



GRADUATE APPRENTICESHIP IN SOCIAL WORK

Overview

This apprenticeship is designed to support the development of apprentices working in the social services sector, specifically in the role of Social Worker. The goal of the apprenticeship is to achieve the relevant skills and knowledge required and set out by the regulatory body for social workers, the **Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)**. Successful completion of the GA Social Work will result in the award of BA(Hons) Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship) and eligibility to register with the SSSC as a social worker in Scotland.

Duration

This apprenticeship is expected to take up to 48 months to complete

Level

SCQF Level 10. More information on SCQF Credit Rating can be found [here](#).

Qualification achieved

Apprentices will achieve the following qualification:

- BA (Hons) in Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship) at SCQF Level 10

INTRODUCTION

THE APPRENTICESHIP

META-SKILLS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

BEFORE THE APPRENTICESHIP

DURING THE APPRENTICESHIP

AT THE END OF THE APPRENTICESHIP



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Click on the section you would like to view or scroll through the pages.

The home button in the top right corner of the page will bring you back here!

Apprenticeships aim to provide mixture of on-the-job (in the workplace) and off-the-job (through day or block release) learning to enable people to develop the knowledge, skills and expertise required by businesses today.

Designed by employers to attract new talent, tackle critical skills shortages and develop existing workforces, apprenticeships can both help people to enter the world of work and develop the skills of those already in work

About Scottish Apprenticeships

Scottish Apprenticeships are for everyone and reflect the Government's commitment to promoting a world-class, inclusive, work-based learning system. They are administered by **Skills Development Scotland**, the National Skills Agency. Skills Development Scotland has a remit to contribute to the nation's economic growth and it does this by supporting individuals and businesses alike to develop and apply their skills in the workplace.

The Scottish Apprenticeship system focuses on three specific key elements:

- The **learning outcomes** aligned to the specific work situations of an apprentice's job;
- The **knowledge, skills and behaviours** that will be developed by apprentices, enabling them to work competently and confidently; and
- The **meta-skills** that will be developed by apprentices to help them to manage themselves, collaborate with others and interact with change.

Throughout their apprenticeship, apprentices will be supported and guided by their employer, mentor and learning provider, and will have their growing competence measured by an assessor to ensure they can perform their job to the standard required. On successful completion, apprentices will be awarded nationally recognised competence-based and/or professional qualifications in their chosen field.

Find further information on funding and eligibility of Scottish Apprenticeships **here**.

Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs)

- Are accredited work-based learning programmes that lead to degrees or degree-level, professionally recognised qualifications
- Are part of the apprenticeship family, supporting the transition into employment by providing work-based learning pathways from Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships to Graduate Apprenticeships at SCQF Levels 9-11
- Have been developed as part of the Scottish Government's approach to developing Scotland's young workforce and Skills Development Scotland's work-based learning strategy

About this standard and framework document

Working in partnership with businesses and stakeholders, this standard and framework document has been written to provide apprentices and employers with an overview of the key features of this apprenticeship. Please read this alongside the **Social Worker Occupation Profile**.

Find further information on apprenticeships **here**!

This apprenticeship is designed to support the Social Worker role to ensure that all new entrants to the profession meet the statutory requirements outlined by the regulatory body: the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

‘Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing’ (International Federation of Social Work, 2014).

Apprentices will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes by the end of their apprenticeship.

- Recognise and understand the role and responsibilities of a Social Worker.
- Recognise and understand the impact of trauma on people’s lives.
- Recognise and understand legal, policy and practice frameworks that underpin social work.
- Prepare for practice with people, professionals and organisations.
- Build transformative relationships with adults, children, families, carers, groups, communities and organisations.
- Conduct assessments using a range of methods, models and approaches.
- Undertake social work interventions using appropriate methods, models and approaches.
- Review and evaluate practice.
- Assess and manage risk to people who use services.
- Assess and manage risk to self and colleagues.
- Apply theory, research, values and ethics to social work practice.
- Manage and be accountable for your own social work practice, learning, professional development, and management of resources.
- Manage and be accountable for data protection and the sharing of information with relevant parties.
- Manage and be accountable for decision-making in multi-disciplinary forums.
- Promote independence, empowerment and citizen leadership.
- Develop meta-skills through a process of regular reflection, coaching, feedback and personal development.

