

# Revised Standards in Social Work Education and a benchmark Standard for Newly Qualified Social Workers

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## Remit

The remit for this project is to meet the following objectives.

a) Develop a revised set of Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE). These will underpin the social work degree qualifying programmes and the work is to include the following.

- Robust revision of the SiSWE with reference to the recommendations in the Dunworth and Gordon [Mapping of SiSWE to the National Occupational Standards 2014 - Scottish Social Services Council \(SSSC\)](#).
- Further evidence from phase 1 work of the Review of Social Work Education which might reasonably be addressed through revision or addition to the SiSWE. This should include clear reference to how the involvement and engagement of people who use services and their carers can be enhanced within the standards.
- Consider the extent to which the recommendations regarding values (from the mapping report cited above) can be addressed through additional learning foci or via an overarching statement of principles.
- Ensure that changes or additions to the 'demonstrable competencies' in the SiSWE are supported by equivalent changes to knowledge and transferable skills.
- Consider and recommend the extent to which the [Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection](#) should be integrated into the revised standards
- In writing the revised standards consider the issues raised in the Equalities Impact Assessment completed in respect of the current SiSWE.

b) Develop a benchmark standard for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs). This standard will describe the competencies to be achieved by a social worker during their first year in practice after qualification and the work is to include the following.

- Clear reference and connection to the revised SiSWE.
- Reference to recent SSSC commissioned research about the experience of NQSWs: Glasgow Caledonian University 2014 [Readiness for Practice of NQSW 2014 - SSSC](#).
- Reference to other relevant research including: CELCIS and Strathclyde University 2014 [Scottish First-line Managers' Views of NQSWs preparedness for practice - SSSC](#).
- A description of how and what knowledge, transferable skills, values and capabilities should be consolidated during this transition period, and how the synthesis of social worker as professional, practitioner and social scientist is demonstrated.
- Reference and connections with current relevant frameworks for example, the continuous learning framework, sector leadership capabilities.

- Reference and connections to current policy drivers, for example, self-directed support, health and social care integration.
- Reference to existing approaches in other professions and /or same professions in the UK and internationally.

## **Part 1: Standards in Social Work Education in Scotland (SiSWE)**

### **Introduction**

Social work practice takes place in complex and demanding circumstances where the role of the social worker has adapted to become one of partnership with those who use services and with other professionals with whom they deliver integrated services. Those who engage with social work, whether by choice or by compulsion, have increasingly asserted the right to determine and shape their own tailored, personalised services. The social work role has evolved into that of working alongside and acknowledging equality in partnership. Finding the balance of power and authority in professional relationships is therefore increasingly challenging and establishing the unique contribution of social work within full integration requires a confident and authoritative workforce. The profession is highly sensitive to political and policy change and it is incumbent on the social worker to maintain her/his own professional update in relation to the statutory framework which determines how practice is shaped and delivered and in relation to the evidence base derived from emerging research. In developing and demonstrating the knowledge, skills and values set out below, the qualifying social worker is arguably better equipped to practice in contemporary circumstances.

### **The evidence base for changes to the SiSWE**

The starting point for this revision is the comprehensive mapping undertaken by Dunworth and Gordon (2014) where the existing Standards (SiSWE 2004) were compared to the later National Occupational Standards for social work (NOS 2012/13). This was a meticulous feat which also demonstrated impressive prescience in anticipating changes in the political landscape. The authors found that the comparison revealed variations in 'language, tone, approach and emphasis' (P8). Important and not too subtle changes had evolved in the therapeutic relationship between social worker and service user particularly the 'the shift towards the personalisation of services through co-production' (ibid). In that respect the changes proposed were future proofed and largely relevant to today's needs. The authors listed areas where change was deemed necessary and advisable but also warned about merely 'tinkering at the edges' of SiSWE. The revised standards below therefore incorporate throughout changes in language, tone and emphasis which represent the shift in the therapeutic relationship to one of equal partnership where service users are supported to gain control and manage their own, personalised services.

To some extent the revised standards below appear to have been 'tinkered with' but the alternative would have been a wholesale abandonment of a Framework which, it is acknowledged, has worked more than adequately for over a decade (Review of Social Work Education: Statement on Progress 2014-2015). The graduates it produces have received considerable attention in recent years in relation to the perceived strengths and weaknesses they demonstrate as new practitioners (Welsh et al 2014; Grant et al 2014, Gillies 2015, 2016) and this has led, as an initial response, to this current review of the SiSWE and to the recommendation for a more structured, supported first year in practice.

The remit for the review of SiSWE requires a robust revision and what follows may not prove radical enough for some observers. However, the exercise conjures up the old adage, 'if I was going there I wouldn't have started from here'. A different starting point may have been an abandonment of the SiSWE in favour of a wholesale adoption of the NOS albeit the original SiSWE were based on an earlier version of NOS (2002) and the revisions below have incorporated updated versions.

Dunworth and Gordon identify the need for some of the integral changes to be global and best represented in overarching statements. Accordingly, the revised standards below include a **Values** and **Principles** section which each contain expectations which will underpin all aspects of the student's activities.

More specific recommendations for change from Dunworth and Gordon relate to a shift in emphasis in how personal capabilities are demonstrated, the emphasis on risk, critical reflection as an underpinning requirement and, related to this, research mindedness and how professional identity can be demonstrated better. Each of these are considered and incorporated appropriately into the revised standards below.

The Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection were introduced to the Social Work degree some requirements in 2006 and remain an 'add on'. In some respects, this rendered the protection of children to be perceived as separate or additional, rather than fully integrated throughout professional social work practice and, arguably, this defeated the purpose somewhat. Students who are not undertaking their practice learning in what they consider 'traditional' social work settings, such as care homes for older people, or shelters for homeless people routinely complain they are unable to meet the Key Capabilities, and much effort is expended in explaining and demonstrating that the protection of children is fundamental to all practice. Margaret Bruce, one of the framework's authors, considers that context and role are fundamental and that students thinking in this way might reflect on why sectors of society are routinely segregated in such ways. It is more about understanding where communities fit together, the significance of childhood for adults in their present situation, the impact on adults and children of parenting and what happens when social workers overlook that (Bruce 2016.) Unlike the SiSWE the Capabilities are

levelled against SCQF Descriptors, making it clear what the minimum standards are for each year of the social work degree. The rationale for this was to make their introduction more palatable and manageable, although ironically this may not prepare early-stage students for the complexity of real life and unplanned situations encountered on practice learning placements (see Welch et al 2014). During this study, in focus group discussion with line managers it was agreed that the key capabilities should be integrated within the new standards but also the need to ensure that the Key Capabilities guidance is available. However, integration within the standards required inclusion of adult support and protection, the suggestion being to have a standard or learning focus that stated there should be knowledge in relation to care, support and protection across the lifespan, therefore both addressing children and adult protection. This has been addressed in the revisions below.

This review offers the overdue chance to incorporate issues of child (and now adult) protection as an underpinning and core requirement. As such, the responsibility for the protection of children and adults in any situation or setting is included in the overarching Principles, with the understanding that the Key Capabilities of Effective Communication, Knowledge and Understanding, Professional Confidence and Competence and Values and Ethical Practice, will provide the detailed knowledge skills and values. They remain a core requirement for successful completion of the degree. (A full review and integration of the Key Capabilities has been beyond the scope of this review process).

The equalities impact report, An Impact assessment of the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland in respect of disability equality and proposals for revision (Brown and Callaghan, 2010) makes a large number of recommendations about how the Framework should be revised, only a few of which were practicable within the scope of this project. While the report is now in danger of itself needing revision, it should be integrated into any revised curriculum.

The Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services (CLF) presents key elements of Personal Capabilities in Managing Relationships and Managing Self and of Organisational Capabilities. Many of the personal capabilities are reflected in the original and revised SiSWE, not least reference to more demonstrable professional confidence, personal and professional resilience and critical reflection in relation to how it contributes to self-assessment and awareness of the impact of actions on others. The alignment of the CLF with the original SiSWE remains less than fully integrated but its value is more readily acknowledged for those qualified and embarking on their career pathway. The organisational Capabilities have provided guidance on establishing Employer standards in relation to NQSW in Part 2 of this report.

The review of social work education (Phase 2) commissioned 12 areas of inquiry (AoI) to inform the review process and where appropriate and relevant the findings of these have been incorporated into the Standards. **It should be noted, however, that the rich and informative data emerging from these studies must be considered in relation to informing a revised curriculum, particularly if this is to become more standardised across Scotland (AoI 5) based on a shared philosophy of learning (AoI 4).**

Specifically, the involvement of service users and carers is more overtly expressed through consistent reference to partnership working and co-production **(AoI 2)**. New skills social workers will need in the future **(AoI 7)** considered not only digital and media literacy but wider skills including creativity (for example, in utilising knowledge of theory and assessment frameworks or in researching areas of interest), entrepreneurship (which was found to be lacking) and innovation (which was in considerable evidence in practice).

