



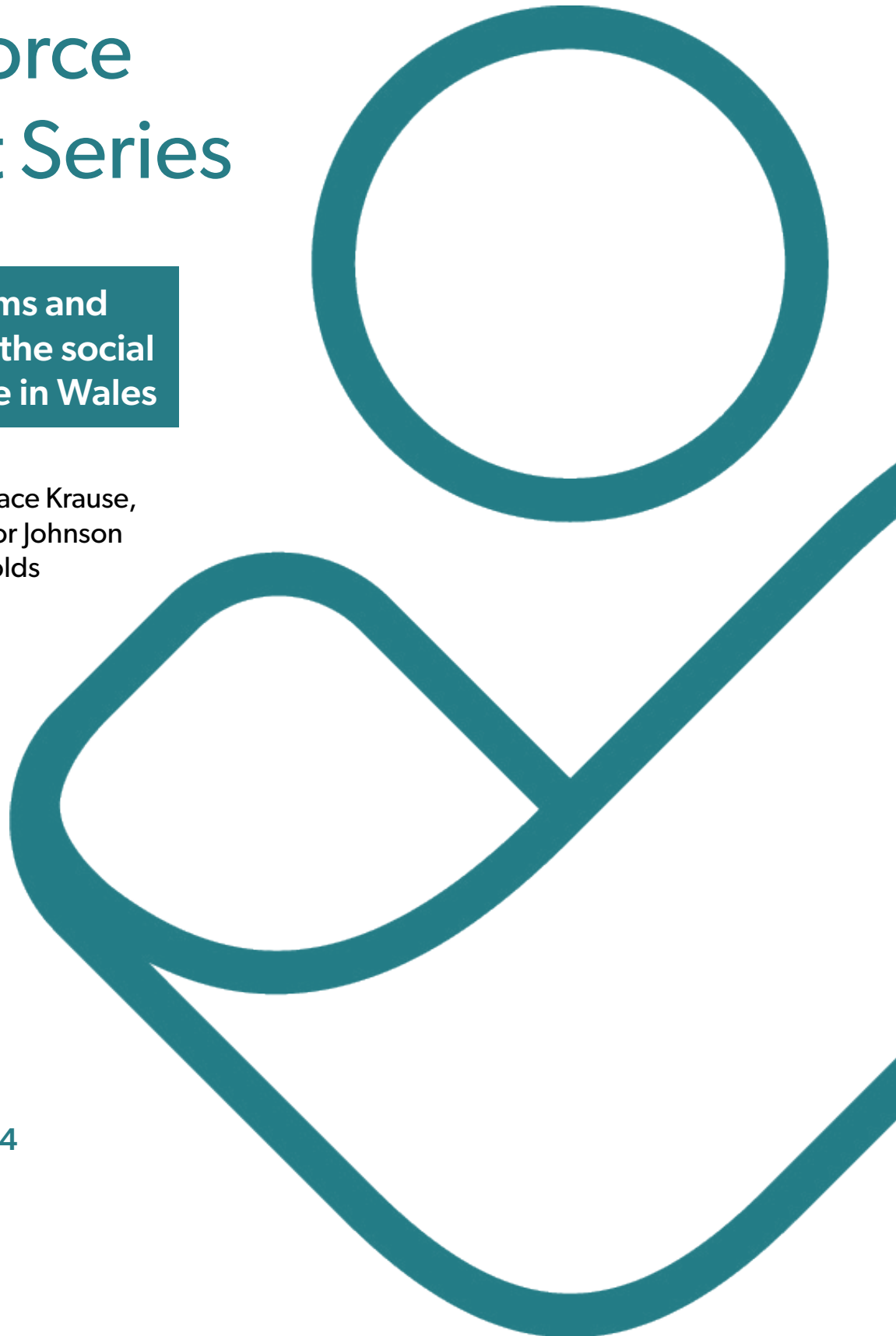
Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Workforce Insight Series

**Improving terms and
conditions for the social
care workforce in Wales**

Compiled by Dr Grace Krause,
edited by Dr Eleanor Johnson
and Dr Rhian Reynolds

Published: July 2024



In this briefing, we've gathered findings from our research to explore the experiences of the social care workforce in relation to the terms and conditions of their work. We've grouped our findings into the following themes:

- job satisfaction
- pay and reimbursement
- employment benefits
- security and flexibility
- trade union membership.

The social care workforce in numbers

The social care sector is a significant economic force in Wales, with adult social care alone adding an estimated £1.2 billion to the economy in the 2015 to 2016 tax year (Kearney and White, 2018). The sector employs an estimated 84,134 people in Wales (Social Care Wales, 2022).