This apprenticeship is designed to develop apprentices' careers by developing their knowledge and understanding of their role, by increasing their skills and by enhancing their behaviours.

Employers from social work have helped to identify the key knowledge, skills and behaviours that graduate apprenticeships working in a social worker role need to develop. Throughout their apprenticeship, apprentices should be regularly assessed to ensure they can demonstrate both know-how and ability in each of these areas; a high-level summary is provided below.

A full list of the **knowledge, skills and behaviours** can be found in the associated [Social Worker Occupation Profile](#).



Knowledge

- Role and Purpose of Social Work
- Values and Ethics
- Relationship-Based Practice
- Professional Boundaries
- Critical Reflection and Reflexivity
- Legal Framework
- Policy and Practice Frameworks
- Assessment and Risk
- Intervention Models
- Trauma-Informed Practice
- Structural Inequalities
- Intersectionality
- Human Development Theories
- Protection and Safeguarding



Skills

- Relationship Building
- Assessment Skills & Task Management
- Goal Setting and Planning
- Professional Judgement
- Critical Reflection and Curiosity
- Recording and Reporting
- Research-Minded Practice
- Ethical Decision-Making
- Communication
- Digital Literacy
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Crisis Intervention
- Boundaries and Conflict Resolution
- Self Care and Emotional Intelligence



Behaviours

- Social Justice and Equality
- Anti-Oppression and Diversity
- Human Rights and Dignity
- Self-Determination
- Empowerment and Co-Production
- Integrity and Accountability
- Ethical and Professional Conduct
- Public Trust
- Professional Curiosity and Challenge
- Leadership and Development
- Research and Lifelong Learning

Meta-skills sit alongside and complement technical knowledge, skills and behaviours. As technology, society and the way we work change at an ever-increasing pace, so meta-skills are the overarching and future-focused attributes that enable other skills to be developed through consideration, reflection and implementation.

Meta-skills support improved performance and productivity, greater adaptability and resilience to change. For apprentices, meta-skills are a critical asset, supporting their ability to cope and excel in the face of change, to solve problems, to collaborate with others and to create successful futures. There are three categories, each with four meta-skills.

Managing yourself - focus, integrity, adaptability and initiative

Connecting with others - communication, feeling, collaboration and leadership

Interacting with change - curiosity, creativity, sense-making and critical thinking

Developing 12 meta-skills in Social Work

Supported by their employer, mentor and learning provider, apprentices should consider, practise and reflect on their use of meta-skills during their apprenticeship, building those skills to enhance their personal effectiveness in their present role and their future careers.



Managing yourself

A clear **focus** is required to ensure that practice is anchored by values and carried out ethically, safely and effectively – guided by legal and policy frameworks; **integrity** is essential when communicating and working in

partnership with people, ensuring that confidentiality, transparency, honesty and respect are front and centre of practice; **adaptability** is key to being a responsive social worker, capable of critical reflection and reflexivity – demonstrating emotional intelligence and professionalism at all times; and using **initiative** is critical to demonstrating leadership capabilities across dimensions of practice where working autonomously and applying professional judgement are required.



Connecting with others

Clear and effective **communication** with colleagues, other professionals, organisations and, vitally, people who use services, is one of the most significant aspects of this type of role; **feeling** is needed to practice in a compassionate, reflective, person-centred and trauma-informed way; skills in **collaboration** are vital when co-producing assessments, plans and interventions with a diverse range of people, professionals and organisations; and strong **leadership** qualities are required when working autonomously, applying professional judgment, influencing others and contributing to the learning and professional development of colleagues.



Interacting with change

A keen sense of **curiosity** is a critical asset when assessing needs and risks, ensuring that a wide range of probabilities are explored, critically analysed and synthesised to inform and underpin decision-making and professional judgement; **creativity** is fundamental to effective practice with a range of diverse people, professionals and organisations, ensuring that diverse needs are met and solutions found for challenges emerging from competing perspectives; **sense-making** comes into play when assessing complex situations, analysing and synthesising information, applying professional judgement – all important to ensuring that decisions are defensible, accountable, and informed by evidence; and **critical thinking** is key when analysing and making sense of information and evidence, ensuring that quality, relevance and reliability inform judgement and decision-making.

