



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Cymru

SECTOR SNAPSHOT: QUALIFICATIONS IN WALES

Background

In December 2022, the Better Social Housing Review was published in England. This report outlined the findings of a review into social housing in England set up by the National Housing Federation and the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). The independent panel made several recommendations for change including the promotion of the traditional housing officer role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a CIH recognised programme of training and continuing development¹.

At the same time, the secretary for levelling up, housing and communities, Michael Gove outlined amendments to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to look at ways to professionalise the sector including mandating that social housing managers must gain professional qualifications bringing social housing more closely into line with other sectors providing front line services, including social work, teaching, and health and care services.

The subsequent Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 defines a relevant housing manager as: A senior housing executive or senior housing manager who has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the provision of services in connection with the management of social housing and be part of the senior management of the organisation².

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 goes on to require that individuals defined as a relevant housing manager receive an appropriate-level housing management qualification equivalent to a Level 4 Certificate or Level 5 Diploma in housing, or a foundation degree from the CIH. The objective of this qualification is to provide individuals with the technical knowledge and understanding across a broad range of frontline housing practices at an operational level.

Whilst Welsh Government has no plans to mandate housing qualifications for relevant housing managers there is an action in the ending homelessness action plan to develop a resilient and valued workforce recognised for their expertise which would include the development of a training and development framework³. CIH Cymru have undertaken research to establish the current qualification make-up of relevant housing managers as part of our professionalism agenda and to highlight the level of skill and knowledge that already exists here in Wales. This report sets out some of the key trends in the responses we received.

Overview of survey

There are currently 47 organisations in Wales who have responsibility for the provision and management of social housing. This is made up of 36 registered social landlords and 11 stock holding local authorities. Overall, 26 per cent of these organisations responded to the survey. We are not able to determine the response rate for just registered social landlords and stock holding local authorities, as a specific question on the type of organisation was not asked. Whilst we acknowledge this is a low response, rate the data received does provide some insight into the level of housing qualifications here and planned future investment in qualifications for housing professionals in Wales. We have also identified additional questions we would like to ask the sector as part of this piece of work specifically around the size of the organisation and how qualifications are currently being funded.

This report outlines the findings of the survey together with some recommendations for the sector around the current level of qualifications and how we can drive forward our professional development including provision of qualifications for housing professionals.

Recommendation one

Future surveys on qualifications to include a question on the size of the registered social landlord or how many people are employed within the housing department of the local authority. Also include a question on how housing qualifications are currently funded.

¹The Better Social Housing Review. https://s41584.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/BSHR_Report_FINAL_embargoed_until_Tues13thDec.pdf

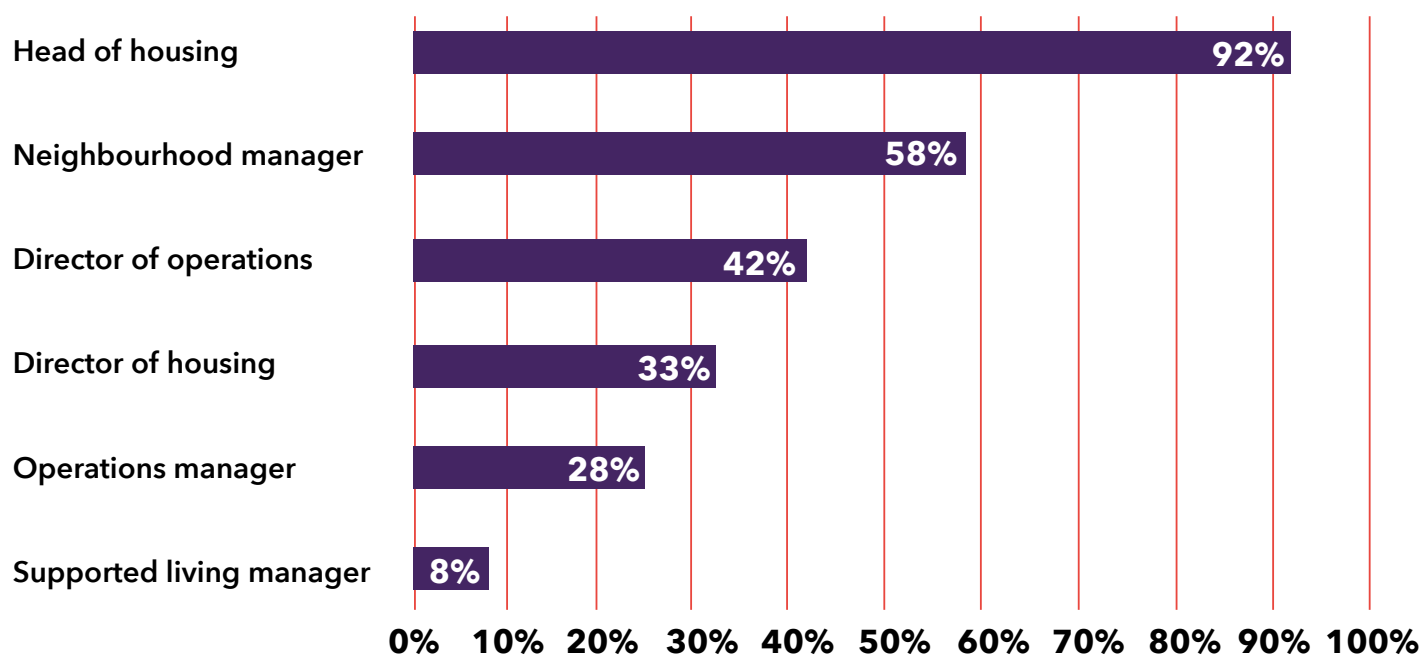
²Standards relating to competence and conduct. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/36/section/21/enacted>