In 2023, we carried out a survey of the registered workforce to find out how people felt about working in social care.

These are some of the important things we learnt from those who responded:

- most people were satisfied with their current job (**57 per cent**)
- while most social workers and social care managers were paid an annual salary (**84 per cent**), most care workers were paid by the hour (**74 per cent**)
- within the next five years, the number of people who said they were at least 'quite likely' to leave their jobs rose to **44 per cent**
- while **57 per cent** of social workers who responded belonged to a trade union, just **38 per cent** of social care managers and **31 per cent** of care workers said they were union members.
- most respondents agreed they could meet the needs of the people who accessed care and support (**70 per cent**)
- more than a quarter (**26 per cent**) were expecting to leave the social care sector within the next 12 months
- the top-rated reasons for leaving the sector within five years were low pay (**58 per cent**), feeling overworked (**45 per cent**) and poor working conditions (**30 per cent**)

(Social Care Wales, 2023a)



Why it's important to improve terms and conditions

Good terms and conditions are important for workers' well-being. Poor working conditions can also have an impact on retention rates and on attraction and recruitment to the sector. This can have a knock-on effect on the delivery of care and support.

From our workforce survey, we know that 63 per cent of registered social care workers started working in the sector because they wanted a job that would make a difference to people's lives. Forty seven per cent said they felt it would be a job they'd enjoy (Social Care Wales, 2023a). This data suggests that the social care workforce in Wales is highly motivated and that workers want to provide the best possible care to the people they support. However, we know from other research that working conditions in the sector can make this difficult to achieve.

Social care workers are highly motivated and want to provide the best care possible

The Fair Work Wales report, produced by the Fair Work Commission in 2019, recommends looking at working conditions in the social care sector. It describes the sector as a 'core industry that contributes to individual and social well-being'. The report also notes that, despite working in a sector of great importance, the social care workforce often struggles with insecurity and poor working conditions.

A Senedd research paper, published in 2022, describes the social care workforce in Wales as 'in crisis' (James, 2022). Recruitment and retention issues are the main reasons for this (James, 2022). The sector is understaffed when compared to other sectors in the Welsh economy. In 2022, there were around 5,323 vacancies in social care across Wales, equivalent to nine per cent of the workforce (Social Care Wales, 2022). It's estimated that there'll be an even higher demand for staff in the future with at least 20,000 additional social care employees needed by 2030 (WeCare Wales, 2022).

We've grouped our findings on terms and conditions into different themes so that we can explore the data in more detail.



Job satisfaction

Our 2023 workforce survey showed us that most social care workers and social care managers were satisfied with their current job (57 per cent and 68 per cent respectively). But it also highlighted the challenges of retaining an experienced and qualified workforce. Over a quarter of all registered workers said they expected to leave the social care sector within the next 12 months, and 44 per cent expected to leave within the next five years (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

The most frequently given reasons for registered people saying they were at least 'quite likely' to leave the social care sector within five years were: low pay (58 per cent), feeling overworked (45 per cent) and poor employment/working conditions (30 per cent). Care workers were most likely to give low pay as a reason for leaving, whilst social workers and social care managers were more likely to give the reason of feeling overworked (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Another factor related to job satisfaction in the social care workforce is whether people feel like they're able to do their work well and meet the needs of people using care services. Most workers responding to our workforce survey (70 per cent) agreed that they could meet the needs of the people they cared for. But only around half (49 per cent) felt they had enough time to do their job well. Social workers were less likely than other workers to agree that they could meet the needs of their clients (40 per cent), or that they had enough time to do their job well (23 per cent). When asked about stress, only 31 per cent of workers felt there was enough support in place. Social care managers were the most likely to believe there was enough support in place to manage stress (45 per cent) (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Pay and reimbursement

Pay across the social care workforce varies by type of role and by employer. We don't have specific numbers for Wales, but we know from UK-wide data that in April 2023, the average annual full-time income of residential, day and domiciliary care managers and proprietors was £43,525, with an average hourly rate of £21.43. Social workers in the UK had an average annual full-time income of £40,152 and an average hourly rate of £21.32 (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

By comparison, care workers and home care workers had an average annual full-time income of £24,124 or an average hourly wage of £12.87. Senior care workers had an average annual full-time income of £26,314 and an hourly income of £13.07 (Office for National Statistics, 2023). These figures fall below estimates from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, showing that a single person in 2023 needed to earn £29,500 a year to afford a decent standard of living (Padley and Stone, 2023). A couple with two children needed to make a combined average salary of around £50,000 a year (Padley and Stone, 2023).