A number of different parties will be involved in the delivery, management and assessment of a successful apprenticeship. As well as the apprentice, key roles include employer, mentor, learning provider and assessor. Each has a specific set of responsibilities during the apprenticeship.

Apprentice Responsibilities

In their day-to-day roles, apprentices have the same responsibilities to their employer as any other employee but they have additional and specific responsibilities for their own learning and development too.

- Agreeing a learning/ development plan with all parties involved and following it through
- Committing to learning throughout the duration of apprenticeship
- Participating in progress meetings with employer and learning provider representatives
- Participating in off-the-job learning where required
- Reflecting on performance and on development of skills, knowledge and behaviours required of the role
- Agreeing new goals to progress learning with all parties involved

Employer Responsibilities

- Providing apprentices with a contract of employment, a job description and an induction Programme
- Paying apprentices in line with company policy, current legislation, fair work principles, and equality and diversity expectations
- Ensuring a working environment that is free from discrimination, bullying and harassment

- Agreeing learning needs and a learning and development plan with the learning provider and apprentices including
 - Agreeing when off-the-job learning will be required and releasing apprentices for this as required
 - Making on-the-job learning arrangements
 - Identifying additional support requirements and agreeing actions to implement these
- Providing a quality work-based learning environment for apprentices, including the facilities and training necessary to demonstrate competence and succeed in the apprenticeship
- Providing the support of a mentor, who has relevant industry experience and is familiar with the employer's business, to support apprentices' development
- Contributing to the ongoing assessment of occupational competence, including observing performance, verifying evidence and profiling meta-skills
- Meeting with apprentices and learning providers to review apprentices' progress and set future goals
- Providing an environment that supports apprentices to take responsibility for their own learning and development
- Supporting and encouraging apprentices during their apprenticeship
- Recognising the achievements of apprentices in career management and progression
- Providing constructive feedback to the learning provider on the quality of their service delivery to inform continuous improvement of both the Scottish Apprenticeships system and apprentices themselves



Mentor Responsibilities

- Helping new apprentices orientate into the workplace
- Providing information, advice and guidance relating to the learning and assessment aspects of the apprenticeship
- Supporting apprentices to define meta-skills in their shared work context
- Working with apprentices, employers and learning providers to ensure problems are resolved quickly
- Acting as an expert witness for apprentices
- Providing support to apprentices as they adjust to the workplace and progress in their career

- Compiling and agreeing learning and development plans and assessment plans with apprentices and employers
- Completing assessment records and submitting records and evidence for verification/moderation
- Reviewing apprentices' progress at regular intervals with the employer
- Supporting apprentices to develop their reflective practice
- Advising apprentices who to approach for support, advice and encouragement both within and out with the workplace
- Seeking and providing feedback from and to employers and apprentices to inform continuous improvement of the Scottish Apprenticeships system and apprentices themselves



Learning Provider Responsibilities

- Providing an appropriate apprenticeship programme for apprentices and employers
- Agreeing the learning needs of the apprentices with both the apprentice and the employer
- Agreeing when off-the-job learning will be required and defining roles and responsibilities for this with relevant parties
- Ensuring apprentices have access to the best quality learning opportunities available
- Ensuring apprentices and employers fully understand the principles and processes of competence-based assessment
- Registering apprentices through MA Online and with relevant awarding bodies, sector skills organisations and Skills Development Scotland as appropriate



Assessor Responsibilities

- Meeting with apprentices, mentors and employers to plan learning and review progress
- Monitoring apprentices' progress against learning and development plans
- Observing and assessing apprentices in the workplace and judging whether their work meets the competence requirements set by the qualification awarding body
- Assessing different types of evidence from apprentices
- Providing constructive feedback on performance and offering suggestions for improvement
- Maintaining current knowledge of industry standards and seeking innovative new methods of work-based learning delivery

The recruitment of apprentices is primarily the responsibility of the employer and, before an apprenticeship starts, consideration should be given to entry requirements and also to ensuring that the workplace adheres to fair work, inclusion and diversity principles.

The recommended entry requirements for this apprenticeship are informed by [Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education \(SSSC, 2024\)](#). Approved providers must ensure that the following conditions are met:

Make sure that the candidate meets the university's admission requirements for the GA degree or meets the SSSC admission requirements whichever are set at the higher level.