³Ending Homelessness in Wales: A high level action plan 2021-2026. https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-11/ending-homelessness-high-level-action-plan-2021-2026_0.pdf

What roles do colleagues, classed as relevant housing managers, undertake?

The survey identified that the majority of relevant housing managers were employed in the role of head of housing as shown in figure one.

Figure 1: Roles undertaken by relevant housing managers



Though our respondents also highlighted that even though neighbourhood managers or area housing officers would be the officers who have day to day management of the organisation's properties they are not always part of the senior management team. This would therefore result in them not being covered by the definition of a relevant housing manager. Yet the better social housing review recommended that the traditional housing officer role should be promoted together with a recognised programme of training and continuing development through CIH. There seems to be a mismatch between the recommendation and the definition of a relevant housing manager.

Recommendation two

Ensure that the definition of relevant housing manager captures individuals responsible for the day-to-day management of social housing even if they do not form part of an organisation's senior management team. This will ensure all housing officers in Wales are included in the qualification's requirement ensuring close alignment with the recommendation of the Better Social Housing Review.

How many colleagues hold a housing qualification?

This question comprised of two parts. The first asked respondents how many colleagues in the organisation possessed a housing qualification. The survey identified 171 individuals who held a housing qualification. However, as the survey did not ask the total number of colleagues within the organisation, we cannot further analysis around the proportion of the housing workforce with a housing qualification.

The second part of the question asked the number of colleagues with a housing qualification who would also be defined as a relevant housing manager. The survey outlined that for 75 per cent of organisations less than half of those colleagues with a housing qualification were in roles that met the definition of a relevant housing manager. More work will need to be undertaken to establish the roles that colleagues with housing qualifications currently undertake. Are they in roles that involve the day-to-day management of properties but not included as part of senior management teams or are organisations investing in their workforce to enable future career progression?