In 2021, research found that 56 per cent of the social care workforce in Wales earned below the real living wage of £9.50 an hour (Clifton, 2021). Low pay doesn't reflect the social value and responsibility of social care work and there have long been calls for parity of pay between social care workers and NHS workers. The Welsh Government has taken action to address low pay in the sector through its real living wage uplift. Significant financial investment is needed to make sure social care workers have the same pay, career progression, training and working conditions as their colleagues in the NHS (Palmer, 2022; The Health Foundation, 2022).

In our workforce survey, low pay was given as the number one reason for social care workers considering leaving the workforce. Overall, only 29 per cent of people working in social care felt they were either 'doing alright' financially or 'living comfortably'. When we consider the data by workforce type, care workers stand out as being particularly affected by growing financial pressures. Nearly 37 per cent of care workers said they were finding it quite or very difficult to manage financially. There was no difference in response to this question between care home workers and domiciliary care workers (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Low pay was given as the number one reason for social care workers considering leaving the workforce

The levels of satisfaction with pay differed greatly across the different workforce types. Over 60 per cent of care workers were dissatisfied with their pay, compared with 47 per cent of social workers. But more than half of social care managers were satisfied with their current rate of pay, with only 28 per cent responding that they were dissatisfied (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Social work students starting out in the sector are also affected by financial pressures. In 2022, 20 per cent of Welsh social work students had considered leaving their course because of inadequate bursaries (Institute of Public Care, 2022). There has since been an uplift for post-graduate bursaries in the academic year 2022 to 2023 and Social Care Wales will be evaluating the impact of these changes in 2024.

Most social care roles have few career progression opportunities, particularly compared with allied sectors such as health and education (Moriarty *et al.*, 2018). One example of this limited career progression is that there's only a small difference in pay between care workers and senior care workers in Wales and England. While senior care workers tend to have significantly more responsibility than their colleagues, on average they only earn an extra 44 pence an hour (Urban Foresight, 2023).

It's also clear that the expenses involved in care work, like work-related travel and training costs, sometimes aren't reimbursed or reflected in care workers' wages. In our workforce survey, 75 per cent of social care managers and 59 per cent of social workers who needed to travel for work-related purposes said they receive enough money to cover their work-related travel expenses. However, this was only the case for 44 per cent of care workers (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

According to the workforce survey, there's also limited access to company cars across all job roles (14 per cent of care workers, 20 per cent of social care managers, and 15 per cent of social workers said they had access to company cars). Domiciliary care workers were more likely than other workers to say that costs associated with work, such as travel, were a cause of stress (36 per cent) (Social Care Wales, 2023a). The Welsh Government has recently provided additional funding to support domiciliary care workers, which can be used to pay for driving lessons and to purchase electric fleet vehicles (Welsh Government, 2022a).

Employment benefits

In our workforce survey we asked all registered social care workers about work-related benefits. The responses showed variation between roles. Most people, across all groups, said they had access to a workplace or company pension scheme. Eighty-seven per cent of care workers, 88 per cent of social workers, and 97 per cent of social care managers said they received a contribution from their employer as part of a pension scheme. While involvement in pension schemes was high among all groups, it was more likely for those who had worked in social care for five years or more, and those aged 35 to 54 years (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Most social care workers said they had access to a workplace or company pension scheme

Almost all social care managers received 28 days' paid holiday (96 per cent), compared with 84 per

cent of domiciliary care workers, 79 per cent of social workers and 78 per cent of care home workers (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Only half of care workers received sick pay – falling to around one in five (22 per cent) for agency care workers or those on a ‘zero hours contract’ (also 22 per cent). Care home workers were much less likely than domiciliary care workers to receive sick pay (41 per cent and 58 per cent respectively). Social workers and social care managers were significantly more likely to receive sick pay (85 per cent and 62 per cent respectively) (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

In the survey, 78 per cent of social workers and 71 per cent of social care managers said they had access to family-friendly policies such as flexible working, carer’s leave, and enhanced parental leave. Care workers were much less likely to have access to family-friendly policies (41 per cent). And care workers with a ‘zero hours contract’ were significantly less likely to benefit from family-friendly policies (31 per cent) (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Some groups of care workers are much more likely to receive sick pay and have access to family-friendly policies than others



Security and flexibility

Most social workers and social care managers who responded to our workforce survey were paid an annual salary, but most care workers were paid by the hour. A very small proportion of registered people (three per cent) had both types of income from different jobs. While those paid hourly were no more or less likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied with their job, they were more likely to say they’d leave their current role in social care within the next 12 months or the next five years (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Whilst the survey didn’t specifically explore this issue, the findings suggest that people who are paid hourly are in more transient jobs. Their working pattern, while suiting their current situation, may not have been what they expected to do long term (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Our workforce data collection shows that overall, 80 per cent of those employed in social care in Wales are employed on permanent contracts. There was only a slight difference between the proportion of those on permanent contracts who worked for local authority-run services and those who worked for commissioned services (Social Care Wales, 2022).

