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A Healthier Wales - a workforce strategy for health and social care, annual report 2023 to 2024

Social Care Wales annual report 2023 to 2024: Achieving
during challenging times

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

Here are some of the highlights of our annual report.

Social Care Wales annual report 2023 to 2024: Achieving during challenging times

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](#).

The social care sector continues to face a number of challenges which are set within the context of significant financial challenges and historical underfunding. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic will continue to be felt for years to come and the cost-of-living crisis is negatively affecting communities.

There are also major workforce challenges within the social care sector. It is difficult to attract and recruit staff and to retain the existing workforce. This is amid a continually growing demand for children's services and adult services, because of an ageing population and people's desire to live longer at home.

In response to these difficulties, we will continue to provide the support the workforce and employers need, by working quickly to implement the commitments set out in the workforce strategy.

Despite these ongoing challenges we have made progress during 2023 to 2024, our third full year of delivering the strategy. These achievements and improvements should be celebrated.

This report summarises the main areas of progress achieved in our programmes of work during 2023 to 2024, along with our work in partnership with Health Education and Improvement Wales (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 have developed since we launched the workforce strategy.

These are:

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

Well-being, the Welsh language, and inclusion are the golden threads of the workforce strategy that run through all our themes and actions. They continue to play an essential part in the culture change needed to provide vital modern, person-centred services for the people of Wales.

We have made this progress at the same time as carrying out significant engagement work. We consulted on the actions and content of the next stage of implementation, which led to the [Social Care Workforce Delivery Plan 2024 to 2027](#). This is in line with our first formal review period, as promised in the original strategy.

In the future we will be able to report against the Social Care Workforce Delivery Plan 2024 to 2027 where we have identified a range of qualitative and quantitative measures. The future annual report will therefore include both a report of progress in terms of narrative and quantitative information.

Our progress in 2023 to 2024

1. An engaged, motivated, and healthy workforce

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

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

We:

- launched new well-being webpages, including an online version of the [health and well-being framework](#)
- spoke at sector events and conferences to raise awareness of the health and well-being framework and the support available to the sector
- published and continue to monitor our achievements against our strategic equality plan
- hosted an expert panel session about the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and what it means for social care in Wales
- continued to contribute to the implementation of the Welsh Government's [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) and [LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales](#)
- provided online peer support sessions and training for managers. We reviewed our approach and in 2024 to 2025 we will be developing a guide to peer support so more people can provide opportunities in their own workplaces
- continued to run a social care well-being network for partners and stakeholders and developed the well-being community of practice
- provided online well-being information and training sessions for the sector, on the well-being topics that mattered most to them

- ran a social care well-being conference so people could connect with each other, share ideas, learn about the well-being tools, and support available. Following feedback from the event we planned and held online workshops on team well-being.
- continued to support the sector to work bilingually as part of our commitment to '[More than just words](#)'. We created targeted resources to support the current and future workforce, including a new [Welsh language awareness e-learning module](#)
- continued to support the Resourcefulness Communities Partnership (RCP) to help it further develop and raise its profile 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 [digital care worker card](#). This recognises social care workers as key workers and allows them to access a range of benefits with retailers, along with well-being support
- published the [social care workforce survey 2023 pilot results](#), which focused on well-being, and launched the 2024 survey
- implemented the first-year activities of the [employer support service](#) and held three employer support roadshows across Wales
- held the [2023 Accolades awards ceremony](#) to recognise the exceptional contribution of teams and individuals in providing social care
- continued to support a range of communities, including:
 - practice educators
 - newly qualified social workers
 - residential childcare
 - place-based care and support
 - responsible individuals
 - evidence
 - approved mental health professionals

- best interest assessors.
- continued to offer a well-being service for those going through the fitness to practice process and updated the information about fitness to practice and hearings on our website
- engaged and worked with the sector to review the codes of professional practice and associated practice guidance to make sure these aligned to the health and well-being framework
- supported Welsh Government work about fair reward and recognition across the social care workforce
- assessed the value of registration badges for the workforce through a pilot scheme.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- used what we learned from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) review of terms and conditions for social workers to support the implementation of a standardised approach across Wales
- shared with partners what we learned from research into what motivates workers to become agency workers, explaining the next steps for us and our partners
- continued to promote the availability of the British Association of Social Work (BASW) social work professional support service
- held two social work conferences in collaboration with BASW, in north and south Wales, to share good practice and celebrate the profession
- continued to support the practice educator community of practice and set up a community of practice for those supporting newly qualified social workers

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to support peer support groups that improve resilience and well-being in their workforce
- continued to contribute to the Welsh Government-led [Social Care Fair Work Forum](#) that aims to improve working conditions in social care
- continued to support the well-being of managers by offering a series of online learning and development events on the following themes:
 - compassionate empathy in practice
 - making cohesive and inclusive teams
 - compassionate boundaries at work
 - resolving conflicts compassionately
 - authentic confidence, assertiveness, and motivation at work
- developed an e-learning resource for [workforce well-being](#) and [personal well-being](#).

