

Consultation on proposed changes to the rules for social work degrees

**Have your say on what the rules for entry requirements for social work degrees in Wales should be**

Consultation closes on 28 April 2023



# Contact details

**Social Care Wales**

South Gate House

Wood Street

Cardiff

CF10 1EW

Tel: 0300 3033 444

Minicom: 029 2078 0680

Email: info@socialcare.wales

Twitter: @SocialCareWales

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**Other formats:** This document is available in large text, Braille and other languages, if required. You can request these by using the contact details above. This document is also available in Welsh.

# Overview

**What are we consulting on?**

We want your views and ideas about our proposed changes to the rules for social work degrees in Wales.

We want to make changes to:

* The Framework for the Social Work Degree: Supplementary guidance to the Rules (2021)
* The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2021

The proposed changes are

1. Removing the requirement for there to be a minimum number of social care hours
2. Removing the level 2 numeracy qualification requirement for entry to social work
3. Removing the requirement for ‘face-to-face' interviews in the admissions process
4. Being more clear about how to manage student transfer requests between regulated programmes of study
5. Using gender-neutral pronouns in future education quality assurance rules, frameworks and guidance.

**Why are we suggesting these changes?**

* To promote greater opportunity for entry to social work programmes
* To increase the number of eligible applicants to qualifying programmes
* To provide more flexibility around the way interviews in the admissions process are carried out
* To make sure student transfer requests are managed consistently between regulated programmes of study
* To make sure we’re not inadvertently excluding anyone with the pronouns we use.

## How to respond

If you’d like to have your say on our proposed changes to the rules for social work degrees, you can do so by:

* [completing the online survey](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=It7CS5ebtk6OiCJUGQdI4h4e-9v1YC5NtCreBXU7EelUNTRINlhPODNMUkcwSDc0UlBBMUJZVDAyRy4u)
* completing this document and emailing it to consultations@socialcare.wales

**When do I need to do this by?**

The closing date for the consultation is 11.59pm on Friday, 28 April 2023.

**Who can I contact if I have a question?**

You can email the education quality assurance team at Social Care Wales at:

consultations@socialcare.wales

**Thank you for taking the time to tell us what you think**

# Proposed changes to the rules for social work degrees in Wales

## Removing the 360 hours of social care experience for entry to qualifying social work programmes

Currently applicants to social work qualifying degree and postgraduate degree programmes need to have at least 360 hours of social care experience in paid or voluntary roles.

We’d like to remove this requirement and to focus more on making sure applicants show the values and basic skills expected of social workers.

We want to make this change because:

* applicants for social work degrees should be assessed on their ability to show the values and basic skills needed for social work training. Applicants may have limited social care experience and still show the necessary values and skills. Equally, someone may have lots of experience of social care work, but not show the values and skills necessary for social work training.
* defining ‘social care experience’ is difficult because there’s a range of different disciplines that could be included. There’s also lots of diversity in the work carried out by people with the same job title in different organisations and teams. This means the process of identifying and quantifying relevant social care experience is subjective and difficult for programmes to manage. We’d like to focus instead on the applicants’ experience and seeing how it’s prepared them for practice in a more meaningful way.
* our research has suggested we should take another look at the current requirements for social care experience to “ensure the experience requirements do not disadvantage those from lower economic backgrounds, career changers, or those with responsibilities for dependents”. Making this change could increase opportunities for those who may currently be excluded by the social care experience requirement. This change would be consistent with Section 1.5 (making sure your actions promote equality, diversity and inclusion) of the [*Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*](https://socialcare.wales/dealing-with-concerns/codes-of-practice-and-guidance).
* Social care and work regulators in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland don’t specify a set number of hours for social care experience for applicants. So some people may choose to train in another part of the UK rather than in Wales.
* We haven’t found any evidence that the current requirement leads to better social work students or better social workers.

Here are the changes we propose making to the rules and guidance for social work degrees in Wales:

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| ***Document: The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2021***  **Current text:**  Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(1)(b) -  ‘Before admitting an applicant to a degree programme, the institution must undertake such assessment of him or her as will allow it to be reasonably certain that:  b) the applicant has sufficient relevant experience of social care that they can demonstrate the values and basic skills that correspond to those generally expected of social workers’    Footnote 11 –  ‘Approved programmes must set requirements for relevant experience of social care of not less than 360 hours’ practice in a paid or voluntary capacity, apart from in occasional and exceptional circumstances when the experience can be shown to have been met through other ways. For example, as a person with lived experience of social work/social care services.’  **Proposed revised text:**  Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(1)(b) -  ‘Before admitting an applicant to a degree programme, the institution must undertake such assessment of the applicant as will allow it to be reasonably certain that:  b) the applicant has prior relevant experience of social care that they can demonstrate the values and basic skills that correspond to those generally expected of social workers.’    Footnote 11 –  ‘Approved programmes should not, unless otherwise agreed with Social Care Wales, set tariffs for frequencies (e.g. hours, number of days, etc.) of social care experience. Social Care Wales may, in exceptional circumstances, agree to tariffs being used by programmes where: (i) it is deemed necessary to manage high volumes of applications; and/or (ii) the specific nature of the programme necessitates that such a requirement is legitimately appropriate; and/or (iii) another legitimate reason is agreed by Social Care Wales.’ |
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| ***Document: The Framework for the Social Work Degree: Supplementary guidance to the Rules (2021)***  **Current text:**  Section 5.1 – ‘Under Paragraph 3(1)(b), the higher education institution must carry out an assessment of the applicants. The institution must be satisfied the applicant has enough experience of social care that they can “demonstrate the values and basic skills that correspond to those generally expected of social workers”. The footnote to this requirement specifies that they must carry out at least 360 hours’ practice in a paid or voluntary capacity, apart from in occasional and exceptional circumstances where the applicant can show they have gained the experience in other ways. For example, as a person with lived experience of social work or care and support. In such cases, the applicant must be able to show how their experience has informed their understanding of people’s social care needs and experience of care and support services. The applicants should complete the necessary number of hours of practical experience by the interview.’  **Proposed revised text:**  Section 5.1 – ‘Under Paragraph 3(1)(b), the higher education institution must carry out an assessment of the applicants. The institution must be satisfied the applicant has enough experience of social care that they can “demonstrate the values and basic skills that correspond to those generally expected of social workers”. Applicants should have undertaken paid or voluntary roles in social care setting prior to applying for programmes. In occasional and exceptional circumstances admissions tutors (or similar) and/or programme leads (or similar) may consider experience gained in other ways where they feel that doing so would be appropriate to the applicant’s personal circumstances. For example, as a person with lived experience of social work or care and support. In such cases, the applicant must be able to show how their experience has informed their understanding of people’s social care needs and experience of care and support services.’ |

## Removal of the level 2 numeracy qualification requirement for entry to qualifying social work programmes

Currently applicants to social work qualifying programmes need to have a level 2 numeracy qualification. A level 2 qualification is equivalent to GCSE Grade C or higher, and can take many forms.

We want to make this change because:

* many parts of a social work role that need numeracy skills are likely to be outsourced. For example, financial support and assessment roles will often be carried out by others who are experts in issues such as social security, budgeting and so on.
* it could make the career more accessible to a wider range of people. This change would be consistent with Section 1.5 (ensuring that your actions promote equality, diversity and inclusion) of the [*Code of Professional Practice for Social Care*](https://socialcare.wales/dealing-with-concerns/codes-of-practice-and-guidance).
* the UK nations vary in their approach whether numeracy qualifications are needed to carry out social work training. People applying to programmes in Northern Ireland need to have a level 2 qualification, but in England and Scotland it isn’t necessary (although some programmes ask for it).

***Document: The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2021***

**Current text:**

Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(1)(d) -

‘the applicant has communication and application of number skills equivalent to Level 2 or higher as specified by the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales; and’

**Proposed revised text:**

Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(1)(d) –

‘the applicant has communication skills equivalent to Level 2 or higher as specified by Credit and Qualification Framework Wales; and’

We also propose to add this new footnote after the word ‘Wales’ above:

**‘**Any changes must have sufficient lead in times that enable prospective applicants to be able to reasonably gain relevant experience. This means: (i) no changes can be made mid-way through an admissions cycle; and (ii) information on any proposed changes must be clearly advised via websites and admissions literature, either twelve months prior to them being implemented, or for a period of time that is at least double the amount of additional experience needed (to allow applicants to identify and undertake this additional experience), whichever is longer. In this instance, 'implemented' means the start of a new academic year for which the criteria will apply. Any changes to applicants who have deferred from a previous year(s) will not be subject to any revised social care hours requirements.’

***Document: The Framework for the Social Work Degree: Supplementary guidance to the Rules (2021)***

**Current text:**

Paragraph 3(1)(d) relates to the applicants’ communication and number skills. The applicants must have a minimum of Level 2 as described by the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW). This can be demonstrated by GCSE grade A\* to C or other measures.

The CQFW has guidance about equivalence, and you can find it at Welsh Government | Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.

