

WF 17

Ymchwiliad i gynaliadwyedd y gweithlu iechyd a gofal cymdeithasol

Inquiry into the sustainability of the health and social care workforce

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Gweithwyr Cymdeithasol Prydain Cymru

Response from: British Association of Social Workers Cymru



## **Consultation response from BASW Cymru.**

### **Inquiry into the sustainability of the health and social care workforce.**

The British Association of Social Workers is a UK wide organisation with a membership of over 20,000 social workers. Since the Association was established in 1970, it has focussed on developing excellent social work practice with a Code of Ethics that reflects both British and International good practice. BASW recognised the need for the Association to be part of developments in each of the four countries as devolution brought in different paths. After nearly twenty years, BASW Cymru is well-established with an increasing membership.

#### **1. Do we have an accurate picture of the current health and care workforce?**

The Care Council for Wales publishes reports based on information supplied by social workers on the Register. At June 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 there were 4189 people registered on Part 1 of the Register who had the necessary social work qualification, although not all were working in social work directly. The majority of social workers are employed by Local Authorities. Although the numbers are small, independent social workers have had a stronger profile in BASW in recent years which may predict a changing pattern in employment in the future. The social work profession remains predominantly female with an increase in registrants over the age of 50.

The Welsh Government also reports on the work force drawn from returns made by local authorities. In the year 2013/14 there were 4922 people working in what are described as social work services for adults or for children and a small number in clinic services. In 2014/15 the number of people working in these services had risen by 1929 to 6851. However, the number of local authority social workers on the Care Council for Wales register rose by 55. The statistics are broad but they suggest that in 2013 80% of people described as working in social work services were registered social workers but this had declined to only 60% by the following year. The possibility is that services are now being delivered by people who are less well trained and not subject to regulation by the Care Council for Wales. As the Care Council for Wales data relates to registered social care workers and the Stats Wales data is not detailed, it is not possible to judge whether this is the case. It would be unfortunate if the investment made by the Welsh Government in improved education at both undergraduate level and in post qualifying training and in regulating the workforce to provide assurance to the public were undermined by employers redirecting work to unqualified and unregulated workers.

## **2. Is there a clear understanding of the Welsh Government's vision for health and care services and the workforce needed to deliver his?**

The principal aims of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 fit well with social work practice. Giving individuals voice and choice, promoting well-being, intervening at an early stage and collaborating with others to improve individual outcomes are the daily work of social workers.

The vision is clear. However, the detail of how some parts of the Act will be implemented which, despite awareness raising sessions, left practitioners unclear about how they could change their working practices. In particular, the messages about the assistance people could expect to improve their well-being and the reality of working in services with diminishing budgets caused considerable concern.

Achieving the vision of the Act will require a workforce who are both knowledgeable and have the ability to enable people to develop their own solutions. People often approach local authorities with a service solution in mind. Assisting them to look at other options, using their strengths and own resources takes skill and often more time than either slotting them into the service or telling them they are ineligible for the service. At a time of budgetary pressure, managing the tension between the available resource and the workforce required will be challenging.

The Act has provided for the establishment of a national Adoption Service to implement best practice across Wales. BASW members have highlighted the importance of post adoption support, particularly for those families who adopt children with complex needs. There is a concern that funding for these services will be reduced or withdrawn altogether. This could result in an increase in adoption breakdown. It is vital that families who experience difficulties caring for children they have adopted have access to skilled practitioners who can help them through what are often extremely challenging circumstances.

Person-centred services are at the heart of the Welsh Government's vision for social care services. This includes the right of Welsh speakers to receive services in their chosen language. BASW is in full agreement with this aspiration. However, of the 76% of social workers registered with the Care Council for Wales in 2014/5 who provided details of their ability to speak Welsh, 65.5% could not speak any Welsh and only 13.5% were fluent. While there was a slight increase in the previous year from 20.4% to 21% in social workers who could speak some Welsh, the percentage of fluent workers did not increase. The tension between providing a service through the medium of Welsh and ensuring the social worker has the appropriate skill set will need to be managed to ensure the best outcome for individuals and families.