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

- held several events around supervision standards to share findings and to begin developing a national approach model which will be consulted upon widely
- scoped work for bespoke professional support for the mental health workforce. We are using this intelligence to decide on our next steps to take this work forward.

2. Attraction and recruitment

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- continued to support a joint health and social care careers 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:

- carried on delivering targeted attraction campaigns for significant shortages in professional and occupational groups, underrepresented groups and hard to recruit areas, through our WeCare Wales programme. Campaign focus included Social Workers in alignment with Social Work Week, apprenticeships, home care and the Welsh language.
- continued to promote and support the take up of apprenticeships as a viable career choice for people entering and staying in the sector. We did this through targeted campaigns and by supporting National Apprenticeship Week in partnership with Welsh Government
- continued to support and coordinate a representative attraction and recruitment stakeholder group with stakeholders including the Department of Work and Pensions, Careers Wales, and awarding organisations such as City & Guilds and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), to strengthen the links between job seekers and careers in social care
- continued to use social media platforms and TV to promote WeCare Wales, using an 'always on' approach to attraction and recruitment
- continued to financially support the care career connector posts in the seven regions
- reviewed and reported on the impact and effectiveness of the care career connector role with plans in place to respond to the recommendations
- re-launched the [WeCare Wales website](#) and jobs portal, following engagement with key stakeholders
- continued to run the Introduction to social care awareness training programmes
- consulted on and made changes to registration entry requirements for the social care workforce, based on feedback from the sector

- continued to support the implementation of a modern, values-based bilingual recruitment approach for all health and social care staff
- completed research to understand recruitment and retention in social care and the role of WeCare Wales

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- carried out targeted campaigning to support the promotion of the social work profession as a career choice during Social Work Week 2023
- reviewed promotion of the improved Social Care Wales bursary on higher education institutions' (HEI) websites.

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to run campaigns specifically for domiciliary care and apprenticeships across TV, social media, and radio
- continued to run the Introduction to social care awareness training programme. This has focused on changing the public perception of care and developing quality training for the public of Wales to consider care as a professional career that offers pathways to promotion.
- developed resources specifically for schools and colleges and for the WeCare Wales website to promote the Introduction to social care awareness training programme.

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

- used [Careersville](#) to promote mental health careers across health and social care, offering resources, information, and live events
- developed a targeted attraction campaign programme for the mental health workforce, supported by Train Work Live and We Care Wales.

3. Seamless working models

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- contributed to and supported the strategic primary care programme workforce and organisational development theme
- offered nurse training to care home staff
- developed routes into reablement training
- contributed to developing a learning resource for Tŷ Dysgu on shared decision making

We:

- contributed to the delivery of the Learning Disabilities Strategic Action Plan, as part of our role on the Ministerial Advisory Group
- continued to support the development and use of a competency toolkit to support the role of trusted assessors
- continued to support and took part in regional workforce boards and regional partnership boards
- continued to support government policy and stakeholder initiatives, including eliminating profit, domiciliary care franchise, and increasing community capacity
- continued to support the work of the Learning and Improvement Network for Reablement to share practice and explore workforce solutions. This included working alongside Public Health Wales to review the status of reablement and intermediate care services as part of a national study led by The Networked Data Lab

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continued to attend national meetings with workforce managers and the HEIs so we are aware of any challenges facing the social work profession
- continued to co-ordinate and chair the Social Work Profession Stakeholder group on a quarterly basis
- are working closely with our colleagues in education quality assurance to discuss continued professional development (CPD) options for social workers

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to work with partners to expand the training including nurse qualifying training, on offer to health and social care workers in care homes, through care home education facilitator roles

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

- continued to support an All Wales Approved Mental Health Professional Leads Network to share good practice and resources to support role development and improvement.
- developed content for Mental Health Literacy Training foundation level 1 e-learning
- developed guidance for recovery colleges and shaped a model to take work forward with partners

4. Building a digitally ready workforce

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- supported the construction and ongoing work of the Gwella professional development website, that sets out learning pathways and opportunities for professionals in social care and health

- worked with partners to increase the availability and catalogue of virtual learning solutions, including e-learning, virtual classroom, and simulation

We:

- developed and contributed to the development of a range of digital learning resources and [learning modules](#), including the following areas:
 - safeguarding
 - infection prevention and control
 - the Welsh language
 - strength-based and outcome focused practice
 - personal and workplace well-being
 - balancing rights and responsibilities in hospital discharge
 - communication methods and approaches in social care
 - various topics aligned to the All Wales Induction Framework
 - codes of professional practice
 - rights-based approaches and person-centred care
 - principles of the Social Service and Well-being Act
- continued to prioritise improving digital literacy and digital infrastructure in the workforce through the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP) grant
- published [research](#) to understand the current status of digital innovation in social care in Wales, and identified what further actions and support are needed
- completed a discovery phase for a digital maturity and literacy assessment with the social care sector in Wales
- joined the AI Commission for health and social care to provide a social care perspective.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continue to liaise with our technology colleagues about advances in practice that can help social work practice and promote these to the sector

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- held four workshops for employers and managers to support the digital inclusion of workers, to increase workers' access, confidence and competence when working towards induction and qualifications
- supported the development of a medication management e-learning resource for social care workers

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

- commissioned a pilot for an app that helps streamline the process of mental health act assessments.

5. Excellent education and training

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- developed a joint induction approach in line with the All Wales induction framework

We:

- administered, allocated and reported on the use of the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Partnership (SCWWDP) grant
- continued to provide support to employers and learning providers with the ongoing implementation of the health and social care vocational qualifications

- began to develop a set of national resources to be used by learners, learning providers and employers to support the achievement of essential skills qualifications
- worked with partners to improve opportunities for learners to carry out education and training through the medium of Welsh
- worked in partnership with the National Centre for Learning Welsh to create the [Camau](#) free learn Welsh course especially for people working in social care
- developed in partnership with the Regional Safeguarding Boards, a [national safeguarding learning, development and training framework](#), to help people who have safeguarding responsibilities in Wales
- continued to support the understanding and use of strengths-based practice across areas of social care statutory and non-statutory services. This is through resources and training including workshops for Responsible Individuals delivered in collaboration with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). We also developed a sector guide on standards and principles when commissioning for and delivering strength- based practice
- continued to offer the collaborative skills communications programme to local authorities
- continued to support the provision of learning to support the workforce in working with unpaid carers
- continued to support the work of the Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) for unpaid carers
- began to develop a skills framework for people working in social care improvement, innovation, and research
- created a team of coaches to build relationships, confidence, and skills in innovation through coaching local teams
- 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:

- continued to provide funding through our SCWWDP grant to support sponsored places for the social work degree
- continued to support student social workers through qualifying training into employment
- continued to influence the value of bursaries for social work students
- began to create a learning journey for CPD for social workers

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to promote opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships so they are viable career choices to enter and stay in the sector
- continued to provide support to employers and learning providers for the ongoing implementation of the health and social care vocational qualifications
- continued to support the use of the All Wales induction framework
- continued to support the use of the induction framework for social care managers
- supported the continued provision for the Social Services Practitioner award
- achieved recognition for the Social Services Practitioner award as equivalent to the first year of the degree in Social Work thereby widening access for vocational learners to enter Higher Education
- supported the consortium of awarding organisations to develop and change the Level 4 and 5 health and social care vocational qualifications with fundamental changes negotiated for the assessment methodology as a response to engagement and feedback from the sector.
- held two face-to-face employer engagement events and developed guidance for night workers in residential children's services

- collaborated with sector colleagues from the Qualifications and Standards Advisory Group (QSAG) to look at a potential process for the transferability of qualifications that aren't currently recognised on the qualification framework, including those from other UK countries and international qualifications
- began working on a project to contextualise the learning and teaching materials used to support Essential Skills Wales, so they better reflect the health and social care, and early years and childcare sectors
- restarted work to develop apprenticeship placement guidance with the steering group made up of sector colleagues
- continued to engage with the sector and held a number of networks and professional development workshops for learning providers on topics relating to the content and assessment of sector qualifications
- held four workshops for employers and managers to support the digital inclusion of workers, to increase workers' access, confidence and competence when working towards induction and qualifications

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

- continued to provide national training in brief solution focussed therapy across health and social care
- established a steering group to develop a competency framework for mental health support workers.

6. Leadership and succession

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- continued to develop and create more social care resources and learning opportunities within the [Gwella](#) portal

- worked to promote compassionate leadership and the supporting [joint principles](#).

