



Perspectives on the Introduction of a Mandatory, Supported, Assessed Year for Newly Qualified Social Workers.

Stakeholder Survey: Key Finding

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Executive Summary

The following report is based on findings from a survey which sought to explore stakeholders' perspectives regarding the implementation of a mandatory, supported, assessed year for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs). The survey contained both fixed choice and open ended response questions in order to gather both numerical and textual data. The inclusion of open ended responses was used to enhance the analysis and add further nuanced detail to the numeric findings. Example quotes have been included throughout this report to further demonstrate the key themes.

Below are the main conclusions of the report:

I. Support for change

- Stakeholders recognised that the current system may leave some NQSWs vulnerable to inadequate supervision which can have direct consequences for workers, service users, and the profession as a whole.
- As such, there was overwhelming support for changing the quantity and quality of support offered to NQSWs.
- In addition to changing support frameworks, there was a call for additional changes to be made to pre-qualifying training and assessment procedures.

II. Major concerns regarding the implementation of the current proposal.

- There was overwhelming support for the introduction of the proposal; however, analysis of open text responses indicated that stakeholders were apprehensive of including additional assessment post-qualifying.
- Stakeholders also highlighted a number of barriers to the implementation of the proposal. These barriers related primarily to a lack of funding and resources.

III. Recommendations from Stakeholders

- A number of questions were raised by stakeholders which will need to be considered prior to the development or roll out of any changes.
- Recommendations were also made by stakeholders and these will be included in future conversations and planning.

1. Background

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), working with partners across the sector, completed a review on social work education in Scotland in 2016. Further work on the recommendations arising from the review has continued in subsequent years and is outlined on the SSSC website¹. One of the recommendations from the report was that Scotland should introduce a mandatory, supported first year in practice for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs).

The Scottish Government is now considering this recommendation and this report details the findings from a survey conducted with stakeholders to assess their perspectives on the proposed year. In addition, the survey created an opportunity for stakeholders to consider a number of options which were outlined in the review and contribute to the discussion regarding how a supported year may be developed and implemented.

2. Method

The online survey was distributed via stakeholder networks and was aimed at social work professionals and those who support the training, assessment, and/or management of social workers. It was carried out between August and September 2017 and was completed by 1,577 people.

3. Survey Respondents

The survey was completed by 1,555 people responding on an individual basis and by 22 people who were responding on behalf of their organisations. Overall, the majority of respondents were employed by local authorities (≈60%). Other employers included: health and social care partnerships (≈10%); third sector agencies (≈10%); private sector agencies (≈ 5%); and universities (≈ 5%). The remaining 10% were coded as other.

¹ <https://www.sssc.uk.com/careers-and-education/information-for-providers/review-of-social-work-education/>

The number and professional status of those included in the organisational responses is unknown; therefore, Figure 1 depicts the professional status of individual responders only.

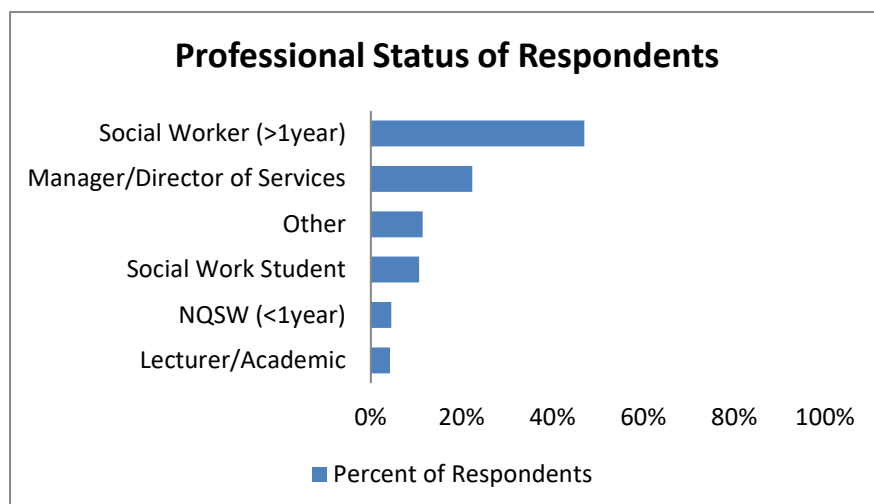


Figure 1: Respondents Profession

As can be seen in Figure 1, social workers who had been in practice for over a year accounted for the largest proportion of responses (47%). This is unsurprising given that they make up the vast majority of the social work workforce². Despite representing a much smaller proportion of responders, the survey obtained relatively good coverage of social work students and NQSWs in relation to estimates of people entering or graduating from social work degrees in any given year.

Those categorised as 'other' includes those working in related areas of social work (e.g. practice teachers, link workers, and policy associates) and social workers who are retired, currently out of work, or working in social care settings.

4. Survey Findings

4.1 Should Scotland Introduce a Mandatory, Supported, Assessed Year for Newly Qualified Social Workers?

In the first instance, respondents were simply asked the degree to which they supported the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year for newly

² <http://data.sssc.uk.com/local-level-data/160-local-authority-post-type-2016>

qualified social workers. Figure 2 shows an overwhelming majority of respondents supported the introduction of the newly proposed year with approximately 84% of respondents stating they either supported or strongly supported the proposal. In contrast, only 7% didn't support or were strongly against the proposal.

