

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwasanaethau i blant sydd wedi bod mewn gofal: archwilio diwygio radical | Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

Ymateb gan Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru | Evidence from Social Care Wales

Dear Committee Members,



Following on from the request to Social Care Wales for information to support the work of the inquiry into 'services for care-experienced young people: Exploring radical reform', please find below some further information. We also outline our views on the wider priorities as requested in the public consultation.

Workforce pressures: The extent of staff pressure and workloads in local authority children's services and their impacting on the three aspects of our inquiry.

In our work with social care leaders and practitioners, we hear consistent reports of high levels of workforce pressure. The workforce strategy for health and social care¹ highlights the importance of workforce wellbeing as well as themes to focus on recruitment, workforce shape and supply.

Social Care Wales has been working with partners to improve the collection and analysis of workforce data. The 2022 workforce data collection was the second year of collecting data from the entirety of social care provision in Wales. The exercise asks each provider of social care to provide details of the people who work for them and the jobs they do. The annual workforce data collection was introduced as a single unified data collection by the Performance and Improvement Framework introduced by Welsh Government in 2020. It replaced a number of disparate collections relating to the social care workforce that duplicated effort and didn't provide a single dataset that represented the entire sector.

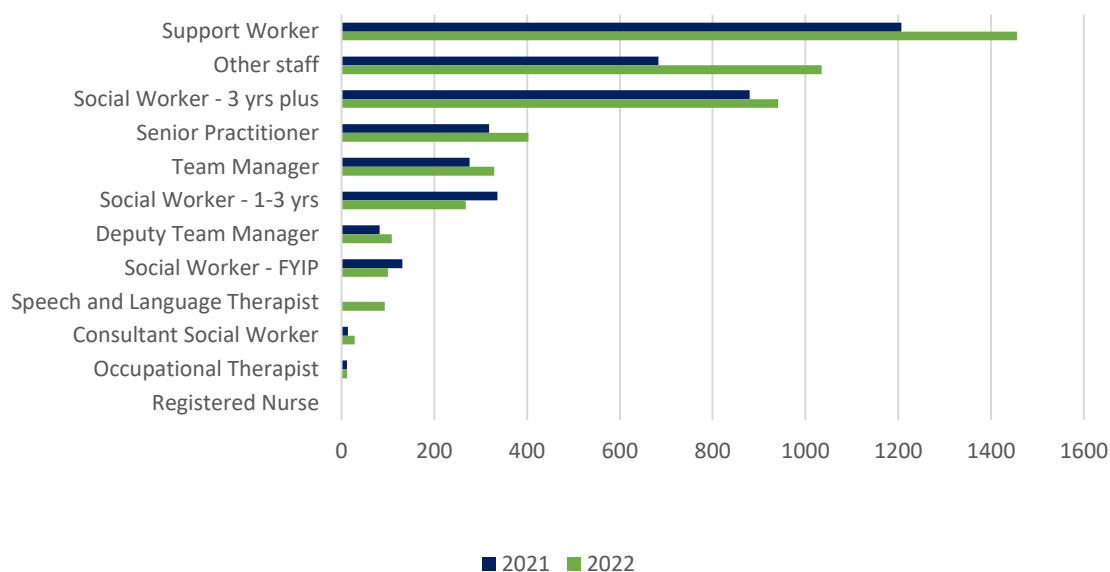
We are able to provide data that has been gathered from the 2022 annual workforce data collection and provide a comparison with data from 2021. Data has been limited to those working in children's social care. In the case of our data, this means those people who work in children's social work teams and children's residential care. These are people employed in a variety of roles, not just social workers.

Initial analysis of the national workforce data collected at the end of 2022 suggests that there are 1,716 social workers working in front-line children's social services in Wales. This is an increase of just over 3% when compared 2021 figures.

Not all those who work in children's social care are qualified social workers, and some social workers occupy managerial posts. In total, there are 4,774 people who work for children's social work teams in Wales.

¹ [Workforce strategy | Social Care Wales](#)

Children's Services staff by role type



Anecdotally we hear that children's social services have difficulty recruiting experienced social workers and this has now extended to general recruitment issues.