The report on leadership **(AoI 10)** found that leadership skills are fundamental to good social work practice (p10) while acknowledging the contested nature of leadership in the context of social work. The significance of effective leadership relates not only to the commitment to improved outcomes for people using services but also the heightened challenge of sustaining public services in the context of austerity (ibid). An emerging challenge therefore is how to reframe the concepts of leadership into a modern interpretation particularly through demonstrating strong values, challenging poor practice and advocating on behalf of others. The Leadership Capabilities Indicators provide six capabilities which focus on the values, attitudes and behaviour 'essential' to good leadership but their purpose is to demonstrate how leadership is possible at any stage in career development by providing exemplars. Where appropriate the capabilities have been incorporated in the revisions below.

The extent of the focus of community development and engagement in social work education **(AoI 3)** was found to be quite broad albeit it featured under different guises. The report makes the case for a considerably strengthened representation in order to better represent recent policy directives on strengthening communities and citizen leadership. Opportunities for Inter/multi professional learning **(AoI 6)** are increasingly important as social work's delivery now sits largely in services integrated with other professionals. In the revised standards below the promotion of the social work role and values has been strengthened in the multi-disciplinary context, reflecting the need for more overt professional confidence.

The revisions are in the draft Standards for Social Work Education (SiSWE).

## **Part 2: A benchmark Standard for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs)**

### **Remit and Aims: To develop a benchmark standard for newly qualified social workers.**

This standard will describe the competencies to be achieved by a social worker during their first year in practice after qualification. The SSSC commissioned the University of Stirling to carry out a project to a) develop a revised set of standards in education for social workers and b) develop benchmark standards for newly qualified social workers. This literature review aims to contribute towards the latter objective of the project, by providing a synthesis of literature to examine current systems and standards in place for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs). The findings of this literature review will inform the context for subsequent analysis and contribute towards setting the benchmark standards for NQSWs in Scotland.

### **Literature review: Introduction**

It is unrealistic to expect social workers to be fully developed professionals at time of qualification (Jack and Donnellan 2010), as the first year of practice is a crucial time period involving considerable learning and development (Marsh and Triseliotis 1996). Structured support provided in the post-qualification period is therefore critical for NQSWs so that they are assisted in their continuing development.

The main aim of this review is to bring together the body of literature which examines standards in place for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) across the United Kingdom. International literature will also be included where applicable in order to borrow learning from other countries. Additionally, studying the experiences of other professional groups such as teachers and nurses in this area can provide interesting comparisons and areas of transferability (Jack and Donnellan 2010). Therefore, useful insights will be drawn from literature relating to standards for newly qualified teachers and nurses to bring a wider perspective and a deeper insight into the supports in place for the helping professions across the UK.

The first section of this paper will set the context by briefly outlining the current measures in place for NQSWs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Discussion will then focus on the measures in place for Newly Qualified teachers and nurses. Section one of the review will conclude with a discussion on elements of the models which differ in order to provide some comparisons and conclusions. The second section of this review will focus upon a selection of themes emerging from the literature pertinent to NQSWs which predominantly relate to employer implications for NQSWs. Throughout and where relevant, insights and comparisons will be drawn from international and inter-professional research.

## Definition

For the purposes of this paper, the phrase newly qualified social worker (NQSW) will be used to denote a social worker who is in their first year of practice since qualifying from a recognised degree.

## Literature review section one: Comparison of schemes for NQSWs and newly qualified nurses and teachers in the UK

### England

#### The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE): Implemented in 2012

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) aims to assist NQSWs develop the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence during their first year of practice (Carpenter et al 2012). ASYE is not a mandatory programme, and social work students are not required to undergo ASYE in order to complete registration. The ASYE is closely related to The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which details what is expected of social workers at every stage of their career (British Association of Social Work 2012). In England, the PCF replaced the National Occupational Standards (NOS) which are still used within Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The PCF involves differing standards for social workers depending on their career level; the standards are categorised under nine domains, as listed below:

Domain	Explanation of Domain
Professionalism	Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development
Values and Ethics	Apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice
Diversity	Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice
Rights and Justice	Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing
Knowledge	Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory
Critical Reflection	Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision making

Intervention and Skills	Use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse
Contexts and Organisations	Engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and operate effectively within multi-agency and inter-professional settings
Professional Leadership	Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management

NQSWs must demonstrate how they have met the nine PCF domains for ASYE by providing evidence. Minimum evidence requirements include the provision of written work as well as the submission of feedback from other professionals (see Skills for Care (2015a) for an exhaustive list). ASYE is funded by the Department of Health, where approximately £2000 for each NQSW is awarded to employers in order to implement ASYE, provide support to NQSWs, and assess each social worker during their first year of employment (Skills for Care 2012; Skills for Care 2015a). Guidance also states that the ASYE assessor should be an experienced social worker and ideally, meet practice development educator standards (Skills for Care 2015a). The ASYE Framework was revised in April 2015, where it was proposed that two separate frameworks should be in place to cover children's and adult's services. Previously, the ASYE framework covered both sectors, however there was some concern that there were different interpretations of the ASYE. It is thought that two separate frameworks may improve robustness in ASYE practice (Skills for Care 2015b).

ASYE was evaluated by Carpenter et al (2012). From the perspectives of senior managers in the study, they shared that ASYE had brought a positive impact upon recruitment and retention, had brought about improvements in supervisory skills, and that the programme was appreciated by NQSWs. However, less than one quarter of senior managers who took part in an interview for the study believed that their organisation provided an 'adequate or better' system of support for NQSWs since the implementation of the NQSW programme (Carpenter et al 2012). Aspects of the programme which were most appreciated by senior managers was the provision of funding, and high quality supervision training. For NQSWs, the participants in the study identified the greatest benefits of the programme as: receiving regular structured supervision in order to reflect on their practice, having a reduced caseload, and taking part in peer support groups (Carpenter et al 2012).

## Wales

### 'Making the Most of Your First Year in Practice': Implemented in 2008

The Welsh model is made up of two sets of guidance; one is directed at employers, and the other is specifically for NQSWs. The programme does not involve formal assessment; however it is mandatory and part of the registration process for social workers in Wales. This model recommends nine elements to be included in the arrangements for NQSWs in their first year of practice, summarised from the Care Council in Wales (2008a), and provided in the table below.

Element	Brief Explanation
Key Learning Areas for NQSWs	NQSWs must learn about: being an employee, about the agency, about the community, and also consolidate knowledge and skills from university
Mentoring and the Personal Development Plan (PDP)	A mentor should be designated for every NQSW (could be for example the team manager or a senior practitioner). An individualised PDP will be developed with the mentor
Protected Case Loads and Work Allocation	The guidance recommends 1 day per month should be reserved for PDP work. NQSWs caseload should be stipulated in the work contract and specify how it is protected
Supervision	'Regular and planned' supervision should take place, and it should be stipulated how supervision links in with mentoring
Collecting Examples of your Development as a Social Worker	A record of training and learning should be kept by the NQSW for the purposes of registration renewal. Examples of appropriate evidence are provided within the guidance
Probation and Appraisal	All social workers will have a probation period and the above log of training and learning should assist in passing this probation period

Resolving Difficulties	When difficulties arise, action must be taken to resolve them. The guidance provides the example of the NQSW experiencing a higher caseload due to other demands in the organisation. Such difficulties need to be addressed promptly
Equalities and the Welsh Language	The NQSW has a responsibility to practice in an anti-discriminatory way and may want to develop fluency in Welsh if this is not their first language
Quality Assurance	The programme requires to be evaluated and so the NQSW must provide feedback for quality assurance purposes

In the guidance documents (Care Council for Wales 2008a; Care Council for Wales 2008b) there is a clear emphasis that the responsibility for the development of NQSWs is a shared responsibility; the organisation and employers have clearly identified roles and responsibilities in supporting NQSWs, as well as the NQSWs themselves taking responsibility for their own learning.