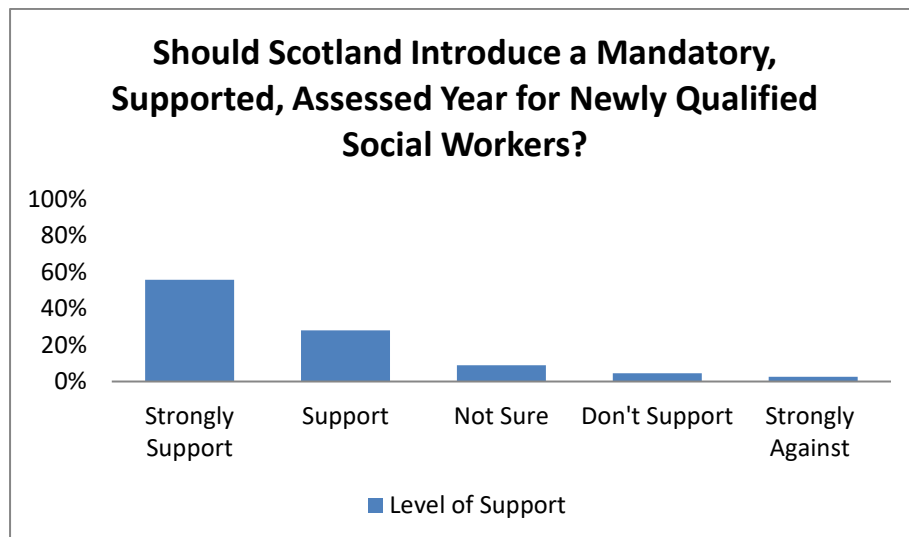


Figure 2: Respondents level of support for the recommendation.

4.2 Rationale for support

The first open ended question asked respondents to provide a rationale for their response and these have been analysed and presented thematically. In total, 1,342 respondents provided a written rationale and these comments were used by respondents as justification for why they supported the proposal or not. Five core themes have been identified and these are presented below in summary form. The first three themes relate specifically to those who supported or strongly supported the proposal and the remaining two are general themes which were identified across the 5 levels of support (strongly support, support, not sure, don't support, strongly against).

It should be noted that responses were restricted due to a 250 character limit and as a result some respondents may not have been able to provide a thorough justification of their choice. However, despite this, an indication of how frequent the themes were within the comments has been provided.

4.2.1 Themes from those who supported or strongly supported the proposal

Theme 1: To support and protect NQSWs

Approximately 22% of the comments (290) suggested that responders were in favour of a mandatory, supported, assessed year as they felt it was necessary to ensure NQSWs were receiving adequate support and protection during their first year of practice. Those who felt this introduction was necessary pointed to the variation in quantity and quality of support across organisations as a key concern and felt that a mandatory, supported, assessed year would ensure employers were held accountable for providing appropriate levels of support. In addition, these respondents felt that the expectations and demands on NQSWs were too high, especially in areas where there were staff shortages. The introduction of the proposal was thought to provide some protection against this by providing a framework which would ensure NQSWs were given protected caseloads that were not out-with their knowledge or capabilities.

Example Quotes

“In my work as a practice educator I have concerns that newly qualified workers experience quite a lottery of support and this should be formalised and standards set to ensure that they receive the right support in their first year of practice” (Lecturer/Academic, Strongly Support).

“As a senior manager and director I became increasingly concerned at the complexity of work expected of newly/recently qualified staff who sometimes seemed unprepared for the reality of social services in local authority” (Manager/Director of Services, Strongly Support).

“I have seen too many newly qualified social workers thrown in at the deep end and being told they’ll pick it up only to end up so stressed they go off sick. They need to be nurtured and shown how, why, and when to approach tasks” (Social Worker >1 year, Strongly Support).

Theme 2: To overcome inadequate training and placements during pre-qualifying stages

Approximately 14% of the responses (189) indicated that responders were in favour of the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year as a way to ensure the competence of NQSWs. This was felt necessary because of perceived inadequacies in the pre-qualifying training and assessment of NQSWs. These comments tended to be very critical of the Social Work degree, the placements provided to NQSWs and suggested that the quality and experience of NQSWs varied considerably as a result. For these respondents, the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year was deemed as a necessary protective measure to ensure NQSWs were fit to practice and to safeguard service users from being placed at unnecessary risk.

Example Quotes:

“I don’t believe that degree courses are equipping newly qualified workers for the reality of working in busy and stressful work environments. I have also been very concerned with [the] quality of written work from newly qualified workers” (Manager/Director of Services, Strongly Support).

“Students are often not getting statutory placements, are entering work places that are short staffed and getting cases that are too high tariff/risk for someone early on in their career; it renders both them and service users vulnerable” (Social Worker >1 year, Strongly Support).

“The jump between academic study and the daily duties of a social worker is far too large. Course placements are rarely adequate or appropriate enough to bridge this gap and management are often unaware of the extra learning requirements of NQSWs” (NQSW, Strongly Support).

Theme 3: To help support the transition from student to qualified social worker

Approximately 14% of the responses (182) indicated approval for the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year as a way to support NQSWs in their transition

from university to work as a qualified social worker. In general, the respondents felt it would allow NQSWs additional time to learn policies and procedures specific to the local authority and practice areas they are working in. They also felt it was important that NQSWs were given the chance to consolidate their learning and enhance their practice based skills whilst being under the protection and guidance of experienced staff members. This was considered beneficial for improving the confidence and practice skills of NQSWs which could in turn benefit the organisation and service users.

Example Quotes:

“This will provide a probationary period for NQSWs, which will allow on the job training and assessment. It will create a bridge between training and employment and may make entry to the profession more attractive” (Manager/Director of Services, Strongly support).

“Newly qualified workers need time to develop both skills and understanding of legislation, policy and procedures. They should, in my view have a protected caseload and a mentor in their first year of practise” (Social Worker >1 year, Strongly support).

