BWRDD PARTNERIAETH RHANBARTHOL
GOGLEDD CYMRU
NORTH WALES
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Workforce – evidence summary

Contents

Overview 2

Challenges facing the social care workforce in Wales 3

Challenges impacting the demand for care in Wales 3

Challenges with attracting, recruiting, and retaining social care staff in Wales 3

Challenges in attracting and recruiting people to the social care workforce 4

Challenges in retaining staff 5

What is the social care workforce in Wales telling us? 5

Challenges impacting the well-being of the social care workforce in Wales 6

Resources to help the social care workforce challenges 7

Search strategy 8

References 9

Disclaimer: This evidence summary includes relevant literature identified from searches on the above topic. It is not an exhaustive list, it presents key finding and not recommendations for practice.

Overview

This report looks at the social care workforce, looking at the issues that are currently being faced and the things that are impacting on the social care workforce. It then looks at the specific issues that may impact on demand for social care, attracting and recruiting social care staff, retention of existing social care staff, and the well-being of social care staff. It includes the views of the social care workforce in Wales. It also includes links to some resources which may help services with the attraction, recruitment, and retention of social care staff.

The report only includes research and reports which are based on Wales and the Welsh social care workforce.

Challenges facing the social care workforce in Wales

The social care workforce is facing many challenges. The key issues include:

- Increased demand for care [1–3]
- Attracting and recruiting people to work in social care [3,4]
- Retaining the staff currently working in social care [3]
- The mental and emotional well-being of staff [3]

We will consider each of these key issues below, looking at how and / or why they are impacting the social care workforce.

Challenges impacting the demand for care in Wales

There is an increased demand for social care in Wales, which is expected to rise further.[1,2]

Some of the factors that are impacting on the demand for social care include:

- Demographic changes with more older people and fewer working age people in the population [5]
- Health inequalities being further exacerbated by COVID-19 [3]
- Increasing mental health issues and insufficient mental health services [3]
- Increasing numbers of people living with multiple long-term health conditions [3]

Challenges with attracting, recruiting, and retaining social care staff in Wales

The social care workforce faces issues with attracting, recruiting and retaining social care staff, alongside an increase in demand for care which is expected to rise further.[1,2]

Some of the key factors impacting on the crisis in the social care workforce include:

- Low pay [1]
- Perceptions of the sector as low status [1]
- Insecure working arrangements with some offering short-term and zero-hours contracts [1]
- Difficulties delivering care in rural areas due to travel [1,5]

- High levels of sickness within the workforce [1]
- Increasing complexity of the role, and the responsibilities involved, workers having significant responsibility over others, and being exposed to risks such as verbal and physical abuse and infection [1]
- External challenges including COVID-19, Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis [1]
- Risk of modern-slavery victims working in the sector [6]
- Demographic changes creating a growing imbalance in some areas, with more older people and fewer working age people in the population [5]
- Working for an agency being more desirable due to the flexibility it offers [4]

Challenges in attracting and recruiting people to the social care workforce

There are many factors which are barriers to attracting and recruiting people to the social care workforce. These might include:

- Low pay and a lack of incentives [1,2,4,7,8]
- Working conditions and responsibilities [1,2,4,5,8]
- Lack of long-term / stable job opportunities [4]
- Professionalisation and regulation [1]
- Lack of public awareness [1,4]
- Lack of understanding about what different care roles involve [4,8]
- Changing entry requirements [8]
- External challenges (COVID-19, Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis) [1,2,4,8]
- Being a sector that does not feel valued [4,5,7–9]
- A lack of diversity in the sector [8]
- Limited career progression [5,8]
- Negative media coverage [4,5]
- Challenging application and interview processes [1,4]
- Lack of quality / qualified applicants [4,7]
- Ineligible applicants [1]
- Competition between employers [1]
- Workforce planning issues [1]
- Difficulties recruiting a diverse workforce [1]
- Being viewed by some as a low status profession [5]
- Difficulties finding experienced staff for manager / leadership positions [5]
- Lack of Welsh speakers [4]

Challenges in retaining staff

There are many factors which impact on staff retention within the social care workforce. These might include:

- Low pay and finding it difficult to manage financially [2,5,10,11]
- Not having access to sick pay or family-friendly policies [2,5,10,11]
- Job security (casual or zero-hours contracts) [2,5,10]
- Lack of flexibility, when working hours no longer suit them [5,10]
- Lack of opportunities for progression [5,11]
- Not feeling valued [2,9]
- External factors including COVID-19, Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis [2,11]
- High levels of stress, excessive workloads, time pressures, and burnout [11]
- Emotionally and physically challenging work [4,5,11]
- Remote and lone working, resulting in feeling isolated [11]
- Not realising what care work involves / being unprepared [11]
- Long-term sickness (which is higher in health and social care than other sectors) [11]
- Staff leaving the local authority for agency work to earn more money with fewer demands [5]

What is the social care workforce in Wales telling us?

The social care workforce survey completed in 2023 tells us a little about what it is like working in social care. The findings may help us understand the issues around retaining staff. [7]

We will look at issues faced by different groups of staff to help understand reasons these specific groups of social care staff may leave the workforce.