There is also a new programme of support for NQSWs in Wales, relevant for social workers who qualify after the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2016. The 'Consolidation Programme' must be completed by NQSWs in their first three years of registration in order to renew their registration as a social worker (Care Council for Wales 2015). It is anticipated that social workers will take part in this programme in their second year of practice, following on from 'making the most of your first year in practice (Care Council for Wales 2015). The Consolidation Programme is the first stage of the developing Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) framework; as the social worker progresses through their career there are other programmes relevant for each stage (Experienced Practice in Social Work; Senior Practice in Social Work and lastly, Consultant Social Work Programme). The Consolidation Programme provides opportunities for NQSWs to consolidate and further develop their knowledge and skills in three core areas of social work practice:

- Applying analysis in assessment to inform interventions
- Working collaboratively with service users, carers and other professionals
- Intervention and application of professional judgement in increasingly complex situations

(Care Council for Wales, 2015:2).

The employers of NQSWs are responsible for delivering the consolidation programme. They may team up with other employers, a university or other approved organisation to deliver the programme. The available guidance does not go into detail regarding the exact content of the programme; however it is stated that a large part of the programme is likely to take place in the workplace (Care Council for Wales 2015).

## **Northern Ireland**

### **The Assessed Year in Employment (AYE): Implemented in 2006**

Northern Ireland have a distinctive approach in supporting NQSWs, with the 'Assessed Year in Employment' (AYE) programme. All NQSWs must successfully complete the AYE in order to be granted registration (Northern Ireland Social Care Council, 2014). The guidance, written by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC 2014) outlines the AYE in depth, covering the responsibilities of NQSWs, employers, NISCC and others. There exists six 'minimum standards' for completion of the AYE, summarised below:

- 1) A Personal Development Plan (PDP) must be completed which follows on from the 'Summary of Learning' which is completed towards the end of the Social Work Degree
- 2) An Induction must be provided to 'NISCC Induction Standards' which include an induction to the AYE
- 3) A 'supervision plan or contract' must be in place and the NQSW must receive supervision at least every two weeks during the first six months and thereafter monthly
- 4) At least ten training and development days must be undertaken and an 'analysis of learning' completed
- 5) There must be a midpoint appraisal at no later than six months. The NQSW must submit a written report to their supervisor in advance of this appraisal on their performance in relation to the 'six key roles' (see below).
- 6) There must be a final appraisal at no later than eleven months. Again the NQSW must submit a written report in advance of the final appraisal demonstrating proficiency in relation to the six key roles. The employer then decides whether the 'AYE registrant is fit to practise as a safe, competent and effective social worker.'

(NISCC guidance 2014:11/12).

The 'six key roles' mentioned above are adapted from the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Social Work, which were revised in 2012/13 (Skills for Care Revised Standards in Social Work Education and a benchmark Standard for Newly Qualified Social Workers

2013). In their written reports, NQSWs must demonstrate how they have met the required criteria for assessment purposes.

There is no published evaluation of AYE online, however NISCC (2014:2) state in their guidance that the AYE is 'broadly achieving its aim of improving support to NQSWs entering employment.' However, there appear to be some ongoing issues particularly related to some NQSWs employed on short term contracts; even though the AYE caters for this and NQSWs can continue their AYE in a different setting once they have secured further employment, it might mean for some that AYE takes longer than one year (Community Care 2014).

Furthermore, there appears to be some challenges in ensuring consistency, clarity and rigour in applying the AYE (NISCC 2014:2).

## **Scotland**

### **No formal programme in place for NQSWs**

There is currently no recognised scheme in place for NQSWs in Scotland. However, the SSSC have developed a framework and provided guidance to ensure that NQSWs undertake and provide evidence of their post-registration training and learning (PRTL). This includes a requirement of a minimum of 144 hours (of which 30 hours must focus on how that learning has contributed to the protection of children and adults from harm (SSSC 2011). Aspects such as induction, caseload protection and supervision are all currently at the discretion and responsibility of employers. Skinner et al (2010) were commissioned by the SSSC to carry out an evaluation of the PRTL for NQSWs, by scrutinising 'Records of Achievement'<sup>1</sup> (RoA) and carrying out interviews with NQSWs, managers, and users of services (and their carers). The main findings of this evaluation showed that:

- Around half of NQSWs were offered support in meeting their PRTL requirements by their employers
- NQSWs were appreciative of the training opportunities that were available to them. It was found that often NQSWs selected their learning activities independently of their managers
- Through scrutiny of the RoAs, it was found that there was variety in the way in which they were filled out, however the authors noted that 'often the record comprised a description of learning activity with little in the way of reflection on learning or evidence of the application of learning to practice' (Skinner et al 2010:2).
- It was observed that use of research-based evidence was found to be very weak when examining the RoAs and in interviews with NQSWs and managers

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<sup>1</sup> The RoA is the document completed by NQSWs when they report their training & learning activities undertaken during their first year of practice

- Overall, the authors concluded that PRTL had, in a large part, 'a positive influence on how individuals and organisations view the continuation of learning beyond professional training.' (Skinner et al 2010:2).

### **Continuous Learning Framework (SSSC)**

The Continuous Learning Framework (CLF) was developed by the SSSC and IRISS (2008) to set out the shared commitment which is required of social service workers and their employers to achieve lifelong learning and continuous improvement, and therefore it is highly relevant for NQSWs. The report outlines the four key areas of the continuous learning framework, which comprises of:

- **Knowledge, skills, values and understanding:** The Standards in Social Work Education and the Standard for Childhood Practice are the frameworks particularly relevant for social workers in training and NQSWs who must demonstrate their ability to meet the standards outlined in these frameworks. The Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers of Social Service Workers are also important frameworks in relation to the expected value base of the social service sector. The CLF framework also highlights the importance of employees to understand and work according to the vision of the organisation and understand the various policies and procedures.
- **Qualifications and training:** Closely linked to the above, qualifications and training will vary depending on the job role undertaken. Organisations are often likely to require employees to carry out additional training as part of their role, for example the protection of children or vulnerable adults.
- **Personal capabilities ('managing relationships' and 'managing self'):** This section includes 13 'personal capabilities' and they have each been described across four stages of progression from 'engaged to established, accomplished and exemplary.' The framework describes what each capability looks like and provides ways in which each could be evidenced. It is at the discretion of employers and workers to determine which of the personal capabilities should be developed at any time. It is recommended that these are discussed during supervision sessions (SSSC 2008:9).
- **Organisational capabilities:** This section highlights the importance of creating organisational environments which support social service workers to continuously learn, embed their learning in practice and ultimately use this learning to bring effective outcomes for those who use services.

### **Newly qualified nurses (UK Wide)**

#### **Preceptorship Framework and the 'Flying Start' Scheme**

The preceptorship programme is intended to provide a structured period of support for newly qualified nurses to assist them in making the transition from

student to practitioner (Department of Health 2009). The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) (the UK's regulatory body for nurses, midwives and health care visitors) strongly recommends preceptorship for newly qualified nurses. However, the preceptorship scheme is not mandatory, and it was found in 2009 that 'substantial proportions' of newly qualified nurses across the UK did not receive preceptorship (Robinson and Griffiths 2009:4). There has been little research carried out in relation to the preceptorship experiences of Scottish newly qualified nurses, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain the proportion of those who actually take part in a preceptorship programme.

The notion of preceptorship is by no means new or unique to the UK; similar programmes are also in place in the US, Canada and Australia. It is well documented within literature across the world that the transition from student nurse to working practitioner can be a particularly stressful and challenging time (Andrews et al 2005; Ellerton and Gregor 2003; Mooney 2007), necessitating the need for effective support and guidance. Interestingly, the UK preceptorship occurs post-qualification whereas in other countries it tends to occur pre-registration (Currie and Watts 2012).

Preceptorship involves the provision of support and guidance to assist newly qualified nurses to make the transition from student to practitioner. The Department of Health (2010) and the NMC (2006) highlight that the preceptorship should involve the following key elements:

- The newly qualified nurse should have protected 'learning time' in their first year of practice
- The newly qualified nurse should have access to, and regular meetings with a designated preceptor. These meetings should be documented
- The NMC (2006) strongly recommends that the preceptorship should last around 4 months (however they also state that this is likely to vary according to local circumstance and individual needs)
- Preceptors should have at least 12 months experience in the same area as the newly qualified nurse. It is also expected that the preceptor will have attended a relevant and appropriate training programme for the role (NMC 2006)
- The newly qualified nurse has various responsibilities (listed by the Department of Health (2010)). Some key responsibilities include: to practice in accordance with 'the code' (NMC 2008); identify learning needs and develop an action plan to address these needs, reflect on their practice and experience, seek feedback on their performance from their preceptor and team with whom they work.

