

# Supporting Social Care Innovation in Wales:

User Research Programme

January to April 2022



**Executive Summary**



**nesta**  
People Powered  
Results



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# Executive summary



**Social Care Wales' greatest assets for innovation are its remit and the workforce it supports.** It is well placed to explore, strategically direct, and embed support for innovation to build towards a future where “[innovation] is all our business” in social care.

In 2022, following the disruption of Covid-19, Social Care Wales commissioned: ***Understanding user needs for support for innovation in social care in Wales*** to explore what is needed to better support innovation and deliver on Wales' policy ambitions for health and social care.

**The research summarised in this report highlights how Social Care Wales could step-into a leadership role, convening stakeholders to build toward a more viable future for health and social care.**

People told us they want change and think it's necessary. **But the system creates inequality:** not everyone has the same opportunity to innovate in Wales. People want work done on the system to **alleviate pressures and unleash their motivation** to deliver better outcomes.

# Our purpose

## Social challenges are complex and need to be understood from different vantage points.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic forcing and increasing the appetite for innovation, it also highlighted and exacerbated existing problems in social care. **Social Care Wales commissioned this user research** because much of the support for innovation in health and social care is mainly focused on and designed for health care. They wanted to gain a broad understanding of who Social Care Wales should work with to support innovation in social care and what those stakeholders value and need to innovate.

**People Powered Results** at Nesta and **Y Lab of Cardiff University** co-delivered this research to inform Social Care Wales on how it can support innovation. It was designed to:

- Generate insights into the **opportunities** and **barriers** facing innovation in Wales by working with a wide range of people including: policy-makers, frontline staff, advocates, people with lived experience and those with experience of innovation;
- Help Social Care Wales **identify key stakeholders** and **develop priority actions** for supporting innovation where needed;
- Develop evidence-based **personas** as a communication tool.

We co-created evidence-based insights, frameworks, and tools through deep, iterative engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders across social care. Even before the project concluded, the user research directly influenced sector ambitions, investment, and actions. Our approach built a network of people across social care interested in supporting Social Care Wales to act on the findings and lead change.



# Programme overview

From January to end of March 2022, we conducted user research to dynamically examine the needs of social care stakeholders and provide Social Care Wales with tried-and-tested ideas for how they could better support innovation and communicate sector needs. After we finished collecting data, we stepped back to look at all the data, refine outputs, and share preliminary findings. The graphic below outlines how the programme progressed.



# What we did

We worked with key stakeholders to test our research approach and methods before implementation. We also worked with stakeholders and research participants to refine key insights and outputs. We did this supported by:

- A **Leadership group** where senior leaders from each organisation brought a strategic view to the work.
- A **Steering group** of engaged innovation stakeholders from across social care to test and refine early findings.

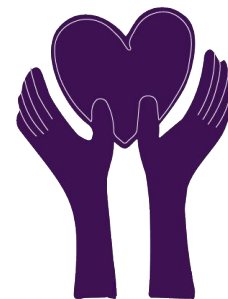
## Target audience

This work built on research from the LSE's [Supporting Adult Social Care Innovation \(SACSI\)](#) project. SACSI identified three groups as having important roles in innovation. Our initial engagements refined those groupings into:

1. **Innovators:** those leading and engaging in the process of innovation with new ideas or adapting approaches.
2. **Enablers:** those with the power to effect change or to support innovation.
3. **Stakeholders:** people who could, or could not, benefit from innovation. Those who innovation impacts.

## Engagement and reach

We engaged **70 people** across adult and children's social care from a range of perspectives over our 3 target groups. We accessed participants through email, social media, and a [launch blog](#).



## We carried out:

- **9 expert interviews:** in-depth conversations with innovation stakeholders to hear personal experiences.
- **6 focus groups with 26 participants:** to reach a larger sample and quickly identify areas of significance.
- **46 questionnaire respondents:** to screen, connect with new voices outside of our networks, validate insights, and collect data for our innovation profile personas.
- **2 final testing workshops with 9 participants:** where interviewees, focus group participants, and Steering Group members explored and critiqued final recommendations and insights for Social Care Wales.

We collected data through interactive, virtual sessions that varied slightly by target group. Not all interview nor focus group attendees completed a questionnaire, and only some questionnaire respondents were invited to participate further.

