

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee on the Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 29

Ymateb gan: Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru

Response from: Social Care Wales

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for Social Care Wales to contribute to the consultation, Routes into post-16 education and training.

Social Care Wales is the workforce regulator for the social care workforce and part of our role is to set standards for the care and support social care and early years and childcare workforce, making them accountable for their work and to develop the workforce so they have the knowledge and skills to protect, empower and support those who need help.

We have split our response into three broad sections to reflect the experience and challenges we have had engaging with compulsory education learners, the work that we have undertaken to try and support both aspects of the learning supply and address these challenges, and lastly, we have included an example of the work from the social care and early years and childcare sector that we support through dedicated careers funding. We look forward to further learning from your work.

[The Health and Social Care Workforce strategy](#) has a theme dedicated to education and learning, with an ambition that by 2030 the investment in education and learning for health and social care professionals will deliver the skills and capabilities needed to meet the needs of people in Wales. Compulsory and post 16 education are a key element to supporting individuals commencing into social care and early years careers.

Our experience of working within the compulsory and post 16 education

The social care and early years sectors have [qualification frameworks](#), that set out the qualifications required for practice in the sector. We consistently deal with queries from young people wanting to enter the workforce with qualifications that are not recognised as part of these pathways. Learners then need to repeat learning to gain qualifications required for practice. We do not have independent research to

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confirm why this is the case, but we do hear the following concerns from employers and learners;

- Information provided prior to joining the sector can be misleading in relation to the career pathways and qualification requirements for the sector
- There is a lack of recognition of prior learning, so even where compulsory and post 16 education could be relevant to a required practice qualification, this is not always recognised.
- Barriers to work experience and placement opportunities exist due to the nature of the work and age of the students (16-18) and an ongoing misunderstanding and/or lack of confidence by employers as to the roles that under 18's can undertake as part of work placements or as part of pursuing vocational qualifications. There are inconsistent approaches in how schools and employers work together to provide access to placements. As a sector with a majority of small and medium small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) there is no co-ordinated approach to work placements in the sector and service pressures including the capacity to provide supervision and support for learners. This limits the opportunities to young people to have a real experience or understanding of the workplace.
- It is unclear as to what destination data is collected and how to access it. Improving the availability of data would help us understand compulsory education learners' journeys especially for those if completing relevant qualifications through compulsory education gaining employment in that industry.
- In terms of future proofing future compulsory education curriculums there is a greater opportunity to align with sector-based qualifications where possible this would reduce confusion and the need for repeat learning when entering the sector as an employee.
- We are aware of and welcome the work that Qualifications Wales are undertaking in strengthening the curriculum for 14 years plus schools-based learning that have more direct links to the world of work
- We have seen a gradual drop in those applying to the degree in Social Work over the last 4-5 years and Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) are reporting that it is more difficult than ever for students who are on programme in terms of affordability, requiring students to take on paid employment alongside their studies.

The perceptions of sectors will impact on young people's choices. We monitor the perception of the social care and early years sector on a biannual basis by

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interviewing a 1,000 people across Wales. Overall, this shows the general public have a general positive perception of the sector, but it has to be recognised that there is still a lot to do in shifting the perception of the public¹. Some of the findings include:

- 50% of respondents feel there are career pathways within the sector (20% were unsure)
- 67% of respondents feel that the sector requires qualifications to work (17% were unsure)
- 79% of respondents felt it was a sector that was relevant for males to work in (9% were unsure)
- 63% of respondents felt it was a poorly paid sector (19% were unsure)

We are due to repeat this perception survey in the next few months.

Equally through our ongoing engagement on supporting the implementation of vocational qualifications, employers raise concerns about the following:

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that the perception of the sector is still that it is a route for students who cannot achieve academically.
- Concerns exist around that those in schools who are sharing careers information / delivering the vocational qualifications element of the curriculum as to whether they have the relevant current knowledge, experience and skills related to the sectors they are delivering qualifications in. For example, our evidence gained from working with schools indicates that they often lack the knowledge to effectively promote sector apprenticeships or career pathways. This results in students not being informed about these opportunities as viable career paths and entry routes into the sector. Where individuals delivering vocational qualifications do not have prior experience in the relevant industry, we would welcome the opportunities for teachers to spend time in the sector with employers so they can draw on real and current experiences.
- Questions exist around whether the breadth of sector career opportunities are fully understood, recognised and promoted within schools. There is often a misconception that sector roles offer limited career progression. This can discourage individuals from pursuing paid employment in this sector, despite the opportunities for advancement and specialisation.

¹ Public perceptions of the care sectors 2022



The following quote is from research we undertook to better understand attraction and recruitment in the sector.

“While some jobseekers are attracted to the sector, mainly due to individuals’ desire to work in a role that can ‘make a difference’ and the flexibility of the role, for the most part, the sector is perceived as unattractive to jobseekers”²

Our response to challenges within compulsory education

By engaging with schools, colleges, HEI’s and community organisations, we have co-produced and provided valuable resources and support to young people, educators, and career advisors. These efforts aim to raise awareness of the diverse opportunities within the early years and social care sector and contribute to a more informed and prepared future workforce. We remain committed to continuing these initiatives and expanding our reach to ensure that the sector remains a viable and attractive career option, and so young people can make informed choices on careers in the sector across Wales.

We have three key areas where we engage with the compulsory education provision, but it is also important to emphasise our links to post 16 education as an immediate transition from the compulsory education.

