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

Social work qualifications and degree programmes

Information about the social work degree, what you can expect from the first three years of practice and post

qualifying training.

First published: 10 March 2017
Last updated: 19 October 2026

This document was downloaded from socialcare.wales and may not be the latest version.
Go to https://socialcare.wales/qualifications-funding/social-work-qualifications for the latest version.

Information about the social work degree, what you can expect from the first three years of practice and post qualifying training.

The social work degree is the professional qualification for social workers in Wales and throughout the UK.

The title of social worker is protected. Only people with a social work professional qualification can practise as social workers. Social workers are expected to increase their knowledge and skills after they qualify.

Definition of a social worker

This is the first national agreed definition of the social worker role. This was created following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including WLGA, BASW Cymru and ADSS Cymru and was unanimously agreed as an official definition for social workers in Wales.

> Social work is a profession that supports, empowers and safeguards the most vulnerable adults and children in society.

Social workers uphold the human rights of people who, for different reasons, may need help to speak for themselves. They have a range of legal, academic and social work knowledge and skills. ‘Social worker’ is a protected title and you can't practice as a social worker unless you’re qualified and registered.

Social workers establish relationships by working with people to help them identify their strengths, needs and well-being outcomes. They support people to

balance their rights and responsibilities and for them to access help and support as required. They also have statutory safeguarding duties, where needed.

The profession gives the opportunity to work with a wide cross-section of the population and to support them at their most difficult, vulnerable times. Social workers are expected to be able to navigate a difficult path at times by developing trust and rapport within complex individual, family and community relationships. It is a rewarding career and gives the opportunity to pursue social justice and meaningful participation in decision making to improve people's wellbeing.

The unique contribution of social work

Here is a definition of social work from the International Federation of Social Workers':

> "Social work is the fastest growing profession in the world as more governments and employers recognise the powerful impact that social workers have in communities. Lower crime rates, better health outcomes, more people accessing work and education are outcomes of social work professionals supporting people to take charge of their own futures and realise their aspirations.
>
> "As a human rights-based profession, social work has an essential role in all societies facilitating communities and populations to raise their voices and stand for their equality alongside all others. The strength of the social work profession lies in capacity to build participatory democracy, engage communities in their sustainable futures, and defend human rights."

Recent changes in legislation in Wales require a more co-productive approach of working alongside people to meet their personal outcomes and establish what really matters to people. This approach enables the workforce to not rely only on a prescribed service model but uses its knowledge and skills, supported by research and evidence from casework to support individuals.

A Healthier Wales, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and the Future Generations Act all require strengths-based, person-centred and outcome-focused practice. They are all based on collaborative working to promote people having voice and control.

The legislation has moved the emphasis to prevention, early intervention and a focus on the community being resourceful and resilient. We work with partners to support people in their communities using a whole system approach based on people’s strengths.

Social work safeguards people who are socially excluded, at risk of abuse or neglect, or vulnerable for other reasons. Social work has to balance the support, and safeguarding roles carefully. These must match the needs and circumstances of the person or family.

What's expected of social workers

Social work is a collaborative profession, working with other professionals to help children, adults and families improve and gain control of their lives when their safety or ability to participate in their communities is restricted.

Social workers are expected to:

- act as an expert and resource for the state

- act as an enabler of people, to promote their dignity and their human rights
- practise in an anti-discriminatory way at all times
- have the duty and the authority to assess and safeguard people at risk
- be the named person with statutory responsibility for managing a caseload of individuals and families
- act as an advocate for vulnerable people and children (as stated in point 32 of the Code of Practice)
- facilitate care and support from different professionals, so people have the right support at the right time
- work within the legislative framework in Wales
- adopt any new technology which helps us meet the needs of our clients.

Finally, the aim for all social workers is to empower people to make positive and lasting changes in their lives, to ensure they reach their potential, and to make a positive contribution to society.

Social workers want to:

- make a difference
- make things better for people
- support people to define what better looks like for them and support them to achieve positive change
- work with people to keep themselves safe as far as possible, whilst also ensuring the statutory duty of safeguarding is upheld when needed
- support people to mitigate the challenges that they have experienced in their lives, often through no fault of their own, so they can try to live as independently and fulfilled as possible
- try and reduce the level of inequality that exists so that people get their best chance in life
- give people hope and opportunities!

Social work qualifying degree programmes

Social workers promote well-being and improve outcomes for people. They focus on what matters to the people who need their care and support.

Social workers need:

- excellent communication skills
- resilience
- knowledge of law and policy
- knowledge of social work theory.

To qualify as a social worker in Wales you must complete a course approved by us.

The social work qualification has equal amounts of academic and practical learning. You can study it at graduate or postgraduate levels. Universities run programmes in partnership with local authority social work services.

Below is a list of approved social work programmes in Wales.

Undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes

Welsh universities offering the undergraduate degree

- Bridgend College *(franchised from Cardiff Metropolitan University)* BSc (Hons)
- Cardiff Metropolitan University BSc (Hons)
- Swansea University BSc (Hons)
- The Open University – distance learning BA (Hons) (Wales)
- University of South Wales BSc (Hons)
- Wrexham University BA (Hons)

Welsh universities offering the postgraduate degree

- Bangor University – Master's in Social Work (MA)
- Cardiff University – Master's in Social Work (MSc)
- Cardiff University - Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work (PgDip)
- Swansea University – Master's in Social Work (MSc)
- Wrexham University - Master's in Social Work (MA)

Social work degree bursaries and funding

Find out what financial support may be available to students

A social work workforce fit for the future: report

The number of social work students has been falling in Wales since 2016.

We've published a report with the Institute for Public Care at Oxford Brookes University that looks at the current situation and what we need to do to make sure we have enough social workers in the future.

Find out more about the report

The Consolidation Programme for newly qualified social workers

This is for social workers in their first social work role after qualifying.

If you qualified after 1 April 2016 you'll need to complete this programme to renew your professional registration.

It's delivered by:

- Porth Agored in association with University of Wales Trinity St David
- University of South Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan University.

The programme requirements can be found on our regulation of social work training guidance page.

Your questions answered

- Read our frequently asked questions about the Consolidation Programme for newly qualified social workers

First three years of practice

Social workers need a set of skills based on knowledge, values and personal attributes. These can't be fully developed through a qualifying course alone and professional development is necessary for social workers as they become experienced practitioners.

We've worked with Care Inspectorate Wales to develop guidance to help with social workers' development after qualifying. This brings together what is expected of social workers and their employers.

The first three years of practice has three stages:

- Induction into professional social work.
- Growing in competence and confidence.

- Consolidation Programme and renewal of registration with us.

With training, support and practice, social workers develop their skills in increasingly complicated situations.

Download the First three years in practice framework

Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) Framework

Following evaluation and review, the Experienced Practice, Senior Practice and Consultant Social Work programmes ended in 2020.

CPEL evaluation reports are available on request by emailing iwqueries@socialcare.wales

The post qualifying framework is currently under review. We're grateful to our partners for their ongoing support in defining post qualifying social work education in Wales**.**

The Consolidation Programme isn't part of this review and there are no further changes planned for these programmes.

Other post qualifying courses listed below aren't part of this review.

Other post qualifying courses

Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP)

AMHPs are trained to apply elements of mental health law with medical practitioners. This can be a social worker and other professionals including community psychiatric nurses, occupational therapists and psychologists. The programme is delivered by Swansea University.

More information about the course

Practice learning and assessment of social work students

Supporting and assessing social work students' practice is vital. It helps decide if they have the skills and knowledge to become a social worker.

The programme is delivered by:

- Bangor University
- Cardiff University
- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- Swansea University.
- University of South Wales.

Manager development programmes

Team Manager Development

Delivered by The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University, the Team Manager Development Programme supports the delivery of excellent social work practice by enabling front-line managers to improve practice quality, manage their team effectively and handle change successfully.

- View transcript

00:00 --> 00:09

We know that investing in our workforce and developing people

00:09 --> 00:13

has always been at the heart of good services in Wales.

00:13 --> 00:15

That's why we worked with the sector to develop

00:15 --> 00:17

the Team Manager Development Programme.

00:17 --> 00:20

The Team Manager Development Programme is an 18 month course,

00:20 --> 00:23

which can help you improve practice quality,

00:23 --> 00:25

manage your team effectively

00:25 --> 00:27

and handle change successfully.

00:27 --> 00:29

TMDP is a very practical course

00:29 --> 00:32

and I think one of the key aspects of it,

00:32 --> 00:34

is it first and foremost gives people the opportunity

00:34 --> 00:35

to network with their peers.

00:35 --> 00:38

Being a manager can be quite lonely place at times

00:38 --> 00:41

and TMDP fosters a real sense of belonging

00:41 --> 00:44

and sort of shared understanding of collective challenges.

00:44 --> 00:47

If you came on the course, you would crucially

00:47 --> 00:49

get the time and space to reflect on your own practice

00:49 --> 00:51

and how you are applying yourself

00:51 --> 00:54

to improve practice quality within your teams.

00:54 --> 00:58

I've found the best bits where the relationships like form

00:58 --> 01:00

with peers from around Wales.

01:00 --> 01:04

Quite often you would meet a similar manager

01:04 --> 01:06

in a similar role, facing the same challenges.

01:06 --> 01:10

And what I had found is they'd come up with solutions

01:10 --> 01:11

that actually I could pinch

01:11 --> 01:14

and I could take that back to my own local authority.

01:14 --> 01:16

So it was very useful listening to other people's ideas.

