

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) form**A. General Information**

Name of proposal	Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year – Phase 4 expanding implementation
Responsible department	Education and Quality Assurance Team, Workforce, Education and Standards

B. Aims of the proposal

What do you hope to achieve?	<p>Scottish Government intends to implement a mandatory Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year in Scotland from September 2024. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) delivered its commission to provide evidence-based recommendations on the implementation of a sustainable and accessible national approach to support Scottish Government achieve this ambition. The SSSC will continue to support the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) and Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) as they progress plans for national implementation and oversight of the NQSW Supported Year.</p> <p>The NQSW Supported Year is based on the programme of activity led by the SSSC in conjunction with key stakeholders since 2018. The approach is developmental in nature and is intended to improve the consistency of the support and development opportunities offered by employers to NQSWs entering the workforce and a framework for NQSW professional development. This is intended to benefit retention and wellbeing within the workforce.</p>
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	<p>The approach has been developed from learning from research, evaluation of pilot activity and feedback from stakeholders currently involved in a small-scale implementation of the approach. The next phase of the programme of work is to expand the implementation beyond the 10 employers identified through a grant application process in 2021.</p> <p>Scottish Government has provided grant funding to sustain and progress implementation within existing areas and additional grant funding to expand implementation to other areas across Scotland. A grant application and decision-making process will determine who will benefit from the next round of grant funding.</p> <p>The SSSC is currently involved in a programme of work to future proof the Register. The development of the NQSW Supported Year provides an opportunity to align changes to NQSW continuous professional learning (CPL) requirements to the NQSW Supported Year and create a more meaningful connection between professional registration and development for the NQSWs.</p> <p>The next phase of implementation will continue to follow the 'all teach, all learn' improvement methodology by sharing information, learning and resources through individual and group learning sessions and published resources on the NQSW website. The project team will continue to support grant holders involved in implementation and engage with employers not are not successful in grant funding to ensure access to available support to prepare for implementation until such time the appropriate strategic infrastructure is in place.</p>
Why is the proposal needed?	<p>Policy¹ and research²³ consistently report the variation in the level of support and opportunity experienced by NQSWs when they join the workforce. There is a need</p>

¹ [National workforce strategy for Health and Social Care in Scotland \(2022\)](#)

² [Grant,S. et al \(2018 -22\) Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: a five-year longitudinal study/](#)

³ [SSSC \(2020\) Learning from the NQSW pilots and next steps in developing a supported year](#)

for a more robust, systematic, and consistent approach to supporting the transition from qualifying education to the workplace and continuous professional learning during the first year in practice. This need has been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic and the current pressures on the workforce. Social work education and entry to the workforce has been significantly impacted since 2020 and many local authority areas are now finding changes to their workforce demographics with large numbers of inexperienced social workers and few experienced social workers.

Phase 4 of the project is required to support existing implementation activity and expand implementation into other areas. Learning to date suggests implementation is a complex activity that requires time to achieve buy-in and an understanding of the expectations of the approach. The approach to implementation to date has created a shared understanding of what supports implementation and how to address the inconsistencies in the support and opportunities available to NQSWs entering the workforce.

From a SSSC perspective, the current CPL approach is inadequate and needs to be updated in line with the ethos and principles of the approach adopted by the wider sector, where validation of CPL is happening at a local level by those who know the worker best. The Future Proofing Programme will address the necessary Rule change to ensure there is scope to align the CPL requirements with the NQSW Supported Year and updated the CPL requirements as required. The SSSC will be cognisant of the pace and scale of implementation to ensure NQSWs are able to meet registration requirements.

We have always approached this work as a best practice model, developing the NQSW website as an accessible resource for all NQSWs, supervisors and managers. This is not reliant on OCSWA securing long-term funding to support implementation. The SSSC will continue to host the NQSW website and promote

	the approach and resources as part of our activity in engaging with the sector until such time the appropriate strategic infrastructure is in place.
How will the proposal contribute to the SSSC's strategic objectives and/or priorities?	<p>The implementation of the NQSW Supported Year involves an agreed approach to transitions embedded within all course providers curriculum, stated expectations of the core elements of support for NQSWs by employers and professional development framed around standards for NQSWs. The focus on reflective supervision and an individual structured professional development plan will positively impact on services delivered to people who need them, therefore the project contributes to all SSSC strategic outcomes.</p> <p>Strategic Outcome 1</p> <p>People who use services are protected by ensuring the regulated workforce is fit to practise.</p> <p>Strategic Outcome 2</p> <p>The SSSC supports and enhances the development of the regulated workforce to deliver high standards of practice and drive improvement.</p> <p>Strategic Outcome 3</p> <p>Our workforce planning activities support employers, commissioners and policy makers to deliver a sustainable, integrated and innovative workforce.</p> <p>Strategic Outcome 4:</p> <p>The social work, social care and early years workforce is recognised as professional and regulated and valued for the difference it makes to people's lives.</p>

