

# National developments for social work

Issue 3, May 2026

## Online sessions: Your voice matters: help shape the future of social work

Many thanks to those who attended the 20 and 22 January online 1-hour lunchtime sessions for social workers.

Your voice matters sessions included national scene setting and breakout room discussions about workforce planning, education and learning, and professional governance and leadership.

The feedback from the sessions was very encouraging:

- 94% said the session was relevant to their area or interests: Participants found the sessions relevant and valuable, with nearly all stating that the content aligned with their professional areas. They praised the clear overview, and the sense of shared purpose and positivity about the future of social work. Several participants noted that they left finding the sessions informative, engaging, encouraging and that their 'voice is genuinely valued'.
- 94% said the questions in the breakout rooms were relevant and sufficient: Breakout rooms were repeatedly highlighted as the most useful element, offering a space for reflection, collaboration and the opportunity to engage and hear from people across the various strands of social work from operational practice – policy – workforce development and scrutiny and reassurance, about shared challenges within the social work profession.
- Some participants highlighted time constraints, with those feeling the one-hour session was not long enough for discussion.
- Substantive issues raised included the need for better resourcing to support learning and development, especially ensuring social workers have protected time to embed new skills. There was a suggestion to develop a framework to ensure that learning is followed up routinely to help embed the learning and practice. Concerns were expressed about gaps between theory and practice for newly qualified social workers, particularly in assessment writing, while also stating that it is difficult to find a knowledge base for learning about local services which is a vital component. The importance of workforce planning was recognised, and participants emphasised the necessity of improving the public and health-sector understanding of social work roles.
- Overall, attendees valued the opportunity to contribute and expressed hope that ongoing engagement – with many requesting further sessions – will support meaningful and sustained change across the profession.

**All the contributions from these discussions will inform the future work of national partners, including the National Social Work Agency and those who are part of the Scottish Social Work Partnership.**



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## Launch of the National Social Work Agency

The [National Social Work Agency](#) was launched on 17 March – World Social Work Day 2026.

A series of events marked the day, including:

- [an announcement by Angela Constance MSP](#), Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, of nearly £1 million investment to strengthen social work professional learning and address workforce pressures across Scotland
- publication of a new resource that spans the social worker's professional journey, from qualifying education to advanced practice: [Valuing Practice: Scotland's Framework for Social Work Education and Learning](#)
- signing the [National Trauma Transformation Programme Leadership Pledge of Support](#) as commitment to embed trauma informed principles and practice to support anyone affected by psychological trauma
- publication of a one-year interim corporate plan, '[Leading excellence, driving change in social work](#)', and suite of corporate documents
- attending a series of local World Social Work Day celebration events from Shetland (online) to Stirling (in-person)
- an online webinar for social workers and the sector hosted by Joanna Macdonald, Chief Executive of the National Social Work Agency and National Chief Social Work Adviser
- launch of the National Social Work Agency website, [socialwork.gov.scot](https://socialwork.gov.scot)

The National Social Work Agency will provide regular updates about its work through its [new website](#) and via this [national developments newsletter](#).

*The National Social Work Agency is an executive agency of the Scottish Government, created to strengthen and support the social work profession. We lead excellence and improvement and provide expert, impartial professional advice to Scottish Ministers. We help shape the policies and services that affect people and communities.*

*Our partnership approach with the social work sector means we hear from a broad range of leaders and experts. From frontline social workers and people with lived experience.*

*We are committed to clarity and transparency in our everyday work and actively listen to feedback and involve partners and people in shaping our work.*

## Social workers in the National Social Work Agency

In addition to the National Chief Social Work Adviser, Joanna Macdonald (Chief Executive), Angela Latte (Deputy Chief Executive), our learning and implementation team, and the majority of our senior leadership team, the National Social Work



Agency also has a number of new professional social work advisers who are part of the senior leadership team:

- **Jamie Aarons** is the agency's **Senior Professional Social Work Adviser for Adults**. Jamie 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.
- **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. Pauline holds several post qualifying awards, including Mental Health Officer and Permanence qualifications.
- **Deirdre O'Reilly** is the agency's **Senior Professional Social Work Adviser for Justice Services**. Deirdre brings nearly 27 years' experience across children and families, and justice services within statutory settings. She has a strong track record of leading teams in complex, high-risk environments, supporting staff through change, driving service redesign, and embedding evidence and values based practice.
- Our new **Senior Professional Social Work Adviser for Mental Health Services**, **James Hogan**, will join the agency in June.

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## 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

#### Local learning partnerships

Extensive consultation with social work educators, practitioners, students, and strategic partners identified that specific improvements within social work practice learning are needed. **Local learning partnerships (LLPs)** were designed as the main way address individual, organisational and systemic needs and drive improvement within the sector.

To realise the changed needed, the Scottish Government allocated funding of £600,000 to introduce an LLP fund, which set out that at least one LLP must operate partly or fully in a remote and/or island locale. The Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (now the National Social Work Agency) invited applications for grant funding of up to £200,000.

We are delighted to share that, as a result of the range of applications, we will now fund four LLPs: Grampian, Highland and Islands, Perth and Kinross, and West Scotland.

More information will be shared via the [National Social Work Agency website](#) in the coming weeks.