01:16 --> 01:18

I think the course taught me

01:20 --> 01:25

to understand the sort of the pressures between managing a team

01:25 --> 01:28

of social workers and supportive support and care workers etc

01:28 --> 01:33

versus the pressures and the expectations, if you like

01:33 --> 01:34

of upper management.

01:34 --> 01:37

I suppose, you know, that there's targets to be met.

01:37 --> 01:41

There's budgetary considerations from above.

01:41 --> 01:44

But there's also a team of individuals and human beings

01:44 --> 01:46

that need to be supported appropriately and effectively.

01:46 --> 01:54

The course taught me, I think, to deal with that difficulty better.

What you'll study

- An introduction to managing practice quality.
- Managing demand and capacity evidencing performance and quality.
- Leading and managing for quality.

Entry requirements

You will normally be expected to:

- have a recognised professional qualification in social work (or similar for non-social work staff) and registration with Social Care Wales, the General Social Care Council, the Scottish Social Services Council or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (or equivalent body for non-social work staff where applicable)
- have a minimum of three years post qualifying experience
- occupy a front line management or senior practitioner position in a social care setting in Wales, or have been identified as an ‘emergent leader’ with impending career progression, and have the support of your employing organisation
- have the ability to study at postgraduate level

Award

Postgraduate Certificate in Managing Practice Quality in Social Care (60 CATS credits at postgraduate level 7) from Oxford Brookes University.

How to apply

To book your place, you'll need to speak to your local authority workforce development team.

Middle Manager Development

Delivered by The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University the Middle Manager Development Programme supports managers to respond to the

requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

- View transcript

00:00 --> 00:08

We know that investing in our workforce and

00:08 --> 00:12

developing people has always been at the heart of good services in Wales.

00:12 --> 00:14

That's why we worked with the sector

00:14 --> 00:16

to develop the Middle Manager Development Programme.

00:16 --> 00:20

The Middle Manager Development Programme is for middle

00:20 --> 00:22

managers in social care settings across Wales.

00:22 --> 00:25

The programme will help you develop as a leader,

00:25 --> 00:27

shape social care

00:27 --> 00:29

and deliver better outcomes.

00:29 --> 00:33

MMDP is the logical next step for anyone who really wants to hone

00:33 --> 00:35

their leadership and management skills.

00:35 --> 00:36

There's a strong focus on

00:36 --> 00:38

strategic management, strategic leadership,

00:38 --> 00:42

that collaborative aspect that comes with the more strategic roles

00:42 --> 00:44

and partnership working.

00:44 --> 00:47

It really helped me to develop my own leadership skills,

00:47 --> 00:50

to reflect on who I am as a leader, how to develop.

00:50 --> 00:51

What are my good points?

00:51 --> 00:53

What are my strengths and what areas I need to develop.

00:53 --> 00:57

And you learn from listening to others and their experiences.

00:57 --> 01:00

I also think it made you think about --

01:00 --> 01:02

So, for example, commissioning was one of the topics

01:02 --> 01:03

we learned a lot about

01:03 --> 01:05

and I thought I don't do commissioning.

01:05 --> 01:07

Social worker practice is what I do.

01:07 --> 01:09

Well, actually, I commission every day.

01:09 --> 01:12

It's just the language around it and the theory behind it

01:12 --> 01:16

that you don't really reflect on yourself and your development

01:16 --> 01:18

and you just think "Oh no - I do this. Oh, yeah!"

01:18 --> 01:20

and it just helps you think to believe in yourself

01:20 --> 01:21

and develop that confidence

01:21 --> 01:24

and to really know, "No, I do do this every day

01:24 --> 01:26

and it's not scary -- the theory and the what's behind it."

01:26 --> 01:27

It isn't scary. It's what I do.

01:28 --> 01:31

You should do the MMDP course if you aspire to be

01:31 --> 01:33

a stronger strategic leader than you already are

01:33 --> 01:38

> and I think you should also do it if you've got an appetite for shaping the social care market,
>
> 01:38 --> 01:40
>
> for influencing your providers,
>
> 01:40 --> 01:43
>
> but also for supporting and looking after your providers
>
> 01:43 --> 01:45
>
> because we're all working to the same goals.

What the programme covers

- Developing as a leader.
- Shaping social care.
- Delivering better outcomes.

Entry requirements

You need to:

- have a first degree and/or recognised professional qualification in social work (or similar for non-social work staff) or equivalent professional experience
- occupy a middle management position in social care in Wales
- have the support of your employing organisation
- have the ability to study at postgraduate level.

Award

Postgraduate certificate in Strategic and Operational Leadership in Social Care from Oxford Brookes University which equates to 60 CATS credits at postgraduate level 7.

How to apply

To book your place, you'll need to speak to your local authority workforce development team.

Contact us

If you have a question or if you can't find what you are looking for get in touch with us.