Robinson and Griffiths (2009) carried out a scoping review of preceptorship for nurses, involving a thorough systematic review of studies exploring preceptorship in the UK. Positively, they found that nurses wanted

preceptorship, and relationships with preceptors were generally viewed positively. Furthermore, many newly qualified nurses reported that assistance was provided to them in relation to helping them ease into their new role and develop their skills. However, Robinson and Griffiths (2009:4) note that 'there was sometimes a discrepancy between being allocated a preceptor and actually receiving preceptorship.' For example in the study carried out by Gerrish (2000), it was found that although newly qualified nurses had been paired with a preceptor, experiences varied considerably. Some participants in the Gerrish (2000) study reported that their preceptors provided little constructive feedback and limited support. Similarly, Bick (2000) also found considerable variation in preceptorship provision with participants views on the programme 'ranging from very effective to little more than a paper exercise' (Robinson and Griffiths (2009:10).

Lack of time was also found to be a key barrier in effectively delivering the preceptorship programme. In all of the studies reviewed, Robinson and Griffiths (2009) found that they all reported 'lack of time' as the main barrier in achieving an effective preceptorship programme. Problems with staff shortages, the demands involved in supervising students, having too many preceptees, and not being allocated to work together were commonly reported issues (for example see Hancock 2002 and Bick 2000). Lastly, Robinson and Griffiths (2009) also found that many preceptors had received little preparation for their role. This led the researchers to conclude that an organisational commitment is required so that staff have the time to deliver preceptorship and also receiving robust training prior to taking on the preceptor role.

### **The 'Flying Start' Scheme**

The Scottish Executive commissioned NHS Education Scotland to develop a web-based educational resource for all newly qualified nurses to access. Scottish NHS boards were funded to implement 'Flying Start' in 2006 which aimed to create an approach which was consistent across Scotland (Banks et al 2011). Flying Start set out to ease the transition between student and practitioner for nurses, involving online learning, structured study days and mentor support. The programme requires nurses to show evidence of learning in ten different areas to complete their preceptorship. Newly qualified nurses are paired with a mentor and have protected learning time. In order to complete the programme, nurses must demonstrate evidence in their portfolio in relation to ten learning units, showing that they have become capable and confident within these areas. The portfolio of evidence is a reflective account of the nurses perceptions and experiences. Mentors also contribute towards reports in the portfolio to report on how they think the newly qualified nurse has developed. When the mentor and relevant manager is satisfied that the nurse has successfully met the ten learning units, and at the end of their first year in post, a date is set for a 'knowledge and skills framework' review and completion paperwork for Flying Start is filled out.

Banks et al (2010) carried out an evaluation which explored the impact and effectiveness of flying start in Scotland, to consider how the programme affected newly qualified nurses particularly in terms of their confidence, competence and career progression. The study involved a two year evaluation employing a range of methods and a wide range of participants involved in the scheme across Scotland. Some of the main findings from the Banks et al (2010) evaluation are listed below.

- A majority of newly qualified practitioners who took part in the study reported that Flying Start had been useful in terms of clinical skills development and confidence
- Those who were able to take protected time were more likely to complete the learning units and report that the support they received was good
- Newly qualified nurses shared that they found self-directed study challenging and felt that they required support in terms of time management and completion of the programme
- Evidence showed that flying start was particularly successful if there was an 'ethos of support at all levels of the organisation' (Banks et al 2010:4)
- Newly qualified nurses were often not able to make use of their protected time for various reasons including lack of time due to wards being busy
- A majority of newly qualified nurses indicated that they completed flying start in their own time.

### **Newly qualified teachers (Scotland)**

The Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) is a Scottish Government scheme managed by the General Teaching Council (GTC). This is a recommended, structured scheme of 190 days (one school year) guaranteed for new graduates who wish to teach in Scotland's state schools. An alternative, flexible route (270 days) is available and also provides for those ineligible for, or choosing not to enter, the TIS or who do not wish to work in a Scottish local authority school. Only about 12.5% of graduates opt out of the TIS and for a variety of reasons, including deferment. New graduates apply for provisional registration, nominating five local authorities of their choice. Primary school candidates have a 90% of achieving their first or second choice of school and secondary teacher candidates, 80%. A substantial financial incentive (£6k for primary and £8k for secondary) is offered to those relinquishing this choice element, known as the preference waiver scheme, which assists supply of teachers for less popular areas. The Scottish Government liaises with local authorities who anticipate their workforce needs in order to predict vacancies and nominate their capacity for TIS candidates and funding follows these probationers on a per capita basis.

The GTC is an independent body wholly funded by subscription from the profession (initially £65 reducing to £50 pa). It functions equally as a regulatory

body and as a professional body, the latter boosted since the introduction of the Professional Update framework. In addition to its administrative and quality assurance roles, it provides professional development advice and will try to resolve problems arising during the TIS either with individuals, the school or the local employing authority. Probation managers (see below) attend two developmental events each year and GTC officials visit undergraduates each year to advise on and promote the TIS. It has a staff of 60, within which two teams of four have substantial input into the TIS.

All newly qualified teachers (probationer teachers) during their guaranteed 1 year's employment work towards achieving the GTC's national benchmark standard, the Standard for Full Registration (SFR) which is the 'gateway to the profession' as this standard also applies to all fully registered teachers as the basis of their continued registration with the GTC. Each local authority has an identified Probation Manager with responsibility for managing the TIS, a role that is either a fully dedicated post, or a supplementary function. Probationer teachers are guaranteed protected development time, reduced class time (typically 0.8 FTE) and multiple levels of mentoring support, (school, local authority and national) and, for example, the resources in the dedicated website, in2teaching. Each local authority will provide a programme of CPD for their probationers, with regular out of school study events encouraging peer support and sharing good practice and many will involve their locality HEIs in these events, typically but not always on a quid pro quo basis. In more rural areas these can require more intensive overnight commitments to accommodate the geographical spread of the probationers.

A graduate undertaking the TIS is supervised in school by a supporter (sometimes called mentor) who is required to offer weekly meetings and provide a range of supports. A teacher graduate will leave university with a record of achievement, the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) profile which should form the basis of the Individual Professional Development Action Plan (IPDAP), in discussion with the supporter and in line with the school's development plan and targets. These weekly meetings are logged with actions signed off by the supporter measured against the Standards. This electronic log, or profile, becomes an interactive document where evidence is stored towards achieving the SFR. It is here the probationer will routinely log any form of professional learning and, crucially, the impact this learning has had. This document can be accessed by the GTC, the probation manager, the school senior management and the probationer teacher. The role of supporter is seen as developmental and although it does not require a specific qualification as yet, there are some local initiatives considering this based on a coaching approach.

Assessment is carried out by the school, typically the Head Teacher or a senior staff member. Throughout the year a minimum 9 formal observations take place on a three weekly cycle (feedback from observation, planning the teaching session, observation) with feedback and identified actions logged. Each element

of the probationer's assessed activity is measured against the standards. At final assessment, a probationer can be recommended for full registration, offered an extension of up to 12 weeks to meet the standards (of whom 70% do so) or for cancellation. The success rate of the TIS is approximately 98% and the scheme is acknowledged to have raised teaching standards to a significant degree and has been called 'world class' (OECD).

Quality Assurance and consistency is provided by GTC who manage the TIS on behalf of Scottish Government and who 'sign off' the probationer as ready to move to full registration. Each probationer's portfolio (profile) is scrutinised electronically to ensure it adheres to the rules which regulate the system. In addition, a sample of final portfolios is examined by GTC as a further layer of quality assurance.

### **Costs**

This gold standard is achieved at a cost. The Scottish Government budget for an annual cohort of between 2,500 and 3,000 graduates entering the scheme is **£51 million** and there is significant additional resource allocation from GTC. In 2015, 2795 successfully passed through the TIS and thus achieved full registration, with an approximate 60% primary : 40% secondary split. The budget finances the 0.2 gap of each probationer's FTE, costs, along with the 0.1 element of their supporter's workload, equivalent to 2+hrs per week. This accounts for approximately £14 million annually. The remainder represents a fixed budget of £37.6 million dedicated to 'additional costs' which include the financial incentives for the preference waiver scheme. Some TIS placements are accommodated by freeing up more senior staff to work in other areas of the school activity or to secondments. In addition some placements are fully funded, particularly in areas where there is less demand from graduates. It is also used to fund certain posts where, for example, the TIS candidate must be paid full time for what the school funds as a part-time vacancy. Employers, once the fees have been allocated, enjoy a measure of autonomy in how the funding is spent and this makes the quality assurance role of GTC challenging at times.