**How well equipped is the workforce to meet future health and care needs?**

Since 2004 new entrants have required either a Bachelors or a Master's degree in social work. More than a quarter of registered social workers in Wales now hold this qualification.

The introduction in 2005 of protection of title for social workers and the requirement to register with the Care Council for Wales was welcomed by BASW, following years of advocating for the introduction of a professional framework. Registration requires social workers to demonstrate that they have undertaken a minimum of five days learning and development in a year.

The development of a Continuing Professional Education and Learning Framework for Social Workers has given further impetus to ensure that social workers continue to develop their skills. The implementation of the advanced levels of the Framework is relatively recent but the impact will be demonstrable with time.

Learning and development has been strong in the fields of child care and mental health but weaker in that of work with older people. Historically older people have been viewed as requiring practical services that can be arranged by people who do not need to be qualified. Social work degree programmes and post qualifying learning have not provided robust training on the role of social work in protecting the rights of older people and enabling them to make their own choices. Incorporating the multi-disciplinary approaches required for positive outcomes for older people has also been problematic. Older people access services in larger numbers than in other service areas so the lack of emphasis on appropriate training could be viewed as somewhat perverse. However, the recent publication by the Care Council for Wales of a Dementia Learning and Development Framework for Wales is a welcome development. There needs to be further work to ensure that social workers providing services to older people have an appropriate knowledge base to achieve the best outcomes.

BASW is focussing on providing comprehensive resources for social workers to continue their Continuing Professional Development. The online content is available to members and is of particular benefit to social workers who are restricted by rurality and other factors from accessing other learning opportunities.

- 3. What are the factors that influence recruitment and retention of staff across Wales? This might include for example: the opportunities for young people to find out about/experience the range of NHS and social care careers; education and training (commissioning and/or delivery); pay and terms of employment/contract.**

The factors influencing recruitment and retention of staff are multi-faceted. A survey conducted by the results of a survey by the Guardian newspaper in December 2015 recorded the positive job satisfaction that social workers expressed but also some of the negative aspects of increasing workload, lack of management support, poor work environments and the persistence of hostile media coverage.

The findings from the Guardian survey are congruent with anecdotal and survey findings among the BASW membership. The results of a survey published in December 2015 in Professional Social Work were reported to show that 'Cramped, noisy, vermin infested, poorly lit, badly heated, dirty and crumbling buildings that lack privacy or quiet places to concentrate appear to be typical working environments for social workers.' The move to accommodating staff in large open plan offices with high levels of noise that make sensitive or confidential phone calls with service users problematic. Hot desking can make it impossible to derive the benefits of team working.

BASW has received concerns from some social workers that they will lose their jobs if they fail to learn Welsh to level 2 standard. Achieving this level enables people to have engage in a simple conversation. It is not sufficient to provide a service through the medium of Welsh. It would be unfortunate if competent social workers were deterred from working in Wales because of a perception that the ability to speak Welsh was a requirement.

Despite these negative aspects, 87% of respondents from Wales to the Guardian survey reported they enjoy their jobs. This was higher than the 79% across the UK. One factor behind this may have been because the scale of cuts to local authority budgets was much greater in England at that time. However, the positive reasons are that social workers feel that their contribution is more valued in Wales, workloads are better managed, there is more support from managers and the integration of health and social care works well.

**4. Whether there are particular issues in some geographic areas, rural or urban areas or areas of deprivation for example.**

Recruitment of social workers in areas further away from urban centres can be difficult. Social workers can find the challenges of working in an environment where services are limited or are only available at a considerable distance and the time spent travelling in a rural area to be unattractive. However, generally there are no specific geographical issues associated with the social worker workforce.

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