported the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to carry out a review of terms and conditions for social workers and suggest ways to standardise these across Wales
- carried out research to understand why people become agency workers
- continued to promote the availability of the British Association of Social Work (BASW) social work professional support service.

For the Strategic mental health workforce plan, together with HEIW we:

- continued to work with the third sector to make sure their contribution and that of volunteers is recognised across the mental health workforce. We have started designing a series of events to celebrate their involvement.

Attraction and recruitment

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- continued to support a joint network to share good practice and resources to improve recruitment and retention across the sectors
- continued to support further developments of the [Careersville](#) resource.

We:

- developed targeted schemes for professions experiencing staff shortages and those that are finding it hard to recruit, with a focus on social work, domiciliary care, apprenticeships and the Welsh language
- continued to promote apprenticeships as a viable career choice for entering and staying in the sector. We supported Welsh Government's apprenticeship week campaign and had our own dedicated social care campaign
- worked with stakeholders, such as the Department of Work and Pensions and Careers Wales, and awarding organisations, such as City & Guilds and the WJEC, to strengthen the links between job seekers and careers in social care
- continued to financially support the care career connector posts in the seven regions
- continued to develop the [WeCare Wales website](#), adding specific resources and support for employers
- further supported the jobs portal's development, improving the user experience for employers and job seekers
- engaged with key stakeholders and used what we learned to develop a new website to be launched in late autumn 2023
- continued to use social media and TV to promote WeCare Wales using an 'always on' approach to social media.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- delivered two targeted attraction campaigns in the summer and autumn of 2022 respectively across TV, social media and radio
- carried out targeted campaigning to support the promotion of the social work profession as a career choice during Social Work Week.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- ran campaigns specifically for domiciliary care and apprenticeships across TV, social media and radio
- continued to run the Introduction to social care programme across Wales and evaluate its outcomes. We developed a range of adapted programmes to meet job seeker needs, such as African communities and young people.

Seamless working models

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- progressed work on the Liberty Protection Safeguards
- contributed to and supported the Strategic Primary Care programme workforce and organisational development theme
- contributed to and supported programmes of work around nursing in social care, including workforce planning data, student nursing placements in care homes and approaches to immunisation plans.

We:

- contributed to the delivery of the Learning Disabilities Strategic Action Plan, as part of our role on the Ministerial Advisory Group
- ran workshops on restrictive practice, in partnership with Learning Disability Wales and Improvement Cymru
- started to develop a competency toolkit to support the role of trusted assessor
- supported and engaged in regional workforce boards and regional partnership boards
- supported government policy initiatives around increasing community capacity
- continued to support the work of the Learning and Improvement Network for Reablement to share practice and explore workforce solutions.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- published a workforce plan for the social work profession.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- published a workforce plan for the direct care workforce
- worked with partners to expand the training on offer to health and social care workers in care homes, through care home education facilitator roles
- agreed pathways for care home staff to access nurse training
- agreed pathways for care home staff to access the Level 4 health care support worker qualification to widen access to nurse training.

For the Strategic mental health workforce plan, together with HEIW we:

- published a workforce plan to support [Together for Mental Health](#), focusing on early priorities around *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*, clinical psychology and perinatal services
- developed implementation plans to support the mental health workforce plan
- continued to support an All Wales Approved Mental Health Professional Leads Network to share good practice and resources to support role development and improvement.

Building a digitally ready workforce

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- launched and promoted digital training modules on infection prevention and control (IPC).

We:

- continued to develop online learning resources
- continued to develop a digital learning platform, adding more learning and development resources for the sector
- monitored the provision of the national priority for digital approaches in the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme grant (SCWWDP) for 2021 to 2022
- published research to understand the shift to digital learning and development in the sector, including identifying what further support is needed
- contributed to the development of e-learning modules to support the Employer Assessment route to register.

Excellent education and training

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- worked with City & Guilds to share intelligence and data about the provision and achievement of vocational qualifications.

We:

- administered, allocated and reported on the use of the SCWWDP grant
- worked with partners to improve opportunities for learners to carry out education and training through the medium of Welsh
- led on the development of a programme of learning to support the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards and put it into practice
- developed, consulted and launched consistent standards for safeguarding training and learning, and published a framework to support the implementation of the standards
- published and supported the implementation of the competency framework for information, advice and assistance workers

- continued to support the understanding and application of strengths-based practice across areas of social care
- continued to offer the collaborative skills communications skills programme to local authorities
- continued to support the provision of learning to support the workforce in working with unpaid carers
- supported the work of the Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) for unpaid carers.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continued to provide funding through our SCWWDP grant to support sponsored places for the social work degree
- supported student social workers through qualifying training into employment
- continued to influence the value of bursaries for social work students
- published the review of the qualifying social work framework and actioned what was recommended for us
- supported the Lead Pharmacist to scope and develop a social work specific medication management and assessment e-learning resource.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- promoted opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships so they're viable career choices to enter and stay in the sector
- continued to engage across the sectors
- supported the implementation and take up of all vocational qualifications
- supported the use of the Induction framework for social care managers
- continued to support the use of the All Wales induction framework
- supported the continued provision for the Social Services Practitioner award, including reaching an agreement with the Open University to recognise the vocational social services practitioner pathway as equivalent to the first year of the degree in social work

- contributed to a light touch review of the health and social care vocational qualifications at Levels 2 to 5
- carried out a review of legislation, resources and National Occupational Standards mapping across Level 2 and 3 practice qualifications
- supported the consortium of awarding organisations to develop and change the assessment methodology for Level 2 and 3 health and social care qualifications
- contributed to early discussions about the review of assessment methodology for Level 4 and 5 vocational qualifications.