Use selection procedures that take account of the candidate's strengths and areas for development; and exclude individuals who would not meet the SSSC's registration conditions.

Make sure that the candidate is registered on the part of the Scottish Social Services Council's (SSSC) register for students. (The SSSC's registration requirements will normally be completed by the beginning of the course and will include relevant suitability checks. A student will not be able to start practice learning in a service delivery setting unless they are registered.)

Make sure that selection policies and procedures include effective and appropriate ways of involving key stakeholders in social services. ('Stakeholders' include people who use services, carers and employers.)

Literacy Requirements

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must confirm on entry to the programme that students:

- Can demonstrate proficiency in English language
- Have capability in literacy to meet programme outcomes
- Have capability for digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes

These skills would normally be equivalent at point of entry to the programme to a minimum Grade C at National 5 or equivalent. Literacy skills may also be evidenced by a test at point of interview mapped against SCQF Level 5 or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) at Level 7.

It is essential for students to demonstrate skills in literacy and criticality over the course of the degree programmes to fully meet the [Standards in Social Work Education \(SiSWE\)](#).

Numeracy Requirements

Make sure that the candidate has one of the following:

- The numerical skills required to understand the course materials and meet the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE), for example: financial assessment; budgetary procedures; managing care plans and resources; interpreting graphical data.

These skills would normally be equivalent to a minimum SCQF level 5 Core Skills Numeracy at Grade C. Core Skills level 5 numeracy is a component of National 5 -Applications of Mathematics and National 5 -Mathematics. The Scottish Qualifications Certificate documents the Core Skills Profile. Numeracy skills may also be evidenced by a numeracy test at point of interview mapped against SCQF Level 5.

- The ability and opportunity to learn and to demonstrate the required numerical skills while studying for the degree, for example successful completion of an undergraduate statistics or data skills module in their first year.

In addition to the requirements note above, each university will have its own process and criteria for admission. Candidates are encouraged to contact each provider to see if requirements for entry are met, and to find out more about processes for recognition of prior learning and experience.

Pathways to Entry

Along with recognised qualifications such as National 4/5, Highers, Standard Grades, HNC/ HND in social care / social services / social science (candidates with a relevant degree may also be considered), other Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships can support a portfolio of relevant qualifications and experience. These include:

- Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare at SCQF Level 6
- Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services (Children and Young People) at SCQF Level 6
- Modern Apprenticeship in Social Services (Children and Young People) at SCQF Level 7
- Modern Apprenticeship in Youthwork at SCQF Level 6
- Modern Apprenticeship in Youthwork at SCQF Level 7

Candidates are encouraged to discuss entry requirements in advance with approved providers of the GA in Social Work. Each provider will have their own criteria and process for admissions where prior learning (see below) and experience may be taken into account.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Individuals applying for an apprenticeship will undergo selection based on the employer's existing HR processes. Learning providers should take account of this and liaise with employers to provide advice and guidance on any RPL and experience that will be accepted for entry onto the programme.

It is recommended that a flexible approach to RPL is adopted, on

a case-by-case basis, with all relevant experience as well as any previous qualifications considered. Learning providers should always consider how they can best recognise apprentices' prior learning to minimise repetition of content. You can find more information on RPL [here](#).

This may include Technical Apprenticeships, such as:

- Technical Apprenticeship Social Services (Children and Young People) Technical at SCQF Level 9
- Technical Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare at SCQF Level 9
- Technical Apprenticeship in Care Services Leadership and Management Professional at SCQF Level 10

Apprenticeship agreement and employment status

All post-school apprentices must hold a contract of employment for the period of the apprenticeship.

In addition, an apprenticeship agreement, confirming the commitment of the employer, the apprentice and the learning provider to the agreed apprenticeship must be signed by all parties. This agreement forms part of the individual employment arrangements between the apprentice and the employer; and of the learning arrangements between the learning provider, the employer and the apprentice.

Registration and certification

Registration and certification of this apprenticeship is undertaken through Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). It is the responsibility of the learning provider to ensure that the registration of apprentices is completed within four weeks of the start of their apprenticeship.