# What we learnt: headlines

**There is an inequality of opportunity to innovate in Wales. People's ability and opportunity to innovate and sustain innovation depends on things like openness of a Local Authority, financial pressures, and ideas of what 'good' evidence is. People want Social Care Wales to work on the system to make it better for them to work in the system.**

There is real appetite for change in social care. The pandemic has provided the opportunity to go beyond recovery. Participants emphasised how **the sector cannot keep on as-is, "it's on its knees."** Innovation is necessary to meet and adapt to increasingly complex, diverse needs and challenges. Social Care Wales is seen as well placed to lead change and provide voice to a sector that currently feels at a disadvantage - both undervalued in the public sector and the public eye.

Participants said **innovation happens everyday in social care** to creatively adapt to meet challenges and deliver better care, but this everyday innovation happens despite the system, often going unrecognised. **People want to see change and be part of it**, recognising how **change is not the responsibility of one actor alone**. People desire changes that are:

1. **Structural** work to relieve pressure in the system;
2. **Relational** work to build trust between stakeholders;
3. **Cultural** work so innovation can become everyone's business;
4. **Infrastructural** work to create shared access points and resources to plug into.

**"It's not that people can't [innovate], it's that they don't feel enabled to."**

This was a key message reiterated throughout the research. Participants know well what is getting in the way and called for action to move beyond traditional approaches to encouraging innovation (e.g. localised, short-term funding, assuming people can't innovate or don't want to). For more on what's driving innovation in social care in Wales and other findings, see our full report.

**"People in the social care system don't feel their contribution to innovation is heard, respected, and taken seriously."**

- Research Participant

# What's Needed? Action and Challenge Areas

We sought to identify the most promising **Action Areas** i.e. where support is most desired and needed.



1

**Act as a convener:** bring people together, provide sector leadership, and advocate for sector needs.



2

**Embed innovation into practice:** examine sector requirements to **both** alleviate pressures inhibiting innovation **and** also embed innovation into existing processes to encourage and recognise work.



3

**Building platforms and opportunities to share ideas:** people want shared infrastructure such as a virtual notice board or national database.

We also identified recurring friction points stifling innovation in social care. These evolved into **6 Challenge Areas**. Stakeholders want innovation support to focus on what's inhibiting innovation from happening *systemically* so innovation can become everyone's business. To achieve that, issues in these broad areas cannot be overlooked.

## VALUE

We need to address the many dis-parities that reinforce social care's inferior status to break negative cycles and truly increase support.

## METRICS

Our current way of measuring, collecting data, and evaluating social care in Wales is undermining wider sector ambitions including innovation.

## LEADERSHIP

So that leadership can come from all levels in social care, we need to examine to define roles, responsibilities, expectations, and skills for leading change.

## RISK

There is more to risk aversion than meets the eye; to enable innovation, new approaches to risk management are needed and already underway.

## SECTOR UNITY

Social care wants a united voice supported by shared pathways and systems to represent sector interests, drive innovation, and make innovation more visible.

## REQUIREMENTS

There is too much pain for too little gain; requirements should creatively realign to alleviate pressure and encourage innovation.



# What do key voices say about innovation? Personas

**Our user research produced 13 evidence-based personas.** We designed two types of personas that work in tandem to capture the diversity of needs and perspective about innovation in social care. They give a systems-view, and should be used together to facilitate reflection, communication, and guide future stages of co-design. They shouldn't be used in isolation.

## Innovation Profile personas

Innovation in social care looks and feels different. These personas distil the 46 questionnaire responses into 6 innovation personalities for social care based on the ([10 Faces of Innovation](#)). The personas explore:

- How different profiles feel about innovation in Wales
- What excites them and what concerns them
- What enables innovation from their view of the system



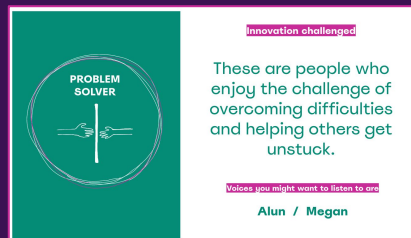
**VISIONARY**

**Innovation active**

These are big picture thinkers. People who encourage others to shoot for the moon and like setting a vision or a course of action.

**Voices you might want to listen to are**

**Alun / Catrin**



**PROBLEM SOLVER**

**Innovation challenged**

These are people who enjoy the challenge of overcoming difficulties and helping others get unstuck.

**Voices you might want to listen to are**

**Alun / Megan**

## Challenge Area personas

These personas zoom into 7 key learnings from research focus groups and interviews. They add a voice to the Challenge Areas set out on the previous page to inform deeper discussion about the **structural** and **cultural** issues stifling innovation. They were designed to inform future stages of co-design: how would these voices respond to an idea? Are we listening to their wisdom?