“I feel that it is very important for newly qualified social workers to have additional support for their first year on the job during their transition into their career. This would benefit the social worker as an individual and the service users” (Social work student, Strongly support).

4.2.2 General Themes from all respondents

Theme 4: Preference for Support rather than assessment

Regardless of whether or not respondents agreed with the overall proposal, most if not all seemed to be in favour of additional support for NQSWs. In contrast, 146 (approximately 11%) respondents highlighted concerns regarding the introduction of mandatory, supported, assessment. Many of the concerns related to additional pressures that assessment might place on NQSWs. In addition to this, a number of

respondents felt that the pre-qualifying training is, or should be, robust enough to ensure competent staff and therefore the first year in practice should focus on continued professional development rather than additional assessment.

Example Quotes:

“Mandatory support for the first year is a good idea and would be a benefit to NQSWs in terms of building confidence and practice. Further assessment would add to stress levels in NQSWs” (Social Worker >1 year, Don’t support)

“Agree with idea of a supported year with protected time for training and group reflection. However consider that the university/placement process for students should be robust enough, that a year’s assessment should not be required in the 1st practice year” (Social Worker >1 year, Don’t support)

“I would not support further assessment; students have passed their degree and shouldn’t have to worry about another period of assessment. This first year should be assessing employers’ capacity to support and prepare newly qualified staff for the challenges” (Other, Support)

Theme 5: Implementation Concerns

Implementation concerns were raised at two points in the survey. In response to this question, 173 responses (approximately 13%) focused on concerns regarding the implementation of the proposal. The example quotes below are based on comments used to justify responses from this initial question but it should be noted that additional concerns relating to implementation were raised or expanded on at the end of the survey.

Those who highlighted implementation concerns focused almost exclusively on the financial and resource pressures which social work services are currently experiencing and argued that the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year may be an additional burden.

Example Quotes:

“I agree in principal it is a good idea and could contribute to improved practice. However, could place stress on already overstretched individuals and organisations. I would be concerned it would not be resourced properly” (Manager/Director of services, Don't support)

“Evidence for it being useful is not conclusive and without a major injection of resources to enable an infrastructure of support, e.g. supervision, this would be another burden on already hard-pressed services” (Lecturer/Academic, Not Sure)

“Due to lack of funding, resources, increased workloads and lack of staff it is likely to be very difficult to implement as everyone is struggling to maintain their own caseloads” (Social Worker >1 year, strongly support)

5. Registration

5.1 If a mandatory, supported, and formally assessed year for NQSWs is introduced, should all those graduating from social work qualifying programmes be able to register and continue to register as social workers, whether or not they pass the supported year assessment?

Social work is a protected profession and as such all those wishing to practice as a social worker must have completed either an undergraduate or Masters qualifying programme for social work and be registered by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) which is the relevant regulatory body in Scotland.

Respondents were asked whether they thought the registration procedures should be altered if the proposal was to be introduced. In total there were 1,566 responses to this question.

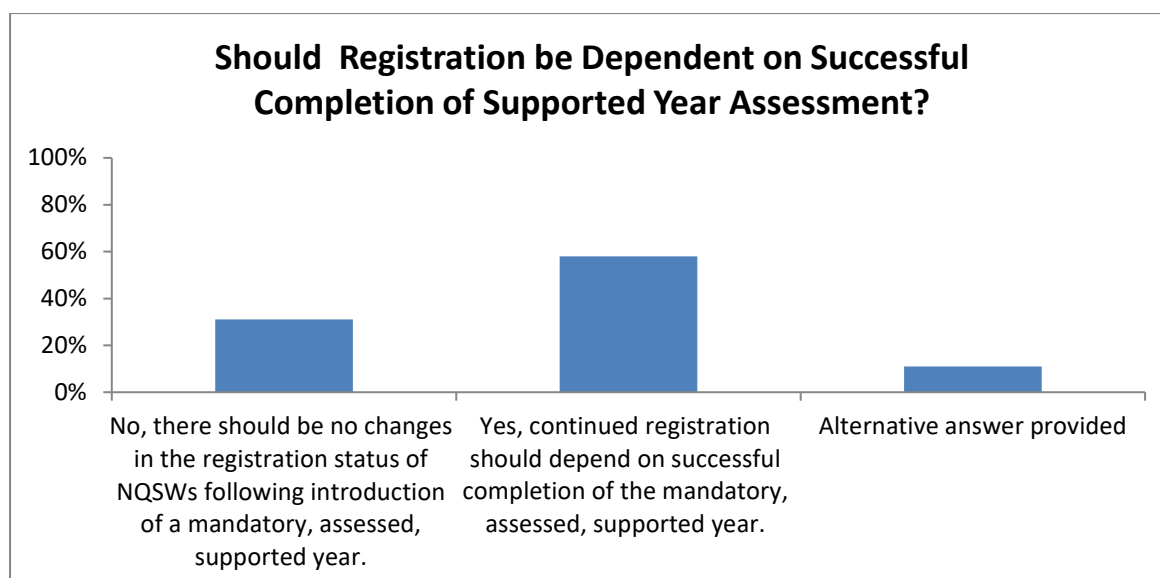


Figure 3: Stakeholder perception on whether registration should be impacted by the proposal

Figure 5 shows that the majority of respondents (58%) indicated that continued registration as a social worker should be dependent on successful completion of the mandatory, supported, assessed year. Of those who provided an alternative answer, the majority stated that decisions regarding registration should be taken on a case by case basis and an individual's circumstances/reasons for failure should be taken into consideration with some people being offered further training or an additional probationary period.

6. Options for Consultation

In the original review, five potential options were identified. These options were outlined in the survey and respondents were asked to rank them in order of preference.