Fair work, inclusion and diversity

The Scottish Apprenticeships system aims to embed fair work principles. Fair Work First is the Scottish Government's flagship policy for driving high quality and fair work across the labour market in Scotland by applying fair work criteria to grants, other funding and contracts being awarded by and across the public sector, where it is relevant to do so. Through this approach the Scottish Government is asking employers to adopt fair working practices, specifically:

- Appropriate channels for effective voice, such as trade union recognition;
- Investment in workforce development;
- No inappropriate use of zero hours contracts;
- Action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace; and
- Payment of at least the minimum Living Wage.

Further guidance on Fair Work First is available here <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fair-work-first-guidance-support-implementation/>

The design and development of Scottish Apprenticeships aims to embed these principles in practical ways by including opportunities for feedback from apprentices as well as the availability of clear pathways into future opportunities beyond the apprenticeship itself.

Protected characteristics

The Equality Act 2010 includes nine protected characteristics, which are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex and sexual orientation. It is against the law to discriminate based on these protected characteristics. Skills Development Scotland is a **Corporate Parent** and, to that end, includes 'care experienced' in a similar way to protected characteristics in all its funded programmes and services.

Attracting the best people into apprenticeships involves ensuring that barriers are removed. Receiving the right support at the right time unlocks the potential of people who could otherwise be denied the opportunity to go on and become valued employees. Supporting people to feel confident about disclosing their protected characteristics in a safe and respectful way allows employers and learning providers to put the right conditions in place to unlock that potential; the right time for this is often at the start of an apprenticeship or even at the recruitment stage. In practice, it might involve ensuring that reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate apprentices, where that is possible and to help them make the most of their apprenticeship journey. Examples might include (but are not limited to) supporting people with sensory impairments, supporting people for whom English is not their first language and supporting people who are care experienced (for example, through fostering, adoption or residential care).

Diversity in Social Work

Official statistics provided by workforce regulator the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) state that there are 10,914 registered social workers in Scotland, of which 6212 are practising in local authorities in Scotland. A further 4702 registered social workers are not practising in statutory services, but are employed in third or private sector agencies across Scotland. The regulator also reports annually on the profile of the entire registered, social services workforce across various categories. The [SSSC Registration Report \(2023-24\)](#) illustrates that the average age of registered social workers in Scotland across all service provision (local authority, third sector and private agencies) is 52 years. The same report shows that “the percentage of men working in the social services sector is 16%, although it is around double or greater that proportion in criminal justice social work and residential children’s services”.

In June 2024 the SSSC also published a [report](#) indicating that demand for social workers in the statutory sector has increased in recent years, and highlighting that the number of social workers per 100,000 has risen from 99 to 113 across the country. This varies according to local area needs, however whilst there has been an increase in demand and an increase in the number of registered social workers practising, data also illustrates that vacancies continue to be problematic for employers to fill. The most recent 6 monthly vacancy report illustrates 596 WTE vacancies across 29 local authorities. In total there are more than double the number of social worker vacancies since 2020. Across main grade roles, vacancies are reported across services as: Adult 11.6%, Children 10.1% and Justice 7.3%, providing an overall vacancy rate across all services of 9.3%. More than half of the local authorities providing vacancy data had rates higher than this.

Data from the SSSC register as of April 2025, indicates that the majority (52.8% / 5,830) of individuals registered as social workers, were aged 45 years and over, with only 20.1% (2,177) under the age of 34. Data also states that the majority (81.2% / 8,794) of those employed were female. Of those employed as social workers 12% identified as having a disability, with 2% noting multiple conditions.

In the narrative reported by employers, too few applicants is the primary reason for vacancies in statutory services, but reference to challenges in retaining experienced staff is also made. Further, the report states that respondents indicated a competitive market resulting from the shortage of suitable applicants. Recruitment and retention challenges are further concerning because of the age profile of registered social workers highlighted above. Overall, the regulator summarises the potential trend of a national shortage of qualified social workers.