**Proposed revised text:**

Section 5.2

Paragraph 3(1)(d) relates to the applicants’ communication skills. The applicants must have a minimum of Level 2 as described by the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW). This can be demonstrated by GCSE grade A\* to C or other measures. Any additional qualifications that may be wanted by programmes in the admissions process must be agreed by Social Care Wales through validation or modification processes. Programmes must demonstrate to Social Care Wales that such requests are necessary for applicants to be able to effectively undertake the programme of studies. Where an additional qualification is agreed by Social Care Wales, programmes must ensure that: (i) no changes can be made mid-way through an admissions cycle; and (ii) information on any proposed changes must be clearly advised via websites and admissions literature twelve months prior to them being implemented. Any additional qualification requirements cannot be applied to applicants who have deferred from a previous year(s).

The CQFW has guidance about equivalence, and you can find it at Welsh Government - Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales.

## Changes to the requirement for ‘face-to-face’ interviews for admission processes to qualifying social work programmes

Currently social work degree programmes must have face-to-face interviews with people applying to study. We’d like interviews to stay as part of the process of applying to programmes, but recognise that changes in technology mean they could be carried out online.

We want to make this change because:

* programmes can still decide to use face-to-face interviews, or do some online and some face-to-face.
* during Covid, programmes were allowed to carry out interviews online. This means programmes have experience of doing this and can use their experiences to help them in the future.
* Online interviews reduce travel costs and time for people applying to social work programmes. This is important for people with caring or work commitments.
* Interviews should involve social workers and people who use care and support or carers. These changes reduce the amount of travel they have to do. Programmes will still need to provide training to these groups of people.
* Online meetings are a common way of working for social workers. Having interviews online reflects this way of working.

***Document: The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2021***

**Current text:**

Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(2) -

‘The assessment referred to in paragraph (1) must include an individual face to face interview.’

**Proposed revised text:**

Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3(2) –

‘The assessment referred to in paragraph (1) must include an interview.’

***Document: The Framework for the Social Work Degree: Supplementary guidance to the Rules (2021)***

**Current text:**

No current text – we propose to add this to the existing framework.

**Proposed revised text:**

We propose to add:

‘Section 5.5 – Paragraph 3(2) relates to interviews in the selection process. The medium (e.g. face-to-face, online, hybrid etc.) for interviews is at the discretion of the institute but must take into account:

* visual verification – Irrespective of medium, the interview process must include mechanisms to verifying the identity of the applicant, and the panel must be satisfied that the applicant is not being coached or unduly assisted, in the interview process. Applicants, and all members of the interview panel, must be visible throughout the interview.
* consistency – If more than one medium is being used, then the programme must be able to demonstrate parity in the admissions process.
* integration – Effective mapping must take place of any wider admissions processes to ensure that the purpose and approach taken to interviews is consistent with wider parts of the admissions process(es).
* equality – Provision should be made to support applicants with specific needs that might exclude them from engaging with one specific medium. This should include recognition that some applicants may lack the technical resources to undertake online interviews. Consideration should also be given to the specific needs of interview panel members.
* training and technological support – Training on the interview process, and any software used to support the interview process, must be provided to panel members. Technological support should be provided to interview panel members as needed.
* data protection – All processes must take into account data protection requirements. This should include ensuring that secure platforms are used for interviews, and that any data captured through the interview is appropriately stored in accordance with institutional requirements.
* interview panel compositions – Unless otherwise agreed with Social Care Wales, interview panels must include: (i) a person with lived experience of services (this includes carers) who has received support and training; (ii) a qualified social worker registered with Social Care Wales (who is not an institutional member of staff) – preferably social workers would be from an employer partner, and; (iii) an institutional member of staff who teaches or assists with the social work degree programme. In exceptional circumstances, panel membership may consist of two members, one of whom must be an institutional member of staff.

## Introducing rules and guidance about managing student transfer requests between social work degree programmes

Students on social work degrees may sometimes want to change the programme they’re studying on. This may be because of changes in their personal lives or for other reasons. Transfer requests are not common, but we don’t currently have any rules or guidance about how transfers should take place. To help students and programmes, we’d like to introduce rules and guidance about how to manage student transfers.

We want to make this change because:

* having the same rules and guidance across Wales will help make sure transfer requests are managed fairly
* the transfer process can be complex for students and programmes. Providing guidance to programmes should make the process smoother. We’d ask that all transfers include mapping of student learning and a support plan to help students make this change
* sometimes students on programmes in other parts of the UK ask to transfer to a social work degree programme in Wales. Each of the UK nations has a different framework for degrees making this a complex process. We’d like to provide guidance about what programmes should do when they receive a request from a social work student who’s studying in another UK nation
* international student transfer won’t be allowed because students need to show their skills in a UK context.