The most recent school census showed that 86% of the previous year's probationers were employed and there is overall a strong upward trend in employment rates. The shortfall can be accounted for partially by those self-deselecting from the profession, choosing to work abroad or in the independent sector, and in <1%, failure to meet the required standard.

### **Maintaining research mindedness**

Probationer teachers, as part of their standards, undertake a Practitioner Enquiry assessment to demonstrate their 'knowledge and understanding of the importance of research and engagement in professional enquiry'. This requires them to demonstrate they know how to access and apply research and how to engage appropriately in the systematic investigation of practice. Some

probationers achieve publication while all have access to the Education Hub, hosted on GTC website, a repository for unpublished research.

## **Discussion**

The main differences between the models for newly qualified workers in the helping professions as discussed include the following (additionally see the table below which summarises the main differences for NQSWs across the UK).

### **1. Mandatory/voluntary and registration implications of scheme**

One of the most striking differences when comparing the schemes is whether the programme is mandatory or voluntary for the newly qualified professional. For the models that are compulsory, gaining full registration will usually be dependent upon successful completion of the scheme. There appears to be a dearth of research in relation to the consequences and efficacies associated with implementing a mandatory or voluntary scheme.

### **2. Nature of assessment technique**

From a brief review of the literature, it would appear that the most intensive forms of assessment for newly qualified practitioners can be found in the AYE model in Northern Ireland, and the teacher induction scheme in Scotland. Both involve the submission of written work throughout the year, assessed observations (for teachers), and appraisals (for AYE registrants). If there is considerable extra work to be carried out by the newly qualified practitioner in their first year in order to meet requirements, then an organisational commitment to ensure the newly qualified worker has the designated time to complete this during working hours should be clearly stipulated, as well as a closely monitoring the NQSW caseload.

### **3. Nature of guidance**

The guidance documents are evidently essential for the effective implementation of the schemes. There does not seem to be a comprehensive, complete guidance booklet available online outlining all terms of the ASYE scheme in England; rather there is a selection of information published by 'Skills for Care'. The evaluation carried out by Berry-Lound and Rowe (2013) found that although employers felt that they had adequate information about ASYE, there were still significant numbers who were unsure about ASYE due to not being aware of the

materials and resources available on the Skills for Care website. All other models appeared to have a guidance booklet; and the Welsh model provided two sources of guidance where one targeted the NQSWs, and the other targeted employers.

#### **4. Minimum standards**

Moriarty et al (2011) highlights how challenging it is to define what it actually means to be professionally competent in an ever-changing workplace. Again, the schemes discussed in this review take different approaches to laying out minimum standards in terms of professional competency. The English approach outlines the standards at every stage of the social work career, whereas the AYE in Northern Ireland uses the existing National Occupational Skills (NOS) in Social Work. Wales is also embarking on a distinctive approach with the consolidation programme where NQSWs are required to develop practice in relation to three core areas. Another differentiation is with regard to the challenge of linking theory to practice in social work. The English social work standards include the requirement to apply 'knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory' whereas this appears to be less explicit in the Wales and Northern Ireland Standards. Lastly, there appears a dearth of research in relation to the various approaches adopted and a lack of evaluations carried out perhaps in part due to the newly implemented nature of schemes in place across the UK.

### **Literature review section two: Employer implications in meeting Standards for NQSWs**

#### **Allocation of work**

In Scotland there does not appear to be any clear direction regarding the protection of NQSWs work in their first year of practice. In the study carried out by Grant et al (2014) which investigated NQSWs readiness for practice in Scotland, 37% of NQSWs reported that they had no caseload protection, with 22% were unsure about whether their caseload was protected or not. This contrasts with existing NQSW guidance in Wales, Northern Ireland and England. In Wales, guidance states that the employer contract should specify how NQSWs caseload will be protected during their first year. The guidance does not specify to what extent the caseload should be protected; but importantly the guidance recognises that the 'quantity of work' should 'allow you enough time to implement the development plan.' (Care Council for Wales 2008a:19). In Northern Ireland, the AYE guidance emphasises the importance of workload allocation, highlighting that it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that 'work allocation should allow for the consolidation and extension of skills and knowledge' (NISCC 2014:4). In England, guidance states that 'reduced

workloads...should be the right of newly qualified social workers' during their ASYE (BASW 2013:3). Some areas in England stipulate in guidance notes that NQSWs will have a reduced caseload, working at 90 per cent; and on top of this a 10 per cent protected professional development time (for example, see Southend on Sea Borough Council, 2012:19) The guidance on this matter is clear, however in practice the allocation of work for NQSWs is a complex matter. Carpenter et al (2012) found that a reduced caseload was not always maintained for NQSWs due to pressures on teams. The research carried out by Manthorpe et al (2014) also found similar challenges in practice as Carpenter et al (2012). Some social work managers in the Manthorpe et al (2014) study explained that they allocated 'low level' cases to NQSWs however the circumstances of the case can often escalate quickly, leaving a NQSW with a complex case. There is also a risk that social work departments that are experiencing staffing/recruitment problems, may lead to the protection of caseloads falling by the wayside (Manthorpe et al 2014).

Another difficulty in relation to this issue is that in order to correctly and fairly allocate work, there should be a formal workload management system. A recent study carried out in England found that for nearly three quarters of respondents in their sample, 'there was no formal system to manage their caseload and ensure that their workload was at a safe level' (Unison 2014:2). A further 32 per cent reported that they were unsure whether their employers had such a system in place. The researchers also found that for NQSWs where there was a caseload management system in place, their caseload was sitting at 83 per cent of the average for social workers, indicating that the protected caseload requirement is being applied for some in practice (but to what extent is unknown). However, Unison (2014) also found that NQSWs were still greatly affected by resource and staffing issues, with 50 per cent of NQSWs carrying additional cases due to staff shortages.

## **Induction**

The importance of a good quality induction period for NQSWs is consistently recognised within the literature (Welch et al 2014; Moriarty et al 2011). However, evidence suggests that induction programmes are often applied variably and inconsistently (Grant et al 2014; Bates et al 2010). Across all countries in the United Kingdom, each social care council stipulates the importance of induction in their various guidance documents. Each country also provides guidance on the effective delivery of induction, whether this is applied to social care or the social service sector more broadly (see for example NISCC 2007a; Skills for Care 2010; SSSC 2014). The SSSC, in collaboration with other stakeholders, developed 'Preparing for Practice,' which is a national induction framework for the Scottish social service sector. The induction framework has six key components: introduction to practice; the organisation; service specific issues; the workplace; roles and responsibilities; and values. The induction

framework was designed so it would apply to all social service sectors and be adapted depending on local context (SSSC 2014).

Findings in relation to the effectiveness of induction appears to be mixed. In two US studies in relation to newly qualified teachers, Strong and Villar (2007) found that induction brought improved outcomes for pupils as well as better teacher retention. However, Glazerman et al (2010) found no statistical difference in relation to these areas. Jones et al (2002) argued that due to the introduction of the statutory induction scheme, for the majority of schools, induction became more coherent and less variable. However, Jones et al (2002) notes that a 'significant minority' of newly qualified teachers still had differing experiences of induction. Thus it is important to recognise that a statutory scheme may improve variability, but it should not be viewed as a panacea to achieve entirely consistent and coherent provision across the country.

A number of studies have highlighted weaknesses and proposed recommendations in relation to induction provision. Jack and Donnellan (2010) argued that induction processes should be structured and better coordinated, so that specific skill sets of managers do not need to be relied upon for effective induction training. Bradley (2006) suggests that effective induction should aim to meet individuals' specific development needs, and adopt a person-centred approach. Welch et al (2014) found that Scottish first line managers felt that effective induction involved a range of both formal and informal modes of support including: mentoring, shadowing, supervision, training and development, as well as generic agency wide induction procedures. In the Grant et al (2014) study, over one third of NQSWs in their sample (33.9%) rated the quality of their induction as 'satisfactory.' However, another third rated their induction experience as 'not very good' or 'poor' (31.9%). Marsh and Triseliotis (1996), although outdated now, is consistent with the findings of Grant et al (2014) where they also found high levels of dissatisfaction in relation to the quality of induction for NQSWs in Scotland. There was also some evidence to suggest in the Grant et al (2014) study that there was a lack of structured induction in place; where some participants were handed an induction pack but with not much direction thereafter. This resonates with a study carried out by Bates et al (2010:162) in England where the researchers found that 'few participants were given a structured induction to help them move into their role in a planned and organised way.' This led Bates et al (2010) to recommend that greater investment is required in induction processes which is also embedded within the wider professional training needs and standards of NQSWs.