<p>How will the proposal address the SSSC's Equality duties?</p>	<p>The policy addresses the equality duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The programme of activity to widen implementation of the NQSW Supported Year to advance equality of opportunity for NQSWs and foster good relations within the workforce.</p> <p>The SSSC Codes of Practice for both workers and employers are underpinned by human rights principles. The Codes require workers to take responsibility for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills and for employers to support this to happen. The NQSW Supported Year will help NQSWs fulfil their responsibilities under the Codes of Practice and fulfil their registration requirements.</p> <p>There will also be expectations on employers meeting the Codes for Employers through the grant funding conditions. In addition to the Codes of Practice, the NQSW Supported Year will have a set of standards for NQSWs which incorporates evidence of the application of an ethical framework in practice.</p>
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C. Data and evidence gathering

<p>What evidence has been used to come to the decisions contained in this EqIA?</p>	<p>This programme of work is underpinned by research, evaluation and feedback from stakeholders. Phase 1 of the project has engaged with NQSW pilot participants, associated line managers, mentors, L&D leads, pilot Leads, HEI representatives, smaller and rural employers and NQSWs. The initial phase of the project has included more than 200 individuals. An independent evaluation alongside phase 1 of the project has allowed participants to provide feedback on the approaches used. Further stakeholder mapping and a communication and engagement strategy was developed alongside this workplan.</p>
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	<p>During phase 2, there have been several virtual engagement events to update on the project and invite feedback on developments. An external Implementation Group has also been established comprising of key stakeholders including Social Work Scotland (SWS); COSLA, NQSW rep, employer rep, Office Chief Social Work Advisor (OCSWA), Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP). SASW, SSSC, Universities, Care Inspectorate and SSSC. Learning is also drawn from the longitudinal study into the experience of new and early career social workers which involved an annual survey of the identified cohort and follow up activity.</p> <p>Phase 3 of the project has involved engaging with 10 early implementation areas, representing 15 employers from a range of geographical locations, small, medium, and large employers of NQSWs. To date there are approximately 150 NQSWs involved in the supported year along with supervisors, mentors and implementation leads. We meet with the early implementation leads individually monthly and as a group bi-monthly to share learning and feedback on the approach. The project team conducted in-depth interviews with each of the areas to further understand implementation and representative feedback from their key stakeholders. Alongside stakeholder engagement, the project team draws on emerging research ⁴ on how social workers learn and discrete research into how learning and development activity is funded within local authorities.</p>
Has the proposal been the subject of relevant engagement and/or consultation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementation Group/ SWEP – The Implementation Group ran from September 2020 with active representation from several key stakeholders to provide expertise and influence the development of the approach and shape the early implementation phase. Members consulted with their networks as appropriate and provided feedback. As we moved into early implementation, reporting on the programme of work was included in wider SWEP reporting agenda.

⁴ Ferguson, Gillian (2022) [The importance of workplace learning for social workers](#) Iriss

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Early Implementation areas – Individual and bi-monthly meetings with the early implementation leads to share learning from implementation and feedback on the approach. The project team conducted in-depth interviews with each of the areas to further understand implementation and representative feedback from their key stakeholders including NQSWs and supervisors. Each area had the opportunity to provide feedback on the definitions of the core elements of support previously agreed with Chief Social Work Officers and on the approach itself. Early implementation areas cover a range of urban, semi-rural and rural areas that employ a range of NQSWs from 1 – 45+ at any one time.3. All information relating to the NQSW Supported Year implementation grant is published and promoted on SSSC website and via networks including SWEP, CCPS and CSWOs.4. Chief Social Work Officers – As key professional leaders within the profession, the CSWO group were invited to provide feedback on the core elements of the approach and the plans for early implementation grant scheme in 2021.5. Social Work Scotland (SWS) sub-groups – information has been disseminated to relevant sub-groups of SWS with the opportunity to provide feedback.6. Early Career Social Workers - While not directly engaged with regarding the project, the annual findings based on participant feedback of the longitudinal study are informing planning and recommendations in all phases.7. HEI representatives - HEI representatives are aware of activity, and some participated in phase 1 pilots. Five of the nine course providers also collaborated on a workstream to agree a common approach to supporting |
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transitions and to embed this within the curriculum. This activity involved focus groups with students, NQSWs and L&D leads with further plans for a development session to build awareness and agree implementation. This workstream continues and has representation from employers, HEI's and SSSC at present with the view to increase membership as appropriate.

