

Scotland's Skills Delivery Landscape – Call For Evidence On Behalf Of James Withers, Advisor To The Scottish Government

The Scottish Social Services Council is the regulator for the social work, social care and early years workforce in Scotland. Our work means the people of Scotland can count on social services being provided by a trusted, skilled and confident workforce.

We protect the public by registering social service workers, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training and education and by supporting their professional development. Where people fall below the standards of practice and conduct we can investigate and take action.

We:

- publish the national codes of practice for people working in social services and their employers
- register people working in social services and make sure they adhere to the SSSC Codes of Practice
- promote and regulate the learning and development of the social service workforce
- are the national lead for workforce development and planning for social services in Scotland
- are an ONS statistics provider.

Our response

Question 1: If there was one thing you would like to see change in how our skills landscape is structured and delivering, what would it be?

The SSSC agrees with the vision for “a skills and education system that can provide individuals with the skills they need to have rewarding careers, and businesses with a skilled workforce which will enable the economy to flourish”.

Together, social service employers and training providers make an enormous contribution to adult learning. All workers registered with SSSC must achieve at least one suitable qualification and the most common route is Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ). There are a range of other awards to support professional development, which is particularly important in Scotland with our changing population and increased complexity of care needs in some settings. There are social service qualification frameworks in Scotland which encourage early years and

social care workers to progress in work, for example from a support worker role (SCQF level 6) to a manager (SCQF levels 9-10).

We are aware that there is some inequity and uncertainty about funding for the qualifications that workers must gain. Although some funding avenues are available and well-used, such as Modern Apprenticeships, it is difficult to give definitive advice to individuals in our careers products about whether their qualification will be funded. This can impact on the extent to which they feel valued and respected in their careers. It can also impact on opportunities to develop new skills to support people using services and construct an individual career path. We would like to see a funding model which is more accessible to individuals directing their own career, which recognises the importance of learning and skills development in social services and which promotes funding equity among full and part time (work-based) learning, and learning at all levels of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Question 2: Thinking about the vision in the Terms of Reference for a system that is simple, people-focused and built on collaboration, how well are we doing against that vision just now? Can you provide specific examples of: a) success in the work of public agencies or the private/third sector; or b) elements that don't work, are confusing or need to be improved?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 3: Thinking about the different national agencies and partners involved in skills delivery, are there areas where more clarity is required about roles and responsibilities or where you think the balance of responsibilities should be changed?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 4: Thinking about how our economy and society is changing and the Scottish Government's ambitions for a skilled workforce as set out in NSET, do you have any evidence on where the current skills and education landscape needs to adapt or change and how it could be improved? Please provide evidence to support your answer.

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 5: Can you provide any evidence of skills structures in other places that are delivering outcomes in line with Scotland's ambitions which Scottish Government should look to in achieving its ambitions?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Part 2 – Apprenticeships

Question 6: Do you have any evidence relating to the outcomes of the current funding and delivery of apprenticeship programmes (Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships) in terms of either outcomes for learners and/or the needs of employers?

We manage the modern apprenticeship frameworks for social services and healthcare (SSH) and social services (children and young people) (CYP) as part of our role with Skills for Care and Development. We work with employers to develop qualification structures and apprenticeship frameworks, including modern, technical and professional graduate levels.

We presently manage modern apprenticeships, technical apprenticeships, professional apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships. The graduate apprenticeship in early learning and childcare programme has been piloted and evaluated with the first cohort of graduates complete and the centres being approved to continue delivering the programme.

The following frameworks sit within the modern apprenticeship requirements:

- Social Services and Healthcare at (SCQF level 6)
- Social Services and Healthcare at (SCQF level 7)
- Social Services Children and Young People at (SCQF level 7).

The following frameworks sit within the technical apprenticeship requirements:

- Social Services and Healthcare at SCQF Level 9
- Social Services (Children and Young People) at SCQF 9
- Childhood Practice at SCQF Level 9.

The following sits within the professional apprenticeship framework requirements:

- Care Services Leadership and Management at SCQF Level 10.

These higher level apprenticeships offer flexible, work-based learning, as a way of developing and up skilling staff to meet specific business and sector requirements.

