Research Support and Engagement Framework: how Social Care Wales works with external researchers

1. Purpose of the Research Support and Engagement Framework (framework)

1.1 Social Care Wales is a Welsh Government-sponsored body with responsibility for registering the social care and social work workforces and supporting improvement and development. We are often approached to support academic researchers when they are applying for research funding or designing and conducting research. Researchers may ask us to:

- promote a research study on our communication channels, such as social media
- endorse their study, which they can state on their applications
- sit on panels for the review of funding applications
- sit on advisory or steering groups for research studies
- participate in research studies as participants, such as for interviews or focus groups
- write letters in general support of funding applications, such as confirming that the topic or research question is of significant interest for social care in Wales or confirming that we will support researchers with specific project tasks
- give permission to access data held in the SAIL Databank on registered persons
- give permission to use our data on fitness to practise and hearings
- partner formally in research studies, for example as part of a consortium
- invite registered people and other individuals to participate in research studies.

1.2 Our ambition is to help improve social care by applying evidence-enriched policy, practice and service models that have a focus on prevention and early intervention, and supporting relevant research is an essential part of creating good evidence. Our research activities from 2018 to 2023 were set out in our five-year research and development strategy. From 2024 to 2029, these are set out in our new research, innovation and improvement strategy, Ymlaen.

1.3 Our framework is for managing our support for and engagement with **social care research** – an outline of what we mean by social care research is included in Appendix 1.

1.4 In order to ensure any research involving either Social Care Wales's data or resources not only meets the aims of the strategy, but is consistent with our

ambition, vision and values, we have established a research support and engagement framework to review, approve or refuse requests from both internal and external sources.

1.5 We are registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner's Office. We have a responsibility to protect our customers' data and comply with legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, and we take this responsibility seriously. The ways in which we collect and process personal data is set out in our privacy notice.

1.6 As a public body, we collect and use personal information where this is necessary to perform tasks that are in the public interest or to perform our official functions, of which research is one. Section 70 of the Regulation and Inspection for Social Care (Wales) Act states: SCW may promote or undertake comparative or other studies designed to enable it to make recommendations under section 69 for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of a care and support service.

2. Criteria for assessing requests for support and engagement

2.1 Our participation in research must be proportionate to the likely usefulness and significance of the research. We therefore reserve support for research that appears feasible, ethically sound and high impact.

2.2 A higher threshold is considered for research involving contact with stakeholders or access to Fitness to Practise-related data. These criteria are set out below.

The principal researcher and research team

2.3 Individuals must be affiliated with an academic institution or another organisation and judged competent (i.e. have relevant research qualifications, skills and experience) to deliver good quality research within the field.

2.4 Applications from external undergraduate, masters or PQ students will not normally be supported. This is because such research is unlikely to be published externally and, consequently, of enough benefit to Social Care Wales and the social care workforce with whom we work to justify our participation.

2.5 Applications from students in social work placements will usually be supported where they involve contact with a limited number of Social Care Wales staff, but not where they involve contact with Social Care Wales stakeholders or access to Fitness to Practise related data.

Scientific and ethical conduct

2.6 To receive support from Social Care Wales, we require that:

- the proposed research is judged to be robust and scientifically sound, with an appropriate methodology for the subject matter.

- the proposed research is judged to be ethically sound in both its conduct and use and has approval from the relevant university / institution's ethics panel, where applicable.
- the proposed research will be conducted in compliance with data protection legislation.
- appropriate data security measures are in place to safely record, handle and store data during the project and following completion of the research.
- confidentiality and anonymity is guaranteed so that no Social Care Wales staff, stakeholder or Fitness to Practise case will be identifiable in any research report.
- the anticipated risks are considered clearly and relevant mitigations are set out. These are weighed against anticipated benefits. This will be mapped out through completion of a Data Protection Impact Assessment.