8. Consultative network – on request the project team have provided inputs to areas not currently involved in the NQSW Supported Year on the approach and associated responsibilities with the opportunity to provide feedback on workstreams. Engagement has included students, NQSWs, Social Workers, L&D leads, and senior management.
9. NQSW website development and resource development - There has been engagement with small, remote and rural employers and NQSWs from 5 local authority areas to help develop the web-based resources. This has involved visiting areas, providing information and engaging in activity to capture feedback. Participants were asked to express interest in continuing to be involved in shaping the web-resource through virtual connections. This work continues through all phases of the project with the intention to ensure rural social work is represented within the approach. Focus groups were used in the development of supervision resources for the approach, with contributions from supervisors. L&D leads and NQSWs.
10. There is a dedicated email address to share comments or suggestions on all elements of the work and this is widely promoted. Updates are provided through the SSSC ebulletin and when appropriate the NQSW website.
11. We are aware that most engagement is via digital/ virtual means. This increases reach; however, we are cognisant of the varying quality of internet coverage particularly in more remote and rural settings in our planning and

	ensure variety and flexibility in how people engage. Arrangements are in place to ensure that information can be accessed in a variety of ways.
Has best judgement been used in place of data/research/evidence?	There is a significant amount of research and anecdotal evidence available to support the development of the project to date with consistent themes emerging from longitudinal research and identification of required supports for NQSWs and how social workers learn. The development of resources has been informed by best judgement of those with subject expertise and clear links to research. This phase of the project is built on learning from 2021 implementation activity and is reliant on local knowledge as applicants for the grant will require to know what is specifically needed and likely to be sustainable within their local area.
Have any gaps been found in the data?	There is currently not a comprehensive overview of what is currently offered to NQSWs and what is required at a local level to implement the NQSW Supported Year for areas not involved in early implementation. The grant application process will provide useful data on what is currently available and what each employer/partnership requires. All local authority employers of NQSWs have been encouraged to apply and the completed applications will clarify resource requirements and any specific themes, solutions or barriers to implementation across a variety of settings. Third sector and independent organisations are invited to apply as part of a partnership bid alongside a local authority however the grant application activity is not likely to yield an accurate picture of what is provided and what is needed in these settings. Local authority settings are the destination for the majority of NQSWs and as such are the primary focus of implementation activity.

D. ASSESSING IMPACT AND IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE EQUALITY

The project will have a positive impact on promoting equality. An overarching aim of the project is that all NQSW will have adequate support to make the transition from education to workplace and continue to consolidate and develop into the professional role. The project will positively promote an equity of experience for NQSWs, supervisors and employers with an emphasis on individual support and learning for all involved. The use of a reflective and reflexive supervision approach requires individuals to consider the use of self (encompassing identified protected characteristics) and any tensions with own value base when applying the ethical framework to their professional practice. This includes consideration of relationships with people who use services, peers, line managers, NQSWs and the supervisory relationship. This individual approach to supervision with a focus on wellbeing should provide the opportunity to address any concerns or personal challenges. The individualised development plans provide sufficient scope and flexibility to address the specific needs of each NQSW and opportunities to address equality issues including all identified protected characteristics.

There will be a greater emphasis on employer support during this first year with increased awareness of employer responsibilities to promote equality and have in place arrangements to address concerns regarding treatment of workers or people who receive services with protected characteristics. Successful grant applications for the implementation will be expected to have the relevant policies in place and promote these as part of induction. Conditions of the grant scheme will remind employers of their existing responsibilities to promote equality within their workforce and of the potential additional barriers to NQSWs with protected characteristics seeking support.

The communication and engagement strategy involves promotion and dissemination of resources and learning relevant to the implementation activity. The promotion and accessibility of the NQSW website means that all NQSWs, supervisors and employers can benefit from the information and resources prior to national roll out.

Sex – neutral – the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSWs employed in that setting and is accessible regardless of sex. We anticipate that a significant proportion of NQSWs may be female due to the demographic of student population however this approach is accessible to everyone equally with the opportunity to pause or extend the NQSW Supported Year to accommodate changes to work patterns or periods of absence from work.