Recent profiling from workforce registration provides some further insights into the workforce:

- 73% work of social workers work in local authorities (a decrease of 2.3% since 2017)
- Turnover is 0.18% for children and 2.21% for adults
- It is estimated (2022) that every year 326 new qualified social workers are required to meet estimated demand for care and support

The Social Care Wales report [A social work workforce fit for the future | Social Care Wales](#) highlights some of the challenges being faced including:

- The number of students on social work qualifying courses in Wales has gone down by 25% since 2016
- On average, only 202 qualified social workers out of the 326 we need each year in Wales, are joining the profession
- Wales has fewer social workers per 10,000 people than any other UK nation.

A report has been published to look at the impact of the pandemic on newly qualified social workers (NQSWS). A number of recommendations have been made to support NQSWS development and increase their confidence in practice. The link to this report is here <https://socialcare.wales/news-stories/covid-19-report-reveals-nqsw-need-support>.

There has recently been changes to training bursaries to support recruitment into qualifying routes and details can be found here <https://socialcare.wales/news-stories/bursaries-to-increase-for-social-work-students-starting-their-studies-from-september>. It has also recently been agreed that the pilot vocational route for the

Social Services Practitioner qualification will be considered as an equivalent to the first year of the social work degree, this is a fully funded route through the apprenticeship frameworks. Initial conversations have also been held with Welsh Government regarding the potential for developing a social work degree apprenticeship.

Social Care Wales has worked with the sector to produce a workforce plan for Social Workers, and this can be accessed here <https://socialcare.wales/about-us/workforce-strategy/social-work-workforce-plan-2022-to-2025> and highlights the range of actions to support social work workforce in Wales.

In Summer/Autumn 2022, Social Care Wales undertook a scoping exercise to support the Welsh Government Social Services and Integration Department's transformation work. We interviewed each of the regional leads for children's services in Wales, along with strategic leaders in ADSS Cymru, Welsh Government, WLGA, CIW and NISB. It sought to gather and analyse expertise to determine recommendations to support the transformation of statutory services for vulnerable children and young people over the next 1-3 years. The feedback from interviews was shared with the Welsh Government programme group in September 2022, including thematic findings and recommendations. The interviews highlighted key concerns in relation to workforce pressures:

- Recruitment and retention
- Use of agency staff
- Morale and sense of not feeling valued and recognised
- Capacity for workforce planning within local authorities, specific to children's services
- Workforce planning in relation to the elimination of profit and upscaling of local authority children's residential provisions.

However, the interviews also highlighted areas of good practice and positive feedback from local authorities and regions. Specifically, 'grow your own' pathways that enable local authorities to support existing staff to qualify as social workers were viewed very positively in terms of enabling skilled employees new opportunities for progression. As of the 9th February 2023, we have had 138 new students enter either year one or year two of the social work degree with Open University. This is reflective of funding that has been provided to local authorities over the last two years to support the "grow your own" approaches. This funding is to be continued as part of the 23/24 grant year and has now reached its maximum level of £309,000 across Wales, ring fenced to support this approach. Feedback from the scoping exercise with strategic leaders, suggests this approach also supports positive working cultures as it nurtures progression routes and good retention rates. Also highlighted through the scoping work was the nature of early intervention and family support work for children and families on the edge of entering the care system often being Welsh Government grant funded. Grant funding makes sustainability, service development and continuity challenging and there was a strong feeling across those interviews that increased and sustainable funding sources would help support and further develop services and retain skilled staff that are aimed at supporting families to stay together.

As you will be aware, there is extensive work underway to support workforce development through the Health & Social Care workforce strategy. The published plan is here <https://socialcare.wales/about-us/workforce-strategy/social-work-workforce-plan-2022-to-2025> . There will be an update on the progress made since its launch published in May 2023.

Continuity of case worker and staff turnover: The impact of changing case workers on the quality of assessments and care.

Data suggest that turnover is 0.18% for children's services (range of -14.63 to +33.33) this compares to a turnover for adults services of 2.21% (range of -13.58 to +24.56). Whilst this appears low overall there is significant variation between local authorities. Anecdotally we understand that variation in pay and other terms and conditions may be contributing with local authorities feeding back that it's not uncommon for staff to leave for a higher salary or 'welcome bonus' through joining another local authority. As exit interview data is limited and lacking detail it is not possible to provide meaningful conclusions. WLGA, SOLACE, Social Care Wales and ADSSC are working collaboratively to consider how to move to more consistent terms and conditions for social workers across Wales.