Option 1. An amended approach to existing post-registration training and learning (PRTL) for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) that:

- is mandatory
- encourages greater ownership by employers with a standardised induction and minimum level of supervision and support.
- is linked to registration
- is not assessed.

Option 2. A phased introduction of a supported year for NQSWs that:

- is voluntary for NQSWs and optional for employers
- is not a mandatory requirement for registration
- is learner-driven – NQSWs self-report learning to demonstrate how they have met the new NQSW standards
- allows a phased introduction of the scheme alongside the existing post-registration training and learning (PRTL) approach.

Option 3. A standardised supported year for NQSWs that:

- has mandatory conditions for NQSWs and employers e.g. for induction and supervision
- is linked to registration.
- is learner-driven – NQSWs self-report learning to demonstrate how they have met the new NQSW standards.
- includes light-touch, practice-based employer-led assessment.
- is externally quality assured (e.g. by the SSSC).

Option 4. An award-bearing year for NQSWs that:

- is mandatory for both employers and NQSWs.
- forms a foundation stage for a career progression pathway.
- is linked to registration
- is formally assessed according to an established framework
- is employer-led
- accumulates credits towards professional awards.

Option 5. An award-bearing year for NQSWs that:

- is mandatory for both employers and NQSWs.
- forms a foundation stage for a career progression pathway
- is linked to registration
- is formally assessed according to an established framework
- is delivered through partnerships between Universities and employers,
- accumulates credits towards professional and/or academic awards
- follows an approved curriculum.

6.1 Respondents Preference

In line with the review, options four and five were the most preferred choices. Figure 3 is based on respondents' first preference only as the ranking process was not completed in a consistent manner. From the 1,574 responses, 139 were excluded as no clear preference was indicated.

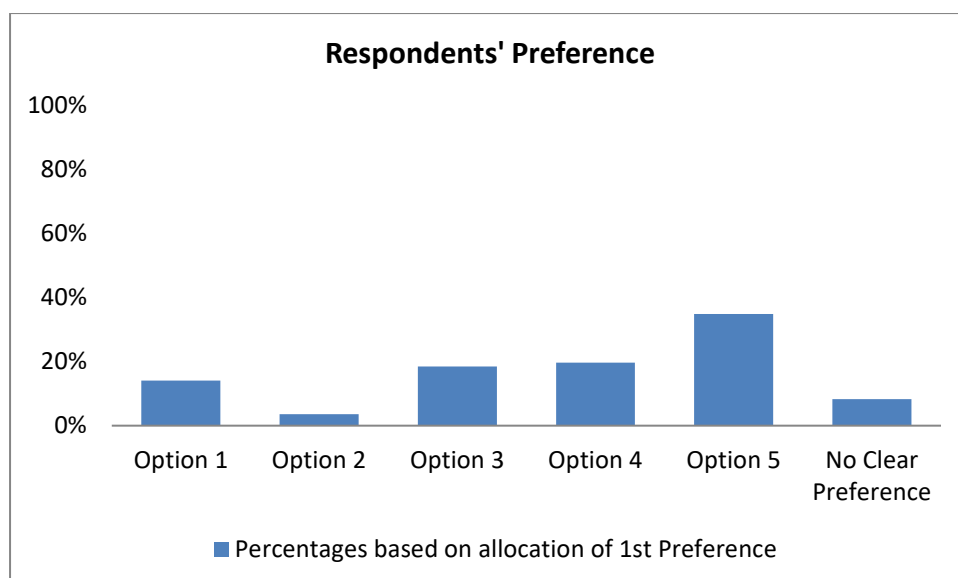


Figure 4: Stakeholders 1st Preference

In addition to the ranking of options, respondents were asked to provide a justification of their choice. Justifications have been summarised below and are presented in order of the most preferred option.

Option 5 as 1st Preference

549 respondents (approximately 35%) chose option 5 as their preferred choice. Respondents who favoured option 5 indicated a preference for Higher Education Institution (HEI) involvement and suggested that this option was the most likely to ensure a rigorous and robust framework which would ensure consistency and structure to the implementation of a supported year. HEI involvement was seen as beneficial for helping NQSWs transition between education and practice by ensuring consistency in learning and assessment procedures. Moreover, HEI involvement was welcomed by these respondents because it could provide opportunities for post graduate qualifications or credits and enhance continued professional development.

Option 4 as 1st Preference

310 respondents (approximately 20%) favoured option 4. These respondents generally agreed that a procedure needed to be in place that ensures that employers would be held accountable for supporting NQSWs but that it didn't necessarily have to be overseen by HEIs or the SSSC. In fact, one of the main differences between those who preferred option 4 to option 5 was the idea that learning and assessment

should be employer led and based on the practice needs of the NQSWs and the services in which they work.

Option 3 as 1st Preference (291 Respondents)

291 respondents (approximately 18%) preferred option 3. These respondents tended to be supportive of mandatory supervision but did not think there should be a requirement for further assessment. The respondents who picked option 3 raised concerns over the feasibility of implementing options 4 and 5 and suggested that these may be too resource intensive and have the potential to put additional burdens and financial pressures on employers and services.

Option 1 as 1st Preference

225 respondents (approximately 14%) picked option 1 as their first choice. Those who were in favour of option 1 were critical of further assessment and felt that NQSWs should have received appropriate training and assessment during their degree or as part of the PRTL. Respondents also raised concerns regarding the potential for unintended consequences of introducing any of the other options. In particular, they argued that the inclusion of mandatory, supported, assessment may act as a barrier to employment by discouraging employers from recruiting NQSWs and stopping prospective social workers from joining the profession.

