



IMPACT | NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELL-BEING (WALES) ACT

STUDY OVERVIEW | MARCH 2023

The Welsh Government commissioned a partnership of academics across four universities in Wales to deliver the evaluation of the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*, an essential component of Welsh Government policy to produce ‘transformative changes’ in the provision of social services across Wales. This independent national evaluation – the IMPACT study (IMplementation of the ACT) – ran from November 2018 to October 2022.

WHAT WE DID

The IMPACT study used Michael Patton’s (2018) ‘Principles-Focused Evaluation’ (P-FE) approach as the overarching framework. P-FE focuses on evaluating how principles guide the implementation of interventions or programmes in contexts which are complex, uncertain and ‘turbulent’, and what happens as a result. There are three central questions that are answered in a P-FE evaluation, and these framed the work done across this study:

1. To what extent have meaningful and evaluable principles been articulated? (Conceptualisation)
2. If principles have been articulated, to what extent and in what ways are they being adhered to in practice? (Implementation)
3. If adhered to, to what extent and in what ways are the principles leading to the desired results? (Optimisation)

The IMPACT project was a programme of work which was constituted of 11 individual studies. In all, we heard from more than 450 study participants from across Wales, all of whom provided detailed and comprehensive accounts of their experiences under the Act, from a range of perspectives.

WHAT WE FOUND

- The legislation, and the principles underpinning it, provides a well-supported framework for change in the practice and delivery of social services.

- Forces around the global public health pandemic, workforce crisis, cost of living crisis and the longer-term challenges around demography and austerity has altered the context in which the Act is placed in unprecedented ways.
- There is clear and compelling evidence of the incredible amounts of hard work, commitment, adaptiveness and goodwill from stakeholders given the challenges faced, but there is also compelling evidence of the problems that remain within the system.
- There are consistent and cross-stakeholder strengths identified in the first phase of the Act’s life (as enacted). There is a largely positive, but somewhat mixed picture about the second phase when the Act was translated from legislation ‘on a page’ into delivery (as practised). There is a much more negative perspective offered from service users and carers unable to achieve the desired results from the care and support they received as consistently as they would want (as experienced).
- This has resulted in a number of people interviewed for this study feeling a sense of disconnect from the promise of those principles, attributable in part to the factors that have impacted on social services since the Act’s instigation, and frustration has built around this.
- The journey towards the realisation of the ambitious aim of the Act is not complete. The question is, therefore, what does the next stage in that journey look like, who needs to take it, to where does it lead, and when will we know when we have arrived?

LIST OF STUDY OUTPUTS

Theory of change and definition of principles

- **Framework for Change (Verity et al., 2019):** Analysis of contextual factors impacting the implementation of the Act in Wales, overview of the Act, and depiction of the guiding directions, principles and aims of the 11 parts of the Act.
- **Literature Review (Llewellyn, Verity and Wallace, eds, 2020; updated in 2023):** 268 papers analysed in initial review (2020) across the Act's principles. 97 papers / reports added in 2023 update, giving a total of 365 papers / reports reviewed.

Process Evaluation

- **Workforce perspectives on implementation of the Act (pre-COVID) (Llewellyn et al., 2021):** Wales-wide survey of key stakeholder organisations/networks (n=30 responses). Stratified case studies on four local authority 'footprints' incorporating interviews (n=140) with three different 'strata' of the workforce: strategic leaders and senior managers; operational managers; and frontline staff. Interviews with key national stakeholder organisations (n=12).
- **Workforce perspectives on implementation of the Act (post-COVID) (Wallace, Verity, and Llewellyn, 2023):** Interviews revisiting the four localities included in the initial process evaluation study to assess impact of COVID-19 on implementation of the Act (n=60 interviews).

Evaluation evidence from service users and carers

- **Expectations and Experiences of Service Users and Carers (Llewellyn et al., 2022):** Service users and carers' (n=170) evidence on their expectations and experiences of social care.
- **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic service users and carers' expectations and experiences (Llewellyn, 2022):** Report produced in 13 languages to ensure accessibility for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Source material was a focus group (n=10 participants) undertaken with older people and carers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

Final Report and supporting evidence papers

- **Final Report (Llewellyn et al., 2023):** [including Summary and Easy-Read versions]

- **Well-being (Lyttleton-Smith, Anderson, Read, and Harris, 2023):** Qualitative study with service user participants (n=26) across four distinct age cohorts (children 5 to 13, young adults, adults aged 20 to 64, and older people), focusing specifically on well-being. Quantitative analysis of National Survey for Wales data of ONS personal well-being questions.
- **Prevention and early intervention (Read, Verity, and Richards, 2023):** Document Analysis of Local Authority Annual Director of Social Services Reports and 22 Council / Corporate Plans or Performance Reports focused on prevention.
- **Co-production (Andrews, Calder, Blanluet, et al., 2023):** Workshops (n=13) and interviews (n=4) with a range of participants (organisational managers in local authorities and provider organisations, practitioners, service-users, unpaid carers and those supporting them) to discuss and understand 'most significant changes' in their experience of co-production.
- **Voice and control (Llewellyn, Saltus and Kent, 2023):** A report drawing together insights on this principle from the published literature review, the service users and carer *Expectations and Experiences* report, and a research study on the experiences of Personal Assistants employed to support people with Direct Payments.
- **Multi-agency working (Wallace and Garthwaite, 2023):** Secondary data analysis of evidence from the *Process Evaluation and Expectations and Experiences* reports, alongside an online consensus building approach to understand key components of multi-agency working (n=26 participants).
- **Financial and economic implications (Phillips, Prowle, Harris and Llewellyn, 2023):** Evidence on attributable costs from three sample local authorities set alongside nationally available datasets on service utilisation and revenue outturn.

Videos

- **A short film describing the study**
- **A narrated presentation** from the study leads, Professor Mark Llewellyn, Director of the WIHSC, University of South Wales and Professor Fiona Verity, Swansea University.

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Study Leads: Mark Llewellyn and Fiona Verity

Study Team: Pippa Anderson, Nick Andrews, Catrin Awoyemi, Heulwen Blackmore, Noreen Blanluet, Megan Elliott, Gideon Calder, Tony Garthwaite, Lisa Griffiths, Ceri Jenkins, Jen Lyttleton-Smith, Marina McDonald, Alison Orrell, Ceri Phillips, Malcolm Prowle, Jonathan Richards, Roiyah Saltus, Sion Tetlow, Carolyn Wallace, Sarah Wallace and Wahida Kent

Partners: Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care | University of South Wales, Swansea University, Bangor University, Cardiff Metropolitan University