The three areas are as follows:

- [Qualifications and standards](#) team who provide ongoing support to Awarding Organisations, learning providers (compulsory and post 16), employers and learners to support the development and delivery of vocational qualifications including apprenticeships
- [WeCare Wales](#) which is our careers and job seeking programme of work which aims to continually promote the opportunities for employment within the sector through clear careers information and support

² Understanding attraction and recruitment in the Welsh social care and child care sector and the role of WeCare Wales



- [Introduction to Social Care and Introduction to Childcare](#) provide a pre-employment programme of learning and awareness to help participants better understand the expectations of roles in the sector prior to potentially job seeking. There are specific strands of this programme that reach out to young people and under-represented groups in the sector.

The following outlines some of the work we have undertaken to bridge the gaps in compulsory (and post 16) careers information working in partnership with the learning supply.

1. Quality of Information and support within Schools.

- We developed and issued a “[teachers pack](#)” to provide consistent information pack for teachers on the social care and childcare sectors
- We developed and issued “[career cards](#)” to all schools and colleges across Wales. These career cards highlight careers in social care, early years, and childcare, detailing progression routes and the qualifications required for these roles.

Feedback indicates that teachers and Careers Wales have utilised these cards at career events and options evenings over the past year. One teacher noted, "It allowed parents to see the wide-ranging careers in social care."

- Over the past two years, we have attended numerous Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) events (the awarding organisation for social care and early years school-based qualifications in Wales) across Wales, engaging with both teachers and college tutors to promote careers in social care and early years, and to offer support resources. We have also established a small teachers' working group. This initiative indirectly benefits young people and learners by ensuring their teachers receive up-to-date information from the WeCare Wales team, thereby providing a more consistent understanding of the social care sector.
- We have worked closely with both Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus to support their work including providing ongoing briefing for their advisors to ensure they are up to date with sector developments. This has included providing links to our

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resources and jobs portal to ensure a direct level of support is in place for job seekers. Feedback for these sessions have been overwhelmingly positive.

- We have modified and delivered our introduction to social care and childcare programmes to schools and colleges to raise awareness of the types of roles and careers that exist in the sector
- We have established the [Care Ambassador scheme](#) whereby volunteers who are employed in the sector champion the people working in our sector whilst encouraging others to consider a career in care.
- To mitigate some of the challenges in the drop in degree numbers applying to Higher Education we have invested additional funding in sponsored students whereby Local Authorities enrol existing employees on to the degree programme and this has proved extremely popular. In addition, we have run two attraction campaigns promoting social work as a career via our WeCare Wales programme of work.

2. Wider engagement in supporting careers information

- Skills Cymru brings together national and local employers, universities, colleges, and training providers to engage with young people aged 14-24, as well as their parents/carers and teachers. Over the past two years, we have participated in this event, hosting a stand with activities related to social care and childcare roles.
- The King's Trust (previously the Prince's Trust) helps individuals aged 11 to 30 develop essential life skills, prepare for work, and access job opportunities. Over the past three years, we have successfully partnered with the King's Trust to deliver a comprehensive Introduction to Social Care programme for aged 16 years and over. This programme includes nurturing and support for young people and has proven to be a successful model. Statistics show that around 80% of participants who completed the programme have secured a role in the sector or pursued further education opportunities as a result.

The Kings Trust Manager states, "The course has been brilliant in supporting our young people to gain a greater insight into a career in social care. We have

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supported over 100 young people across Wales to complete the course so far, it is extremely accessible, and the trainers are fantastic and engaging. The course also offers valuable certificates in Safeguarding, Infection Control and Autism Awareness to best equip people for gaining employment in the sector. The guaranteed interview scheme has been invaluable and has enabled many of our young people to go straight into employment.”

- We have worked with employability coaches and careers advisors to better understand the skills, values, and requirements within the social care sector. including delivering sessions on tailoring CVs for the sector.
- Girlguiding Cymru offers a programme, created with input from the girls, which is full of fun, adventure, and variety. Following a successful pilot, we have produced a WeCare Wales joint collaboration community badge, available to any guiding group in Wales. The rationale behind this initiative is to raise awareness of the care sector and the roles within it, potentially supporting long-term careers in the sector.

3. Support to the sector

We provide annual grant funding to the Local Authorities in Wales to employ regional careers connectors whose primary aim is to work within the locality to promote careers in the sector. The funding supports seven such posts and they work with employers, learning providers, (compulsory and post compulsory), careers services and employment organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and job centre plus to help provide support, resources and raise awareness and understanding of careers in the sector.

Below is an example of the work that they do with this example being from the Gwent region;

“We have the Gwent Career College Consortium which is a partnership approach to supporting the recruitment and development of Health and Social Care workers post 16.

As part of this programme, we have the Health and Social Care Integrated Schools Programme which involves ongoing engagement programme across Gwent schools



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that includes WeCare Wales, NHS, University of South Wales, Careers Wales and Coleg Gwent. Schools have been accommodating, and the feedback is positive.

We have also produced a 'Padlet' around adult social care pathways which has been shared with Careers Wales in Gwent.

In conclusion, it is critical that we support all learners regardless of age, to be able to clearly see the pathways open to them, whether that be into further learning and education or into employment. As you can see, we are making efforts to help this transition but recognise that there is a lot more to do, working in partnership with all key stakeholders to ensure clarity of approaches to the benefit of all.

For further information, please contact jon.day@socialcare.wales

Yours sincerely,

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