Option 2 as 1st Preference

Very few respondents (55, approximately 3%) chose option 2 as their most preferred choice and even fewer provided an explanation for the choice. Of those who did, there was a reluctance to impose mandatory requirements as this was considered unnecessary for all NQSWs and it was feared that implementation of the other options would simply add to pressures and paperwork for both NQSWs and their employers.

7. Implementation

7.1 Implementation in non-local authority settings

The survey also sought to identify factors relating to implementation. Respondents were asked to rate how easy it would be for a non-local authority employers (e.g. a third sector service provider) to implement each of the options.

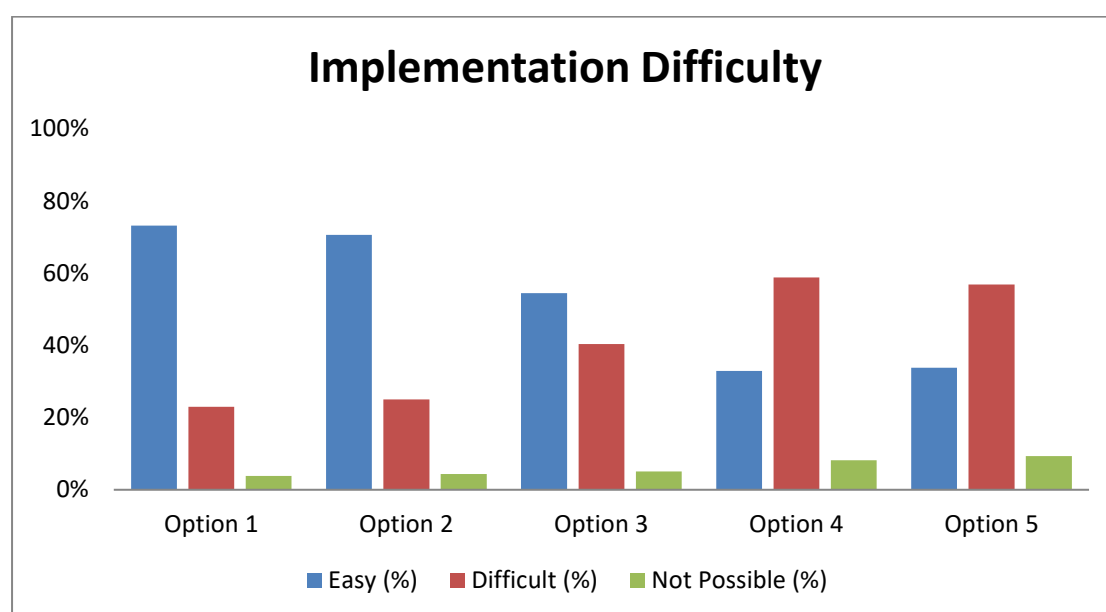


Figure 5: Ease of Implementation

As can be seen in Figure 4, the options which received the most support (options 4 and 5) were also considered to be the most difficult to implement out with statutory settings.

7.2 Additional Features

Respondents were asked to judge how essential the following components would be for inclusion in any changes implemented.

- Rotation between specialities
- A component that develops research skills
- Experience of a range of statutory settings
- A designated mentor
- Minimum days/hours of learning/training
- Supervisors specifically trained to supervise NQSWs

- Restricted caseloads
- An experienced social worker as supervisor
- A standardised induction process
- Protected time for learning/training
- Minimum requirements for structured supervision and reflective learning

Figure 6 shows the percentage of respondents who judged each component as essential, important, or not important.

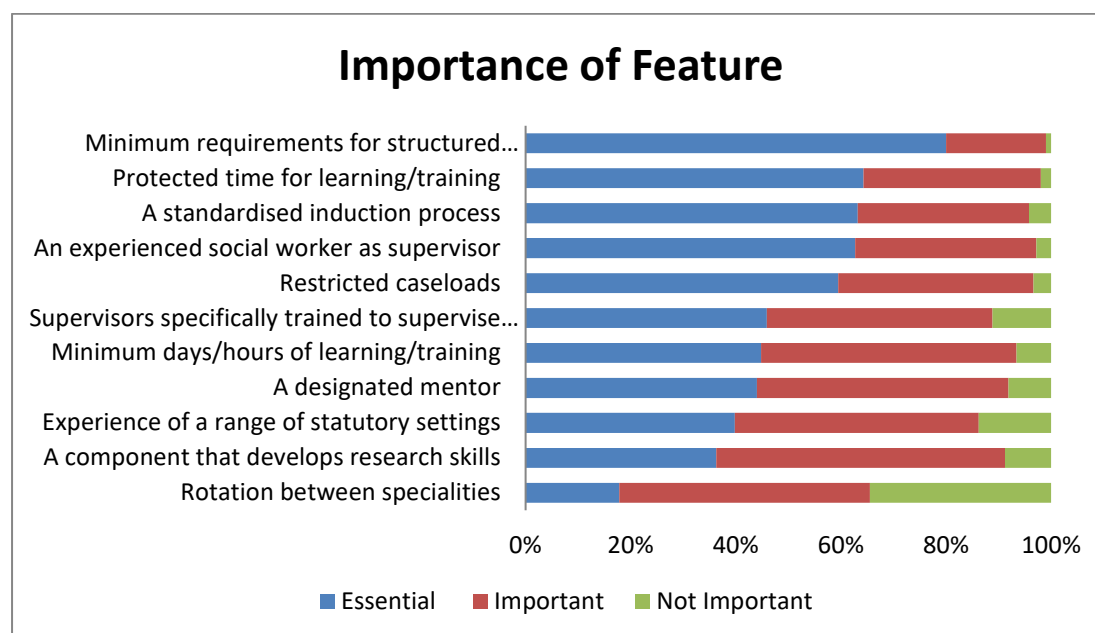


Figure 6: Importance of feature

For readability purposes, the figure has been ordered in relation to how essential the component was deemed to be. Five components were considered essential by over 50% of the respondents:

- Minimum requirements for structured supervision and reflective learning
- Protected time for learning/training
- A standardised induction process
- An experienced social worker as supervisor
- Restricted caseloads.