Race – positive – the approach applies equally to all NQSWs and is accessible regardless of race, however the NQSW Supported Year promotes a greater understanding of the potential personal and professional challenges that some NQSW can experience in seeking support from colleagues, supervisors and employers because of their race. The grant conditions remind employers of their responsibilities and to support reporting and/or challenging anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice within work settings.

Disability – positive - The implementation of the approach tests out a broad range of both formal and informal learning resources available locally, regionally, nationally and online. The resources developed through the NQSW national resource will be inclusive in language and content and will encourage continuous learning opportunities to meet different learning styles. There will be greater flexibility in evidencing learning opportunities in a range of ways will be positive in meeting a range of preferred learning styles and a focus on individual professional development will create an individualised pathway to maximise their development of every NQSW. Resources and content developed for the NQSW website are subject to accessibility checks. The NQSW Supported Year promotes a greater understanding of the potential personal and professional challenges that some NQSWs may experience in seeking support from colleagues, supervisors and employers because of disability.

Sexual orientation – positive - the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSW employed in that setting and is accessible regardless of sexual orientation. Where possible the images used on the NQSW website will be gender neutral and resources will be reflective of diversity. The grant conditions remind employers of their responsibilities and to support reporting and/or challenging anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice within work settings.

Gender reassignment – positive - the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSWs employed in that setting. Where possible the images, language and resources associated with the NQSW Supported Year will be gender neutral and reflective of diversity. The grant conditions remind employers of their responsibilities and to support reporting and/or challenging anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice within work settings.

Age – neutral – the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSWs employed in that setting. It is recognised that there is a wide age range within the NQSW population. The individualised development plans provide sufficient scope and flexibility to address the specific needs of each NQSW, recognising previous relevant experience and strengths regardless of age.

Marital and civil partnership – neutral – the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSWs employed in that setting. We have not identified any potential for impact, either negative or positive resulting from the expansion of the NQSW Supported Year.

Pregnancy and maternity – neutral. Employers will have specific policies in place. NQSWs remain on the register to enable them to return to work following maternity leave in line with their contractual arrangements with their employer. Any NQSW going on maternity leave will not be disadvantaged; they remain registered and the existing processes for the management of extensions to NQSW CPL requirements will remain valid.

Religion or belief – neutral - the implementation of the NQSW Supported Year applies equally to all NQSWs employed in that setting regardless of religion or belief. We have not identified any potential for impact, either negative or positive resulting from the expansion of the NQSW Supported Year.

E. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUPS LIVING IN AN ISLAND COMMUNITY

This section considers the impact or effect of the proposal on island communities and whether this could be significantly different from its effect on other communities.

The grant to support the implementation of the Supported Year is applicable to all employers of NQSWs including remote, rural or singleton NQSW employers. The approach is flexible and adaptable to provide singleton and large groups with equal opportunities to develop and consolidate learning during the NQSW year. It provides consistent information on expectations and support for employers, supervisors and NQSWs.

A partnership bid from six highland and island employers was successful in the 2021 grant funding to support early implementation. We will continue to work alongside this partnership to support implementation and address challenges around workforce recruitment and retention, distance, geography, connectivity and demography. We have demonstrated flexibility in the approach to making sure the islands receive fair and equitable treatment and that there is no detriment to their unique circumstances. The partnership is working together to promote good relations and equal opportunities for NQSWs. We benefit from their active participation in the current engagement and learning activity associated with early implementation.

We are collaborating with representatives from Island and rural areas to inform the development of resources for the NQSW working in rural social work to support them to negotiate their transition into their professional role. This work includes representation from the Island communities and as resources develop there will be opportunities for wider feedback and scope to develop more nuanced resources if required. All resources will be available via the NQSW website or in other formats if required.

An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required.

F. CHILD RIGHTS AND WELLBEING

This section considers the impact of the proposal on children and young people, or specific groups of children and young people, in Scotland.

