

## **The Recognition of Professional Qualifications and Regulation of Professions - Call for Evidence**

### **Introduction**

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulator for the social service workforce in Scotland. Our work means the people of Scotland can count on social services being provided by a trusted, skilled and confident workforce.

We protect the public by registering social service workers, setting standards for their practice, conduct, training and education and by supporting their professional development. Where people fall below the standards of practice and conduct we can investigate and take action.

**Please outline your process(es) of recognising someone with an international qualification. In your answer, please include details of how this differs from the process of recognising a domestic applicant, the rationale for this/ the reasons why this is the case, and the costs of administering this route.**

The SSSC recognises qualifications in social work from universities in Scotland, the UK and internationally. Students on SSSC approved social work courses in Scotland are required to join the part of the register for student social worker. Following graduation, they are required to pay a fee of £80 to join the part of the register for social worker.

Applicants with a social work qualification from one of the other three UK jurisdictions are required to submit an online application to the SSSC in order to register as a social worker in Scotland. The application fee is £80. Applicants with a specialist social work qualification may be required to complete a compensatory measure to fully meet the standards of the generic social work degree in Scotland.

International applicants who want to have their social work qualification recognised are required to make an online application to the SSSC. They will then have to have their qualification assessed to ensure it meets the minimum standards required. The application fee for international applicants is £80. However, the fee for assessing international social work qualifications is £320. International applicants are required to provide detail of their qualification which include confirmation of any periods of

supervised and assessed practice which formed part of the qualification. We can also consider post-qualifying learning and training as a part of this decision-making.

The assessment of international social work qualifications is subject to three stages:

1. Consideration by internal and external assessors
2. Quality assurance
3. Decision-making panel

The scrutiny required to assess international qualifications varies from candidate to candidate, as does the associated cost, however, the average cost to the SSSC is substantially more than the £320 fee which is charged to the applicant.

**Please outline any additional steps and their resource implications that you face in processing applicants with international qualifications?**

International applicants may be required to obtain a certificate from Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG). This has an associated fee of £59.

If the applicant wishes their qualification to be assessed by the SSSC, as mentioned above, they may be subject to one of four outcomes:

1. Accept the application on the basis of the qualification alone
2. Accept the application on the basis of the qualification and post qualifying learning
3. Refuse the application on the basis of insufficient evidence or because the qualification deviates too far from our standards.
4. Require that any shortfall in the qualification when compared to our standards is met by completing a compensatory measure.

If we decide to accept an international application, we will proceed with our normal registration process, unless there are other barriers to the individual's registration.

If we decide that there is a shortfall between the applicant's qualification and the standards required by the SSSC, the applicant can be required to complete an adaptation period or an aptitude test.

The adaptation period is a period of supervised and assessed practice which is designed to meet the shortfall between the applicant's qualification and the standards expected by the SSSC. The applicant will

be assessed by a qualified social work educator. The SSSC quality assures this period, however, it is up to the applicant to arrange and fund it.

The aptitude test consists of a series of written papers together with both oral and written exams which are arranged by the SSSC. The papers and tests are assessed by both internal and external assessors. The cost of this to the applicant is £790.

On successful completion of either the adaptation period or the aptitude test, the applicant will be deemed to meet the SSSC's qualification requirements and will be registered.

**With reference to any of the additional steps outlined above, what would you suggest are the priorities for the UK Government in considering future ways to recognise international qualifications? Please include any details on what an ideal system could look like, as well as how it could operate. Please consider what the priorities would be for the profession you regulate.**

It is our opinion that any future system for the recognition of international qualifications within the UK should ensure that we have enough flexibility to allow appropriate regulation while also ensuring that all overseas applicants are treated equally.

For the SSSC it is important that we have the ability to establish processes which ensure we are able to assess international applicants' qualifications with sufficient scrutiny. Central to this would be the ability to conduct detailed assessments of international qualifications against our own standards with no unnecessary restrictions on how we carry out this assessment. For example, the SSSC should have the ability to ask international applicants to provide evidence of their qualifications themselves, rather than us having to gather this evidence ourselves. The SSSC should also be able to stipulate the type and format of such evidence.

