

# National developments for social work

Issue 2, January 2026

---

## Scottish Social Work Partnership – Your Voice, Your Impact: Shape the future of social work

The engagement period for the Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP) has now closed and we would like to extend a **huge thanks** to all practitioners, partners, and more who took the time to get involved.

We believe the best ideas come from listening and are delighted to have received feedback via the online questionnaire based around our Engagement Pack, as well as further experiences and reflections from NCS Forum workshop plus our recent online sessions on 20 and 22 January, and other meetings across teams and organisations.

Thanks again to everyone who came along on 20 and 22 January. We were sold out with full waiting lists too! We heard about the realities and challenges the sector faces, as well as the opportunities for meaningful change – the passion for inclusive services and initiatives was clear.

The feedback from the sessions was really positive and 94% of those who completed the post-session survey found the content relevant to their area or interests. Feedback included requests for more online sessions - we'll make sure to keep you posted about upcoming engagement.

The next step is an independent analysis of the feedback which will inform the shape of the Strategic Plan 2026-29.

We look forward to sharing more with you in the next newsletter in spring.

---

## National Social Work Agency

**World Social Work Day, 17 March 2026, will mark the official launch of the National Social Work Agency.**

World Social Work Day is an international moment to recognise the impact, professionalism and values of social work. Launching the National Social Work Agency on this day reflects a clear commitment to placing social work and social workers at the heart of national reform and improvement.

The National Social Work Agency will play a key role in supporting the social work workforce, strengthening leadership and learning, and providing national



coordination that complements and amplifies the important work already happening across Scotland.

The National Social Work Agency will:

- advocate for all social workers (statutory, third sector, independent sectors), including students
- provide professional, impartial social work advice to Scottish Ministers
- report annually, via the National Chief Social Work Adviser, to Scottish Ministers on Scotland's social work services and social work workforce
- support the National Chief Social Work Adviser to provide national professional leadership
- hold policy responsibility and oversight of social work education and professional learning
- work with partners, including COSLA and Social Work Scotland, through the Scottish Social Work Partnership (SSWP), to have oversight of national workforce planning and workforce numbers
- enable collaboration and delivery of the Strategic Plan for Social Work in Scotland (2026–29), as part of the SSWP
- oversee improvement priorities and promote collaboration with improvement agencies in the sector

Approaching the launch, the National Social Work Agency will continue to engage with social workers, employers and partners to shape the agency's priorities and approach.

---

## SSWP current priorities - updates

Teams across COSLA, Social Work Scotland and the Scottish Government are working with sector partners to push forward work in the following themed areas:

### 1. Education and learning

#### Graduate apprenticeship in social work

The pilot year of the graduate apprenticeship began in November 2025 at the University of the West of Scotland, with 26 apprentices from five employers starting an undergraduate programme combining work-based learning and academic study.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, Ms Angela Constance, MSP, visited the University of the West of Scotland on 28 January to [formally launch the pilot of the GA in Social Work](#). She met with UWS staff, representatives of SW sector organisations, pilot employers, and, most importantly, some of the new apprentices undertaking the programme.

Following the visit, Ms Constance said, *"Social workers make a tangible difference to people's lives every day, and I was delighted to meet with the inaugural cohort of*



apprentices to formally launch the new Graduate Apprenticeship programme at the University of the West of Scotland. We know the demand for social work continues to grow which is why it's so important we create new, flexible routes into the profession that can attract talented and passionate people from all backgrounds and at different stages of their careers. The apprenticeship programme is a great example of how to achieve that. Partners across the sector have worked together to open up this work-based route into social work for people who might not have been able to access traditional pathways, allowing them to earn while they learn and gain hands-on experience from day one.”



A Graduate Apprenticeship in Social Work Implementation Group (GASWIG), chaired by Andrew Dick (Interim Head of Children's Services & Chief Social Work Officer, Aberdeenshire Council), has been established to develop a toolkit supporting employers and learning providers. The group includes sector representatives, with opportunities to contribute via a wider reference group. To get involved, contact [Heather.Gibson@gov.scot](mailto:Heather.Gibson@gov.scot).

### **Social work career resources**

Following engagement across the sector, we are developing a digital career resource to support social workers to build fulfilling careers, grounded in continuous professional learning. This work will underpin a future National Training Plan for social workers, including potential resources to strengthen knowledge and skills in areas such as public protection. We will keep you updated as this work progresses.

### **Local learning partnerships**

Local learning partnerships are being developed as collaborations between social work employers and education providers to improve access to high-quality learning and development, and to strengthen links between education and practice.

Online sessions held in November and December 2025 introduced the model and explored local readiness. Further guidance has been developed, and a follow-up engagement session will take place on 10 February to share local approaches and strengths. To attend, please reserve a place via [Eventbrite](#).

Scottish Government has recently announced [investment of up to £600,000 to strengthen the design and delivery of social work practice education](#).

## Framework for Social Work Education

The development of a new *Framework for Social Work Education* is progressing well and, subject to approval by the SSSC Council, is expected to be published in March. The framework will, for the first time, include new standards for post-qualified social worker learning, as well as refreshed standards for qualifying education.

## 2. Professional leadership and governance

### Delivery group

The delivery group for this workstream is being established with the first meeting will take place on 4 February. The group will build on the initial steps already taken, as noted below.

### Social Work Governance Framework

An evaluation of the CSWO developed governance framework against the Care Inspectorate's 2025 review has been undertaken, with a view to ensuring that the framework aligns with expectations around assurance, risk, supervision, and continuous improvement.