The capacity crisis in the social work professional workforce serves as an additional driver to ensuring a sustainable inflow of graduates to the workforce, at a time of rising demand for social work skills and knowledge. Whilst offering high quality training in the profession, existing routes into social work have limited scope to support widening access to the extent required, and which would largely benefit, the social work profession. Structural barriers may result in prospective candidates being unable to attend a traditional full-time course due to their geographical location, limited financial means and/or caring commitments. This includes people with experience of using social work and/or social care services and are the candidates requiring encouragement and support to train. Having first-hand experience of using services brings an extremely valuable perspective to the social work role.

Once the apprenticeship starts, there are a number of key considerations, tasks and milestones that apprentices, employers, learning providers, mentors and assessors should undertake to optimise a successful outcome for all parties.

Work-based Learning

Work-based learning – aligned to and assessed against both the **learning outcomes** and the **knowledge, skills and behaviours** of the apprenticeship – is the central and most significant component of an apprenticeship and is based on apprentices' real-life experiences in the workplace. Work-based learning is a partnership between apprentice, employer and learning provider and all apprentices must have the support of a mentor in the workplace.

Get more information on work-based learning [here](#).

Meta-skills Development

This apprenticeship includes a learning outcome that provides opportunities to develop meta-skills. To effectively develop the 12 meta-skills outlined earlier, apprentices must first understand what they are and how they might apply them in their role. To help with this, a simple exercise to define what the 12 meta-skills mean in their role (in language that both apprentice and employer are comfortable with) should be used. This will allow apprentices to consider their own meta-skills profile and which meta-skills they might need to develop or apply in order to perform effectively at work.

Setting development goals, action planning and regularly reflecting on progress will help apprentices to develop their meta-skills and it is vital to provide the time and space for reflections to take place. Naturally

occurring opportunities to discuss and reflect on meta-skills might include inductions or performance management, career development and performance review sessions.

Delivery of Training

The graduate apprenticeship in social work is a full-time undergraduate programme which typically takes four years to complete. This culminates in the award of a BA (Hons) in Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship). This qualification meets the SSSC requirements for registration as a professionally qualified social worker in Scotland. Each approved provider will have its own mode, sequence and structure of delivery, and each Higher Education Institution (HEI) will have its own teaching and learning strategy to underpin its approach. The Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (SSSC, 2024) states that all providers must:

Design the content, structure and delivery of the learning to allow social work students to show that they can meet the SiSWE and are suitable to be registered with the SSSC.

Support students throughout the programme in continuously developing their abilities in numeracy, literacy, digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes and prepare for professional practice.

Ensure that the programme is continually updated as a result of developments in legislation, government policy and best practice so students have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need.

Have mechanisms in place to engage with key stakeholders in social services to ensure that policies and procedures for assessments are

Ensure that students' achievement against the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) is regularly and accurately assessed and confirm that all social work students have been assessed and have met all the learning outcomes before they are awarded the degree in social work.

Ensure that transition to work preparation is in place and that students' continuing learning requirements are recorded in an individual learning plan that they can take with them into their career in social work.

Practice Learning

Assessed periods of practice learning have always been a critical part of social work education. This will be no different for the GA Social Work pathway. The Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (SSSC, 2024) states that a Practice Learning Opportunity or Practice Placement is a period of time in which Social Work Students are based in a service delivery setting in the statutory, private or voluntary sector. The setting must provide the learning opportunities necessary for the student to meet The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE). There should be a minimum of two periods of practice learning. Each period of practice learning should include a minimum of three observations of direct practice, two of which must be conducted by the allocated Practice Educator. The third must be conducted by someone approved by the allocated practice educator but who is not necessarily a qualified practice educator themselves. A minimum of two observations of practice must involve direct work with people using the service. The student must demonstrate the ability to use critical reflection and link theory to practice in both placements. The student must have a different practice educator for each period of assessed practice learning.

Learning providers must ensure that all students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe and competent to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting. Assessed preparation for direct practice is different from direct practice and should not count towards the placement days.

All social work students must spend a minimum of 180 days in practice learning. Practice learning is supervised, direct practice in a service delivery setting in which the student actively participates in the day-to-day work of the team and is formally assessed whilst doing so. The equivalent of half a day for every five practice days and a maximum of two university recall days are allocated reflective study time and count as part of the practice placement.

Learning providers must ensure that assessed practice learning is structured over the course of the degree programme to allow students to gain experience and develop abilities through undertaking a minimum of one period of practice learning that lasts for at least 80 days and includes experience of statutory social work functions and tasks involving legal interventions, including but not limited to the protection of children and vulnerable adults ideally in a local authority setting.

