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Priorities for the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee Care Council for Wales response

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The Care Council for Wales aims to ensure the social care workforce in Wales is safe to practice; has the right skills and qualifications to work to a high professional standard. In addition we also ensure that the Early Years Workforce have the right skills, knowledge and qualifications to give the best possible start to the children of Wales. We work with employers, learning providers and the Welsh Government to support skill levels in the sector.

In 2017 we will be renamed as Social Care Wales. Our remit will be expanded to include the regulation of social care training, service improvement and the co ordination of research. In this response we have identified key issues that the Committee should consider for its priorities

Social care, early years and child care are crucial sectors to the economic and social well-being of Wales. An estimated 70% of citizens in Wales have personal or immediate family experience of using sector services.¹

Social care support enables people to retain or return to employment, whether they are a person who requires support, an unpaid carer or a family member. The National Strategic Skills Audit for Wales² highlighted social care as one of four potential job creation sectors and one of the ten fastest growing occupations in Wales. However, despite increasing expectations on the workforce, in particular to reduce the burden on the NHS this remains a low wage sector, for which recruitment and retention remains a significant concern. According to the Resolution Foundation, “while they have always been low, pay levels in social care are being squeezed by the perfect storm of rising demand (driven by the rising care needs of our ageing population) coupled with falling public funding. Typical pay in the sector is moving closer to the minimum wage every year³.”

Social care qualifications

In the course of the next three years, following a review by Qualification Wales, there will be a reform of health, social care and early years qualifications.

The priority for the care and early years sectors is a robust, evidenced-based system for the accrual of competence, knowledge and skills. This is fundamental as we have a qualifications based register in Wales to give the public confidence in professionals who are supporting them. There are currently 8,385 individuals on the compulsory register in Wales covering social work, social care managers and residential childcare workers. In 2018 this registration will be expanded

¹ [Skills for Care and Development](#)

² [National Strategic Skills Audit for Wales](#), Welsh Government, 2013

³ [As if we cared: The costs and benefits of a living wage for social care workers](#), Resolution Foundation, 2015



to around 20,000 domiciliary care workers and in 2020 to around 25,000 care homes workers⁴. There is a need to ensure publicly funded social care qualifications in Wales, meet the skills needs of employers or learners. Recent reviews from Estyn⁵ and Qualifications Wales⁶ have highlighted these issues. The Care Council welcome the findings of these reports as an opportunity to be used alongside our regulatory role for social care training, collaborative work with the sector and the regulatory remit available to Qualifications Wales to respond to these issues. We will be working closely in collaboration with Qualification Wales and with training providers and other partners to ensure that courses provide qualifications which meet learners, employers' and society's needs between now and 2019. This must ensure provision of learning through the medium of Welsh across Wales.

In particular we would encourage full collaboration between the regulatory powers of Qualifications Wales and the monitoring of work based learning contracts. In April 2017, the Care Council for Wales will become Social Care Wales with new powers to approve courses. This will help to drive up quality but will only be successful in partnership with the other key stakeholders such as the work based learning contracts section and the Further Education College sections of the Welsh Government.

The example of early years qualifications shows what can be achieved. We are delighted to report that following excellent partnership working over a period of time, there is progress in early years degrees in Wales, with five universities⁷. Graduates from these five programmes will, for the first time, be able to leave education with the knowledge skills and occupational competence required to work in the sector.

It is critical that public funding is aligned to the qualifications requirements to work in a sector. Qualifications should give learners and employers the skills and knowledge required to undertake an occupation.

Apprentices

The care sector requires an apprenticeship system that meets the needs of employers across the care sector, to recruit a range of people, including those over the age of 25. While the Council supports the view that employers should invest in their staff's development we also recognise the pressures many businesses experience in this sector due to the introduction of National Living Wage, the Apprenticeship Levy and austerity cuts to public funding. We have some concerns for the sustainability of the sector in the longer term without some skills funding from government. The Council very much welcomes the recent announcement of a return of all age apprenticeships in Wales and hopes that European funded projects do not limit opportunities or access to learners by excluding sub sectors or valued learning providers.

We would welcome some clarity at the earliest opportunity on how Wales will respond to and deal with the apprenticeship levy in order that we can provide some advice to employers.

⁴ Combined StatsWales and Local Government Data Unit figures on the workforce employed directly or commissioned by local authorities

⁵ [The quality of education and training in adult health and social care](#), Estyn, May 2016

⁶ [Health and Social Care – Sector review report](#), Qualifications Wales, July 2016

⁷ Bangor University, Glyndwr University, University of South Wales. Cardiff Metropolitan University and University of Wales Trinity St David's.

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