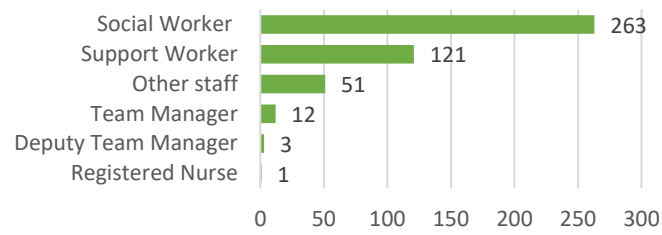
We do not hold data on the impact of changing case workers on the quality of assessments and care. The Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) have published survey findings <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/publication/children-looked-after-in-wales-survey/> and an evidence review on what children and their families think about the care they receive, which includes views on staff turnover/continuity <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/publication/what-do-children-and-young-people-looked-after-and-their-families-think-about-care/>.

Vacancy rates: The current vacancy rates and their impact on the three aspects of our inquiry.

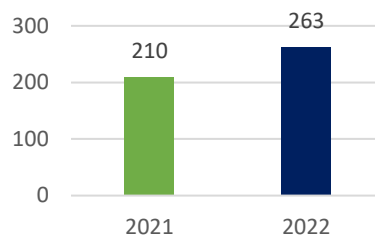
Figures for vacancies in children's social care showed that the number of vacancies increased in 2022 by 38.3% to 639. Of these, 451 (70.6%) were vacancies that were actively looking to be filled. The remaining vacancies were 'held', meaning they were not looking to be filled at this moment in time.

Over 50% of the vacancies identified by local authorities in children's services were for qualified social workers.

Children's services - vacancies by role type

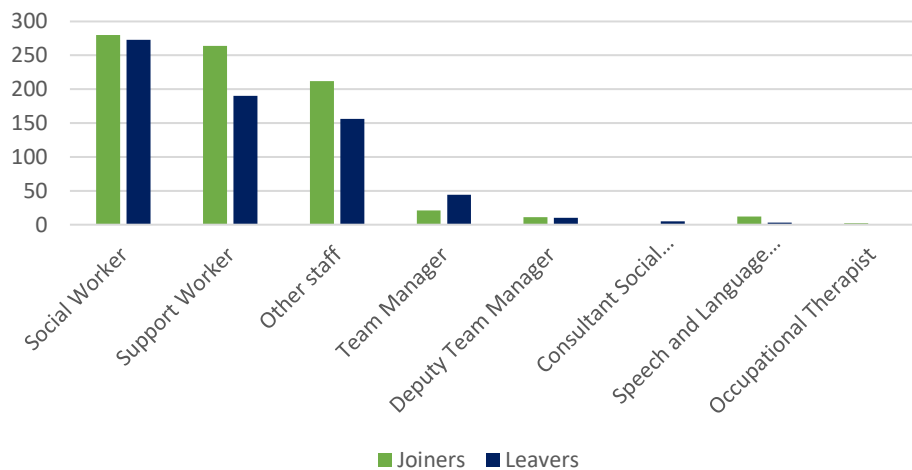


Social Work Vacancies



Turnover rates in children's social care are highest for qualified social workers, with a minor net gain of workers over the past year.

Children's Services - joiners and leavers in 2022



Social Work agency staff: The extent of the use of agency staff for children's social care and its impact

Some data suggests that the use of agency workers in children's services has decreased slightly over the course of the year from 56 in 2021 to 49 in 2022. 85.6% of all agency staff utilised in children's services were for qualified social workers. However, this data is collected through engagement similar to a census. This means it is dependent on the validity of the data provided and is a snapshot of that given day, therefore there are limitations to the reporting. Dependency on agency staff remains a key concern as does the risk of agency fees continuing to increase.

As a result of this work we are now undertaking research with agency workers to further understand their motivations for becoming or accessing agency work including how they support their pension provisions, CPD, sick leave, etc. This intelligence will then be used to better inform employment offers from local authorities and other agencies providing social work provision e.g. CAF/CASS. The initial findings suggest that whilst the differences in pay between agency workers and permanent staff were considered a factor in the decision to work for an agency, this wasn't generally the most important factor. Flexibility in how many hours worked, what kind of work they did, where they did it and when, was the most important factor for most agency workers we spoke to. This generally overrode the downsides of agency working, such as not being paid for sick leave, with holiday pay, pension contributions, and training opportunities usually provided by the agencies. The full report is likely to be available in Spring 2023.