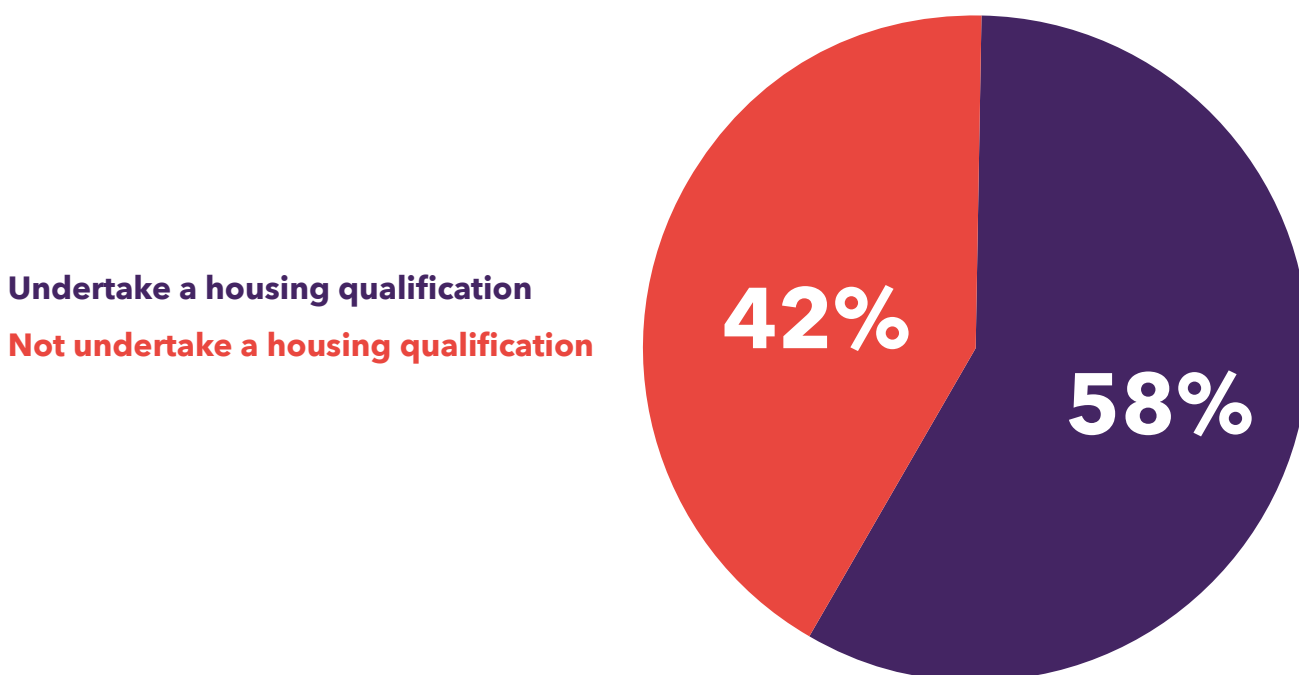
Recommendation three

For future surveys include a question on what type of role colleagues with housing qualifications are currently undertaking to assess the effectiveness of the current definition of a relevant housing manager. Does it need to be widened due to how roles are defined in Wales?

Are colleagues in relevant housing management roles without a housing qualification currently undertaking a housing qualification?

The survey identified that 58 per cent of colleagues in relevant housing management roles without a housing qualification are currently undertaking a housing qualification as shown in figure two.

Figure 2: Proportion of colleagues in relevant housing management role without housing qualifications currently undertaking a housing qualification



For the 58 per cent undertaking a housing qualification all are undertaking a CIH accredited qualification at Levels 3, 4 or 5.

If colleagues with no housing qualifications have moved into a relevant housing managers role via internal promotion is there an expectation to then secure a housing qualification?

The survey showed that just 25 per cent of colleagues promoted into a relevant housing management role without a housing qualification would be expected to then gain a housing qualification. Some respondents provided some reasons as to why gaining a qualification was not an expectation:

"Gaining a qualification is not an expectation but all managers have a willingness to upskill and partake in continued professional development however, capacity constraints often hinder that."

"We are currently reviewing our approach to qualification expectations internal promotion. However, Level 4, Level 5 and degree level housing qualifications have not always been readily available in North Wales."

We have heard from the sector that capacity constraints have often posed a barrier to colleagues being able to pursue qualifications. Often this involves a day out of the organisation and often due to constrained resources this can prove difficult. Our latest sector snapshot highlighted the effect that reduced resources are having on service delivery with 43 per cent of respondents citing high workloads as the key pressure on service provision it is perhaps no surprise that capacity constraints are impacting a colleagues' access to continuing professional development (CPD). Yet CPD is a vital part of driving professionalism in the housing sector in Wales.

Recommendation four

If qualifications are to be mandated in Wales it will need to be accompanied by sufficient funding to not only enable a colleague to pursue a qualification but to enable an organisation to increase the number of people they can employ. This in turn will help reduced workloads to reasonable levels reducing impact on service provision and help overcome capacity constraints that seem to be acting as a barrier to CPD.

What need or demand is there is Wales currently for higher level apprenticeships in housing?

Over 90 per cent of respondents highlighted the fact that there is a need for higher level apprenticeships in Wales. This demand is partly created through their own organisational professional development strategies or because there is currently only one educational facility in Wales delivering this. A lack of availability pan Wales was a common theme.