In addition to the importance of each component, respondents were asked to rate how easily it might be implemented. Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents who judged each component as easy, difficult, or not possible.

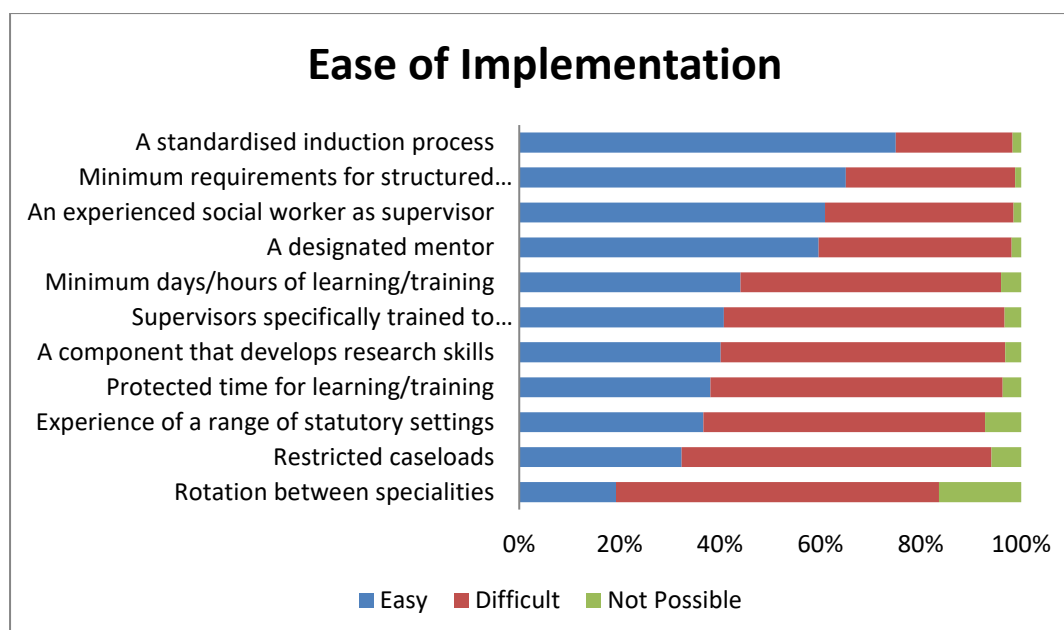


Figure 7: Ease of Implementation

Again, for readability purposes, the figure has been ordered in relation to how easily implemented the component was deemed to be. Four components were considered easy to implement by over 50% of the respondents:

- A standardised induction process
- Minimum requirements for structured supervision and reflective learning
- An experienced social worker as supervisor
- A designated mentor.

To aid with interpretation, Figure 8 compares the essentialness of the component with how easy it would be to implement.

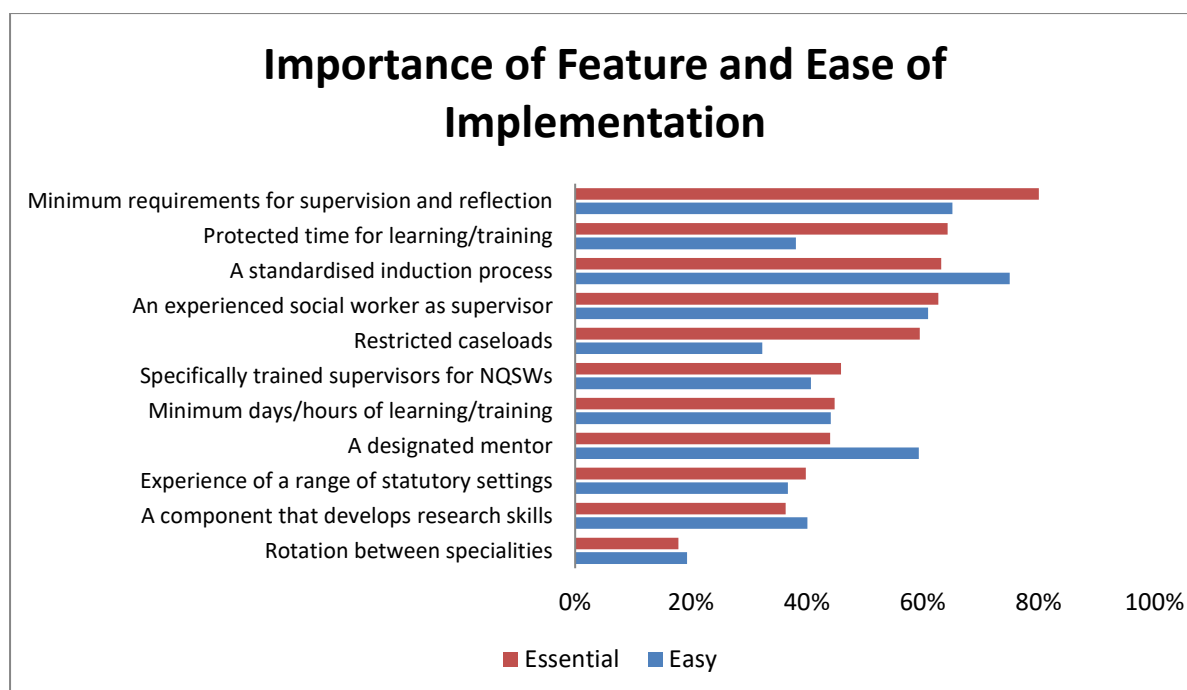


Figure 8: Importance vs. Ease of Implementation

Figure 8 shows that the majority of suggestions were seen as relatively difficult to implement. Of the five components seen as essential to implement by at least half of the respondents only three were also considered easy to implement by at least half:

- Minimum requirements for supervision and reflection
- A standardised induction process
- An experienced social worker as supervisor.