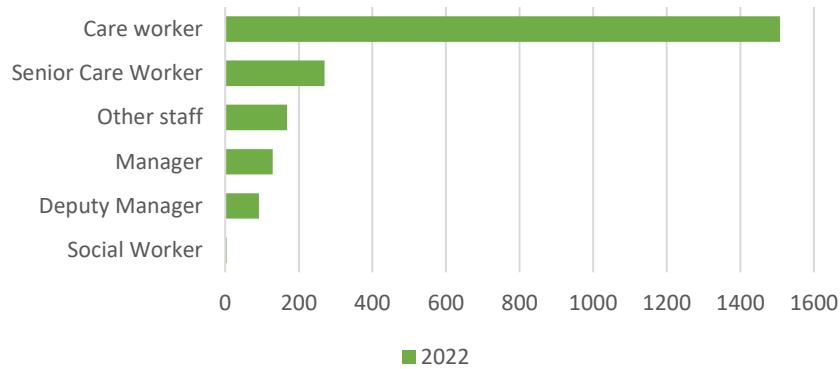
We are supporting work led by ADSS Cymru on scoping potential approaches to help support a sustainable agency worker marketplace.

Residential care workforce: The stability of the workforce

Data from the children's residential care sector is less mature than the collection of workforce data from local authorities and we are less confident with this data as they are still developing and still improving.

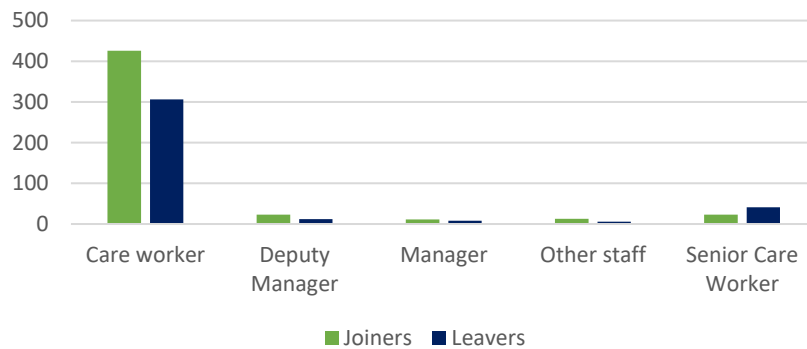
We are able to present some initial findings. Our returns shown that there are 2,171 individuals working in children's residential care in Wales. Over 60% of the children's residential workforce work independently of local authorities and operate in the private sector, as a social enterprise or within the third sector.

Children's residential care by role type



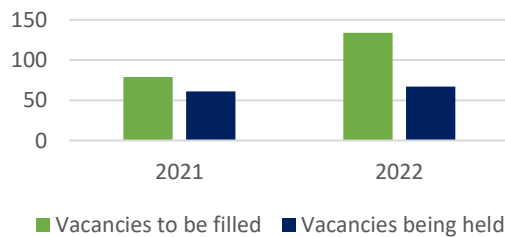
Staff turnover in children’s residential care is very high, with a significant amount of movement in the service. Almost a quarter of the staff currently in the workforce joined in 2022.

Children's residential care - joiners and leavers in 2022



Vacancies in children’s residential care have increased by 43.6% over the course of the last year with vacancies to be filled and vacancies being held both increasing.

Children's residential care - vacancies



This data needs to be viewed against a backdrop of a sector in flux. Local authorities face the challenge of planning for and ensuring a sufficient and appropriately skilled workforce as they upscale their in-house residential provision at pace.

Initial training and continuous professional development as relevant to all three aspects of our inquiry.

Social Care Wales provides a £10 million SCWWDP learning and development grant, shared across local authority social services led partnerships, which is inclusive of all services, private, third sector services as well as foster care. We collate an annual monitoring report and this includes examples that shows approaches to qualifications delivery, as well as ongoing CPD offers for registered and non-registered staff.

A new framework has been developed to support the post qualifying development programmes for social workers in Wales. We will be considering the next steps to this development later this year.