Recommendation five

If we want to mandate or promote housing qualifications, we need to ensure that the qualifications are available pan Wales not just online or in a learning centre in one area. This will need to be considered for all levels of housing qualifications.

What value do you think a higher-level apprenticeship in housing would bring to individuals and organisations?

Respondents agreed that there was significant value to providing higher-level apprenticeships. Common reasons were:

- It will professionalise the housing role promoting housing as a career
- They provide a good grounding in housing
- Helps career progression
- Allows individuals to gain vital practical experience as well as gaining a qualification.

Would your organisation support individuals to complete higher-level apprenticeships in housing?

All the respondents to the survey would support individuals to complete a higher-level apprenticeship in housing. Though there were some caveats to this.

"With over 50 colleagues who may need a housing qualification we would not be able to fully support unless funding was provided."

"We don't want this to be imposed and then just be a tick box exercise to say training completed. It also needs to improve services or competency of the workforce."

How do you currently provide continual professional development within your organisation?

The majority of respondents would use personal development plans as the basis for establishing what CPD an individual would need. These would then be regularly updated, and individuals encouraged to add in their own training and development goals for the year. Most respondents would utilise internal training or saw attendance at conferences as key learning opportunities as part of an individual's CPD.

Only 17 per cent of respondents specifically highlighted CIH training as part of CPD within their organisations. Though this may be due to there only being one learning centre currently delivering face to face qualifications in Wales. While CIH housing academy does provide online learning it does not seem to be an option of choice for those responding to the survey.

Recommendation six

CIH Cymru to work with CIH Housing Academy to establish the number of Welsh learners they would enrol on an annual basis to see if more work promoting the availability of the online learning is needed in Wales.

Does your organisation promote and support the gaining of housing management qualifications and /or continuous professional development.

All the respondents to the survey promoted training but not all saw this as promoting CPD within their organisation rather they only saw qualifications as actively contributing to CPD. There is clearly a different definition of what CPD is between organisations.

To support individuals some organisations are in the process of developing processes to keep a record of the CPD hours completed by individuals on an annual basis. Though it is not clear if this is then compared with the CPD goals set as part of their personal development plans.

Conclusion

Overall, there is some support for qualifications in Wales, even though there is not a specific requirement for individuals to gain qualifications if they are promoted into a relevant housing manager role without a housing qualification. Despite the support, there are some barriers from capacity constraints to a lack of learning centres pan Wales. These will need to be addressed if Wales moves to mandating qualifications.

There is also a need to look at how we measure and define CPD in Wales; as some see CPD as just gaining a qualification while other organisations take a holistic view and see CPD as anything that improves an individual's knowledge through training opportunities.

There is also a level of confusion around what roles fit the definition of a relevant housing manager. Some respondents felt housing officers would be included but due to the way the definition is written would not be included as often they are not part of senior management. As such would not be covered by the requirement for qualifications. This contrasts with the better housing review that recommended upskilling those responsible for the day-to-day management of housing.

If we in Wales wish to move towards mandated qualifications, we need to ensure the right level of funding is made available as well as ensuring the right roles are included as part of the professionalisation of housing here in Wales.

Recommendations

- **Recommendation one:** For the next survey include a question on the size of the organisation or how many people are employed in the local housing authority together with a question on how housing qualifications are currently funded by the organisation or local housing authority.
- **Recommendation two:** Ensure that the definition of relevant housing manager captures individuals responsible for the day-to-day management of social housing even if they do not form part of an organisation's senior management team. This will ensure all housing officers in Wales are included in the qualification's requirement more closely aligning with the recommendation of the better social housing review.
- **Recommendation three:** For future surveys include a question on what type of role colleagues with housing qualifications are currently undertaking to assess the effectiveness of the current definition of a relevant housing manager. Does it need to be widened due to how roles are defined in Wales?
- **Recommendation four:** If qualifications are to be mandated in Wales it will need to be accompanied by sufficient funding to not only enable a colleague to pursue a qualification but to enable an organisation to increase the number of people they can employ. This in turn will help reduced workloads to reasonable levels reducing impact on service provision and help overcome capacity constraints that seem to be acting as a barrier to continuing professional development.
- **Recommendation five:** If we want to mandate or promote housing qualifications in Wales, we need to ensure that the qualifications are available pan Wales not just online or in a learning centre in one part of Wales. This will need to be considered for all levels of housing qualifications.



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