



Health and Social Care Committee – Consultation on Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Council of Deans of Health written submission – September 2021

The Council of Deans of Health is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. The Council represents the 100 UK university faculties engaged in education and research for nursing, midwifery, and the allied health professions. Our nine member institutions in Wales work together with policy makers to help shape the education and research of the future healthcare workforce in Wales.

Question 1: Initial priorities identified by the Committee

Which of the issues listed above do you think should be a priority, and why?

1. The health and social care workforce, including organisational culture and staff wellbeing

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the central importance of the health and social care workforce to the success of the nation. The Council of Deans of Health Wales applauds the profound contribution of healthcare professionals during the pandemic.

The pandemic also underlined the importance of the healthcare higher education sector, which has been key to the nation's response. This included the deployment of nursing, midwifery and allied health students and some academic staff within clinical practice to expand the NHS workforce, providing training to upskill the health and social care workforce, and offering facilities and equipment to NHS services.

Ensuring we have a sustainable workforce to meet the current and future healthcare challenges of the Welsh population is the key priority of the healthcare higher education sector. Healthcare education is resource intensive and costly, and it must be adequately funded to meet the high costs involved to deliver the future workforce. We welcome the recent Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) Strategic Review and recommissioning process. We must sustain investment in placement capacity and innovation and fund initiatives to increase placement opportunities outside the NHS.

In order to grow the future workforce, healthcare higher education needs capital investment for additional buildings, facilities, and equipment to manage the current and expected student growth. We need innovation and investment in infrastructure to enhance digital innovation and remote delivery. Simulation will be needed to modernise the learning experience and produce staff equipped for the future digital NHS.

Universities drive research outputs and innovation in healthcare delivery. There is a need to strengthen the academic workforce to educate future professionals, including the clinical academic workforce. This requires adequate investment in teaching qualifications and research opportunities for the wider workforce. This would lead to an increase in the sustainability of both academic staffing and clinical academic careers.

The expansion of masters level education and investment in postgraduate education and flexible learning pathways would also help to create a healthcare workforce which is more highly skilled and better able to respond to future population health demands and the changing healthcare landscape. As HEIW enters phase two of its Strategic Education Review, which involves reviewing postgraduate provision, increased funding to support the development of the postgraduate education infrastructure required to deliver the future healthcare workforce will be key.

Retention of registered professionals is as important as recruitment. There is a need to improve recruitment strategies, but also retention rates in the registered population so that we have the clinical education workforce to educate and supervise the students of the future.

Regarding student support, universities and prospective students need certainty about student support arrangements in the long term to allow for planning and development. Healthcare students should be able to access both the standard maintenance support package through Student Finance Wales and an NHS Bursary to cover full tuition fees and additional costs related to clinical placement expenses. This would recognise the unique nature of these courses and their importance to the future health and social care workforce.

It is important to consider the mental wellbeing of the health and social care workforce, especially considering the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a need for ongoing wellbeing support for healthcare students on placements in healthcare settings. This should include access to confidential services outside of student placement circuits. To ensure students receive the best support, it is important that universities have increased financial support for placements to ensure that students and academic staff have sustainable access to suitable wellbeing support appreciating the needs of healthcare students, as a discrete group of students. These aims are consistent with the Quadruple Aim ambitions set out in [Healthier Wales](#), specifically developing a motivated and sustainable health and social care workforce, as well as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

2. Evidence-based innovation in health and social care

The Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped the delivery of health and social care across the UK. Innovations in both technology and practice allowed for the increased use of digital innovation and remote working that made sure the NHS continued to operate. In particular, technological innovations have allowed for remote treatment and adherence to social distancing and self-isolation rules.

Innovations in health and social care have moved the sector forward significantly during the pandemic. It is important that many of these practices remain in place to allow for flexible healthcare as the NHS emerges from the pandemic. The Welsh Government must consider the continually increasing use of

technology in healthcare and invest in the infrastructure and equipment needed by higher education to provide digitally enhanced and simulated placements to produce a future healthcare workforce better equipped to deliver services. It is also important to consider students in this context, and how to deliver technological innovations that will best meet their needs. Innovations must be tailored to students as individual learners.