The workforce data collection shows that local authority-run services employ a higher proportion of their staff on casual and/or zero hours contracts (12.9 per cent for local authorities compared to 9.7 per cent for commissioned services) (Social Care Wales, 2022).



Trade union membership

Our workforce survey showed a considerable variation in trade union membership across different parts of the workforce. Social workers were much more likely to say they belonged to a trade union (57 per cent) than other groups. Just 38 per cent of social care managers and 31 per cent of care workers said they were union members. Social workers were mainly members of UNISON and the Social Workers Union. Care workers were mainly members of UNISON (Social Care Wales, 2023a).



What's happening and what's planned for improving terms and conditions

Work has already begun on improving terms and conditions for the social care workforce in Wales. For example, the establishment of the Social Care Fair Work Forum, our workforce strategy for health and social care, our workforce health and well-being framework, and the establishment of an expert group to advise on the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru's shared ambition for a National Care and Support Service.

Social Care Fair Work Forum

There are signs of improvement in pay for people working in social care. The Social Care Fair Work Forum was established in 2020 and brings together many social care stakeholders to explore issues like increasing pay and improving working conditions across the sector. The forum involves government, employers, and unions working in social partnership to look at how the definition of fair work should be applied to social care workers in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023b).

In its first year, forum members worked together to propose applying the real living wage across social care in Wales. As a result, paying social care workers the real living wage is now one of the key pledges in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government (Welsh Government, 2022c). As part of this ongoing commitment, local authorities and health boards across Wales received £43 million to provide an uplift to the real living wage for registered workers in care homes and domiciliary care for 2022 to 2023 (Welsh Government, 2023b). There's also work underway to regulate pay rates within children's social work as part of a wider programme around children's social workers who work for agencies (ADSS Cymru, 2024).

The forum also announced it was developing a pay and progression framework and consulted on an early model in the Welsh Government's Rebalancing Care and Support Programme consultation in 2023 (Welsh Government, 2023a).

Workforce strategy for health and social care

A Healthier Wales: our workforce strategy for health and social care (Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales, 2020) supports the implementation of actions to support the workforce across all services and settings. This includes specific workforce plans for the social work workforce, direct care workforce, and strategic mental health workforce. In line with the aims of the workforce strategy, we want the Welsh Government and Fair Work Forum to achieve fair work for all social care workers in Wales.

Workforce health and well-being framework

As a result of our workforce strategy, we launched Your well-being matters (Social Care Wales, 2023b), our workforce health and well-being framework. This framework is designed to help social care organisations create workplaces that support and promote the health and well-being of the workforce. The framework includes four commitments for employers to make that help create safe working environments and resources to support this.

A National Care and Support Service

The Welsh Government is exploring the potential of a National Care and Support Service for children, families and adults, that would be free at the point of need. An expert group has been formed to produce practical recommendations on how this can be achieved (Welsh Government, 2022b).

The group has made suggestions around how to meet the values, principles, and vision set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. This includes supporting and valuing the workforce by agreeing national standards for appropriate pay and terms and conditions for all social care workers in Wales.

Ymlaen

In our research, innovation and improvement strategy for social care 2024 to 2029, Ymlaen, we commit to gathering and making sense of good quality data and research. This will help us improve conditions for people working in social care and improve outcomes for people accessing care and support. This means we'll continue to:

- use research and data to identify potential future opportunities and challenges and explore possible solutions
- highlight the difficult issues that affect people working in and accessing social care
- build the strong and compelling reasons to convince others of the need for change
- connect people to evidence and research happening in Wales, about Wales, and relevant to Wales
- present and promote the evidence needed to do things differently.

Carrying out our own research and data collection and producing briefings like this helps us to meet these commitments.