In partnership with employers and organisations, learning providers must ensure that practice learning opportunities offer contrast both between placements and between the placement and the students usual place of work, offering a breadth of opportunity between sectors of the workplace and the groups of people who use our services.

Students must not undertake the primary or lead role in child protection, adult support and protection or the supervision and management of sex offenders.

Integrated Learning

Social work education has a long history of integrated learning in Scotland. Theory and real-world experience share a critical interdependence which results in co-produced knowledge and skills for students as they apply learning across a range of live and simulated practice experiences (Kettle et al., 2016). Previous reviews of social work education have concluded that qualifying pathways should be viewed as ‘foundational’ and not accepted as the conclusion of a social worker’s training (McCulloch, 2018). Research demonstrates that newly qualified social workers feel that the integrated nature of social work education prepared them well for practice (Grant et al., 2017; 2022). Learning and professional development are lifelong processes, with a shared responsibility between education providers and employers to support and provide experiences to enable practitioners to grow and develop (McCulloch and Taylor, 2018). The wider impact of social work education on self-development and self-fulfilment must also be recognised as added value to any potential apprentice looking for personal as well as professional gains from their social work training (Butler-Warke and Bolger, 2020). The social work apprenticeship therefore offers the opportunity for students to fully immerse in the process of integrated learning in real time where significant benefits extend beyond the classroom and across the entirety of careers.

Social work students will typically receive foundational knowledge from classroom learning (largely drawn from social sciences and psychology), including opportunities to simulate the application of knowledge whilst developing social work skills and techniques required for practice (usually across Years’ 1 and 2 of taught provision). Social work students will normally consolidate their knowledge and understanding during assessed periods of practice learning (typically across Years’ 3 and 4) where all students are required to demonstrate competence across six Standards in Social Work Education and

Ethical Principles (SSSC, 2019). Each academic year will typically follow principles of constructive alignment where learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment methods are designed in tandem to create a cohesive and effective learning experience for students. Dimensions of knowledge and understanding often build upon each other in terms of depth, complexity and challenge over each level. Students are expected, in particular, to develop core skills in critical thinking and analysis as they progress on the apprenticeship, with each stage requiring evidence of improvements in competence and confidence across core areas of social work practice. A constructivist approach also underpins how knowledge is co-produced between the student and their learning environment and students will benefit from integrating and consolidating their learning in real time at their place of work throughout the entire duration of this degree, ensuring that principles of experiential learning remain front and centre of their apprenticeship.

A learning and development plan and an assessment plan should be developed and regularly updated for all Graduate Apprentices. These documents will also identify any additional needs and help employers and learning providers provide apprentices with the appropriate support or adaptations required to successfully complete their apprenticeship. There is also an expectation that all social work students will complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to support their transition into the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQS) Supported Year in practice. Each HEI will have its own arrangements for supporting GA’s to complete this towards end of their apprenticeship (see page 17 for more information on the Supported Year).

Approaches to Assessment

Apprentices are expected to provide evidence of meeting the learning outcomes and the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of this apprenticeship; also, evidence to demonstrate that they are competent in the workplace. It is important for apprentices to recognise how they have developed skills and understanding along the way, and where these still need to be developed.

Observation, questioning and examination of product evidence

This three-method approach classifies all assessments under observation, questioning and examination of product evidence. It is therefore based on the development of a portfolio of work and regular reflection on learning and skills development through professional dialogue between apprentices and mentors, employers and learning providers.

Holistic assessment

The holistic approach allows larger pieces of work to evidence a number of learning outcomes, rather than a piecemeal process of finding separate evidence for each outcome and/or its associated knowledge, skills and behaviours. Work-based projects or problem-based activities often provide the richest opportunities for holistic assessment.

Each HEI will decide on the most appropriate methods of assessment to meet the learning outcomes for each module provided on their own GA social work programme. Students will evidence a broad range of knowledge, skills and behaviours whilst engaging in assessed periods of practice learning, including the application of theory to practice and ability to undertake social work roles and tasks with growing autonomy and professionalism. Principles of constructive alignment will ensure that learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment methods are designed in tandem to create a cohesive and effective learning experience for students.

