



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

Workforce Insight Series

**Valuing social
care work in Wales**

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In this briefing we use findings from our research to look at how people working in social care understand the way they're seen and if they feel valued by those around them. We'll look at the impact of increasing professionalisation and training on perceptions of how social care work is valued. We also consider the knock-on effect of these factors on attraction, recruitment and retention within the sector.

The social care workforce in numbers

The sector employs an estimated 84,134 people in Wales (Social Care Wales, 2022). In the general population, there's strong support for the social care workforce with 72 per cent tending to agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I have confidence in people who work in care' (Social Care Wales, 2023b). This number stands in contrast to what people working in social care told us about how they think they are seen by others.

In 2023, we carried out a survey to find out what the workforce thought about working in social care and this included asking them about how they felt valued.

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

- overall, most registered people who responded to our survey felt valued by their colleagues (**71 per cent**) and by their manager (**61 per cent**)
- fewer than half (**48 per cent**) felt valued by colleagues in other sectors like health staff and the police
- only **44 per cent** of social workers agreed that they felt valued by partner agencies. This was lower than the figure for care workers (**47 per cent**) and for managers (**62 per cent**)
- just **20 per cent** of social workers agreed that they felt valued by the general public. This compared to **48 per cent** of care workers and **48 per cent** of managers

(Social Care Wales, 2023a)



Why valuing social care work matters

In 2022, a Senedd research paper described the social care workforce in Wales as being in crisis. Two of the main challenges facing the social care sector are recruiting enough people to meet demand and a high turnover of staff.

Even though most people working in social care are highly motivated to make a positive difference in people's lives, they don't always expect to remain in the sector for long. In our workforce survey, 57 per cent of social care workers were satisfied with their current job. Over a quarter of all registered workers expected to leave the social care sector within the next 12 months, and 44 per cent expected to leave within the next five years. Care workers were most likely to cite pay as their reason for thinking about leaving, whilst social workers and social care managers were more likely to say they were thinking of leaving because of feeling overworked (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Addressing factors like pay, working conditions and limited career progression can help people feel recognised and valued and improve recruitment and retention as a result. We've explored the theme of improving terms and conditions in a separate workforce insight series briefing. We've also produced an evidence summary that presents the most up-to-date research evidence on attraction and recruitment in social care in Wales (Urban Foresight, 2024).

Addressing factors like pay, working conditions and limited career progression can help people feel recognised and valued

People working in social care

In 2023, a Public Perceptions Survey asked 1000 people from the general population in Wales how they felt about the social care workforce. The majority, 72 per cent of people, said they had confidence in people working in social care (Social Care Wales, 2023b). In the same survey, 77 per cent of respondents said they believed that social care staff should have the same pay as NHS staff doing comparable work. Only 12 per cent disagreed with this.

Our workforce survey asked people registered with Social Care Wales if they felt valued by different groups for the work they did. Overall, most care workers felt valued by the people and families they directly supported (76 per cent). Most registered people also said they felt valued by their colleagues (71 per cent) and by their manager (61 per cent). However, fewer than half felt valued by colleagues in partner agencies like health staff and the police (48 per cent) (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

The general public is also a key stakeholder for the social care sector. Fewer than half (44 per cent) of workers who responded to our survey said they felt at least somewhat valued by the public. This fell to only 20 per cent for social workers. A total of 52 per cent of social workers told us they did not feel valued by the general public (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

What prevents people working in social care from feeling valued?

We don't have more detailed data on how the workforce in general feels about public perception of social care. However, we do have some data on how social workers feel about this. In research with agency workers that was commissioned by Social Care Wales there were clear concerns that the profession was judged unfairly with very little positive promotion in the media or by government bodies (ORS, 2023). One children's social worker said:



“When things go wrong, it’s always the social workers being blamed... families think we just want to remove children...I get asked how much bonus I get to remove a child...a lot of that is media driven...even on soaps it’s portrayed wrongly” (ORS, 2023).



Others agreed, with a children's social worker going on to say:



“It winds me up, don’t get me started. Like Emmerdale and Eastenders, they don’t [do] their research? Do they actually know what we do? We can’t go into a home and say, ‘we want that baby to be seen by the local GP’, like that would happen” (ORS, 2023).



The study reveals a strong desire among social workers to be treated fairly and for media coverage to be balanced and show the positive side of their work. A report of an independent review that portrayed child protection social workers unfavourably was described as ‘fuel’ for negative media coverage. One children's social worker said:



“What are we supposed to tell the press if that is the representation coming from an independent review...? What possible leg do we have to stand on to try and shine a better light on social work if that’s how we’re being treated?” (ORS, 2023).



The perception within the workforce that the general public don't value their work is likely to have a negative impact on all who work in the sector. This needs to be explored and challenged if a career in the sector is to become a more attractive option.



Professionalisation and training

An important factor influencing recruitment and retention in social care is the current effort to increase professionalisation across the social care workforce.

Creating a more highly qualified workforce should result in improving the status of social care work. However, increased demands and expectations are not always reflected in employment conditions.

In the past two decades social care providers and Welsh Government have worked towards increasing the professional status of social care and childcare provision in Wales. Professionalisation has played an important role in improving the quality of care and raising the status of those working in the sector. Respondents in our study on understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and childcare sector believed that a better quality, more professional sector was key to attracting more workers (Urban Foresight, 2023). This is particularly the case in social work. Employers report that requiring a degree to practice social work has made the role of social worker more attractive for younger people with academic strengths.