A key difference for TAs and PAs is the replacement of core skills with career skills. Core skills only go up to SCQF level 6 and employers have said that career skills should reflect the work-based requirements at a higher level. Career skills are certificated separately. They require

approval from the SQA for the career skills identified below. Apprentices require to be certificated for 15 credits at SCQF level 7 or above. Foundation apprenticeships (FAs) are for pupils in fifth and sixth year of secondary school and take two years to complete. The SSSC, however, does not have any input into or control over the models for foundation apprenticeships as they are not relevant for registration with us. There are two social service FAs:

- FA Social Services and Healthcare
- FA Social Services (Children and Young People).

Delivery and assessment of a subject specific National Progression Award (NPA) in either social services and healthcare or social services and young people will be in fifth year and takes a blended approach between college and placement. The FA in sixth year is delivered and assessed in the workplace. The NPA provides knowledge and an introduction to the skills that will help pupils to complete the SVQ units. The NPA has 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 6 and the SVQ 2 mandatory units have a total of 37 credit points at SCQF level 6. These two parts, along with an associated work placement, form the FAs.

The skills gained by undertaking an FA can be developed and used in a variety of careers and there is a wide range of job opportunities in the social service sector.

Question 7: The Terms of Reference sets out an ambition for apprenticeship programmes to be an embedded part of the wider education system to ensure that there are a range of different pathways available to learners. Do you have any views or evidence on how changes to the operation of apprenticeship programmes could support this ambition?

Foundation Apprenticeships offer advanced entry to a Modern Apprenticeship (or SVQ) at the same level, with an additional two units to meet the full requirements of that award. The MA or SVQ at SCQF level 6 allows learners to meet SSSC qualification requirements for support worker roles in early years and social care.

The SSSC has had feedback from foundation apprentices that they see the programme as a good pathway into social care. However, there is little evidence on the pathways between different apprenticeship programmes, for example between foundation apprenticeships, modern apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships. This is due to the limited timescale for which the foundation apprenticeship has been offered and more evidence on career pathways will become apparent as the programme continues. The SSSC analyses and publishes data on SVQs and Modern Apprenticeships, however we have a limited ability to track individual learning pathways including progression between awards. This

means we are unable to gather a more in depth understanding of common career pathways. If the skills system facilitated this, for example by using unique identifiers (Scottish Candidate Numbers), we could gain an improved understanding of the career pathways and articulation routes people follow in social services. This would support skills planning and career promotion.

The SSSC view is that embedding apprenticeship programmes further within the education system would be beneficial. Apprenticeships offer a good way of people accessing workforce, but there needs to be more clarity for students and young people around accessing apprenticeships. While apprenticeships are a popular route for young people entering early years careers, our data shows that they are less popular for young people entering social care. It may be that improvements need to be made in how young people are directed to apprenticeships. Accessing apprenticeships may be difficult for young people as there is not a single point of contact and MA vacancies are advertised in number of places.

Question 8: Apprenticeships are often described as being 'demand-led'. Do you have any evidence about how process for developing and approving apprenticeship frameworks responds to skills priorities? Please include suggestions of how the development process could be enhanced.

The SSSC believes that increased partnership working would allow the development of apprenticeship programmes to be enhanced. For example, the SSSC has worked well with Skills Development Scotland over the past few years, however, we believe that earlier collaboration would be beneficial to the development of apprenticeship programmes.

We also believe that the approach to developing apprenticeship programmes tends to use a one size fits all model. The one size fits all nature of this approach does not necessarily take account of the requirements of SSSC registration. For this reason, we believe there should be earlier collaboration between development drivers and sector regulators in the development of apprenticeship programmes.

Question 9: SAAB and AAG are described as employer-led groups. Do you have evidence on the benefits or risks of employer leadership in apprenticeship development or the impact it has on outcomes for apprentices and/or employers? Please include suggestions for how the governance of apprenticeship design and delivery could be strengthened.

The SSSC believes that it would be beneficial to involve all key stakeholders in apprenticeship design, including regulators. At present the boards and groups are made up of employers and representatives from industry, but not necessarily representatives or employers from the social

work, social care and early years sector. There are also no regulators represented in these groups.

