**CYNGOR GOFAL CYMRU
CARE COUNCIL FOR WALES**

Key Messages and Challenges arising from 2004/05 Annual Report

Health and Social Services Committee
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National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay

Introduction

The key messages and challenges arising from our Annual Report for 2004/05 can be grouped under three main headings:

- High standards in the practice and conduct of social care workers

- High standards in the training of social workers

- A skilled and qualified social care workforce.

High standards in the practice and conduct of social care workers

There are now 4,592[1] people with a recognised social work qualification registered with the Care Council. Social work students on the degree programme in Wales are also registered. This means that students make a commitment to professional standards even in their training. This is a step which some other professions are only now considering.

In line with priorities, managers of child care services, adult residential and domiciliary care have been invited to register. Eleven have registered by the end of January. We are in discussions with a number of employers who want to progress with the registration of all their staff.

The Care Council register provides information about the profile of social workers, students and in future other groups of staff. This is the first time this level of information has been available and its analysis provides a national picture which should help inform future planning. The information currently confirms that social work continues to be a largely female domain and that 50% of those registered with a qualification in social work are under 45. Two thirds of social work degree students registered are under 35, with 28% under 25. Focusing on management support and other retention strategies is therefore key if we want to keep them in the sector.

Whilst there is clear support for registration in the sector, our experience shows that registration only happens in a real way to improve public protection when it is a requirement. This is linked to the need to ensure that the regulatory framework outlined in the Care Standards Act continues to reflect modern services and staff roles. We will be providing advice to the Assembly later this year on these matters.

Now that social work is a regulated profession we have the power to investigate concerns brought to the attention of the Care Council regarding the conduct of social workers. We are now receiving conduct referrals and are currently involved in 22 preliminary investigations. We can begin to see that the registration process has introduced a new and different focus on professional standards.

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[1] Total at 2 February 2006

We already have a protocol with the Police Authorities in Wales and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) and are developing protocols with employers and the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (SSIW). The focus is on information sharing and coherence in our approach to improved public protection.

Whilst CSIW and the Care Council have very specific and different remits, we are conscious of needing to minimise the burden of regulation on the sector and are exploring how we might collaborate to streamline the information required by the sector for registration purposes.

High standards in the training of social workers

308 social work students are currently enrolled on social work training courses in Wales. Of those, 263 are enrolled on the degree in social work with the remainder being the final intake of the Diploma in Social Work.

We provide funding to local authorities as a contribution towards providing necessary learning opportunities for students and we are also doing work to identify creative models which have successfully maximised resources and expertise to increase the quantity and secure high quality learning opportunities.

All of this will be part of the Wales Strategic Plan for Social Work Training. We will be progressing this with employers, the eight higher education institutions and HEFCW. This will also pick up the recommendations for actions identified in the ADSS report – *Social Work in Wales: A Profession to Value*[2] including the need to look at ways of attracting and training returners into the sector (not necessarily to front line practice but maybe as support to teams) and increase the numbers of Welsh speaking social workers. It will also include the modernisation of Post Qualifying (PQ) Training involving establishing an All Wales Post Qualifying Social Work Partnership of eight higher education institutions and the 22 local authorities. A submission for funding for this will be made to HEFCW in July.

There is evidence coming through however of more social workers undertaking PQ courses this year. This indicates that there is more investment in continued professional development. The need to evidence post registration learning as part of re-registration with the Care Council has been instrumental in reviving the importance given by individuals and employers to investing in on-going professional development.

A key challenge for the sector is the capacity to invest in the development of social work students and its own staff in order to improve both recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.

Another challenge for the sector and for training providers is to consider how far training, recruitment and retention strategies take account of the fact that it is a largely female domain and also that younger people are entering the profession.

A skilled and qualified social care workforce

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[2] Social Work in Wales: A Profession to Value, ADSS Cymru, August 2005

The strategic focus has been on driving up standards across the social care workforce through:

- Recruitment and retention
- Qualification attainment
- Sufficient and appropriate learning provision of high quality
- Improved image and profile of social care.

The challenges for employers continue to be the recruitment and retention of their workforce.