## **Supervision**

Research has consistently emphasised the importance of supervision for NQSWs (Chenot et al 2009; Davys and Beddoe 2009; Welch et al 2014). Similarly, England, Wales and Northern Ireland all stipulate that supervision is crucial for a NQSWs development. The expected standards of supervision are slightly different, as summarised in the table below:

Country	NQSW supervision standard
England	Supervision should take place weekly for the first six weeks, and fortnightly in the first six months. Thereafter, supervision should take place monthly (minimum).
Wales	The guidance does not specify how frequently supervision should take place; however it is stated in the guidance for NQSWs that supervision should be 'regular and planned.'
Northern Ireland	Supervision should take place fortnightly for the first 6 months, and monthly thereafter. Guidance also emphasises that supervision must be 'recorded, formal, planned and carried out by an experienced social worker.'

In Scotland, the SSSC does not have specific standards in place regarding supervision for NQSWs. However, the PRTL guidance for employers acknowledges that supervision is a key component for NQSWs development (SSSC 2010). There are also resources available on delivering effective supervision (see <http://www.stepintoleadership.info/supervision>) as a practice guide. Recent research has found that NQSWs value supervision greatly in Scotland, where almost all of the NQSWs in the research sample shared that they benefitted greatly from supervision when it was provided (Grant et al 2014), and around half reported satisfaction with the quality of the supervision received. However, some qualitative evidence in the Grant et al (2014) study appeared to suggest that a disproportionate emphasis was placed on caseload management. This is in line with other research findings which have found that supervision is increasingly focused upon managerialist and risk management tendencies, with less emphasis on personal reflection and professional development (see for example Beddoe 2010; Noble and Irwin 2009). Similarly, Jack and Donnellan (2010) found that from the perspective of NQSWs, there was insufficient time spent on personal reflection which left them feeling unsupported. There are many different functions of supervision (Welch et al 2014), and caseload management and risk management are important; however, the literature also points to the need for balanced and structured supervision sessions which involve personal reflections for the NQSWs development. The Welsh model for NQSWs have taken this into account by stating in their guidance that supervision should 'provide time for reflection and learning as well as managing performance.' (Care Council for Wales, 2008a:11).

### **Support in the workplace for NQSWs**

Gregory (2007) identified a number of elements that assisted NQSWs when conducting a study in relation to the experiences of newly qualified social

workers working as probation officer in England. Gregory (2007) argued that the presence of a supportive senior officer who has good knowledge of the training programme could provide additional supervision and help enhance transitions into the workplace. Stalker et al (2007) recommends that different sources of support aside from a line manager (for example, peers support and co-working) are also valuable for NQSWs. The literature suggests particularly with the demands on line managers (see section below), additional sources of support for NQSWs would certainly be valuable for many for their ongoing personal and professional development.

There are other important means of support for NQSWs which are also identified within the literature. Studies have shown the importance of having a range of different sources of support in order to help social workers deal with the stress associated with the profession (Takeda et al 2005; Stalker et al 2007). This is perhaps particularly salient for social workers working in children's services, with current political and media criticism, and problems with recruitment and retention (Jack and Donellan 2010).

Mentoring, or support from colleagues is an area identified in the literature which can aid and support NQSWs in their first year of practice. As in Wales, there may be a mentoring requirement built into the NQSW framework (Care Council for Wales 2008a); or it may be provided in a more ad hoc way. Support from colleagues was identified by Gregory (2007) as an element which enhanced transition into the workplace for NQSWs, and Maben et al (2006) identified that the existence of good role models assisted nurses in their transition from student to staff nurse. Similarly, Grant et al (2014) found evidence to suggest that NQSWs relied upon a significant amount of support from work colleagues outside of the line manager relationship. Indeed, 98% of the NQSWs in the study classed support from other professionals as either 'important' or 'very important.'

### **Line managers, organisational demands and NQSWs**

Line managers clearly have considerable responsibility in supporting NQSWs. Research has found that line managers can receive little or no support themselves, therefore limiting their ability to effectively support NQSWs (Jack and Donnellan 2010). Bates et al (2010) also found that managers were often affected by severe time and resource constraints, which can subsequently affect NQSWs personal and professional development. In teaching, \*\*\*

Similarly, there are also considerable challenges for the preceptorship programme for nurses due to severe time and resource constraints on staff. It has been recognised that due this problem, substantial proportions of newly qualified nurses who are allocated a preceptor do not actually receive preceptorship (Robinson and Griffiths 2009). Many authors conclude that in order to address the problems in relation to preceptorship, a commitment from the organisation is essential (for example, Robinson and Griffiths 2009; Garish

2000). There is a clear need for further investment in resources to embed the preceptorship programme such as providing training programmes for preceptors and a system wide commitment that safeguards time for newly qualified nurses and preceptors to work together (Robinson and Griffiths 2009). Others recommend that preceptorship should be a formal Human Resources activity which is subject to quality monitoring procedures in order to ensure it is actually being carried out in practice (Farrell and Chakrabarti, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

This review has brought together a body of literature which examines the standards and experiences in place for NQSWs across the United Kingdom. The first section of this paper set the context by outlining the current measures in place for NQSWs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and concluded with a discussion to consider some key comparisons. The main elements of the schemes which differ are in relation to whether the scheme is mandatory or voluntary, the registration requirements, assessment procedures, the guidance available, and lastly the nature of minimum requirements in relation to professional competency. The second section of this review focused upon a selection of themes emerging from the literature pertinent to NQSWs which predominantly related to employer implications for NQSWs. This involved the discussion of considerably important aspects of NQSW practice: workload management, induction, supervision, other means of support, and the organisational demands which affect the contexts in which NQSWs are situated. Lastly, it is important to emphasise that the perspectives of service users is largely missing from this review, because the expectations they have regarding NQSW standards represents a clear gap within the literature (Moriarty et al 2011). In any development of minimum standards for NQSWs, service users should be involved and consulted. Moriarty et al (2011) recommends that it is vital not to just focus upon individual practitioners and abilities, but to place the work of NQSWs in the wider context in which their practice is based.

## **Establishing a Baseline Standard for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW)**

As the above literature demonstrates, there are various approaches in the UK to supporting and assessing the first year in practice and what the 'standards' expected should be. Recent research outputs in Scotland (Welch et al 2014, Grant et al 2014, Gillies 2015,2016,) have revealed the perceived shortcomings in how NQSW perform and but also in how they are supported in their first professional posts in Scotland. These findings have reinforced the need for a structured and supported first year of professional practice. While expectations vary, on the whole managers do not expect graduates entering their employment to be fully competent and that ideally their first year is therefore one of consolidation rather than compensating for the gaps in their capabilities in

relation to how the social work degree has prepared them for the professional responsibilities. The standards underpinning the social work degree (SiSWE) are being revised simultaneously and it is hoped that some of those elements of concern or gaps in competence will be addressed as the revised degree prepares and produces its graduates.

In an ideal world, by the end of the first or probationary year, NQSW will be expected to have gained in experience to the extent that they are consistently demonstrating a greater degree of confidence, effectiveness, leadership and autonomy across a range of practice situations. They will have consolidated their transferable skills and should be applying them to specialist practice areas. The world is not ideal, however, and it is likely that NQSW will encounter the consequences of staff shortages, reduced budgets and greater demand on services as they embark on their career.

The SiSWE are highly detailed and are designed to guide the development of the student over four years of study and learning in practice. By contrast, standards for NQSW will be met principally 'on the job', in reality with considerably less time for reflection and review, diminishing application of theory, and most probably, supervised by hard pressed, possibly ill-prepared, senior colleagues (Skills for Care 2016). The employer's expectation of a fully competent practitioner may put further pressure on the supervisor who is faced with a somewhat less than finished article (Welch et al 2014).

It is important therefore that the standards for NQSW are seen as fit for purpose, clear, accessible and uncomplicated, while retaining obvious links to the social work degree standards and responsive to the evidence reviewed above about which dimensions of practice require enhancement.

## **Methodology**

Focus groups for both managers and NQSWs were proposed for three locations around Scotland; Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Due to no response from the Edinburgh location this group was cancelled. In Glasgow, 4 managers attended and only one NQSW. The protracted illness of the lead researcher who conducted this group prevents the findings being presented here other than those conveyed in a brief verbal report. In Aberdeen, 9 managers and 12 NQSWs responded to the call. Each focus group lasted around 2 hours and was recorded for transcribing purposes.

