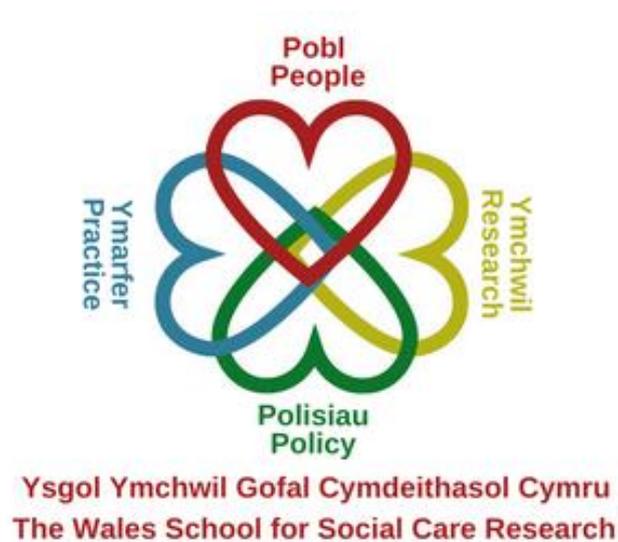


Wales School for Social Care Research Strategy

Strategy Document



Mission:

The Wales School for Social Care Research will contribute to the sustained co-production of excellent social care research that informs and enriches social care policy and practice in Wales in order to have a positive impact on people's well-being across the life course (children, young people and adults).

Overview

The document sets out the Strategy for the initial phase of the implementation of the *Wales School for Social Care Research* established by the Welsh Government to contribute to strength in excellent social care research with real world application and positive impact on the well-being of people in Wales. The School is a part of the wider Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure, with the School Hub located in the College of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University. The School's development is a response to the need for credible and timely social care evidence that responds to ever pressing population and service needs and issues for people across the life course (i.e. children, young people and adults). With an all Wales remit, the School will respond to the cultural and socio-economic uniqueness of Wales and be aligned with the Welsh public policy context.

The Strategy is scoped out within the parameters of guidelines set by Health and Care Research Wales which have established the School's aims and objectives. As these guidelines make clear the *Wales School for Social Care Research* will be an organisation with an all Wales focus, operating at the interface of academia and practice. It will build bridges between social care knowledge production and social care policy and practice, contribute to understandings of critical social care research questions and enhance excellent research that responds to them. Public involvement and engagement permeates all the work of the School in line with values and principles of co-production.

There are other bodies in Wales with aligned responsibilities. Social Care Wales has a legislated responsibility for "*Supporting the development of research capacity and applied research and assisting policy makers locally and nationally in developing best practice*". The School will collaborate closely with Social Care Wales in its work. The Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure includes research centres with social care agendas and research and development support functions. In addition, Welsh universities are engaged in generating social care research, knowledge mobilisation and capacity building and with distinctive expertise (e.g. WISERD (Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research Data and Methods), CASCADE (Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre) and Centre for Innovative Ageing (CIA)). The School strategy is based on the premise of working collaboratively with these organisations in order to support and strengthen social care research across Wales. It will not duplicate existing research activity.

This Strategy document has been prepared by Professor Fiona Verity building on the work of the former Director of the School, Professor Judith Phillips.

Reading this document

This Strategy document is a comprehensive overview of the aims, objectives and strategies of the School and will guide the work of the School. It will be accompanied with shorter public documents that communicate the strategic direction of the School.

Strategy Overview

This Strategy document outlines the *Wales School for Social Care Research* mission, values and organisational structure and the plans for the initial phase of operation. It follows the approach suggested in the Huxley Report into Social Care Research to ‘*move forward on several different fronts at once*’ [1 p. 38]. The School will work in three areas:

1. Encourage, promote and facilitate a social care research programme structured around 4 themes.
 - a. **Social determinants of care needs** (social, economic and environmental factors impacting on social care);
 - b. **Prevention and early intervention** (e.g. community development and community based interventions, social planning, integrated models)
 - c. **Social care delivery** (e.g. organisation of delivery, practice, evaluation, partnerships, workforce issues);
 - d. **Institutional structures and policies** (e.g. resource allocation, integration, public policy).
2. In collaboration with Social Care Wales, the Health and Care Research Wales Support Centre and existing social care research providers, support research capacity building in social care to strengthen research and strengthen the capabilities of people who do research.
3. Support research knowledge mobilisation and public engagement in social care research in collaboration with the above mentioned organisations.

What will the School offer?

The School will benefit social care practitioners and the social care sector in assisting them in taking forward their research and evidence based practice aspirations, and benefit research providers in supporting them engage with the social care sector in the delivery of research that makes a sustained and tangible difference. This includes care quality, and improvements in identified priority areas. The School’s activities will inform improvements in the delivery of quality social care for children, young people and adults as outlined in the *Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014* with its focus on wellbeing, people, prevention and integration.