For the Strategic mental health workforce plan, together with HEIW we:

- provided national training across health and social care in foundation level cognitive behavioural therapy and brief solution focussed therapy.

Leadership and succession

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- worked to develop and subsequently grow the social care resources and learning opportunities within the Gwella portal.

We:

- continued to invest in developing compassionate leaders across health and social care
- developed and piloted a cross-sector senior leadership programme across the statutory and third sectors in social care
- continued to invest in specific leadership programmes for social care heads of service and statutory directors, including the Team Manager Development

Programme (TMDP) and Middle Manager Development Programme (MMDP) qualifications, with bespoke programmes in place for directors and assistant directors of services and workforce

- developed and launched an Aspiring Manager Learning and Development Programme
- continued to provide a leadership role to promote bilingual working
- supported the Welsh Government's Mwy na geiriau action plan, focusing on workforce development.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continued to invest in specific leadership programmes including TMDP and MMDP qualifications.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to support peer networks for registered social care managers in private, voluntary and public services to improve well-being and help protect resilience
- continued to support the promotion and implementation of the new Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications, including the related apprenticeship pathways.

For the Strategic mental health workforce plan, together with HEIW we:

- began scoping the options for a joint mental health team manager development programme.

Workforce supply and shape

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- published the workforce plan for the mental health workforce.

We:

- continued to co-ordinate the workforce data collection, improving the levels of return and the accuracy of the data
- continued to change our data collection approaches to make sure there's robust data, including improving data reporting around language and ethnicity
- looked closely at areas of concern to better understand the profile of the workforce, for example, by profiling nurses in social care and the use of agency workers. We used this information to support effective decision making
- began a scoping review of the approaches to workforce planning across the sector and made recommendations for developing this function. Reports on our findings and recommendations were finalised in May 2023
- continued to support the work of the Carers Ministerial Advisory Group
- contributed evidence to the Carers Summit.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- published the workforce plans for the social work profession
- supported the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) to develop a memorandum of cooperation for the use of children services agency workers.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- published the workforce plans for the direct care workforce
- continued to support the development of the [Social Care Fair Work Forum's](#) Pay and Progression Framework.
- continued to support the care home workforce to register in time for mandatory registration in October 2022
- supported the Welsh Government's Transformation of Children's Services programme of work, including the national practice framework.

For the Strategic mental health workforce plan, together with HEIW we:

- developed surveys for Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs) and Section 12 doctors to help with future workforce planning
- scoped how we can support health boards and local authorities to embrace the principles of workforce planning within the mental health workforce
- supported health boards and local authorities across Wales to embrace new roles within their mental health multi-disciplinary teams including Physician Associate and Clinical Assistant in Applied Psychology (CAAP).

Work to come

The following areas of work haven't yet begun. This is for a range of reasons including lack of capacity either within Social Care Wales or in the sector itself due to vacancies. There have also been some changes in policy direction, such as in relation to the Liberty Protection Safeguards.

Social work workforce plan:

- share good practice around offering general support to social workers, such as peer support and supervision and de-briefing sessions
- develop the role of social work ambassadors
- develop a 'Social work digital capabilities framework'
- commission a revised digital skills element of the social work curriculum for all undergraduate programmes
- launch our new post-qualifying framework for social work
- introduce a learning and development framework to support the implementation of the new Liberty Protection Safeguards that will replace the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards
- review our approach and process for recording ongoing continuing professional development (CPD)

- design a leadership qualities framework
- develop a leadership programme for aspiring colleagues from minority groups
- analyse the jobs portal and its data to look at workforce supply and demand and review our approach to workforce planning.

Direct care workforce plan:

- develop resources for managers to begin assessing how well they meet the well-being at work commitments that are integral to the health and well-being framework
- develop resources that clearly show the career paths available to all staff in the direct care workforce
- develop and deliver learning and development programmes to put the Liberty Protection Safeguards into action
- develop social care-specific resources so more people can gain essential skills in communication and application of number.
- review how we support registered people to record their CPD easily, and in an accessible way.

Conclusion

The pandemic has had a long-lasting effect on the health and social care sectors. It's shone a light on the challenges that existed before the pandemic and created new challenges during the ongoing recovery.

We aspire to achieve the ambition of the 10-year strategy, but we recognise more needs to be done to put longer term plans in place to meet these aspirations. We will continue to support collaborative working across health and social care, between local organisations and national bodies working in social partnership.

The work carried out since the strategy's launch, which is linked to its seven key themes and underpinning golden threads, has allowed us to gain a momentum we can build upon in future years, in-line with our longer-term goals. This puts us in a good position to meet the challenges and opportunities that 2023 to 2024 and beyond will bring.

We've consulted on the next three-year phase of delivery, linked to the ambitions of the health and social care workforce strategy. This will be published in October 2023 and will provide a clear set of actions so we can continue to support the workforce and build on the work already carried out.

Social Care Wales, September 2023