The structure of the focus group started with an introduction to the project and then moved on to a discussion around the key findings from the study of first line managers view of NQSWs preparedness for practice in comparison with NQSW experiences (Welch et al, 2014). This was to ascertain whether these findings were consistent with the participants' experiences and if they noticed

any difference or gaps. Following this discussion the participants were asked to review the Standards in Social Work Education and to record any revisions they thought were needed, what growth was expected after the first year in practice, any particular learning foci, and in what ways the learning/development may be demonstrated after the first year. Finally the participants were asked to identify the top three skills or knowledge a NQSW should be able to demonstrate after the first year.

### **Findings from focus group discussions**

The aim of developing a benchmark standard for NQSWs defining the competencies that should be demonstrable by the end of the first year in practice provided generated a discussion that would have benefitted from longer conversations had time allowed. The managers and NQSWs discussed not only what growth should be evident but also how NQSWs could be better prepared before they begin work, especially in a statutory setting. Both groups discussed the possibility of longer placements and the possibility of a mandatory statutory placement. They felt this would better prepare the NQSWs for the level of complexity within the work as well as help with confidence building. This led on to discussions by both groups as to the lack of confidence many NQSWs have and how this is something that needs to be developed within that year.

Overall, both groups described NQSWs as needing to demonstrate a higher degree of professional competence after the first year of practice. This was especially pertinent when it came to undertaking assessments, knowledge and implementation of theory, level of critical analysis and reflection, report writing and risk assessments. The six areas the SiSWE encompass were still the key areas that we would expect the NQSWs to be able to achieve, therefore it is not about creating a new standard necessarily but instead about additional requirements and outcomes the NQSWs should be able to demonstrate within each of the six main areas, similar to how the newly qualified teachers are assessed as was discussed within the literature review.

In addition, feedback stated that within the standards, there should be an explicit value and ethics statement that encompasses all the levels of assessment. This would sit above the already in place table with the expectation that the value statement is integrated within all the standards. It was felt that it is important to keep the language within the revised statements general in order to ensure a long term suitability for the profession. So although currently it may be relevant to add in additional knowledge about, for example, migration and refugees, it would be more appropriate to ensure the standards reflected the global impact and influence inherent within the profession.

The final discussion around what top skills a NQSW should be able to demonstrate after the first year can be summarised within the categories of

Interpersonal skills such as increased confidence, time management, professional writing, increased sense of professional identity, communication, empathy, emotional intelligence were mentioned. Assessment skills such as understanding and assessment of risk, critical analysis, managing complexity and Reflective Practice with a focus on understanding roles, ability to 'hit the ground thinking', accountability and awareness of own resilience and wellbeing.

### **Discussion of findings on perceived gaps in knowledge, transferable skills, values and capabilities**

While this section identifies those areas where NQSW are thought to require further development, it is worth revisiting the fact that the available evidence confirms that NQSW are, overall, well prepared for their first professional role, as stated in Grant et al as the findings reported here support the case that newly qualified social workers are generally well-prepared by professional qualifying programmes (2014:64) and that many of the problems identified thereafter result during transition to employment where there is inadequate induction and supervision and work expectations exceed their capabilities.

Where specific 'gaps' are concerned, a consistent finding from across the literature and the focus group discussions is that of **professional confidence particularly in assessment, managing risk and in working with complex situations** (Welch et al 2014, Grant et al, 2014, Focus Group, Aberdeen). The focus group recommended consideration of a mandatory statutory placement during the degree, (albeit the Key Capabilities require an assessment of a child or parenting capacity). It is challenging to meet the perceived need for greater confidence in working with risk and complexity, other than through experience and this may be addressed to some extent through the proposed Employers' Standards below where they will be required to provide a full range of experience, and a caseload gradually growing in size and complexity. This should be supported by regular and consistent supervision and other informal supports like shadowing and mentoring, through which professional mastery (Welch et al, 2014) and practice wisdom can be significantly enhanced. At the end of the first year, that kind of controlled experience should contribute to a greater confidence and competence in line with a more experienced and authoritative practitioner. However, as the literature review reveals, protecting caseloads cannot guarantee against having to deal with staff absence or predicting a straightforward referral spiralling into a highly complex case.

The Welch et al study revealed that 92% of respondents did not believe NQSW demonstrate the '**necessary resilience for the job**'. Resilience is a somewhat contested term but is generally meant to convey a degree of personal and professional strength and resistance. One definition of resilience is a 'dynamic

process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity' (Luthar et al, 2000: 543), conveying an ability to bounce back and adapt through learning from the experience. There has been an increasing concern about how social workers protect themselves more effectively, not just from physical harm, but also emotionally and psychologically all of which impact on morale and staff retention rates. This is increasingly important in the context of contemporary practice where social workers may have no fixed work base and work without the support of immediate colleagues or alongside colleagues who are not social workers. This concern is addressed in both sets of standards in the overarching principle which requires the NQSW at all times to be aware of your personal and professional wellbeing and resilience, seeking appropriate support to maintain a positive work/life balance. In addition, the accompanying proposed Employers' Standards requires them to provide clear guidance on where the NQSW can seek both professional and personal support within the organisation.

**Report writing** remains a source of dissatisfaction with line managers and can be addressed to some extent by HEIs through increased simulated practice in relation to report structure, use of evidence and gaining confidence in making recommendations. The Glasgow focus group line managers expressed concern about the **reluctance or hesitation in NQSW in reaching or presenting a conclusion to their assessment**, and routinely seeking a decision from their supervisors. While this relates partly to report writing, it more accurately reveals a **lack of confidence in decision making**. The quality of writing, however, insofar as it relates **to poor spelling and grammar** is an issue shared by HEIs and the solution arguably lies with education at a much earlier stage than degree level entry.

The proposed benchmark standard presented below addresses those areas for development in the NQSW which can be consolidated during the first year in practice. They relate to, and define an enhanced level of competence to, the SiSWE while drawing on the empirical studies reviewed above, the NOS, elements of personal capability from the Continuous Learning Framework and the Leadership Capabilities Indicators.

In so doing they set out the expectations of a more autonomous, authoritative practitioner, demonstrating professionalism and leadership through supporting others and research-mindedness.

## **Employers' standards**

The evidence has repeatedly demonstrated the 'vital role' employers have in supporting NQSW and in recruitment and retention of staff, not least by demonstrating a commitment to new employees and to the reputation of a supportive employer (for example, SfC, Grant et al 2014). As in other parts of the UK it will be important to underpin any standards for NQSW with complementary expectations for employers, as those proposed below.

### **Standards for Employers of Newly Qualified Social Workers** (with acknowledgement to NISCC)

1. Plan, implement and review an induction process for NQSW which includes:
  - guidance on organisational aims, objectives, procedures and processes
  - clarity around their responsibilities and role within the organisation and how their work contributes to the purpose of the organisation
  - guidance on how they can access professional and personal support
  - expectations concerning the NQSWs responsibilities for continuous professional development and career progression in line with their personal learning plan
  - expectations concerning the NQSWs continuing registration with SSSC.

(See Preparing for Practice: Induction guidance for social service employers in Scotland. SSSC 2014)

2. Allocate appropriate and relevant work opportunities which will allow the NQSW to engage in the full range of professional social work activity expected of a practicing social worker and which will allow the consolidation and extension of the skills and knowledge gained during the degree in social work.
3. Ensure the work load of the NQSW is limited and graduated appropriately in terms of increasing volume and responsibility.
4. Establish and maintain a learning culture which supports continuous employee development and contributes to improvement in service outcomes.
5. Provide formal supervision with opportunities for reflection at regular intervals of no less that fortnightly in the initial six month.

6. Allow for informal support in the form of mentoring, shadowing and peer support.
7. Ensure those supervising the NQSW are suitably trained in the requirements, and supported and recognised in terms of their increased responsibilities and workload.
8. Provide the required (tbc) number of study days and the learning opportunities required to meet the standards for Newly Qualified Social Workers.
9. Provide regular appraisal at the agreed intervals (tbc) and a final assessment based on agreed standards (tbc).

## **Benchmark Standard for NQSW at the end of their first year in practice**

### **1. Values Statement**

In all aspects of your practice you must adhere to the SSSC Codes of Practice for Social Services Workers and demonstrate a commitment to practising in a manner which reflects, at all times,

- Anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, respecting diversity within different cultures and values
- Promoting equal opportunities and social justice
- Honesty, openness, empathy and respect

### **2. Overarching Principles**

In all aspects of your practice you should

- Demonstrate ethical principles based on sound professional values and critical reflection to underpin your evidence-informed practice
- Demonstrate awareness of your responsibility to protect any child or adult at risk of harm or abuse irrespective of role, setting and situation
- Observe appropriate professional boundaries in relationships, including in the use of social media
- Be aware of your personal and professional wellbeing and resilience, seeking appropriate support to maintain a positive work/life balance.