In the social care and early years sector the apprenticeship framework has to hold the qualification required for SSSC registration, but not being represented in the groups means we sometimes have to come in and highlight sector requirements, not just employer needs. To allow us and other regulators to help in the development of apprenticeship requirements there is a need for regulator participation at an early stage.

Part 3 -National Occupational Standards(NOS)

Question10: Do you have any evidence on how the current arrangements for NOS are delivering against the intended ambitions of the NOS Strategy?

The SSSC believes that in Scotland we are currently doing a good job in delivering against the intended ambitions of the NOS strategy, especially in social service and healthcare qualifications which are tied to the NOS. However, the NOS for social service and healthcare and children and young people were last reviewed in 2012. We are working with the UK sector skills councils, standard setting organisations and the NOS governance group to undertake a review of these NOS in 2024/25. We would like to see NOS that are reflective of our sector, how we want to measure knowledge and skill and that ensure future-proofing.

The social work, social care and early years workforce is changing as Scotland's demographics change, as are the knowledge and skills needed to work in the sector. However, the lack of flexibility of the present NOS creates a tension between the nature of NOS as they currently are and their use in qualifications. The NOS framework was designed to promote flexibility and progression across roles, however in practice learning providers can find the framework limiting. This may relate to training provider capacity to offer Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) between awards, or the limitations of unit choice for particular awards.

In the future we would like to see NOS that are more dynamic and flexible. Social work, social care and early years qualifications need to be flexible and able to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of service providers and people who are supported. A more agile NOS and NOS review procedure could make it easier to make required changes nationally, for example around language and terminology. Scoping exercises regarding what may be involved in a review of the NOS has begun across UK partners. The review is due to be completed in December 2025.

Question 11: The NOS Strategy positions NOS as the foundation of vocational training and learning in Scotland. Do you have any evidence to support how changes to the delivery landscape for developing and championing NOS could support this ambition?

The SSSC believes that a full review of the NOS and their development would have positive changes on the delivery landscape.

Part 4–Upskilling and Reskilling

Question 12: Do you have any evidence to demonstrate how the existing delivery arrangements for upskilling and reskilling, including the specific funding programmes, are impacting on intended outcomes for learners and/or industry and sectors?

We promote funded upskilling opportunities to learners, for example in 2021 we promoted opportunities with the Open University funded by Flexible Workforce Development Fund and National Transition Training Fund. The Open University reported positively on the high number of enquiries from employers and workers which led to it awarding nearly 90 funded module places. We believe there continues to be aspiration across the workforce to upskill in order to provide the best quality of care and support and meet the changing needs of the population.

There is limited evidence about how the sector is making use of the various upskilling and reskilling funding programmes. We would like to see a funding system which places equal value on, and is designed to provide, part-time (work-based) learning and courses at all levels of the SCQF. It would also be helpful for SSSC and the sector to have access to more data which is better integrated about the uptake of funding for particular social service qualifications. This will enhance our understanding of the career pathways people follow and the demands for particular skills.

We believe the sector would benefit from further engagement with the Upskilling Fund and note that several universities offer relevant modules for social service workers. Promotion of this fund by SSSC in previous years has been limited due to uncertainty about application timescales. It would be valuable for the sector to have a consistent timetable in advance which allows workers to plan ahead and seek approval and support from their organisations to take part in additional study.

Question 13: Do you have any evidence about what measures, if any, should be in place to understand the quality of national skills programme delivery funded by public investment through independent training providers?

The SSSC believes that independent training providers have a significant role to play in upskilling the workforce, promoting training opportunities

and supporting career development within the sector. In 2019 we found that approximately 70% of SVQ provision was through independent training providers. These providers should continue to work closely with employers within the sector to make sure training provision is aligned with employer needs.

Part 5 –Sector and regional skills planning

Question 14: Thinking about the government’s ambition to optimise the existing system for upskilling and reskilling throughout life, do you have any evidence to support how changes to the delivery landscape could help to achieve this ambition?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 15: Thinking about the overall ambition to ensure that the skills and education system is aligned to local, regional and national skills priorities, what aspects of the current delivery landscape are working well to support this ambition?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 16: The Auditor General recommended that the Scottish Government take urgent action to deliver improved governance on skills alignment. Do you have any evidence to support whether the current arrangements are likely to deliver progress?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 17: The NSET sets out a vision for a system which is agile and responsive to future needs, where labour market insights can inform strategic provision planning. Do you have any evidence to indicate how changes to the delivery landscape could better deliver this vision?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 18: Skills Development Scotland currently leads and coordinates approaches for Skills Investment Plans for sectors and Regional Skills Investment Plans. Do you have any evidence to demonstrate the success of this approach or to support the impacts of SIPs on sector skills outcomes or RSIPs on regional outcomes?