Workforce-related research used in this series

The workforce insight series reflects on recent workforce-related research that Social Care Wales has carried out and commissioned. This briefing on improving terms and conditions brings together information from recent projects and reports, including:

- [Workforce Data Collection Report, 2022](#). This reports on data collected from providers about their workforce. It includes data on over 61,000 people working in social care. In the text this study is referenced as (Social Care Wales, 2022).
- [Social Care Wales Pilot workforce survey - Overall report of findings](#). This reports on the results of a survey distributed to everyone registered with Social Care Wales. It includes data on 3,119 workers, 6.5 per cent of the registered workforce. In the text this study is referenced as (Social Care Wales, 2023a).
- [Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care](#). This reports on existing literature, insights from care providers, and an exercise that reviewed online platforms, to explore job-seeking behaviours in the care sector and beyond. In the text this document is referenced as (Urban Foresight, 2023).

References

ADSS Cymru (2024) New All-Wales Pledge Comes into Effect, available at <https://www.adss.cymru/en/blog/post/all-wales-pledge-version-2> (accessed: 12 June 2024).

Clifton, A. (2021) *Social care: a system at breaking point?*, Senedd Cymru, available at <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/social-care-a-system-at-breaking-point/> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Fair Work Commission (2019) *Fair work Wales - Report of the Fair Work Commission*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/fair-work-wales.pdf> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Institute of Public Care (2022, unpublished) *Social Care Wales: A framework for qualifying social workers in Wales report*.

James, R. (2022) *Social Care: a workforce in crisis?*, Senedd Cymru, available at <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/social-care-a-workforce-in-crisis/> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Kearney, J. and White, A. (2018) *The Economic value of the adult social care sector – Wales, A report submitted by ICF Consulting Limited*, available at https://socialcare.wales/cms-assets/documents/The-Economic-Value-of-the-Adult-Social-Care-Sector_Wales.pdf (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J. and Harris, J. (2018) *Recruitment and retention in adult social care services*, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London, available at https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/86594147/Recruitment_and_retention_report.pdf (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Office for National Statistics (2023) *Earnings and hours worked, occupation by four-digit SOC: ASHE Table 14. 2023 Dataset*, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/occupation4digitsoc2010ashtable14> (accessed: 15 April 2023).

Padley, M. and Stone, J. (2023) *A minimum income standard for the United Kingdom in 2023*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2023> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Palmer, B. (2022) 'What should a health and social care workforce strategy look like?', *BMJ*, 29 (378), pp. o1906-o1906.

Social Care Wales (2022) *Workforce data collection report, 2022*, available at <https://socialcare.wales/cms-assets/documents/Social-care-workforce-report-2022.pdf> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Social Care Wales and Health Education and Improvement Wales (2020) *A healthier Wales: Our workforce strategy for health and social care*, available at <https://socialcare.wales/cms-assets/documents/Workforce-strategy-ENG-March-2021.pdf> (accessed: 15 April 2024).

Social Care Wales (2023a) *Pilot workforce survey - Overall report of findings*, available at <https://socialcare.wales/cms-assets/documents/Workforce-Survey-Report-2023.pdf> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Social Care Wales (2023b) *Your well-being matters: workforce health and well-being framework*, available at <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/health-and-well-being-resources/your-wellbeing-matters-workforce-health-and-wellbeing-framework> (accessed: 15 April 2024).

The Health Foundation (2022) *Lower paid NHS and social care staff turnover*, available at <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/lower-paid-nhs-and-social-care-staff-turnover> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Urban Foresight (2023) *Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care*, the Insight Collective, Social Care Wales, available at <https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/assets/documents/WeCare-reports/Understanding-job-seeking-behaviours-full-report.pdf> (accessed: 16 May 2024).

WeCare Wales (2022) *WeCare Wales Report*, December 2022, available at [WeCare-Wales-update-report-Dec-22-ENG.pdf](https://socialcare.wales/assets/documents/WeCare-Wales-update-report-Dec-22-ENG.pdf) (accessed: 10 April 2024).

Welsh Government (2022a) *£10 million funding boost for domiciliary care in Wales*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/10-million-funding-boost-domiciliary-care-wales> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Welsh Government (2022b) *Establishing a national care and support service*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/establishing-national-care-and-support-service> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

Welsh Government (2022c) *Administering the Real Living Wage for social care workers*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/administering-real-living-wage-social-care-workers#93604> (accessed: 2 May 2024).

Welsh Government (2023a) *Rebalancing care and support programme: Consultation Outcome*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/rebalancing-care-and-support-programme> (accessed: 15 April 2024).

Welsh Government (2023b) *Social care fair work forum: annual progress update 2023*, available at <https://www.gov.wales/social-care-fair-work-forum-annual-progress-update-2023.html> (accessed: 6 February 2024).