- **Civil rights and freedoms** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. NQSW will reflect on their practice in this area.
- **Violence against children** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. NQSW must be able to evidence their understanding of their contribution to the protection and wellbeing of children and adults. The Supported Year will enhance the transition for NQSW to support them in applying their skills to identify where there is actual or potential for violence against children.
- **Family environment and alternative care** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. The Supported Year will enhance transition and provide an opportunity for NQSW's to positively impact children in family setting and alternative care.
- **Disability, basic health and welfare** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. The Supported Year will enhance transition and provide an opportunity for NQSW's to positively impact children with disabilities across the range of areas described in this criterion.
- **Education, Leisure and Cultural activities** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. The Supported Year will enhance transition and provide an opportunity for NQSW's to positively impact children in relation to education, leisure and cultural activities.
- **Special Protection measures** - The NQSW Standards against which progress is measured are underpinned by the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) ethical framework and Codes of Practice and in line with Registration Rules. The Supported Year will enhance transition and provide an opportunity for NQSW's to positively impact children with special protection measures.

G. HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES

This section considers the impact of the proposal on physical and mental health and wellbeing; this includes for example, participation, creativity and developing potential.

The expansion of the NQSW Supported Year will have a positive impact on health and wellbeing inequalities. It can provide a structure to open communication to show where areas of support, flexibility, advice and help are needed whether this be due to health or lack of opportunities. The aim of the NQSW Supported Year is to provide equity of experience for NQSWs in their first year in practice. The early implementation of the NQSW Supported Year provided the opportunity to test and refine the proposed national approach including the core elements of support that need to be provided by employers and it supports the responsibilities of the NQSW and employer under the Codes of Practice.

The information and resources developed will be accessible to all and attention will be paid to formal and informal partnerships and connections.

The requirements and support offered through the NQSW Supported Year will offer a continued focus on formal and informal learning, regular supervision, professional development and peer support. Positive experiences of being supervised in a way which focuses on wellbeing, progression and development instead of purely case management should positively impact on health and wellbeing which will be particularly beneficial for individuals entering the profession having had a disrupted learning experienced.

H. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

This section is concerned with the impact of the proposal on pay and employment opportunities as well as valuing and supporting voluntary work.

The project has a neutral impact here. Previous research and engagement with the sector show that there is not an appetite to link the NQSW Supported Year to a probationary year with reduced salary. NQSWs entering the workforce do so as a qualified social worker on the agreed salary scale as determined by their employer. The approach focuses on the continued professional development of the NQSW against standards which articulate the core characteristics of professional practice. We have conducted in-depth interviews with the early implementation areas awarded grants in 2021 and shared these findings with OCSWA and SWEP so they can be taken into consideration when determining plans for implementation, resourcing and necessary infrastructure as it

moves forward to national implementation. We will maintain strong links with all areas involved in implementation and any unintended outcomes from introducing a Supported Year such as a reluctance of employers to take NQSW workers because of the expectations on employers or a detrimental impact on those in supervisory roles through agreed governance structure.

The requirements and support offered through the NQSW Supported Year offer a continued focus on formal and informal learning and development. Positive experiences may positively encourage the NQSWs into mentoring, practice teaching and management as their careers progress.

Depending on how the advanced practice workstream develops there is potential for a clear pathway of progression and recognition of both formal and informal learning.

I. Care experienced children, young people and adults.

This section concerns our duties to put Scotland's care experienced children, young people and adults at the heart of what we do.

The expansion of the NQSW Supported Year will have a positive impact on care experienced NQSWs. The approach is supportive and developmental in nature, responding to the strengths and areas of development on an individual basis for all NQSWs entering the profession.

The approach is intended to be applied across all settings with all workers expected to engage in activities that increase their knowledge, understanding and contribution to the wellbeing and safety of children, young people and adults. The standards and wider approach are sufficiently flexible to incorporate the existing and emerging best practice and policy relating to care-experienced children, young people and adults.

J. DECISION MAKING

Which of the following statements best describes the action that should be taken following the EqIA in relation to your proposal?

No major change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Adjust the policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue with Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stop and remove the policy	<input type="checkbox"/>

Outline the reasons why you've selected this option.

Consideration has been given to the main issues.

The project meets legislation, best practice and does not discriminate.

Oversight of OCSWA/SWEP and engagement with the sector will continue to ensure relevance.

Current approach to implementation provides an opportunity to learn and share implementation ideas and solutions to barriers generated by the sector.

K. MONITORING AND REVIEWING

How will the implementation of the policy/proposal be monitored? How and when will the impact of the proposal be reviewed? Outline the actions that will be taken, the timescale for these and who will be responsible for carrying out these actions.

Action	Timescale	Person Responsible
The EqIA will be reviewed in 12 months	12 months	NQSW Supported Year project lead.

L. SIGN OFF

Name: Laura Lamb

Title: Acting Director of Workforce, Education and Standards

Date Approved: 16 July 2023