Quality assurance

SFC expects universities to have in place processes for assuring and enhancing academic standards and the quality of the student experience. This includes an expectation that institutions operate systems of annual monitoring and periodic Institution Led Quality Review across the full range of their provision, including GAs.

Outcomes of these activities should include identifying areas of both improvement and good practice, and actions to deliver enhancement for consideration at institutional level.

The Quality Standards that apply to GA Providers can be accessed on SFC's Quality in Scotland's universities section on the [Learning and Quality webpage](#).

The Quality Standards assess the extent to which each provider maintains capacity and capability to successfully deliver quality provider services throughout the period of delivery.

The relevant awarding and accreditation bodies will undertake the quality assurance of the assessment of competence-based and professional qualifications.

Learning providers are responsible for assuring and enhancing the quality of degree provision through engagement with [Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework](#).

Institutions must utilise these Quality Standards, combined with existing quality assurance and enhancement arrangements, to ensure a high-quality experience for GA students.

Qualification Requirements

Competence-based qualification

Through their apprenticeship, apprentices must complete the following competence-based qualification. This qualification brings together the development and assessment of all the **learning outcomes and knowledge, skills and behaviours** required of the role in a single qualification. It includes meta-skills development and assessment, which are integrated with technical skills.

- BA (Hons) in Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship) at SCQF Level 10

Pathways and Progression

A successfully completed apprenticeship, including the achievement of competence-based and professional qualifications, opens the door to a number of opportunities for progression in both work and further learning.

Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year

All newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) in Scotland will undertake a Supported Year in practice. This is aligned to SSSC registration and the responsibilities and entitlements afforded to registered social workers. The aim here is to ensure that all NQSWs have access to support and development opportunities which consolidate social work education and help develop professional identity and social work practice. Principles of the NQSW Supported Year include:

- Being developmental in nature
- Valuing different ways in which social workers learn
- Promoting professional identity
- Having a transparent process

Employers should support the transition of NQSWs into the workplace by ensuring that minimum expectations are met around the following:

- Induction
- Professional development
- Professional supervision
- Continuous professional learning
- Protected case-load
- Protected learning time
- Peer support and mentoring

In addition to the learning and assessment plans used throughout the apprenticeship, all GA Social Work students will complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) in the final stages of their programme at university. This document builds on the earlier learning plans and forms a link between social work education and workplace learning and situate supervision and professional development at the centre of the NQSW Supported Year moving forward. NQSWs will engage in a structured approach to discussing and reviewing professional development at fixed points during the NQSW Supported Year in addition to discussion as part of regular supervision. NQSWs will be expected to evidence learning and development across the following core elements:

- Ethics, values and rights-based practice
- Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice
- Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making
- Promoting well-being, support and protection
- Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts
- Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice
- Self-awareness and reflexivity
- Professional leadership

Career Advancement

Successful apprentices may progress to senior and specialist roles, such as Senior Social Worker / Team Manager, Mental Health Officer (MHO), Practice Educator, Care Inspector, Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO).

Further Study

Options for those wishing to pursue further professional learning and development include:

- Professional Development Award in Practice Learning at SCQF Levels 10 and 11
- Mental Health Officer Award at SCQF Level 11
- Post Graduate Diploma Chief Social Work Officer at SCQF Level 11
- Professional Development Award in Scrutiny and Improvement Practice (Social Services) at SCQF Level 10
- PhD or Professional Doctorate at SCQF Level 12
- A number of HEI's offer specialist post-graduate courses for social workers at certificate, diploma and Masters level.



Pathways and Progression

This apprenticeship will support professional recognition as it includes learning and skills outcomes common to a number of the introductory professional qualifications relevant to the social services sector. The apprentice, employer and learning provider will determine the most appropriate professional pathway in light of the apprentice's specific work role and the learning provider will guide each successful apprentice on the professional registration process they should follow. It is compulsory that all apprentices on the GA Social Work programme are registered with the Scottish Social Services Council as a student social worker. Eligibility for registration as a social worker is only possible after successfully completing the GA Social Work programme and achieving the award of BA(Hons) Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship).

Version Number	Date	Description
Version 1	September 2025	New apprenticeship