**Rosie**

Learning and Development Lead  
**Innovator**

**The lack of sustainable funding fuels perpetual projects and pilots.**

" The needs of the most vulnerable people, and those less engaged due to underlying health issues, are being marginalised due to resource or capacity issues. "

Challenge area | **Metrics and Requirements**



**Alun**

Director  
**Enabler**

**We need to think about the culture and how we cultivate leaders.**

" We aren't very good at helping people develop as leaders. Currently, we teach them to manage, deliver and cope rather than to lead. "

Challenge area | **Leadership**

# Three Horizons

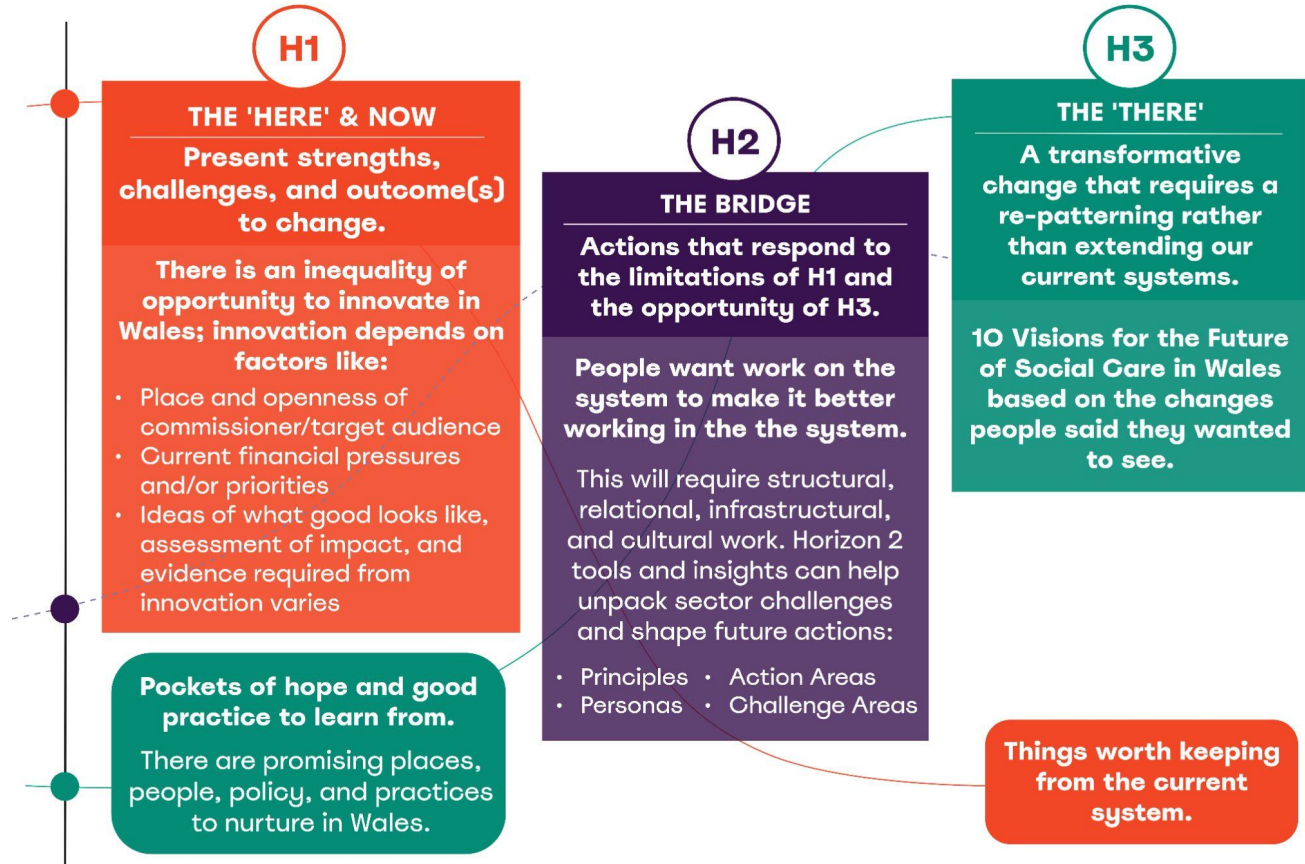
## for Innovation in Social Care in Wales

We used the [Three Horizons model](#) to view research findings and outputs together as a system.