## Graduate Apprenticeship in Social Work

The first cohort of apprentices on the pilot of the Graduate Apprenticeship in Social work are progressing well: 26 apprentices from five employers are combining work-based learning with academic study at the University of the West of Scotland (UWS).

The [Framework and Standards](#) and the [Occupational Profile](#) documents are held by Skills Development Scotland, and form the national part of the qualification. Each learning provider who wishes to offer the GA in Social Work must develop their own delivery programme, which must pass validation with the SSSC. Read more about the [course developed by the UWS](#) on their website.

To support wider roll-out, the GA in SW Implementation Group (chaired by Andrew Dick, CSWO Aberdeenshire) is busy creating a toolkit specifically for social work. The toolkit will be available to all employers, learning providers, and prospective apprentices to help them prepare and understand how the apprenticeship works. This resource will soon be available on the [National Social Work Agency](#) website.

## Valuing Practice: Scotland's Framework for Social Work Education and Learning

[Valuing Practice](#) was published to coincide with the launch of the National Social Work Agency. Created in collaboration with sector partners, including the SSSC, this strategic framework for education and professional learning is a shared vision. It promotes a culture of continuous learning to enable a skilled and confident workforce that makes a meaningful difference to people and communities. *Valuing Practice* spans the social worker's professional journey: from qualifying education to advanced practice.

The National Social Work Agency has policy responsibility and oversight of social work education and professional learning in Scotland. The SSSC, as the workforce regulator, has a statutory duty to set and uphold standards. Publication of *Valuing Practice* demonstrates the success of close collaboration and the clarity of focus of sector partners to improve the consistency and quality of social work education and professional learning, and the commitment to social workers in communities.

[Valuing Practice](#) is available on the National Social Work Agency website, with links to the standards and requirements set by the SSSC.

## 2. Professional leadership and governance

### Delivery group

The delivery group is now established and meeting regularly, providing oversight and coordination across the workstream. Membership includes Scottish Government, COSLA, SASW and the CSWO network, with a focus on maintaining strong partnership working and ensuring delivery against agreed priorities. A Terms of reference and Delivery plan for the work is in draft.



## **Social Work Governance Framework**

Progress has been made to consolidate and refine the draft national Professional & Care Governance Framework, aligning it with the Care Inspectorate's 2025 review and relevant regulatory standards. Engagement with the CSWO network and wider partners (including COSLA, SSSC and professional bodies) has taken place to gather detailed feedback and support shared ownership. The focus has been on ensuring the framework is both robust and practical, supporting greater consistency and clarity in governance arrangements across local authorities and HSCPs.

## **CSWO Regulations and Guidance**

A gap analysis against current guidance has been completed, alongside initial drafting and stakeholder engagement. This work is supporting development of updated guidance on the CSWO role, with a focus on clearer expectations of professional leadership, stronger alignment with national bodies, and improved clarity around governance and assurance responsibilities. Further engagement will continue as proposals are refined ahead of formal consideration by SSWP leadership.

## **Mentoring and leadership development**

Development of the CSWO Award Mentoring Framework has continued, alongside work to shape a wider leadership offer for senior social work leaders. This includes scoping targeted learning opportunities in response to feedback from CSWOs—for example on statutory responsibilities (including mental health duties), agency decision-making, and leading complex change. Work is being progressed with national partners to align this with existing programmes (such as NES's Leading to Change) while ensuring it reflects the specific context of social work leadership.

## **Next steps**

The next phase will focus on finalising the governance framework and updated guidance, alongside progressing and testing elements of the leadership offer. Continued engagement with partners and the CSWO network will support implementation and adoption across the system.

## **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 survey of LAs has been undertaken gathering information including sources considered for workforce planning; challenges; caseload information; projections for future staffing need and use of agency staff. The information gathered is being analysed and will be part of a wider overview report that will also incorporate the workforce profile data. This report will lay out current practice and baseline data and



ultimately influence the approach and content of a national social work workforce plan.

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## Upcoming events

### **Social Work Policy Panel 12-1pm, 02 June, online**

The Social Work Policy Panel is a free, online space for learning, discussion and debate on important social work policy issues in Scotland. Open to all social workers, students and partners, the panel offers timely insights from research and practice. The panel is jointly run by the Scottish Association of Social Work (SASW), the National Social Work Agency and Social Work Scotland.

The next session takes place on 02 June, when Awais Mashkooor will speak about his ongoing research on integration and the Scottish Government-commissioned PDL course, 'Working across the divide: culture, leadership and what integration really asks of us'.

[Register online via the SASW website.](#)

### **Social Work Scotland Justice Conference 9am-4pm, 03 June, Radisson Blu, Glasgow**

**Celebrating Practice, Shaping the Future** brings together practitioners, leaders, and partners from across Scotland to recognise the meaningful impact of our collective work and to look ahead with purpose and possibility.

Keynote speakers:

Joanna Macdonald, Chief Executive, National Social Work Agency and National Social Work Adviser, Scottish Government

Cat Dalrymple, Director of Justice, Scottish Government

Dr Hannah Graham, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Stirling

Delegates will have the opportunity to attend workshops covering topics including 'autism and a socio-ecological response to sexual violence' and 'embedding a public health and problem-solving approach to supporting those with problematic substance use who enter the justice system'.

[Find out more.](#)

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