In addition it would be important for the SSSC to have discretion to consider post-qualifying learning in our assessment of international candidates, discretion to decide when to refuse applications and discretion to set adaptation periods and aptitude tests as we see fit. Our view is that the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 provides a sufficient legislative framework for this.

**Do you require legislation to give you powers to make changes to your international recognition routes?**

The SSSC treats all individuals with non-UK social work qualifications equally. Our ability to make changes to our international recognition

routes are limited by the EU Directive 2005/36/EC, EU Directive 2013/55/EU and the European Union (Recognition of Professional Qualifications) Regulations 2015, at least until the end of the transition period. We have the same processes in place for individuals without EEA mutual recognition rights and we apply these in exercise of our functions and powers under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001. Therefore, if we are not subject to the EU Directives, the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 would provide us with the statutory framework to make these decisions on international recognition routes.

**What level of dialogue do you maintain with your international counterparts? Please outline the benefits and challenges to cooperation. Please also outline if you are a member of any international networks of regulators, what they are and your experience with them.**

We occasionally correspond other social service regulators from around the world, either by email or through the IMEI system, who need to check the qualifications or registration status of applicants to the professions they regulate.

**What are your priorities for supporting UK professionals on your register to have access to their profession in other countries? Please outline any Government support that would help.**

We support social workers to achieve the highest level of education and training possible. This ensures that they are well placed to access the social work profession in other countries.

**Do you have any provisions for the recognition of professional qualifications held by refugees residing in the UK? If yes, please detail what these are and why you have implemented these provisions. If no, please detail why not.**

The SSSC does not currently have any provisions for the recognition of qualifications for refugees. One of the main reasons for this is that it is unlikely that the individual's refugee status would have any bearing on how their qualification would be assessed.

**Please describe the process by which UK professionals gain qualifications to enter the profession, including detail on the types of education and training they must undergo and how long it takes to complete them.**

Those looking to become a social worker in Scotland need to complete a degree in social work at university. The universities offering social work qualifications in Scotland are:

- University of Dundee
- University of Edinburgh
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- University of the West of Scotland
- Robert Gordon University
- University of Stirling
- Open University
- University of Strathclyde
- Edinburgh Napier University

Social work courses are full time, delivered over four years for undergraduate degrees or two years for postgraduate degrees. There is also a work-based route provided by the Open University. All courses include practice learning where you are assessed in work placements.

**Please describe the process you offer for professionals who have gained the relevant UK qualifications to be brought onto your register.**

Described above.

**How often do you review your processes and standards? In your answer, please describe both formal and informal ways this is carried out (e.g. via consultancy, membership surveys) and include detail of any changes you have recently made based to this process.**

We review our processes every three years or as changes in legislation require.

**Thinking about key changes that have been made to your qualification processes, what has been the cause for this change? Below are some non-exhaustive possible options to consider in your answer.**

We make changes to our processes primarily on the basis of feedback from applicants and registrants and from our own internal reviews.

**Do you feel that the current standards you set, against which applicants are assessed to enter onto the register, are a fair reflection of the level of skill, training, education, and experience required to practise their profession? Please explain your answer.**

Our qualification assessment criteria consist of standards, duration of supervised and assessed practice, academic level, duration of study and our key criteria and principles. The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) are a key part of our assessment and set out what student social

workers need to achieve to gain the Scottish social work honours degree and become professionally qualified. We are therefore confident our assessment criteria are a fair reflection of the level of skill, training, education and experience required to practise as a social worker in Scotland.

**Please detail any principles of regulation you follow (e.g. proportionality and transparency) and how you uphold them, and whether they support you in your duties as a regulator.**

We assess qualifications for registration from the UK, Europe and the rest of the world and our processes comply with EU directives and regulations. Proportionality was a central consideration in the development of our criteria and principles that we use to assess qualifications. We had to balance the risk of a worker not being able to practise against the protection of the public.

