

Care experienced children and young people

PAC(5) CEC16

Evidence from Social Care Wales

Social Care Wales response to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry looking at public services for care experienced children and young people within the Committee's remit of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are employed in the discharge of public functions

Social Care Wales is a Welsh Government-sponsored body established under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 to protect, promote and maintain the safety and well-being of the public in Wales.

Our aims are to:

- provide public confidence in the social care workforce
- lead and support improvement in social care
- develop the early years and social care workforce.

As part of our aim of providing public confidence in the social care workforce we maintain a register of residential child care managers and workers. Staff must belong to this register in order to work as residential child care workers. We are also responsible for assessing the fitness to practise of registered residential child care managers and workers.

Key points:

- **47 per cent of registered residential child care workers are not qualified**
- **a disproportionate number of our fitness to practise referrals relate to residential child care workers**
- **since April 2018, we have been responsible for supporting the improvement of social care services. Services for children who are looked after is one of our three priority areas for improvement. We are carrying out a range of activities to achieve this, including research, training resources and qualification reform**

Workforce register

In 2017, we published our ninth report of residential child care managers and workers¹. The main concern identified in this report is that **the percentage of residential child care workers (RCCWs) who do not hold the required qualification has risen from 41 per cent in 2014 to 47 per cent in 2017**². Staff can register having completed an induction framework but in order to re-register after three years they need to attain a qualification.

¹[Rheolwyr a Gweithwyr Gofal Plant Preswyl ar y Gofrestr yng Nghymru 2017](#), Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru // [Residential Child Care Managers and Workers on the Register in Wales 2017](#), Social Care Wales

² Tabl 20, cyfeiriad uchod; Table 20, above reference

Our evidence suggests that many staff choose to leave the register rather than take a qualification and continue. Turnover of RCCWs on the register is high. In 2017, the turnover rate for RCCWs was 21 per cent. The turnover of registered residential child care managers on the register was lower at 13 per cent.

More work is needed to understand why so many workers choose not to remain in their roles. We will then use this information to plan how we can improve career opportunities to attract and retain more workers to this group.

According to our report, 70 per cent of RCCWs work for private providers; 22 per cent work directly for local authorities; 7 per cent work for the third sector and 1 per cent work for agencies.

Evidence shows that stable relationships with adults leads to resilience and better outcomes for children. We also know that the fact the children are living away from families means that they are likely to have experienced trauma or abuse. The statistics may lead to concerns about the stability of the workforce and how prepared they are to support this group of children.

Fitness to practise

An residential child care worker or manager may be referred to Social Care Wales if there are concerns about their fitness to practise. Investigations can only be carried out if a person is registered – then they are governed by our rules³. They may also consider whether workers have complied with our practice guidance⁴.

If an RCCW is not registered because, for example, they are in the process of completing their induction framework, we are reliant on safe recruitment practices, with employers checking references and running effective background checks. Anecdotal evidence from our fitness to practise team suggests this may not be entirely robust, particularly where an individual is working for an agency or recruitment is carried out by a third party. We are also aware of individuals who are facing fitness to practise investigations and have changed employers without telling the new employer about the proceedings.

Our evidence tells us that the majority of referrals about RCCWs to our fitness to practise team concern the following:

- inappropriate language to or in front of individuals who use services
- restraints
- medication errors

³[Rheolau addaswydd i ymarfer](#), Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru // [Fitness to practise rules](#), Social Care Wales

⁴[Y gweithiwr gofal preswyl plant: Canllawiau ymarfer ar gyfer gweithwyr gofal preswyl plant sydd wedi cofrestru gyda Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru](#) // [The residential child care worker: Practice guidance for residential child care workers registered with Social Care Wales](#)

- leaving young people unsupervised and at risk of harm
- forming inappropriate (sometimes abusive) relationships with children and young people.

Referrals of RCCWs to our fitness to practise team are disproportionate when compared to other registered groups of social care workers. In 2016 to 2017, 45 per cent of all social care referrals to our fitness to practise team related to RCCWs. Overall RCCWs represent approximately 23 per cent of the total register.

Social Care Wales's contribution to improving services for children who are looked after

Since April 2018, we have been responsible for improving social care services. In consultation with the Welsh Government and the social care sector, we decided to make services for children who are looked after one of our three priority areas for improvement.

We are a member of the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group, and we are actively involved in all three work streams, at all levels of the structure. Furthermore we are involved with the Welsh Government's Residential Child Care Task and Finish Group.

We are in the process of carrying out scoping research that looks at innovation and improvement in children's social care taking place in Wales, focussing on children who are looked after, and children on the edge of care. We will then share this research to as wide an audience as possible to share best practice.

We commissioned an e-learning resource on the local authority responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 for children who need secure accommodation and these are available on our Information and Learning Hub⁵. We have commissioned research into children who need care and support in secure units for welfare reasons.

We are guiding a development by the Social Care Institute for Excellence to develop a practice guide on therapeutic interventions for the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people who are looked after. It is due for completion by spring 2018 and is based on research undertaken for the Department of Health in England, but re-framed within a Welsh context.

We are developing our work on outcomes-focussed practice, with the aim of addressing adverse childhood experiences and building children's resilience and emotional well-being. We are working on an online improvement hub for practitioners to enable access to research and evidence-informed interventions. Coupled with the scoping research, and the therapeutic intervention work, we will develop strategies to share best practice across Wales.

⁵ [The Secure Estate](#), Social Care Wales (formerly known as the Care Council for Wales)

Workforce

In relation to social workers, we are in the process of reviewing their degree with the aim of ensuring that newly qualified social workers are able to meet the challenging and varied needs of the children they care for. A known contribution to children building resilience is having stable relationships with adults. Therefore this review will support the continuing development of the workforce to effectively meet children's needs for skilled, experienced and talented workers. We also commission the Continued Professional Education and Learning Framework (CPEL). This supports practitioners to build their understanding and skills in working with children and families within a Welsh context.

We are revising the health and social care induction framework with the aim of providing more support to residential child care workers. There is ongoing work, with partners, reviewing the qualifications framework for children and adult health and social care workers. For our most traumatised and abused children, these aspects of workforce development are crucial in that we need to be sure that we can offer these children better care than if they remained at home.

We are aware of the wider challenges in providing good quality care to children who are looked after, and as such, are involved with reviewing the fostering regulations and developing a national fostering framework, including post-approval training for foster carers, including kinship carers, a growing proportion of the fostering caring population.