

National developments for social work

Issue 1, October 2025

Introducing the Scottish Social Work Partnership



The **Scottish Social Work Partnership** (SSWP) is a new national partnership bringing together:

- National Social Work Agency (Scottish Government)
- COSLA (local government)
- Social Work Scotland (local social work leaders)

Aim of the Scottish Social Work Partnership

Scotland has a skilled, supported and sustainable social work workforce; one that upholds human rights, promotes social justice, and discharges statutory duties on behalf of local government; and to harness evidence-informed practice, promote social work principles and reinforce the value of social work in all systems in which it operates.

Together, as the SSWP, partners will work to:

- provide national oversight and understanding of the workforce, grounded in local expertise
- collaborate with other organisations to improve the quality, experience, impact and sustainability of the workforce
- deliver national activities and projects – a new strategic plan (2026–29) including, social work education and learning, workforce planning, and professional governance and leadership.

Scope of the Scottish Social Work Partnership

The SSWP is about making positive changes and improvements across the whole of the social work workforce. Therefore, the work of the SSWP will encompass registered social workers and paraprofessionals who support social work services (e.g. social work assistants, residential childcare workers), local authority based occupational therapists, and student social workers.

Inclusion of these roles recognises the way we work together locally and the shared challenges we face. The work of the SSWP will shape how we strengthen learning, leadership and planning for a future workforce across all social work sectors.



Voice, Your Impact: Shape the future of social work

We believe the best ideas come from listening – and that’s why we’ve launched a national conversation to hear views and to put your voice at the heart of what we do.

Our [Engagement Pack is now live](#), with opportunities for you to shape the future of our work – with your colleagues or as a team discussion, or your own thoughts. Whether you’re passionate about inclusion, innovation, social work values or simply want to make sure your perspective is heard, this is your chance to contribute.

What’s inside?

- Updates on current projects and priorities
- Key questions we’re exploring
- Ways you can get involved and influence decisions

Why it matters

Your feedback helps us build better, more inclusive services and initiatives. Every comment, idea, and reflection helps us move forward together to **shape the future of social work across Scotland** – the national Social Work Agency and the Scottish Social Work Partnership.

[Click here to read the engagement pack and share your feedback.](#)

Let’s make sure every voice is part of the conversation. Thank you for being part of this journey — your input truly makes a difference.

New National Chief Social Work Adviser

Joanna Macdonald has been announced as the new **National Chief Social Work Adviser** and will take up post in December 2025.

In this key advisory role of National Chief Social Work Adviser, Joanna will also serve as **Chief Executive of the National Social Work Agency**. This new dual appointment marks an exciting and significant step forward in strengthening social work leadership and collaboration across Scotland.



National Social Work Agency

Launching in spring 2026, the **National Social Work Agency** (NSWA) will lead excellence and drive change in social work. The NSWA is currently being set-up. The team in the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser will move across to the NSWA.



Joanna Macdonald, as the new **National Chief Social Work Adviser**, will lead the NSWAs, bringing strategic direction and national leadership to the profession, and will enhance the profession's visibility within the Scottish Government.

As an executive agency of the Scottish Government, the NSWAs will:

- provide professional impartial social work advice to Scottish Ministers
- report to Scottish Ministers on the state of Scotland's social work sector
- support the National Chief Social Work Adviser to provide professional leadership of social work
- raise the profile of social work as a profession and champion the interests of all social workers, including student social workers
- contribute to and provide national coordination of national policy affecting social work
- have policy responsibility and oversight of social work education and learning, and national workforce planning
- oversee improvement priorities and national implementation support across social work
- enable Once for Scotland initiatives, where a national approach for social work is required.