Adult social care providers have found that some more experienced staff have responded well to new progression and professionalisation frameworks. However, respondents also highlighted that higher qualifications, more training, and achieving registration status also complicated attraction and recruitment efforts and had unintended consequences (Urban Foresight, 2023).

New progression frameworks have had positive responses from some more experienced staff

In this research on understanding attraction and recruitment, social care providers and employers were asked about the main challenges around staff retention (Urban Foresight, 2023). They reported that keeping staff long term was complicated by issues like burnout, overwork, and dangerous conditions. The challenges and issues faced by social care providers and employers included:

- having too many people to care for and not enough time to do so
- other time pressures
- lack of sick pay or other paid leave
- emotionally and physically challenging work
- low support for stressful situations, or a general lack of workplace support.

Respondents also raised concerns around professionalisation and training requirements. They reported that some staff left because they didn't want, or didn't feel able, to engage with the training now required of them. There's also a clear sense that pay, one important way to show staff that they're valued, hasn't kept up with professionalisation. One respondent said:



“There's no incentive for people to get qualifications. Social care is becoming too much like social work in terms of qualifications, but it doesn't have the accompanying salary or reputation”
(Urban Foresight, 2023).



Our workforce survey responses also support the idea that training and professionalisation can place increased demands on social care staff. Quite a few managers responding to the survey (38 per cent) felt that registration and qualification requirements presented a challenge in terms of recruitment and retention (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

There's a strong desire by most registered people (80 per cent) to improve their knowledge and skills. This rose to 85 per cent for social workers and 88 per cent for social care managers. Overall, there was a high level of agreement with the statement 'I have enough training to fulfil my CPD requirements' (77 per cent); the figure was even higher, at 87 per cent, for social care managers (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Most registered people want to improve their knowledge and skills and agree that there are training opportunities available to them

A slightly lower percentage (75 per cent) agreed that there were training opportunities available to them. For social workers and social care managers, this suggests some unmet demand. The responses also show that it's not always easy to access the training people need. Although 65 per cent said there were no barriers to accessing training in their workplace, this left a large number of people facing barriers to accessing training.

It's clear that social workers are considerably more likely to face barriers when accessing training than other workforce types (57 per cent reported no barriers, compared with 66 per cent of care workers and 73 per cent of social care managers). The two most common factors getting in the way of training for social workers were time constraints (29 per cent) and the availability of courses (18 per cent). It's possible that the two are interlinked: with a wider offer of courses allowing more options and flexibility to fit training around other commitments.

For other respondents, access to training was less problematic. Amongst social care managers, 13 per cent considered time to be a barrier to accessing training, and an almost identical proportion identified course availability as a challenge. A small proportion of care workers cited the availability of courses (11 per cent) and a lack of information about the training available to them (11 per cent) (Social Care Wales, 2023a).

Professionalisation and training opportunities offer many potential benefits. These can include helping to address high staff turnover in social care, making people working in social care feel more valued and raising the overall quality of care. But professionalisation can also create some unintended consequences that can negatively impact on recruitment and retention. The data shows us that there's still some way to go to create a social care sector in Wales where staff are suitably trained and supported to work to the highest standards.

Professionalisation can help to address high turnover, make workers feel more valued and raise care quality, but it can also have unintended consequences

For professionalisation to be effective, it must come with investment that helps the workforce make the most out of training. Raising requirements for people in social care, without also improving their pay and working conditions, will lead to more people leaving the sector and increased pressure on remaining staff.



What's happening and what's planned in terms of recognising and valuing social care workers in Wales

Work is already underway to improve how social care workers are recognised and valued, and how this can improve attraction, recruitment and retention in the sector.

This includes the work of [WeCare Wales](#) and the establishment of the Social Care Fair Work Forum.

Social Care Fair Work Forum

One important way to help social care workers feel valued for the work they do is to improve working conditions in the sector. Improving workforce terms and conditions will support recruitment and retention efforts.

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, local authorities across Wales received £43 million to provide an uplift to the real living wage for registered workers in care homes and domiciliary care (Welsh Government, 2023b). 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).

WeCare Wales

WeCare Wales is an initiative, set up by Social Care Wales, to attract people to work in social care. The aim of WeCare Wales is to raise the profile of the care workforce and promote understanding about the nature and variety of roles and career opportunities in social care.

WeCare Wales provides information, advice, and support to people interested in social care careers. This work is carried out by WeCare Ambassadors, who are existing employees volunteering their time to share experiences. The programme also draws on the expertise of regional care career connectors that are funded by Social Care Wales to engage employers, employees and potential applicants across the Welsh regions.

[Media campaigns](#) have been used to raise awareness of the different roles within social care using real people working in care and support. They are powerful and moving 'day in the life' stories that inspire people to join the social care sector and remind the general public of the valuable work being done. These campaigns have also helped to create a more cohesive identity for the social care workforce in Wales (Urban Foresight, 2023).

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 valuing social care 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).
- **Public Perceptions Survey, 2023 (unpublished)**. This study involved interviewing a demographically representative sample of 1,000 people, aged 16 and over, who were living in Wales. They were asked about their attitudes towards the social care workforce in Wales. In the text this study is referenced as (Social Care Wales, 2023b).
- **Agency workers' motivations (unpublished)**. This research involved carrying out focus groups with 26 practising social workers and care workers who chose to work through an agency in Wales. In the text this study is referenced as (ORS, 2023).
- [Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales](#). This reports on research carried out to understand the current attraction and recruitment crisis in the Welsh social care and childcare sector, as well as the role of WeCare Wales in supporting attraction. In the text this document is referenced as (Urban Foresight, 2023).

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