We:

- continued to invest in developing compassionate leaders across health and social care
- delivered a collective and compassionate senior leadership programme for local authorities and the voluntary sector
- developed and delivered a bespoke professional development programme for new directors, consisting of action learning sets, guest speakers and individual coaching sessions
- delivered and evaluated the Aspiring Middle Manager Learning and Development Programme
- continued to provide a leadership role to promote bilingual working
- continued to support the Welsh Government's 'Mwy na geiriau' action plan
- researched the most effective ways of supporting diversity in social care leadership and identifying options for a pilot to support the professional development opportunities of Asian, Black, and other ethnic groups
- worked with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to explore how to move ahead with support for embedding positive cultures
- developed new compassionate leadership webpages to support the sector.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continued to promote, support, and review the Team Manager Development Programme ([TMDP](#)) and Middle Manager Development Programme ([MMDP](#)) qualifications and created marketing videos for both programmes
- delivered a session for TMDP tutors to help them identify resources to support teaching around compassionate leadership as part of the programme

- continued to provide a mentoring support system for newly appointed senior leaders
- delivered a learning development session for practice educators about difficult conversations, linked to the compassionate leadership principles of managing difficulties positively, openly, courageously, and ethically.

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 Health and Social Care qualifications, including the related apprenticeship pathways.

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

- developed and delivered a fully funded Level 7 accredited Mental Health Team Manager Development Programme. Sixty candidates have started their studies.

7. Workforce supply and shape

Show

Together with HEIW, we:

- developed workforce planning guidance to identify and develop Welsh language skills in the health and social care workforce.
- refreshed the resource pack to support the increasing community capacity programme

We:

- continued to support the skills development and confidence of social workers in moving towards operational models of strengths-based and person-centred practice
- continued to improve and bring together approaches to collecting and publishing workforce data across the social care sector and made Social Care Wales registration data available in the National Social Care Data Portal for Wales
- launched a data maturity assessment with local authorities to better understand the gaps in culture and learning around data use
- continued to support the work of the Carers' Ministerial Advisory Group
- continued to contribute evidence to the Carers Summit
- completed a [scoping review](#) of the approaches to workforce planning across the sector and started to respond to the recommendations to develop this further
- continued to support the work of the Resourcefulness Communities Partnership to help develop and promote local initiatives that improve well-being in communities throughout Wales.
- explored developing a model to support volunteering placements in social care settings
- reviewed the 'Welsh language skills in your workforce, using them effectively' toolkit so it is in line with relevant legislation, reports, frameworks, and incentives. We also created a [digital resource](#) to support its use.
- began a pilot project to support employers to develop Welsh language workforce plans, in partnership with the Welsh Language Commissioner
- started to consider and respond to the workforce implications of the National Care Service
- commissioned an independent review of our registration functions and started to develop an implementation plan to respond to the recommendations.

For the Social work workforce plan, we:

- continued to support the social work workforce with registration
- continue to discuss the importance of overseas workers and their integration into the workforce in a safe and supported way
- continued to work closely with our Welsh Government colleagues to spot opportunities that will improve the current situation

For the Direct care workforce plan, we:

- continued to support the development of the Social Care Fair Work Forum's Pay and Progression Framework.
- continued to support the care home workforce with registration
- continued to support the Welsh Government's Transformation of Children's Services programme of work, including the national practice framework
- carried out an occupational therapy training needs analysis with local authorities, bringing together a national picture of the education and training needs moving forward, including the opportunities and challenges of placements
- supported the development of a Level 5 programme in collaboration with the National Commissioning Board to focus on commissioning for well-being outcomes.

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

- provided funding for a cohort of 20 people to attend AMHP training across north and south Wales.

Work to come

We will develop the following areas of work further in 2024 to 2025.

- carry out research to understand the challenges agencies face, looking at how we can support them. This includes building relationships and creating resources for agencies and employers who use agency staff, to make sure they are aware of their regulatory responsibilities
- develop and deliver a post qualifying framework for social work
- review the 'Consolidation of practice - first three years' guidance for social work
- work with the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA) to provide workforce planning training to social services departments within local authorities
- Identify and consider with national partners the costed options for a national model of workforce planning support
- review codes of practice, practice guidance and fitness to practice principles
- review our approach and process for recording ongoing CPD, to support registered people to record their CPD easily, and in an accessible way
- develop national resources for use with Essential Skills Qualifications part 2
- look at how to improve career pathways and offer clarity on mandatory training, qualification and CPD requirements
- carry out a digital maturity and literacy assessment with the social care sector in Wales.

Conclusion

As a sector we continue to aspire to achieve the ambition of the 10-year strategy and we will continue to support collaborative working across health and social care, between local organisations and national bodies working in social partnership.

The work achieved in phase one since the strategy's launch has allowed us to gain a momentum we can build upon in future years, in-line with our longer-

term goals.

The [Social care workforce delivery plan 2024 to 2027](#), outlines the clear set of actions for phase two of the strategy's delivery, so we can continue to support and develop the workforce.

Social Care Wales, June 2024

Here's an easy read version of the annual report

[Workforce strategy annual report 2023 - 2024](#)

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