Preface

Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment an idea came to life. While some are considered lightbulb realisations, others are gestated over longer periods of time. The journey of this book has origins rather than any obvious single starting point. Perhaps the most overt of these is that all three of us, as editors, had often sat in meetings between Social Care Wales (the regulator for social work and social work education in Wales) and those Higher Education Institutes (universities teaching social work), where one of the regular conversations was about the need for resources that specifically captured the increasingly Welsh nature of social work practice. This distinct nature has accelerated since 2016 and the enactment of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWWA). It was, however, already emerging through separate matters of culture, devolution, economics, language and legislative deviation.

One of the editors (Wulf) had been deliberating on these thoughts for some time, and during one such focused musing (Christmas 2020) he concluded that he would try to see if it was possible to get a Welsh dedicated social work book off the ground, and if not he would let the matter leave him and be for others to take up in due course. His mind set up, he chose to approach the other two editors (Abyd and Jo) to see if they were interested, and if they said no, again the idea for him would probably be laid to rest. They both instantly said yes. Still not 100 per cent convinced we had a ‘goer’, we then agreed to approach our first few thoughts for possible author contributors and gauge whether there was any wider appetite and support. They all instantly said yes too.

It is from these speculative origins and such positive responses, that the idea rapidly turned itself into a reality. A quick serendipitous conference bumping into Isobel Bainton (Commissioning Editor at Policy Press) confirmed some potential publisher interest. From here, we just snowballed. Every potential author we approached said yes, each with a belief in the need to tell the collective story, and to our pleasant surprise we ended up with a structure and abstracts that resonated well with the publisher’s peer review process. From this point there was no turning back, and this huge wave of energy and positivity has meant here we are.

While working through the starting points, it became clear to us that we wanted to bring together a text with three core aims.

First, we knew quite early on that in capturing the formative journey of social work in Wales, we wanted an edited volume and not a textbook per se. This book had to and does tell of early passages of devolved practice rather than describing a finished scenario. We would argue, anyway, that social work is always evolving rather than has reached any conclusive definitive understanding of itself and those it works with. In encompassing the first decade of practice leading up to and following the SSWWA, we wanted to afford space to selected accounts of things that are important and could be told now, rather than any forced formulaic consideration across the lifespan or all client groups/services. The story to be
told in the future will be different from this current one. We want this to be a text that offers something to help people think about their practice rather than being told how to practice.

Second, and critically, we wanted a text that captured a diversity of voices, and this in turn meant a diversity of styles and messages. In part we hope this text reflects the ambitions inherent in the SSWWA, of coproduction, inclusion and partnership. This edition, therefore, includes contributions from those identifying as people with lived experience, practitioners, students, researchers, and social work lecturers. It is deliberately a *collection* of perspectives.

Finally though, and given the starting points, the book had to be and aims to capture something that we have chosen to coin as ‘the Welsh way’. It has an explicit understanding of how social work in Wales is developing its own way of being. Our journey as social workers, educators and writers has, in a way, been a mirror of the Welsh journey identified by the First Minster in his preface. In doing so, we have encouraged authors to consider some comparisons with international social work, and in particular the departures from England/UK, the previous and current areas of shared jurisprudence. This said, we have also been keen to produce a text and its content that also speaks to those beyond Offa’s Dyke, and have kept a continual regard for the international social work practice and writing communities.

In delivering this aim we have set out a book in three distinct sections. The book’s three structures are those of (i) broader contextual considerations, (ii) applied practice perspectives and (iii) emerging and critical conversations. The majority of the chapters have some common elements to provide the reader with some consistency in the navigation. However, within this framework are contributions that have deliberately retained very distinct voices and styles.

In Part I, the broad scene is set in terms of policy by Hefin Gwylim, law by Miriam Ennis and regulation by Ian Thomas. This is followed by an intriguing exploration of the often vexing Welsh Context by Gwenan Prysor, before Jo Redcliffe, Jaime Ortiz, Sarah-Jane Waters and Liz Lefroy explore the intersections of social work education and coproduction.

In being conscious of not providing an ABC of how to do social work and alongside whom, we have specifically curated, in Part II, a diverse range of applied practice examples. It begins with David Wilkins’ reflections on child and family social work in Wales and Hayley Douglas and Helena Barlow’s exploration of the Welsh joint children and adult approach to safeguarding. This is then followed by the reflections of Sarah Buckley, Graham Attenborough, Hope Lawrence, Tim Wynn, Jenny Burgess, Eluned Plack, Anna-Louise Edwards, Rhiana Povey and Sandra Williams on their own experiences of social work, education and involvement. We then have explorations of unpaid carers, youth justice, and alcohol and other drug recovery from Daniel Burrows, Jen Lyttleton-Smith, Tim Versey, Sarah Vaile, James Deakin, Wulf Livingston and Tegan Brierley-Sollis. The final particular practice example examines social care practice with older people and comes from another large collective of Penny Alexander, Diane Seddon, Katherine Algar-Skaife, Sarah Lord, Gill Toms and Kelly Barr.
Arriving at Part III, we wanted to give regard to the developing and ongoing nature of a number of critical challenges that reflect modern social work practice. While not unique to Wales, each of these considerations has, in turn, its own strong Welsh flavour in their messages for social work practice. These start with Thompson’s application of a holistic approach to well-being. Two chapters than look at emerging issues for young people; Naomi Parry and Ceryl Davies’ examination of transgender children and families, and Davies’ research on young women’s intimate relationships. It is unsurprising that our ongoing considerations also include those of racism by Jade Forbes and Abyd Quinn Aziz and migration by Tracey Maegusuku-Hewett, Haddy Sallah, Joanne Pye, Natacha Leao de Silva and Beth Pearl. And, given the emphasis in SSWWA on communities that we also include chapters about community development by Fiona Verity and the COVID-19 pandemic by Christian Kerr, Robin Sen, Gillian Macintyre and Abyd Quinn Aziz. It is fitting that the final chapter in this book comes from Rhoda Emlyn-Jones, in which she reflects how many of the previous chapters’ messages are being translated into an emerging and specific Welsh way of doing social work practice.

We hope the reader will find this content informative and stimulating. We want the diversity of the considerations and narratives to resonate with the variety of social workers and social work practice within Wales. We recognise that this is a book of the here and now and that what it describes and aspires to can only be fully achieved over the years to come. By consequence it is likely it will be other contexts, practices and challenges that will need to be captured in future editions.

This book is not ours, we have merely been the curators of others’ work and the recipients of huge amounts of generosity. We would like to say thanks to all those who have enabled the idea to come to fruition. I (Wulf) would like to thank Abyd and Jo for saying yes, coming along on the ride and helping an old man with one of his swansong ambitions. We cannot really express enough thanks to all the authors who have contributed. Their willingness to work with us, provide positive responses to editorial feedback and mindfulness of timelines have made our job so much easier. We have been, throughout this process, especially conscious of those for whom writing or publishing is not their everyday fare, many of whom have produced their fabulous contributions despite the intense difficulties and pressures of COVID-19, family life and work (case) load demands. Thank you. We would also like to say additional thanks to Ceryl Davies and Liz Lefroy for taking on a first-level editorial role in regard to Chapters 10 and 16. We have been superbly encouraged and supported by Policy Press and in particular Isobel Bainton in the early stages, and Jay Allan in the composing stage. There have been moments when getting the book over the line has been all consuming for three of us, and we would like to pay special thanks to our colleagues and families for their continued supporting and understanding during these moments.

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