***Document: The Framework for the Degree in Social Work in Wales 2021***

**Current text:**

No current text – we propose to add this to the existing framework.

**Proposed revised text:**

Under The Schedule Criteria for the Approval and Quality Assurance of Degree Programmes in Social Work Paragraph 3:

3-4 – For student transfers:

1. Institutions shall not accept transfer requests where the: (i) institution is located outside the United Kingdom; or (ii) the request is from a programme that is not recognised/accredited as a qualifying social work programme by an appropriate UK regulator.
2. No institute is obligated to review or accept student transfer requests
3. Institutions ‘receiving’ the request for a student transfer (the institution which the student is looking to transfer to) must: (i) be satisfied that the request complies with the requirement set out under part ‘a’ above; (ii) undertake a mapping exercise to determine what training has been completed and to establish any gaps in necessary knowledge/skills; (iii) confirm with the ‘sending’ institute (see point ‘d’ below) that there are no outstanding fitness-to-practise/suitability/conduct issues for the transferring student; (iv) confirm with the ‘sending institute’ (see point ‘d’ below) that no other exit award has already been made and that any institutional credits remain valid, and have confirmation that there are no confirmed or impending fails that would preclude the continuation of a student's candidature; (v) take into account the requirement set out under paragraph 3.3 and work with the student to ensure these requirements are met through the transfer process; (vi) for transfer from institutions in other parts of the United Kingdom, must seek to ensure that the applicant is provided with sufficient opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of relevant Welsh legal and policy frameworks; (vii) be satisfied that there are sufficient resources available at the institute, and through partnerships arrangements (in the case of placements) to be able to support the student for the remainder of their studies; (viii) liaise with Social Care Wales regarding any changes to student registration, bursaries and wider funding arrangements, and; (ix) ensure that Social Care Wales is notified of any transfers during annual monitoring processes.
4. Institutions ‘sending’ ( the institution which the student is looking to leave) must: (i) seek consent from transferring students to share information; (ii) provide information as might be legitimately required by the ‘receiving’ institute to comply with point ‘c’ above; (iii) liaise with Social Care Wales regarding any changes for student registration and bursary/funding arrangements, and; (iv) ensure that Social Care Wales is notified of any transfers during annual monitoring processes
5. Transferring students must: (i) provide any relevant documentation/guidance to the ‘receiving’ institution. This can include consenting to the direct transfer of necessary information/documentation between institutions; (ii) disclose any ongoing fitness-to-practise/suitability/conduct processes, or other information as might be reasonably needed by the receiving institute to determine their suitability to undertaken social work training, and disclose information as might be reasonably required for the ‘receiving' institute to fulfil their obligations under paragraph 3.3; (iii) meet the costs involved, or where a students is seconded (or otherwise funded) have sought agreement for any costs to be met; (iv) retain responsibility for considering how an transfer might impact on their financial circumstances, and; (v) ensure that they update their registration with Social Care Wales upon successful transfer to a new institution.
6. Social Care Wales may in instances of a programme closures/withdrawal, or for other exceptional and unspecified reason(s), undertaken such actions as are necessary to support with this process. This may include: (i) group transfer processes, but only where it is satisfied that the individual learning and equality needs of students are effectively being considered, and; (ii) the provision of additional support to students, programme partners, and both ‘receiving’ and ‘sending’ institutes where appropriate and possible.

***Document: The Framework for the Social Work Degree: Supplementary guidance to the Rules (2021)***

**Current text:**

No current text – we propose to add this to the existing framework.

**Proposed revised text:**

We propose to add:

‘Section 5.6 – Paragraph 3(4)(c) identifies that a mapping exercise must take place where a student is looking to transfer from one regulated social work degree to another. The mapping exercise should be recorded, and information made available to both the student looking to transfer, irrespective of whether the transfer is agreed to or not. The mapping exercise should include consideration of the following:

* learning outcomes
* the National Occupational Standards (NOS)
* hours of teaching (as specified under Part II, Section 6(g))
* hours of placements (as specified under Part II Section 6(h))
* Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales levels
* institutional credits
* the Quality Assurance Agency Benchmark statements for Social Work
* Social Care Wales degree framework levels/stages.