Care workers

Issues reported by care workers which may impact on them leaving the workforce include:

- Only half receive sick pay [7]
- Not having family-friendly policies, like flexible working, carers leave, and enhanced parental leave (41%) [7]
- Receiving low pay (61%) and struggling financially (37%) [7]

Social workers

Issues reported by social workers which may impact on them leaving the workforce include:

- Being dissatisfied with their job (38%) [7]
- Not having the right staff in place [7]
- Having too much work or not enough time to do it (77%) [7]
- Not feeling safe at work (24%) [7]
- Barriers to accessing training (40%) [7]

Social care managers

Issues reported by social care managers which may impact on them leaving the workforce include:

- Working 40 hours or more per week (49%) [7]
- Finding it hard to switch off after work (77%) [7]

Challenges impacting the well-being of the social care workforce in Wales

The well-being of social care staff was found to be worse than the general population with lower life satisfaction, staff being less likely to report feeling that life was worthwhile, having lower happiness levels, and higher anxiety scores.[12]

The well-being of social care staff has the potential to impact on social care services. Factors that are impacting the well-being of the social care workforce include:

- High workloads and reduced staffing levels [12]
- Feeling unsafe at work [12]
- Experiencing bullying, harassment, and discrimination [12]
- Not being supported or feeling valued [12]
- COVID-19, working through the pandemic [3]

Resources to help the social care workforce challenges

Social Care Wales has put together several documents that may help support the attraction, recruitment, and retention of social care staff. These include:

- Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales [1]
- Understanding job-seeking behaviours: insights for social care [8]
- Social care and child care: attraction, recruitment and retention – a guide for employers [13]
- Improved well-being and workforce retention [11]
- Workforce Insight Series [14]
- Attraction and recruitment: An evidence summary [4]

Some other resources that may help support the attraction, recruitment, and retention of social care staff:

- WeCare Wales: Toolkit [15]
- Social Care Fair Work Forum [16]
- Social Care Academies [17]
    - Academi Gofal Gwynedd [18]
    - Wrexham Social Care Academy [19]

Search strategy

Basic searches of Social Care Wales, Senedd Research, Insight Collective, and Google were completed. A detailed search of Scopus was also completed but no relevant articles were found.

Scopus

recruitment OR recruit* OR retention OR wellbeing OR well-being OR mental (abstract)
AND
workforce OR staff (abstract)
AND
“social care” OR “care worker*” OR “social work*” (abstract)
AND
wales (abstract)
AND
wales OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)
Limit: 2021-2026

References

(1) Social Care Wales. *Understanding Attraction and Recruitment in the Welsh Social Care and Child Care Sector and the Role of WeCare Wales*; 2024. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/reports/understanding-recruitment-retention-and-job-seeking-behaviours-reports-and-resources-for-employers.

(2) *Social care workforce crisis in Wales: what is causing it and what is being done to fix it? - Wales Centre for Public Policy*. https://wcpp.org.uk/blog-posts/social-care-workforce-crisis-in-wales-what-is-causing-it-and-what-is-being-done-to-fix-it/ (accessed 2026-05-05).

(3) *Challenges and Priorities for Health and Social Care in Wales - Wales Centre for Public Policy*. https://wcpp.org.uk/report/challenges-and-priorities-for-health-and-social-care-in-wales/ (accessed 2026-05-07).

(4) *Attraction and recruitment*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/evidence-summaries/attraction-and-recruitment (accessed 2026-05-07).

(5) Welsh Local Governement Association. *A Question of Priorities: Social Care in the Context of the Impact of Austerity, Rising Demand, and the Pandemic*; 2023. https://www.dataunitwales.gov.uk/reports.

(6) *A spotlight on social care workers – the latest challenges facing the sector - Part 2*. https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/a-spotlight-on-social-care-workers-the-latest-challenges-facing-the-sector-part-2/ (accessed 2026-05-05).

(7) *Social care workforce survey 2023*. Social Care Wales. https://socialcare.wales/research-and-data/workforce-survey-2023 (accessed 2026-05-05).

(8) Social Care Wales. *Understanding Job-Seeking Behaviours: Insights for Social Care*; 2024. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/reports/understanding-recruitment-retention-and-job-seeking-behaviours-reports-and-resources-for-employers.

(9) *Valuing social care work in Wales 2023*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/workforce-insight-series/valuing-social-care-work-in-wales (accessed 2026-05-05).

(10) *Improving terms and conditions for the social care workforce in Wales 2023*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/workforce-insight-series/improving-terms-and-conditions-for-the-social-care-workforce-in-wales (accessed 2026-05-05).

(11) *Improved well-being and workforce retention*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/evidence-summaries/improved-well-being-and-retention (accessed 2026-05-05).

(12) *Supporting the well-being of the social care workforce in Wales 2024*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/workforce-insight-series/well-being-2024 (accessed 2026-05-07).

(13) Social Care Wales. *Social Care and Child Care: Attraction, Recruitment and Retention A Guide for Employers*; 2023. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/reports/understanding-recruitment-retention-and-job-seeking-behaviours-reports-and-resources-for-employers.

(14) *Workforce insight series*. Social Care Wales - Research, Data & Innovation. https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/workforce-insight-series (accessed 2026-05-05).

(15) *Toolkit*. WeCare Wales. https://wecare.wales/employers/toolkit (accessed 2026-05-05).

(16) *Social Care Fair Work Forum | GOV.WALES*. https://www.gov.wales/social-care-fair-work-forum (accessed 2026-05-05).

(17) *New academy to support social care workers in Wales | GOV.WALES*. https://www.gov.wales/new-academy-support-social-care-workers-wales (accessed 2026-05-06).

(18) *Academi Gofal Gwynedd*. https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Health-and-social-care/Academi-Gofal-Gwynedd.aspx (accessed 2026-05-06).

(19) *Wrexham Social Care Academy - Wrexham Council News*. https://news.wrexham.gov.uk/wrexham-social-care-academy/ (accessed 2026-05-06).