NSWA and SSWP explained: different roles, shared goals to support social work in Scotland

National Social Work Agency	Scottish Social Work Partnership
A Scottish Government agency (evolution of OCSWA)	A collaborative consensus-based partnership
Led by the National Chief Social Work Adviser (Chief Executive of the NSWAs)	Led by OCSWA/NSWA, COSLA and Social Work Scotland, with the support of sector partners and the workforce
Has responsibility to lead / coordinate social work policy, improvements and professional standards	Coordinates / aligns national and local efforts and activities to improve support for the workforce
Will drive excellence in social work through national leadership, oversight and change	Collaborates to ensure delivery and shared leadership across the sector
Is a national voice of the social work profession	Is underpinned by a strategic plan for social work

What's happening to support social work – by the Scottish Social Work Partnership

Collaborating as the SSWP, Scottish Government, COSLA and Social Work Scotland are taking forward work within three initial priority themes:

- Social work educational and learning
- Workforce planning
- Professional governance and leadership

We'll refine our themes and plans for 2026 onwards, based on feedback we receive:

Your Voice, Your Impact: Shape the future of social work (see page 2). Your feedback helps us build better, more inclusive services and initiatives, and will help to shape a national plan for social work in Scotland. [Share your views](#).

SSWP social work education and learning priority:

- **Social Work Career Resource – join a focus group**

We're holding an online session to seek the views of social workers, student social workers and those involved in social work learning about the development of a Social Work Career Resource (*formerly the Advanced Social Work Practice Framework for Social Workers*).

We want to hear from social workers, social work students and those involved in social work learning – their experiences of learning and development and the influence this has on career planning. We need your insight.

Please register to attend. We'll send you a Microsoft Teams invitation. If the event is full, please join the waiting list as spaces may become available:

- [Social Work Career Resource - Thu, Nov 13, 2025 at 10:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)

Contact us SocialWorkEducation@gov.scot with questions, ahead of the session.

- **Local Learning Partnerships – what are they?**

Local Learning Partnerships (LLPs) are planned as locally-led collaborations between social work employers and education providers. LLPs aim to improve access to high-quality learning and development for both students and qualified social workers, and to strengthen the connection between education and practice.

We're holding online sessions to introduce the LLP model and to support attendees to reflect on their local readiness. We'll explore five core components of the model, share a practical self-evaluation tool, and discuss how a test-and-learn approach can help local areas build on their existing strengths.

Please register to attend:

- [Exploring Readiness: Local Learning Partnerships - Thu, Nov 27, 2025 at 2:00 PM | Eventbrite](#)
- [Exploring Readiness: Local Learning Partnerships - Tue, Dec 2, 2025 at 10:00 AM | Eventbrite](#)



SSWP workforce planning priority:

Workforce planning is broadly understood as a process of ensuring that a workforce has an appropriate number of workers, of the right type, in the right place, at the right time. A wider description might include several stages, from the initial planning stage of establishing supply and demand, continuing through issues such as recruitment and retention; training, education and development; employment conditions; and supporting and nurturing workers in the workplace.

Social work employers in Scotland have varied influences on their approaches to workforce planning. This can include the context they operate in; their workforce planning capacity; how or if they plan alongside other linked workforces; the size of their workforce; and the type of organisation or sector they represent. Local labour markets also vary across the country, often shaped by rural or urban geography.

The SSWP will, in the first instance, establish and analyse an up-to-date profile of the social worker workforce at the national level, based on readily available data, alongside local insights. This will be supported by work to help establish the demand for social workers, using local information; together with contextual work to establish the wider issues influencing social work workforce planning; while improving our shared understanding of the workforce planning perspectives of key partners.

An SSWP Workforce Planning Core Group held its first meeting in October and will refine a workplan during November to take forward the above actions over the coming months. It is proposed that the outputs from the workplan will help to shape a national workforce plan for social work.

SSWP professional governance and leadership priority:

- **Professional and Care Governance Framework**

A new professional and care governance framework, developed by a group of six chief social work officers (CSWOs), has been shared with the wider CSWO network. The next phase will bring together a group to explore how this framework can be applied locally and ensure it aligns with leadership reflections from the Care Inspectorate's [Review of social work governance and assurance across Scotland](#).

- **Topical Leadership Development Sessions**

Bespoke leadership development content is being created for social work leaders, including CSWOs, focusing on their responsibilities as overseers of mental health officer activity. This commissioned work, owned by Social Work Scotland, will be available from March 2026.

Additionally, transformative leadership support for self-directed support is being developed by Social Work Scotland-hosted SDS Team. Guidance for agency decision makers is also in the pipeline.

- **Mentoring Framework**

Following collaboration with the University of Dundee and Glasgow Caledonian University, Social Work Scotland is facilitating a mentoring framework for



CSWOs. This will provide valuable mentoring for current and future cohorts of the CSWO award.

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