### CSWO Regulations and Guidance

Work is underway on draft revised version of the CSWO regulations and guidance. Stakeholder engagement is planned for February–March, with proposals for revision being presented to SSWP leadership in March–April. The focus is on clearer professional standards, better connections with national bodies, and more consistent implementation locally.

### Mentoring and leadership development

The CSWO Award Mentoring Framework has been drafted and offers structured, evidence-informed mentoring over a 12-month period. It is designed to support reflective leadership, resilience, and sharing good practice among senior leaders. A broader leadership offer – aligned with NES's Leading to Change - is also being scoped with partners, alongside targeted workshops (for example on mental health duties) and practical resources around agency decision-making.

If you'd like to be involved, by giving feedback on the framework, taking part in mentoring as a mentor or mentee, or helping shape the leadership offer – please look out for SSWP callouts in upcoming communications.

## 3. Workforce planning

### Current workforce profile

Our “shadow year” goals for the Workforce Planning priority include gaining a clear understanding of the current profile of the workforce; considering issues of demand for social workers; understanding the wider context facing the sector (including financial, economic, societal, geographic and other issues); and articulating the workforce planning aspirations of the SSWP partners as a collective to inform our future approach.

## Workforce planning data

A key priority for early 2026 is to gather baseline workforce planning data, via a survey of local authorities. This will cover a range of areas including current approaches to workforce planning, including use of data and evidence sources; workforce supply and demand issues; caseload management; and use of agency/other non-directly employed social workers.

## Strategic plan

Findings from the survey; other relevant data, insights and contextual information; as well as input from each of the SSWP partners, will inform the development of an overall workforce plan as well as the Strategic Plan for the SSWP.

---

## Social workers in the National Social Work Agency

We are creating a new national body led by registered social workers. It will be shaped by those who understand people, practice and communities and their experience of social work education, the workforce and local systems will drive change across the profession.

- **Joanna Macdonald**, as Chief Executive of the agency, is also the National Chief Social Work Adviser to the Scottish Government. Joanna has over 35 years' experience across social work and in public sector reform. She began her career as a relief social care assistant in a care home before qualifying as a social worker, and has held senior leadership roles, including Director of Adult Social Care, Chief Officer of two Integration Joint Boards and, previously, as Deputy Chief Social Work Adviser within the Scottish Government.
- **Angela Latta**, as Deputy CE, also serves as Deputy Chief Social Work Adviser to the Scottish Government. Angela Latta is an accomplished social work leader with over 20 years of experience spanning frontline practice, strategic management and national policy development. A passionate champion for the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families, she has previously held a number of strategic and operation management responsibilities across children's services and public protection. She has a strong track record of building partnerships across health, education and voluntary sectors to deliver joined up support.
- **Jamie Aarons**, the agency's Senior Professional Social Work Adviser for Adults, is a qualified Mental Health Officer with over 20 years' experience across children's and adults' services; initially within clinical and educational settings with children and families affected by trauma, then with adults across a range of teams and settings. Jamie has held roles spanning practice, policy and strategic leadership in hospital and locality based teams, as lead officer for Adult Support and Protection and most recently within the Scottish Government.

- **Pauline Cochrane** is the agency's Senior Professional Social Work Adviser for Children. Pauline began her career in residential services before qualifying as a social worker 27 years ago. She has since dedicated her practice to children's services, building extensive experience across a range of local authorities and services areas. Pauline holds several post qualifying awards, including Mental Health Officer and Permanence qualifications. More recently, she has held a senior management role within children and justice services. Pauline will join the National Social Work Agency in April 2026.
- Majority of the NSWA Senior Leadership Team are registered social workers, and our learning and implementation team is made up of registered social workers with enhanced trauma training, leadership and practice experience.
- There is a number of professional social work advisers within other directorates in the Scottish Government. They will have links into the National Social Work Agency.

---

## The National Social Work Agency is hiring!

We are advertising for two new professional social work advisers:

- [Justice](#)
- [Mental health](#)

If you would like more information on either role, please contact [Angela.Latta@gov.scot](mailto:Angela.Latta@gov.scot) Closing date for applications 22 February 2026.

---

## Upcoming events

- **UNISON Social Work Issues Group (SWIG) webinar** **11 February 1-2pm** will look at the challenges for women practicing social work in a patriarchal society. It will consider the experiences of women in social work, as students, practitioners and those who use social work services. Speakers include Jane Fenton, University of Dundee and Abi Robertson, SWIG member and social worker.
- **Leading to Change** announced applications are open for Cohort 16 of the Leading for the Future. You can [register for drop-in sessions](#) to find out more.
- **Leading to Change**, in partnership with the Institute of Health and Social Care Management, is running two events in March for those working in health and social care: A Hunter Gather's Guide to 21st Century Leadership on [10 March](#) and [11 March](#).

- **Care Roadshow Scotland** returns to Glasgow on **21 April 2026** at Hampden Park, bringing together professionals from across adult social care, including domiciliary, residential and complex care. This [free to register](#) event features CPD-accredited seminars with sessions from Alzheimer Scotland, peer-to-peer learning focused on innovation, and an exhibition showcasing the latest care technology, products and services.
- **Social Work Scotland** announced their second [Justice Conference](#) will take place in **Glasgow, 3 June 2026** bringing together practitioners, leaders, and partners from across Scotland to recognise the meaningful impact of collective work and to look ahead with purpose and possibility. Confirmed keynotes from Joanna MacDonald, Chief Executive, National Social Work Agency, and National Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government, and Cat Dalrymple, Director of Justice, Scottish Government.

---

## Stay connected. Stay informed.

Get the latest policy updates and insights, as well as opportunities to get involved in advancing social work. [Sign up](#) and be part of our national social work community.

**SIGN UP**