One of the ways to improve this situation is to raise the profile of social care and promote career opportunities to ensure there are clear pathways to enable access to and progress through the sector. This is a long term programme of work. We have already been improving links at a national level with Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales so that there are coherent strategies throughout the country, with less duplication of initiatives regionally. In work done with the Assembly, the need for better understanding of health and social care within Jobcentre Plus has been acknowledged. The Care Council is currently hosting regional employer engagement workshops for Jobcentre Plus employees across Wales to improve awareness about work in the sector as well as an understanding of the needs of employers who are recruiting workers.

Already work has begun to improve the information and opportunities available for 14 – 19 year olds. The work placement information pack, *Young Faces of Care*, piloted in Conwy, has generated interest within the sector in the combined Apprenticeship models launched by the Assembly Learning and Skills Division. The Care Council was notified recently that the expression of interest it submitted to the Assembly for Combined Apprenticeship funding has been successful.

The indications appear to be that the social care sector, like many others, is recruiting workers from other countries as one of the ways of responding to recruitment and retention challenges.

The challenges of retention are complex. There were quite strong messages in the CSIW Annual Report about the need to strengthen management and in particular human resource management within regulated settings. It is likely that this would improve retention. The purpose of the local and regional partnerships was to share induction, training and development opportunities. There are examples where this has been done well. We will be looking at how this can be strengthened and whether learning exchanges on specific areas such as induction would be helpful for smaller organisations in particular.

Information available indicates that National Vocational Qualification attainment in social care continues to rise in Wales. There is an 11% increase in those with specified qualifications within local authorities. The progress seems better in services for adults than would appear in services for children. The Care Council, CSIW, Assembly Policy and SSIW colleagues are already working together to establish stronger formal links with children's services, in particular in residential

settings, with a view to facilitating partnership working and progressing the improvement agenda.

Despite having in place an agreed and well publicised framework of qualifications for social care for several years, there is a continued mismatch between what the colleges and training providers are providing and the learning and assessment that the sector has identified that it needs. This remains a significant challenge for the social care sector.

In our role as the Sector Skills Council for the social care sector in Wales we have been working with ELWa on a joint assessment of the sector which included:

- an examination of employer demand for learning, skills and qualifications;
- an audit of learning supply;
- a study of people's experience of studying in social care; and
- an analysis of these parts to identify actions and priorities.

The outcome of the assessment held no surprises; the challenges remain the same including the need for:

- funding for training and learning needs to be simplified to ensure access to the qualifications most relevant to the sector;
- providers of training should be encouraged to work more regionally to make the commissioning, delivery and assessment of training more effective.

The longer term challenge is to make sure that the strategy can be reviewed and revised as necessary to reflect the strategic priorities which will be set out in the Social Services Directions Paper.

In 2005 we co-ordinated and led the first ever Social Care Accolades to identify and acknowledge good practice in learning and development across the whole social care sector in Wales. This was a huge success, on two counts; one was the fact that SSIW, CSIW, Welsh Local Government Association, Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, Care Forum Wales, and the British Association of Social Workers worked in partnership with the Care Council on this. The second was the positive feedback from the sector on the importance of having an event which recognised and celebrated what social care has done well.

We are now developing the categories for the next Accolades with our partners and they will be launched in the autumn. The winners will be announced at a celebratory event on 21st June 2007.

Whilst we already have mechanisms for involving service users and carers in shaping our work and in the governance of Council, we recognised that we needed to be consistent and able to measure how well we were doing. With the steer of our Service Users and Carers Reference Group, we have developed service user and carer participation standards which we will be consulting on shortly. We are keen that this work informs and is informed by other work that the Assembly is doing as part of *Making the Connections* on community engagement and also citizen participation.

To conclude

The key challenges for the future will be:

- Consideration of the registration framework to ensure that it provides maximum impact in terms of public protection for vulnerable groups.

- Ensuring that the regulatory framework provided by the Care Standards Act continues to reflect modern service provision and staff roles.

- What additional steps need to be taken to enable the sector to have the necessary capacity to support social work students as part of the overall recruitment strategy.

- Clarifying the extent of international recruitment, developing an understanding of the strategic role, and then developing with the Assembly and employers a framework to address the specific requirements of the sector in Wales which arise from international recruitment.

- Securing a change in the funding and quality of training provision to meet the needs of the sector.

Prepared by Chief Executive, Care Council for Wales
for Health and Social Services Committee. 16 February 2006.