Resources required to support the research

2.7   To receive support from Social Care Wales, we will assess whether:

- the nature of the proposal makes Social Care Wales's involvement necessary.
- likely costs to Social Care Wales, including staff time and data provision, of supporting the work are clearly identified and have been built into the initial funding bid. These are proportionate to the expected benefit of the research.
- the research is not likely to disrupt Social Care Wales's ability to provide our services.

Benefits of the research

2.8   We will also assess the benefits of the research to Social Care Wales, specifically:

- the potential significance of the research is clearly set out, linking aims and outputs. This is relevant to our [statutory remit and strategic aims](#) and the findings are likely to be of use to Social Care Wales and the stakeholders we work with.
- where research involves contact with our stakeholders or access to Fitness to Practise related data, the research has national significance contributing to the evidence base of best practice.
- the research does not appear to duplicate existing similar research.
- the findings will be presented in an accessible and timely manner, with clear plans for dissemination to influence the social care sector.

2.9   Conditions of our support if a funding bid is successful:

- the Research Manager will be advised of any major changes to the research design or plan, and determine whether re-approval is required.
- the researcher adds details of the project to our 'Project Finder' on the Insight Collective website, so that others can learn about the research in progress.

- Social Care Wales is kept up to date on progress and findings of the research and is given sight of the findings in advance of publication to be ready for any enquiries from the public or the media arising from the research.
- Social Care Wales is acknowledged in any research reports or publications arising from it.
- On completion, the researcher will write a short summary of the research – including any relevant policy and practice implications for Social Care Wales – for our digital channels.

Conflicts of interest or political implications

3.1   We will not support research where the research presents any conflicts of interest with our role as a Welsh Government Sponsored Body.

3.2   We want to support social care researchers to apply for grants only available in Wales, while ensuring we do not give researchers in Wales an unfair advantage over each other. We will meet with any applicants who approach us. We will give feedback and input on their applications, except where Welsh researchers/institutions are in competition with each other for Wales-only funding – e.g., funding from Health and Care Research Wales. In this case, we will only provide an endorsement, which researchers may state on their application.

3.3   We will not support research that is for commercial purposes, or directed towards commercial development, other than in exceptional circumstances.

For all queries related to our Research Support and Engagement Framework, please contact our Research Manager, Emma Taylor-Collins (emma.taylor-collins@socialcare.wales).

Appendix 1: What is social care research?

1. To count as **research**[1], projects must:
   - define a series of research questions, issues or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its aims and objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions, issues or problems to be addressed
   - specify a research context for the questions, issues or problems to be addressed – and why it is important to address these particular questions, issues or problems should be addressed
   - specify the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions, issues or problems

2. We define **social care research** as research about[2]:
   - The provision of care, support, and personal assistance in the context of interpersonal relationships, whether formal or informal, in relation to: activities of daily living, maintenance of independence, social interaction, enabling the individual to play a fuller part in society, assisting individuals to manage complex relationships, and assisting the individual to access or receive services from a care home or other supported accommodation or to take advantage of educational facilities.
   - The provision of advice; practical assistance in the home; assistance with equipment and home adaptions; visiting and replacement care; meals; or facilities for occupational, social, cultural and recreational activities outside the home.
   - The provision of protection or social support services for children or adults in need or at risk, or those with social needs arising from illness, disability, age or poverty
   - The social needs of people receiving social care, and the services or initiatives addressing those needs, including prevention of deterioration; promotion of physical or mental health; improving opportunities and life chances; strengthening families; and protecting human rights.
   - The organisational systems, infrastructures, care settings, and/or personnel involved in the management and leadership, commissioning, provision, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of care and support services, and/or the interface between; or impact of the above on related systems such as healthcare, education, housing, and the criminal justice system.

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[1] From the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)'s definition of research
(https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/researchfundingguide/introduction/definitionofresearch/)
[2] Developed in a 2014 joint stakeholder workshop led by Health and Care Research Wales.

- National and/or local policies that affect the ethos, commissioning, organisation, provision, monitoring and evaluation, and delivery of care and support services.
- The improvement of social and community cohesion (rather than the individual).