The mapping process can be assisted by the sharing of programme and module guides between institutes. If the mapping exercise shows that there are gaps, then a bespoke transition support plan must be drawn up and agreed to ensure that the necessary requirements are being met for any standard qualifying programme. This may include 'auditing' (e.g. attending teaching, but not being re-assessed) of modules to ensure that necessary elements have been covered and/or knowledge is contemporary. The final decision regarding a transfer resides with the institution receiving the transfer request.

Where a transfer request is declined, the student should be notified as soon as is reasonably practicable and must be advised of the reason for their request being declined. In such instances, students should be able to continue with their studies at the original institute (where possible).

## Gender-neutral pronouns in future rules and guidance

We’d like to use gender-neutral pronouns in all our future rules and guidance for education quality assurance. This change is being made to recognise that the binary approaches used in the past can exclude applicants, students and staff in education providers and placement settings. The change will mean that as new rules are written or existing rules are reviewed, we’ll change the pronouns so they’re gender-neutral where possible.

**How we propose to use gender-neutral pronouns**

Where possible, we will use gender-neutral terms and pronouns s for all rules, policy documents or other guidance provided as part of education quality assurance. Where we need to use gendered pronouns for clarity or to make sure information is accessible, we’ll use:

* ‘them/she/him’
* ‘they/her/he’
* ‘theirs/hers/his’.

Pronouns for specific gender(s) may be used only where it’s necessary to discuss a particular topic or person who’s identified a pronoun preference*.*

## What next?

We‘d like you to help us make sure our proposed changes to the rules for social work degrees are fit for purpose. Are we focusing on the right things? Are we being bold enough? What will be the results of our work?

To help us think about changes to the rules for social work degrees in Wales, complete the questionnaire below or [online](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=It7CS5ebtk6OiCJUGQdI4h4e-9v1YC5NtCreBXU7EelUNTRINlhPODNMUkcwSDc0UlBBMUJZVDAyRy4u).

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| **Section 1 – About you and your organisation** |
| Are you responding to this consultation as:  an individual  on behalf of an organisation |
| If you are responding as an individual, are you a/an:  person who uses care and support  early years worker  social care manager  social care worker  social worker  social work student  owner of a setting providing care  responsible individual  employer of social care workers  educational professional  member of the public  other – please describe below: |
| If you’re responding on behalf of an organisation, is your organisation:  central or devolved government  a local authority  a social care employer  a learning provider  other – please describe below:  Organisation name:  Type of work carried out by your organisation: |

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| **Section 2 – Removing 360 hours of social care experience for entry to qualifying social work programmes** |
| Do you agree with the proposed changes?  Yes  No  Comments:  What potential advantages or benefits do you think may happen because of the proposed change?  What potential risks or disadvantages do you think may happen because of this change?  Do you have any other comments? |

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| **Section 3 – Changes to the requirement for ‘face-to-face’ interviews for admission processes to qualifying social work programmes** |
| Do you agree with the proposed changes?  Yes  No  Comments:  What potential advantages or benefits do you think may happen because of the proposed change?  What potential risks or disadvantages do you think may happen because of this change?  Do you have any other comments? |

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| **Section 4 – Changes to the requirement for ‘face-to-face’ interviews for admission processes to qualifying social work programmes** |
| Do you agree with the proposed changes?  Yes  No  Comments:  What potential advantages or benefits do you think may happen because of the proposed change?  What potential risks or disadvantages do you think may happen because of this change?  Do you have any other comments? |

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| **Section 5 – Introducing rules and guidance for managing student transfer requests between social work degree programmes** |
| Do you agree with the proposed changes?  Yes  No  Comments:  What potential advantages or benefits do you think may happen because of the proposed change?  What potential risks or disadvantages do you think may happen because of this change?  Do you have any other comments? |

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| **Section 6 – Gender-neutral pronouns in future rules and guidance** |
| Do you agree with the proposed changes?  Yes  No  Comments:  What potential advantages or benefits do you think may happen because of the proposed change?  What potential risks or disadvantages do you think may happen because of this change?  Do you have any other comments? |

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| **Section 7 – Welsh language** |
| What effects will our proposals have on the Welsh language, specifically on:  i) opportunities for people to use Welsh  ii) treating the Welsh language less favourably than the English language?  How could we increase the positive effects or reduce the negative effects? |

# How we will use your views

Any response you send us will be seen in full by our staff dealing with the issues this consultation covers. It may also be seen by other members of staff to help us plan future consultations.

We will be publishing a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish the responses in full. Normally, the name and address of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, let us know in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, but we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including Social Care Wales. This includes information that has not been published.

But the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. There may sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone’s name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we decided to reveal the information.