**Please detail any requirements you may place on the professionals you regulate and why they are necessary. If you do not impose any requirements, please justify your reasons for not doing so.**

We require social workers regulated by us to hold a recognised qualification, to join our register and pay their registration fees, abide by the SSSC Codes of Practice, and engage in relevant post-registration training and learning.

**Please describe the process by which you determine your application fees. Please set out any principles or guidelines you adhere to when determining fee amounts.**

The scrutiny required to assess international qualifications varies from candidate to candidate, as does the associated cost, however, the average cost to the SSSC is substantially more than the £320 fee charged to the applicant. To take a proportionate approach, we decided to align our fee with the estimated average cost of the internal staffing resource required for each assessment. We took a similar approach to setting the fee for aptitude tests.

**Please detail any changes that you are considering for your sector to ensure the profession you regulate stays relevant to current challenges. Does current regulation allow for you to make these changes?**

We want to ensure we continue to have the flexibility to maintain the high standards we expect from social workers registered in Scotland. In order

to ensure our workforce's skills and training remain relevant to the challenges faced by the sector, we periodically review our post-registration training and learning resources and requirements.

**Please detail any steps you take to help make sure that your standards and processes are adaptive, support innovation and promote social mobility.**

We assess all non-UK social work qualifications equally, regardless of an applicant's country of origin and many of these do meet our requirements. To ensure our registration processes are adaptive, we review our processes every three years or as legislation requires.

We also have a responsibility for workforce data and intelligence. We produce workforce data, information and intelligence for employers and other customers to support the development of the sector. We develop and publish Official Statistics and National Statistics on the social service workforce.

## **Continuous Professional Development**

**Please detail any continuous professional development that is required for professionals to remain on your register. Please include detail on how often this should take place, in what form, as well as the benefits of adhering and consequences of not adhering to these requirements.**

For professionals to stay on our register they need to do a certain amount of training and learning to keep their knowledge and practice up to date. This helps them deliver good practice when working with people who use services, their families and carers. All registered social workers need to undertake post registration training and learning to advance their professional development or contribute to the development of the profession.

For example, newly qualified social workers are required to undertake 24 days of training and learning. This can be achieved in several different ways including formal and informal learning. It may include:

- induction activities, shadowing colleagues, team meetings, supervision
- completing specific formal and informal training courses
- professional discussions with colleagues, other professionals and people who use services
- self-directed learning including reading, independent study, online research/study
- experiential, action or enquiry-based learning

- leading or engaging in practitioner enquiry/action research.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

**Do you collect data on the diversity of both your UK and international applications? For example, on gender or ethnic background.**

We currently give applicants the option to provide diversity data when they apply for registration with us. This is done through their online MySSSC account. However, we only ask applicants to provide diversity data the first time they complete an application. Furthermore, it is not mandatory for applicants to provide this data to us.

**Please outline any steps you take to eliminate unconscious bias from your recognition process.**

In order to eliminate unconscious bias, we use both internal and external assessors and have robust quality assurance processes in place. We also remove any photos from assessment documentation.

**Please outline any steps you take to support job creation in the profession you regulate.**

We promote careers in the social service sector through our Careers in Care website. For example, on the Careers in Care website we have a story from a senior practitioner in criminal justice social work who gives insight into her role and advice for those considering a career in criminal justice social work. We provide career stories and learning resources to facilitate people moving into a career in social services.

**Please outline any steps you take to attract a diverse workforce to the profession you regulate.**

We recently released our 'Treating Everyone Fairly' statement. This statement articulates our commitment against all forms of racism and recognises the important role played by the social service sector in fighting discrimination. We are committed to going beyond the minimum statutory duties when it comes to considering and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for people with protected characteristics.

**Scottish Social Services Council**

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