As can be seen in the figures, rotation between specialities was considered particularly difficult to implement.

8. Additional Comments

The final question in the survey provided stakeholders with an opportunity to identify any additional features that they considered important for a mandatory, supported, assessed year.

The responses to this question focused primarily on factors relating to the implementation of the proposed year rather than components of it. As mentioned earlier, the answers to the final question contained 127 comments relating to implementation concerns. Of these comments, some related to newly raised concerns

and others were simply expansions upon those previously noted (see Theme 5). In the final section, implementation concerns accounted for approximately 26% of all comments. For the most part, these comments echoed the concerns highlighted earlier and were based on concerns around funding and resources.

The final question was not restricted in the same way as previous open ended options therefore responders were afforded greater space to discuss their concerns. The example quotes below have been provided as they provide more depth to those included previously.

8.1 Funding and Resource Concerns

Example Quotes

“Predominantly if this is to be done in the best possible way, protected time needs to be offered to both the supervisor/assessor and the student. Social workers caseloads are too high and whilst students are often welcome, the practicalities are too difficult to manage alongside your work. With on-going cut backs to additional and complimentary services within social work, I do not see how this can be implemented when social workers are already spreading themselves thinly and then criticised for not getting things right” (Social worker >1 year, Strongly support).

“I think in the current climate of financial restraint and austerity any demands on overworked social workers is difficult to manage and achieve a balance in respect of work commitments. There is already a poor work life balance for experienced social workers and any additional tasks will see experienced practitioners being lost to agencies or the profession. I would like the best possible support service available to all NQSW however it must be balanced with the needs of the existing workforce and demands ring fenced funding if this aspiration (we should all be aiming for) is to be achieved. All of this is very worthy and I fully support the aims however without funding will not be achieved across local authorities or third sector” (Manager/Director of Services, Support)

“Many of the above would require a whole new way of recruiting and managing staff resources. As an employer, I need the staff in post to do the work however recognise the need for new staff to learn. This would require further financial investment nationally to achieve. There is also the relationship/continuity of service which would be difficult to sustain for our service users if staff rotate/move regularly” (Manager/Director of Services, Not Sure).

8.2 Additional Concerns

“Structured supervision with reflective learning and evidence based practice will only be effective with a skilled reflective supervisor and there are variations in this skill within teams. HEIs input will be important to avoid this becoming a tick box exercise skimmed over by employers. NQSWs will need a reduction in caseload to complete additional study and this will likely pose difficulties for employers in already stretched services. Specifically trained supervisors would be the ideal provided they are given a reduction in caseload to complete the work effectively or a separate role. Some experience of specialties and various statutory settings would help those who did not get varied student placements but again will require extra manpower to facilitate/organise not to mention significant additional funding for LAs. The whole system would have to be well organised and audited independently to avoid the pitfalls of becoming another layer of pointless bureaucracy as PRD can be (eg being asked to identify training needs only to find that no training in that area is available)” (Other, Support).

“Most of the above in reality will be difficult to carry out. Voluntary agency may be reluctant to employ you in the first year and the statutory sector do not have the resources to facilitate your needs. This could make employment for first year graduates very difficult. There has to be a way of protecting the NQSW and the service user without putting too much pressure on the employer and making it difficult for them to employ you. This move could actually damage the future for NQSWs. It is also important to consider the experience of the NQSW...some NQSWs will require more support than others and could hinder those that already have lots of experience and a job to go to. It needs to be a balanced approach and not one that disadvantages some while supporting others” (Social Work Student, Not Sure).

“The above options are predicated on the premise that the proposal is going to be introduced. I think it needs more consultation and wider questions to be asked. It is easy to introduce regulations, with less considerations given to their longer term implications. We need to ask questions like: how often LAs are able to work with HEIs to offer appropriate practice learning opportunities even when there is a surplus of trained practice teachers; what mechanisms are there to support third sector to ensure these regulations; what mechanisms are there to support SWs who trained overseas who arrive here and who would perhaps need more support; think of third sector that are struggling due to funding cuts but expected to ensure such regulations on NQSWs” (Lecturer/Academic, Don’t support).

9. Suggestions

Although many of the final comments simply highlighted concerns regarding the introduction of the proposal, others provided suggestions and/or additional insights into how the pre and post qualifying years could be improved.

9.1 Additional Training

Respondents highlighted a number of key training needs for NQSWs some of which related to general skills (e.g. writing and communicating social work reports) and others which related to enhancing topic specific knowledge.

9.1.1 General Skills

In terms of general skills, the ability to write and communicate social work reports in a clear and logical manner was considered fundamental for all social workers and was recognised as skill that NQSWs may require additional support with. Suggestions from stakeholders indicated that additional training and more robust assessment of these skills during the pre or post qualifying period was needed for NQSWs to build proficiency.

Example Quotes:

“Workers should have time spent shadowing experienced workers and be supervised/observed on visits and meetings in a non-threatening manner. Their case

load should be varied and include short term pieces of work and support to organise vets before writing reports for Children's Hearings and Case Conference" (Other, Strongly Support).