Social care is complex and it is important not to oversimplify what's needed. The Three Horizons is a tool to make sense of complexity, identify a vision, and explore ways forward.

Visit the full report to see the Three Horizons output in more detail or [click here](#) to see the full size.

### Innovation in Social Care in Wales: key horizon findings



# Where to next: 10 Visions for the Future of Social Care

**The emerging visions from stakeholders that set out a brighter future for social care where innovation is key to developing preventative, values-based care that takes a whole-person approach.**

Participants want to work toward a future that bridges the gap between visionary legislation and implementation. These 10 visions are a first iteration based on the user research. They should be refined and revisited with stakeholders across health and social care before setting sail on future courses of action. Social Care Wales can begin stepping into a sector leadership role as a convener by testing these visions and exploring how the Action Areas can respond to them.

1

Innovation and change can happen because there is ownership, agency, and a sense of possibility spread throughout the system.

2

Preventative practice and early support are accessible and the default way of doing things so need no longer escalates.

3

Care is tailored through deep listening that seeks to learn, adapt, and respond to people's needs and concerns to do what matters to them.

4

The sector takes a whole-person approach, seeking to join dots, strengthen connections, and coordinate services.

5

Integration is seamlessly delivered by communities working in partnership with the public sector, health, and social care professionals.

6

Sector resourcing and working practices enable partnerships that create long-term sustainable care.

7

People can get what they need, regardless of their ability to pay.

8

People of all levels are heard and can make a difference in how care is delivered and experienced.

9

Social care is valued across the public and public sector and the people who provide it feel confident, skilled, and respected.

10

Accessing care strengthens community and a person's connections with community.

# What next: Recommendations

**Thank you** to everyone who participated and shaped this work by generously volunteering time, insight, and enthusiasm. **User research is impossible without research participants.**

This summary only touches the surface of an extremely rich user research experience. To access the full report, resources, persona card decks, and more detail on the Challenge Areas and Three Horizons, [click here](#).

## Recommendations for Social Care Wales to support practical action and experimentation that enables innovation:

1. **Build upon the momentum created by this user research project to develop a solid foundation for future action.** Formally engage committed stakeholders to create an innovation community to sustain enthusiasm.
2. **Practically explore how the Three Horizons approach, research outputs and personas can guide and inform key action areas with Social Care Wales' strategy** to maintain momentum. This work could be expanded to include external stakeholders to encourage a sector response.
3. **Embed innovation into how Social Care Wales operates by discussing user research findings, approach, and outputs.** Identify the support people and teams might need to do that.
4. **Step into a leadership role by taking a cross-sector approach to developing the 10 Visions of the Future.** Bring stakeholders together to set clearer strategic directions for the sector and build the structures, support, and skills required to achieve those visions.

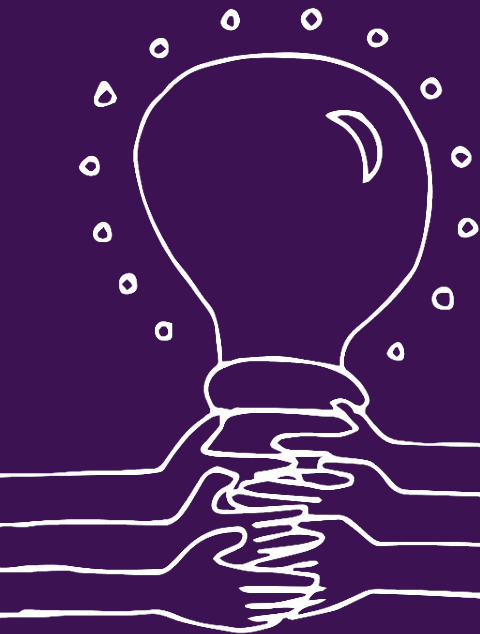
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For the full report [click here](#)



# Full web addresses

URLs in order of hyperlink appearance:

- People Powered Results at Nesta: <https://peoplepoweredresults.org.uk/>
- Y Lab of Cardiff University: <https://ylab.wales/>
- SACSI project: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/research/sasci>
- Launch blog:  
<https://peoplepoweredresults.org.uk/blog/shape-new-visions/social-care-wales-user-research-understanding-social-care-innovation/>
- 10 Faces of Innovation: <https://www.ideo.com/post/the-ten-faces-of-innovation>
- The Three Horizons Model: <http://internationalfuturesforum.com/three-horizons>
- Full Three Horizons output: [3HEnglishFinal.jpg](#)
- Final report on this user research: [ENG SCW UR Final Report External.pdf](#)