Colleagues in our registration and regulation team are looking at pathways for 'return to social work' opportunities as well as registration for those who qualified in other countries. We are supporting Welsh Government in wider national approaches to explore this further.

Social Care Wales has continued to oversee leadership programmes for the sector, primarily for local authority social services, for those in the roles of team manager; middle manager; assistant directors (heads of service) and directors. We are currently developing an 'aspiring middle manager' programme.

We recently launched the safeguarding training standards, developed in partnership across sectors. These standards outline initial training and ongoing professional development requirements specific to safeguarding and in relation to roles and responsibilities. The project group are currently developing a learning framework to outline learning objectives aligning to each level of training and this is due to be launched later in 2023.

Views of priorities as relevant to all three aspects of our inquiry.

The inquiry also asked that agencies considered priorities across the three aspects. Detailed below are our views, having taking into consideration our learning from across the remit of work undertaken by Social Care Wales.

1. Before care: Safely reducing the number of children in the care system

Please outline a **maximum of three** top priorities for radical reform of services for safely reducing the number of children in the care system:

Priority 1:

Increase the sufficiency and sustainability of family and youth support, including community based services that sit outside of children's services, to support early identification of need, strengths based practice and support protective factors to help children and strengthen families and communities.

Priority 2:

An ambitious all Wales strategy that is able to implement a long term plan to tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality as well as respond to the immediate needs of the increasing numbers of children living in poverty. The Care Experienced Children statistical briefing identifies that 58.9% of respondents felt that poverty was an 'important' or 'very important' factor influencing rates of children entering the care system.

Priority 3:

Achieve a consistent means of assessing and managing risk in the community with families, wherever possible. This needs to nurture a shared multi-agency ownership of risk and create a culture where a family and child's voice can be heard in a meaningful way.

2. In care: Quality services and support for children in care

Please outline a **maximum of three** top priorities for radical reform of services for children in care:

Priority 1:

Increasing the numbers of social workers and retaining those workers within their roles. This would help achieve continuity in the relationships that children living in care have with their social worker, as well as ensuring that those workers have manageable workloads and are able to provide consistent time and support to children living in care. This is key to enabling them to have secure relationships with those involved in making decisions about their life.

Priority 2:

Robust availability of therapeutic residential settings and therapeutic support for children living with foster carers. Ensuring sufficiency of placements and appropriate skills of staff to support the child or young person in a manner in which is best for them, according to their needs.

Priority 3:

Scotland's 'The Promise' approach to radical reform, explored the concept of 'love in the care system', there are opportunities to prioritise what this looks like for children in Wales and how nationally we can ensure children growing up in the care system feel loved and secure. This builds on evidence based practice in Wales and affirms our vision for relational and strengths based practice whilst recognising the importance of the corporate parenting role for all public services and most

importantly seeking to fulfil what every child needs and deserves. The 2021 Residential Children's Care conference embraced this as part of its theme. There was considerable positive feedback from across the sector and a strong feeling of the importance of developing this as a national vision in supporting child-led, relational based support for children living in care.

3. After care: On-going support when young people leave care

Please outline a **maximum of three** top priorities for radical reform of the on-going support provided when young people leave care:

Priority 1:

A commitment that every young person in Wales, leaving care is entitled to a safe and supportive place to call home. Development of a consistent offer of supported housing, offering every young person leaving care a safe place to call home, in an environment where they can receive ongoing support.

Priority 2:

A continuation of the basic income pilot, enabling a more detailed evaluation and a greater understanding of the learning from a progressive approach to social policy and support for care leavers. Given the cost of living crisis and the known impacts of poverty, an expanded pilot would allow more young people to benefit as well as opportunities to gather evidence and learning over a longer time period.

Priority 3:

A consistent all -Wales transition support offer for young people from 14-25years that enables continuity of supportive relationships, supports the young person to plan for their transition, navigate the system and establish what matters to them, supporting them to achieve this. A holistic offer of support should recognise the intersectionality of disadvantage that young people who have lived in the care system experience and some of the specialist support needs they may have. It also recognises the ongoing role of the corporate parent in supporting young people as they explore their independence and navigate adolescence and the need for consistent, safe relationships as well as pathways to opportunities and help when they may need it.

We hope this information is helpful to work of the committee in undertaking their inquiry. If we can provide any further information or be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,



Sue Evans

Chief Executive Social Care Wales