"In a statutory setting I think it is vital that NQSW get supported experience of preparing for, managing the stress of, and verbal input to, crucial meetings like those of Child Protection, Children's Panels, court, Adult Support & Protection Meetings"
(Social Worker >1 year, Not Sure).

"Experience in writing complex reports to satisfactory level should also be assessed"
(Manager/Director of Services, Support).

9.1.2 Topic Specific Knowledge

Child protection was seen as a particularly challenging area of social work practice. It was suggested that all NQSWs, regardless of the area in which they work, should have an awareness of and training in child protection. Specifically it was recommended that NQSWs be required to complete levels 1 and 2 of child protection training as a minimum. Moreover, it was argued that NQSWs should work jointly with experienced staff on protection cases for at least one year.

An opportunity to engage in additional topic specific training was also identified. There was a wide array of topics areas identified as requiring further training. These included but were not limited to:

- o Mental Health
- o Domestic Abuse
- o Substance misuse/addiction
- o Family Therapy and Parenting Programmes

Example Quotes:

"Specialised training as part of the induction process for instance protection training and area specific information such as POA and guardianship training in community care or kinship care in C&F" (NQSW, Strongly support).

“I think that in the first year workers should be allocated increasingly complex cases, but not CP cases until at least two years post qualifying. This protects workers, but also vulnerable clients. First CP cases should be co worked with a very experienced worker who has ability to share learning. I think it is also important that a team understand the needs of NQSW and the commitments the employer has. Employers should not have more than one NQSW in any team and not place that in a team that is facing any particular issues, such as staffing, or where there is high dependency on agency workers” (Social Worker >1 year, No response)

“More training courses made available for free for or subsidized cost allowing third sector or private organizations to access for the social workers. Topics like; Child exploitation, MAPPA and Interviewing vulnerable people, Working with Asylum seekers and Traveller Communities, Gender based violence and domestic abuse, Assist or suicide prevention” (Social Work Student, Not Sure).

9.2 Formal and informal learning and support systems

Stakeholders recognised the importance of both formal and informal learning and support options for NQSWs and argued for an increase in peer-assisted learning and informal support opportunities. These were considered important for improving not only the skills of NQSWs but also their health and wellbeing.

It was suggested that because social work is an extremely demanding and complex profession NQSWs may benefit greatly from peer-support networks where NQSWs can receive support and learn from others who are experiencing similar challenges.

Shadowing and mentoring opportunities were also highlighted as a relatively simple but effective way for NQSWs to enhance their skills.

In terms of formal supervision a small number of responses indicated that it may be beneficial for NQSWs to have access to an external supervisor as well as one within the team. It was thought that having an external supervisor may allow for more open and honest reflections from NQSWs and enhance emotional support.

Example Quotes:

“Regular feedback is required from the student on their perception of their workload, the levels of support offered and whether they feel they are developing their practice safely. This piece of reflection needs to be assessed by an external body to ensure that the worker can feel they are free to be open and honest about their experiences and, where there are any issues with their support needs, this can be addressed in a focussed and timely manner” (Social Worker >1 year, Strongly Support).

“I think it is very important that NQSWs have the opportunity to shadow, learn from experienced workers, and learn from mistakes as well as good practice. They should have time to discuss cases with their peers and experienced workers and a chance to experience different specialities” (Lecturer/Academic, Strongly Support).

“Peer support from other newly qualified workers, e.g. study groups/practice sessions to reflect on practice issues and bounce ideas around in relation to case work, but also to access emotional/practical support from those going through the same experience as you” (Social Worker >1 year, Strongly Support).

9.3 Changes to pre-qualifying procedures

In addition to changing post-qualifying training and support, stakeholders called for changes to be made to the pre-qualifying period. Specifically, there was concern that the content of the degree, the quality of placements, and the assessment procedures, were not adequately preparing social work students for practice. These concerns were raised at various points within the open ended responses and stakeholders suggested further review of the pre-qualifying procedures.

In regards to the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year, there were calls for this to be implemented within the degree programme rather than as a post-qualifying option. Additional recommendations focused on improved collaboration between education and social work services to help reframe both the content and placements offered.

Example Quotes:

“Gathering information, analysing and making assessments are fundamental to the SW post. The training is academic and workers are leaving uni without the skills required. Training also needs to be reviewed. It's not working” (Manager/Director of Services, Strongly Support).

“If the social work course was more relevant to the actual work social workers do then the 4th year of the degree could be this supported year” (Social Worker >1 year, Not Sure).

“At the moment new workers are given a great deal of additional training although this is likely to depend on where they are. One of the issues is the placements that individuals have during the course of their training as this is not always in a setting where professional social workers are based. If this is going to occur then what funding will be available to be able to provide the days out of work as a case load would still require to be covered and this will fall on the others in the service. Also this will take more time away from providing services from the people providing the support” (Manager/Director of Services, Don't Support).

10. Conclusions

In general the majority of respondents appeared to be in favour of change. The fixed choice questions indicated that there was great support for the introduction of a mandatory, supported, assessed year which was supported by HEIs but was based on developing and assessing practice based skills. However, based on the comments it was clear that respondents prioritised the introduction of additional support rather than additional assessment.

In terms of support, respondents suggested that there was a need for standardised support frameworks to be introduced which would help tackle inconsistencies in the current support practices across agencies and local authorities.

In terms of assessment, although many people were against the introduction of additional assessment post-qualification, if this was to be introduced, they argued it should be based on practice skills. The stakeholders also recognised and voiced concerns regarding the current approach to social work training and placements.

As a result the findings from the survey highlight two major points for consideration: 1) What can be introduced to improve support and post-training opportunities for NQSWs?

2) What can be introduced to improve the training and placement opportunities for social work students?