### **3. Benchmark Standard for NQSW**

The six statements below describe what employers might expect from NQSWs (SSSC, cited in Welch et al 2014:9). They form a useful minimum standard for setting out the areas in which their knowledge, skills, values and competence can be consolidated and developed during their first year in practice.

NQSWs have the necessary knowledge and skills to manage complex caseloads

NQSWs have the necessary resilience required for the job  
NQSWs are able to use sound professional judgement  
NQSWs have demonstrated the habits of learning and inquiry  
NQSWs understand outcomes-based approaches and are able to deliver personalised services  
NQSWs are able to take on social work roles in integrated services

They form the basis of the proposed competences presented below.

## NQSW Competence 1

Rationale: This competence reflects the transitional requirement to develop the growing confidence in utilising core social work knowledge, skills and values in the assessment process and in the analysis of the accrued information in order to reach confident and defensible decisions.

Alignment with SiSWE	<p>1:0 Prepare for, and work in partnership with, individuals, children, parents, families and extended families, carers, groups and communities</p> <p>1.3 Assessing needs and options in order to plan a course of action</p>
<b>Assessed Competence for NQSW</b>	<p><b>NQSW 1 : Demonstrate confidence in undertaking the assessment process using advanced analytical skills</b></p>
Supporting evidence of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being prepared to make and be accountable for decisions that are appropriate to role</li> <li>• Being able to identify appropriate causes of action confidently, concisely and in a timely manner</li> <li>• Employing critical analysis of multiple sources of concern and risk</li> <li>• Taking ownership of professional judgement and assessment abilities</li> <li>• Being aware of the impact decisions made will have on the lives of vulnerable people</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 2

Rationale: This competence reflects the growing emphasis on early intervention in family situations as a means of preventing greater problems including possible harm. It calls for assertiveness and confidence in weighing up options and possible consequences.

Alignment with SiSWE	<p>2.0 Plan, carry out, review and evaluate social work practice with individuals, children, parents, families and extended families , carers, groups, communities and other professionals</p> <p>2.1 Identifying and developing opportunities for prevention and early intervention</p>
<b>Assessed Competence for NQSW</b>	<b>NQSW 2: Demonstrate ability to make authoritative and informed judgements where early intervention can prevent harm, abuse or family breakdown</b>
Supporting evidence of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the challenges and opportunities affecting people and see these from a range of perspectives</li> <li>• Demonstrating confidence in professional intuition</li> <li>• Taking proportionate responsibility for decisions and interventions</li> <li>• Recognising and managing compliance both real and 'disguised'</li> <li>• Demonstrating appreciation of 'hidden' risks, value and limits of self-reported evidence</li> </ul>

### NQSW Competence 3

Rationale: This competence requires the social worker to demonstrate familiarity with the wide range of evidence sources underpinning decision making and to evaluate that evidence using a sophisticated and critically sound appreciation of the implications of the decision making.

Alignment with SiSWE	<p>4.0 Demonstrate professional confidence and competence in social work practice.</p> <p>4.1 Through critical analysis and reflection, evaluating and using up-to-date knowledge of national and international research into, social work practice</p>
<b>Assessed Competence of NQSW</b>	<b>NQSW 3: Demonstrate the ability to use consistently sound professional judgement</b>
Supporting evidence of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating the ability to modify professional judgement in the light of new evidence</li> <li>• Utilising supervision effectively through clear presentation of evidence of professional decision making</li> <li>• Demonstrating heightened awareness of the impact on, and implications of, any decisions on the situation of those involved</li> <li>• Demonstrating effective processes for accessing and managing and analysing information sources including safe use of IT and social media</li> <li>• Applying knowledge of operational instructions and processes rigorously</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 4

Rationale: This competence reflect the growing assuredness and assertiveness required of the professional social worker in managing cases where the complexity and professional demands bring a heightened need for a consistently confident response.

Alignment with SiSWE	<p>4.0 Demonstrate professional confidence and competence in social work practice</p> <p>4.1 Through critical analysis and reflection, evaluating and using up-to-date knowledge of national and international research into, social work practice</p>
<b>Assessed Competence of NQSW</b>	<b>NQSW 4 : Demonstrate the necessary advanced and critical decision making skills and the confidence to manage complex caseloads</b>
Supporting evidence of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating confidence in challenging the decisions of others in a constructive and professional manner</li> <li>• Managing the complexity and uncertainty of major change and work with others within and out with the organisation to find innovative ways to overcome challenges</li> <li>• Demonstrating autonomy in decision making while seeking appropriate and timely support</li> <li>• Recognising and managing competing demands under pressure</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 5

Rationale: This competence supports the social worker in developing the necessary confidence in working alongside, and in partnership with, service users, thereby managing the power differentials inherent in contemporary practice.

Alignment to SiSWE	<p>4.0 Demonstrate professional confidence and competence in social work practice</p> <p>4.2 Working within agreed standards of social work practice utilising personal and professional capabilities</p>
<b>Assessed NQSW</b>	<b>NQSW 5: Demonstrate confidence in applying an outcomes-based approaches and assured ability to deliver personalised services</b>
Supporting evidence to competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating knowledge, understanding and application of a range of interventions, including mentoring and coaching to empower service users and families</li> <li>• Recognising more overtly strength and capacity in others in order to agree the level of own contribution</li> <li>• Demonstrate leadership in providing access to others to sources of empowerment and decision making and challenging barriers</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 6

Rationale: This competence ensures the practising social worker develops appropriate and adequate strategies for protection against the demands of the job and recognises when and how to seek support.

Alignment to SiSWE	<p>5.0 Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, for their own social work practice within their organisation</p> <p>5.1 Managing one's role as a professional social worker in an accountable way</p>
<b>Assessed NQSW competence</b>	<b>NQSW 6: Demonstrate the necessary level of resilience to meet the demands of the job and to achieve a good work/life balance</b>
Supporting evidence to competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising exercising and improving own leadership</li> <li>• Developing strategies to deal with concerns in professional and personal life</li> <li>• Demonstrating emotional intelligence in how to curtail the emotional impact of stress and distress</li> <li>• Managing conflict effectively</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 7

Rationale: This competence supports the transition from student to practitioner to professional who demonstrates leadership through the routine application of research evidence to practice and thereby supports the learning of the team and brings confidence and authority to the wider arena of integrated services.

Alignment to SiSWE	<p>5.0 Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, for their own social work practice within their organisation</p> <p>5.2 Taking responsibility for one's own continuing professional development</p>
<b>Assessed NQSW Competence</b>	<b>NQSW 7: Demonstrate the habits of a practitioner-researcher through routine and continuous learning and enquiry with which to encourage and support the learning of others</b>
Supporting evidence to competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking responsibility for recognising and seeking ways of meeting own developmental needs</li> <li>• Demonstrating research-mindedness to inform and continuously improve outcomes</li> <li>• Bringing new ideas to stimulate change and improve outcomes</li> <li>• Keeping informed about organisational policy and procedural change</li> <li>• Being able to recognise and enhance assets in individuals, families, groups, and communities</li> <li>• Demonstrating leadership by contributing to team knowledge building and how this can be incorporated into practice</li> </ul>

## NQSW Competence 8

Rationale: This competence emphasises the unique and central contribution social work brings to the multi-disciplinary arena where an assured professional approach, mindful of the roles, attitudes and constraints of colleagues from a range of disciplines is necessary for effective collaborative practice.

Alignment to SiSWE	<p>5.0 Manage and be accountable, with supervision and support, for their own social work practice within their organisation.</p> <p>5.6 Working effectively with professionals within integrated, multi-disciplinary and other service settings</p>
<b>Assessed NQSW Competence</b>	<b>NQSW: 8: Demonstrate the ability to fulfil the social work role in integrated services</b>
Supporting evidence to competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upholding and demonstrating the distinctive role and contribution of social work in partnership with other professionals</li> <li>• Understanding and respecting the role and function and constraints of other professionals</li> <li>• Sharing insight appropriately with others within and out with the organisations to challenge views and bring about continuous improvement</li> </ul>

## **Final comments**

While the standards for Employers and for NQSW are set out above they have been prepared prior to decisions concerning the nature of the first year in practice in relation to:

- whether it will be mandatory, and or assessed
- how it will relate to continued professional registration
- whether/how the NQSW standards will form the basis for career pathway
- their alignment to professional and/or academic awards.

It is acknowledged therefore that what is presented here represents possible first steps in defining the future requirements for social work degree students and newly qualified social workers in Scotland.

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