This year, Health Education England (HEE) has announced £15m of dedicated investment in simulation for healthcare faculties, and the Scottish Government has committed to £3.8m for innovative technology. It is important that Wales follows this with investment as soon as possible, in order to continue to provide high-quality education.

Question 2: Key priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Q2. In your view, what other key priorities should the Committee consider during the Sixth Senedd in relation to:

- a) health services;*
- b) social care and carers;*
- c) COVID recovery?*

a) Health services

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the fundamental importance of the healthcare workforce to the success of the nation. Going forward, it is key to ensure a sustainable and viable workforce. Universities are key to educating and delivering this workforce and must be adequately funded to do so. Universities also work with local boards and healthcare partners to develop the existing workforce. It is important to ensure that there is a sufficient funding for CPD provision to continue the development of the healthcare workforce. This is crucial for retention.

Alongside this, it is important that healthcare services continue the innovative practices they have developed during the pandemic, including technological developments. We must also look to develop areas of healthcare excellence in Wales. A focus on rural healthcare opportunities, including in advanced practice education, primary care, social care, community settings, and public health could provide impetus to support workforce retention and skills mix. These areas of excellence could be used to deliver on the ambitions of the Programme for Government to better integrate health and care and to reduce the health inequalities exposed by the pandemic.

b) Social care and carers

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of practice placements for healthcare students in social care settings. It is important to develop more placements in social care settings, as we consider the further integration of health and social care. This must allow for expanded placement capacity. New training and development plans by Social Care Wales also provide opportunities for the further

integration of health and social care. Alongside this, a social care placement may support healthcare students to consider a career in social care, which they may not have known about without this experience. Increasing placement provision outside of acute NHS services would further widen the choice of placements for healthcare students. The Welsh Government is committed to further integration between health and social care, and this proposal is an excellent opportunity to further this agenda.

c) COVID recovery

The Covid-19 pandemic has without doubt had a significant impact on the healthcare sector. The contribution of the healthcare higher education sector has been key to the nation's response to the pandemic. This has included the deployment of nursing, midwifery, and allied health students and some academic staff within clinical practice to expand the NHS workforce, providing training to upskill the health and social care workforce, and offering facilities and equipment to NHS services. Healthcare research in universities has been critical to developing safe and effective Covid-19 vaccines and continues to inform our response to the pandemic. This work has highlighted the central importance of the healthcare higher education sector to the nation's wellbeing and success, both now and in the future.

The experiences of the pandemic highlighted in stark terms the impact of inequalities on the health of individuals and communities. The connection between inequalities and poor health was evidenced in the Marmot Review in 2010 and reiterated in 2020. Regarding Covid-19, it was clear even at the start of the pandemic that those with existing inequalities, including with poor health and living in deprivation, were most at risk.

The Welsh Government must ensure that it develops a workforce that is able to meet the needs of different communities across Wales. In recent years there has been a focus on inclusion health and other strategies to better meet the needs of those experiencing structural inequalities. These efforts must be redoubled post-pandemic. When engaging in this work, the Welsh Government should consider the views of vulnerable groups across Wales.

The experience of Covid has shown that as a system we can rapidly evolve services for the benefit of patients. This is a key lesson for the future. Going forward we will also need to focus efforts on ensuring that we have a sustainable ICU nursing workforce and rehabilitation services in response to long Covid. Students across a range of disciplines must be trained in these settings to ensure the workforce pipeline.

A key issue that has arisen from the pandemic is increased pressures on healthcare services. This can only be addressed by increasing and developing the workforce. This situation provides an opportunity for the Welsh Government to think about how to develop placement capacity for healthcare education (including in the private and social care sectors) and grow the workforce. Alongside this, it is important to consider the use of interdisciplinary teams. Increased working between different professionals would benefit health services and education in the context of increased service pressures. This work should take place immediately, as the UK continues to recover from the pandemic. In the development of this, the Welsh government should involve universities and healthcare professionals.

For more information contact:

Amelia Canning, Policy Intern, amelia.canning@cod-health.ac.uk