Background

The clear imperative to continue to strengthen impactful and excellent social care research across Wales is well documented. Numerous reports highlight the need for knowledge to improve policy and practice to better meet growing social care needs and demands and the existing constraints of a poverty of evidence, underfunding and uneven organisational support for social care research [1, 2, 3]. A seminal document is the Huxley Report (2009) entitled *Social Care Research Priorities and Capacity in Wales* which reports on a comprehensive consultation and analysis of social care research in Wales. This report recommended research capacity building in both 'academic and practice settings' leadership for social care research, and increased resources for social care research [1, p.v].

The broader context of demographic and socio-economic pressures and an increasing need for social care alongside increasing expectations, austerity and associated social care budget cuts, time constraints and competing priorities for practitioners create particular challenges in social care. As well, there exists different agendas, priorities and KPIs in social care research between academia (REF driven) and practice (evaluation and good practice driven). This can create a situation that Wiseman calls the 'parallel universes' of universities, policy and practice sectors and the wider public which can impact on effective communication of research and result in miscommunication of areas where new knowledge and ways of working is needed [4]. The School is a response to readdressing this situation and going forward in ways that build on existing practice and research strengths and momentum, as well as create new understandings in social care. It is also noted that there have been new developments in social care research in Wales since the Huxley Report.

Policy context

The *Wales School for Social Care Research* sits in a Welsh Government public policy context supportive of strengthening social care research capacity. Key 'transformational themes' identified by Welsh Government policy [5] include: a citizen and personal outcome focused approach; strengthening 'voice and choice'; rethinking assessment and care management- putting professional practice before excessive bureaucracy; assets and strengths based approaches; the health and social care integration agenda and the development of inter-professional practice; supporting prevention and wellbeing in diverse communities. These themes form part of the cultural context in which the School is located.

These above transformational themes have been incorporated into the major Welsh Government policy frameworks on which this Strategy for social care research builds, including:

- *Sustainable Social Services: A Framework for Action* (2011) emphasising the need for high quality evidence so that best outcomes can be achieved for service users and carers and the strengthening of social care research as a priority;
- *Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act* 2014 with an emphasis on an integrated social services which is empowering, playing a preventative role, citizen driven and in partnership. The implementation of the Act will have ramifications for the social care sector in Wales;
- *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act* 2015 with a focus on communities and joined up working;
- Prudent Healthcare with an emphasis on creativity, coproduction and an evidence base to policy and practice.

Similar initiatives in the United Kingdom include the NIHR School for Social Care Research in England, a partnership between leading universities funded by the National Institute for Health Research; the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) and other initiatives in Scotland and the Northern Ireland Social Work Research Strategy (Health and Social Care Board).

Organisations such as Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Making Research Count (UK collaborative research dissemination initiative), Research in Practice (RiP) and Research in Practice for Adults (RiPfA) also work to build social care research capacity building and service and workforce development. As will be detailed in this Strategy document, the *Wales School for Social Care Research* will explore links and collaborations with these aforementioned initiatives.

Definitions

The key concepts used in the *Wales School for Social Care Research* Strategy document have varying meanings. For the purposes of this Strategy the following definitions are used.

Well-being

The *Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014* defines wellbeing in the following way:

“Wellbeing” means well-being in relation to any of the following:

- (a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- (b) protection from abuse and neglect;
- (c) education, training and recreation;
- (d) domestic, family and personal relationships;
- (e) contribution made to society;
- (f) securing rights and entitlements;
- (g) social and economic well-being;
- (h) suitability of living accommodation. [6]

Co-production

The following definition is from the Public Health Wales/Co-Production Wales document ‘Seeing is Believing’. In this document co-production is defined as a process “*which enables citizens and professionals to share power and work together in equal partnership, to create opportunities for people to access support when they need it and to contribute to social change*”. [7] In enacting a co-production approach the School will draw upon Health and Care Research Wales core principles for engagement and involvement in research. These principles emphasise the importance of meaningful public involvement, based on mutual respect and accountability, and occurring in all phases of a research process. They foreground the need to be transparent in research relationships and for diverse public involvement strategies.

Developing Evidence Enriched Policy and Practice (DEEP)

The work of the School will be informed by the Developing Evidence Enriched Policy and Practice (DEEP) approach. This approach is an appreciative, collaborative and democratic approach to the discovery, exploration and use of research alongside contextual knowledge in service and workforce development.

Research capacity building

Research capacity building is a dynamic process over time, building on what works well in order to strengthen relevant and quality research that does make a difference in policy and practice. This includes producing capacity for research to respond to emergent issues and needs. In the *Wales School for Social Care Research* capacity building will operate at three interrelated levels:

- a) **Strengthening Individual knowledge and capabilities** to use research evidence in policy and practice, formulate research questions and be engaged in research (e.g. the skills and knowledge of social care workforce, voluntary sector staff, university researchers);
- b) **Strengthening Organisational capabilities** to generate and sustain social care research environments based in approaches where evidence can inform policy and practice;
- c) **Strengthening Institutional processes** to support a sustained social care research agenda and effective knowledge mobilisation. (E.g. resource allocation, policies and procedures, links). [9, 10,11]

Mission

The Wales School for Social Care Research will contribute to the sustained co-production of excellent social care research that informs and enriches social care policy and practice in Wales in order to have a positive impact on people's well-being across the life course (children, young people and adults).