The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001, section 54, subsection 3 requires us to ensure that there is adequate provision for further education and training for those registered with us. The Workforce Skills Report for the social work, social care and early years sector in Scotland, which we produce, looks at the current provision of qualifications for the

social work, social care and early years workforce, demand for qualifications and how they meet current skills needs. It also looks at barriers to undertaking qualifications and what new skills are needed for the future.

Question 19: One of the major challenges and opportunities facing the economy is the just transition to net zero. Thinking about the current delivery landscape, how well is it structured to deliver this ambition?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Part 6 –Careers and Young People

Question 20: Do you have any evidence to inform how the new Careers by Design Collaborative could be embedded within the wider education and skills system and delivery landscape to enable the recommendations of the Careers Review to be taken forward to ensure people can access the advice, information and guidance that they need?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 21: Alongside Careers information, advice and guidance, do you have any evidence to demonstrate what additional support young people, including those from marginalised groups, might need to develop their skills and experience to prepare them for the world of work? Please include details about who you think should be responsible for providing this support.

We believe that social service careers are rewarding and life-changing. They can also be complex and challenging. For young people with limited work experience the modern apprenticeship programme can offer a supportive entry route to careers in this sector, equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to meet the challenges this work entails. The modern apprenticeship programme also gives young people access to workplace mentoring, and diverse learning opportunities from both their employer and the training provider.

We recently worked with social care partners to hold an online careers week for secondary schools. We believe it is important young people can hear directly from those already in work and have an opportunity to ask questions. We also support a network of Careers Ambassadors who engage directly with schools. We know the sector wants to engage more with schools but find this challenging due to capacity constraints. We are grateful for support from Education Scotland and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and would like to see continued strengthening of engagement between industry and education.

SSSC collaborates with employment support providers to promote careers. Programmes designed for young people, for example those offered by the Prince's Trust, appear to have a positive impact and engage well with young people from marginalised groups. Young people have an opportunity to complete learning materials and meet employers. They also have individual support from youth workers which can continue into employment where that is needed. We will continue to encourage and support similar supportive employment routes for young people. The SSSC would like to see higher engagement with the Modern Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare among young people aged 16-19 and 19-25. Increased engagement among this demographic should not, however, be at the expense of opportunities for existing workers. It would be helpful to see opportunities advertised in a consistent way for young people, for example on apprenticeships.scot.

The SSSC believes that young people would benefit from additional support to develop their meta-skills. Skills Development Scotland have developed a comprehensive package of learning materials in relation to meta-skills which have been well received by training providers and which enjoy support from students, in particular our graduate apprentices have reviewed this package positively. Our belief is that meta-skills provide a good understanding of the skills needed to be successful in the social work, social care and early years workforce. Meta-skills are being included in the new HNC next generation programme which is currently being piloted. When the time comes to review the content of our Modern Apprenticeship programmes, we will be looking to align them with meta-skills.

We also believe that young people should receive further support in relation to the development of digital skills. Digital skills are core skills in the social work, social care and early years sectors and will only become more important in the coming years. Making sure that qualification programmes include a focus on the development of digital skills will ensure the young workforce is better able to adapt to changes in service delivery and may make careers in social work, social care and early years more attractive.

Part 7 –Employer Support and Engagement

Question22: Do you have any evidence about how the current arrangements for employer engagement in skills and education are supporting delivery of Scottish Government’s ambitions and outcomes?

The SSSC has no view on this.

Question 23: Thinking about the different aspects of the system in which employers have an interest, and the existing mechanisms for feeding into policy and delivery, do you have any evidence to support how changes in the delivery landscape could improve the partnership working between Scottish Government, its public bodies and employers?

The SSSC would welcome earlier consultation for feeding into policy and delivery developments to allow further and more in-depth collaboration between ourselves and other public bodies and stakeholders.

Scottish Social Services Council

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