AIM 1: To lead and promote the development of a culture of research-mindedness, evidence-enriched practice, and research activity in social care services in Wales.

OBJECTIVES

1. Building on previous work, develop and progressively roll out a system for enhanced evidence-enriched practice in social care services across Wales.
2. Develop, progressively roll out, and subsequently refine a bespoke national system of research *Knowledge Mobilisation* for social care research spanning academia, policy and practice.
3. Administer a capacity-building programme of research funding grants specifically for social care practitioners, managers, and educators.

AIM 2: To facilitate the development of social care research capacity in both practice and academia through providing leadership.

OBJECTIVES

1. Establish a clear, recognised, and prestigious identity.
2. Collaborate to support enhanced capacity in existing institutional infrastructure, social care researchers and the social care sector to engage with and conduct research.
3. Facilitate collaboration both within Wales and between Welsh, UK and international partners.

AIM 3: To lead by example in facilitating, developing, and championing innovative and fully-embedded public involvement in social care research in Wales.

OBJECTIVES

1. Promote and encourage the active, informed, and innovative involvement of the public in all appropriate aspects of social care research in Wales.
2. Ensure service users, carers and the wider public are fully and actively engaged in all appropriate School activities and governance structures.
3. Develop the evidence base for public involvement in social care research and related activities.
4. Work closely with the Health and Care Research Support Centre to promote, develop and enhance expertise in public involvement in social care research.

AIM 4: To contribute to identification of social care research priorities and knowledge gaps in Wales, and to assist the sector to address those areas.

OBJECTIVES

1. Develop a Wales wide system for identifying research priorities and knowledge gaps.
2. Work with the sector, finding ways to address identified knowledge gaps and enhance School activities through knowledge mobilisation, and primary and secondary research.
3. Develop a programme of practice and policy-relevant research (ensuring that it does not duplicate research activity within Health and Care Research Wales Centres and Units).

Strategy Areas

Strategy Areas	
Aim 1: <i>Strategy Area 1</i>	Development of DEEP (Developing Evidence Enriched Policy and Practice)
Aim 1: <i>Strategy Area 2</i>	Building research mindedness in social care sectors
Aim 1: <i>Strategy Area 3</i>	Research knowledge mobilisation
Aim 2: <i>Strategy Area 4</i>	School visibility
Aim 2: <i>Strategy Area 5</i>	Collaborative work
Aim 2: <i>Strategy Area 6</i>	Influencing social care public policy
Aim 3: <i>Strategy Area 7</i>	Public involvement in social care research
Aim 3: <i>Strategy Area 8</i>	Public involvement in School activities/processes
Aim 3: <i>Strategy Area 9</i>	Public involvement in research knowledge mobilisation
Aim 4: <i>Strategy Area 10</i>	Social care research: assessment of gaps and priorities
Aim 4: <i>Strategy Area 11</i>	Themed social care research programme
Aim 4: <i>Strategy Area 12</i>	Strengthen the methodological repertoire of social care

Section 3: School Model of Operation

The *Wales School for Social Care Research* builds on past initiatives in Wales, is informed by a public policy context and the current state of play in social care research across the social services sector and within research organisations. For instance social care research related activities are being undertaken by a range of organisations (government, voluntary and private social care agencies, service users and carers, the wider public, community based organisations and researchers (both higher education institutions and private researchers).

Given its plural aims and the number of key stakeholders, the *Wales School for Social Care Research* model of operation is critically important. The School will be a catalyst and enabler and draw on principles of inquiry, systems thinking, capacity building, collaboration and engagement, and valuing different forms of knowledge (see Table 1). The School will operate on a hub and spoke model with the Hub based at the College of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University. Key staff are the Director, Senior Project Officer and Research and Practice Development Officers.

Funds will be allocated to support capacity building activities, and research development processes which include generating understandings of what social care knowledge is needed, supporting practice based research and seeking funds for research. Radiating from the School Hub will be spokes of negotiated collaborative work with many players (i.e. social services sector, service users and carers, the wider public, researchers, community based organisations and the private sector). The Hub will have a developmental role, and will also act as a liaison point for social care agencies and researchers in terms of making accessible research data and methodological expertise, and facilitating links between researchers and social care practice arenas related to children, young people and adults.

In addition to collaborations within Wales, partnerships and shared projects will be developed across the UK to further 'excellent social care research that informs and enriches social care policy and practice in Wales'.

Table 1: Principles informing the work of the School

- ***Taking an all-Wales approach*** acknowledging the cultural uniqueness and diversity across the country
- ***Valuing different forms of knowledge-*** systematic research, practitioner wisdom and organisational knowledge and the lived experiences of people accessing social care and support and their families
- ***Capacity building*** (individual, organisational and institutional levels)
- ***Engaging and involving the public of Wales*** in social care research using the Health and Care Research Wales core principles for public engagement and involvement
- ***Collaboration and partnerships***
- ***Complexity and systems thinking***

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