

Supporting information for the Standards for Social Work pre and post qualifying consultation 2025

Introduction

This Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) consultation focuses on standards for social work. The pre and post qualifying standards will be part of the updated and expanded Framework for Social Work due to be published in 2026.

The SSSC is responsible for setting standards for social work education and the regulated workforce. We want to establish a cohesive set of standards that reflect the professional identity of the profession and clearly articulates the unique contribution of social work from the beginning of the student journey through to strategic manager level. The post qualifying standards will form part of the updated and expanded Framework for Social Work Education and will be the foundation for professional pathways when they are developed.

With your help, we will capitalise on earlier work and build on the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) and the core learning elements for social workers to achieve this.

Why do we want to make changes?

This activity will support the Scottish Government ambition for a strategic framework which incorporates both social work education and professional practice.

1. Pre-qualifying

The Standards in Social Work Education (SISWE) and Ethical Principles were revised and published in 2019. We want to make sure they remain relevant to social work education and practice. Pre-consultation activity suggests the SiSWE remain relevant however would benefit from a refresh to make sure that the language and content is consistent, inclusive and trauma informed.

[Read The Standards in Social Work Education 2019.](#)

2. Post qualifying

As a precursor to the Scottish Government work on an advanced practice framework, we worked with a subject expert group to describe the core characteristics of social work practice.

The core characteristics were adopted by the SSSC and are used as the core learning elements for all social workers to frame continuous professional learning. Feedback from the 2023 continuous professional learning consultation shows that they are highly relevant to social work practice. The core characteristics have been central to the NQSW Supported Year since 2021. They are positively viewed as a helpful framework to understand the professional role, however, will provide a clearer transition from education to employment if they are called standards.

The standards will be based on the eight core characteristics/ core learning elements listed below. They are interdependent and intended to be considered holistically.

1. Ethics, values and rights-based practice
2. Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice
3. Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making
4. Promoting wellbeing, support and protection
5. Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts
6. Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice
7. Self-awareness and reflexivity
8. Professional leadership

[Read an example of how the current NQSW descriptors is set out.](#)

What we are doing

This work is formed of two interconnected workstreams which will happen in parallel; consultation on the standards and a short-life working group to develop the post-qualifying standards. This table sets out the timeline.

	Consultation on refresh of SiSWE and post-qualifying standards	Engagement – short life working group (SLWG) to develop the post-qualifying standards
June	Consultation period June – Sept	Establish SLWG key stakeholders
July		Draft standards from current core characteristics/ core learning elements
August		
Sept		
Oct	Update SiSWE	
Nov	Report to Council	
Dec	Complete Framework	
Jan		
Feb		Final feedback from SLWG
March	Publish Framework in March 2026	

We will set up a short life working group to further develop the content of the post qualifying standards for social work using the core characteristics and the structure used for the [NQSW descriptors](#). We are consulting on the standards while they are further developed by the short life working group to ensure that they reflect social work and can be structured and formatted in a way which brings them to life for every registered social worker. Feedback from the consultation will inform the short life working group.

We want the post qualifying standards to be a useful tool to support reflection on and discussions about professional practice and your feedback can help with this.

Further information

Framework for Social Work Education

The Framework for Social Work Education (2003) comprises of the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) and Learning and Teaching Requirements.

There has been an incremental approach to updating the framework. The SiSWE were updated and published in 2019 with the addition of ethical principles. The Scottish Requirements for Social Work Training were updated and published in December 2024.

The framework will be expanded to include standards for post qualifying social work education and will be the foundation for professional pathways when they are developed.

[Read The Standards in Social Work Education 2019.](#)

Post qualifying standards

The post qualifying standards will provide a simple framework to support social workers to understand and articulate the unique contribution of social work, the power and authority afforded to the protected title and responses to ethical dilemmas that arise.

The standards are based on these eight interdependent core characteristics and should be considered holistically.

1. Ethics, values and rights-based practice
2. Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice
3. Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making
4. Promoting wellbeing, support and protection
5. Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts
6. Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice
7. Self-awareness and reflexivity
8. Professional leadership

They describe the knowledge, skills and values common to all professional social work practice regardless of setting, role or experience.

The standards will be developed around the four broad categories below and will reflect where relevant the different levels of knowledge, skills, responsibility and leadership expected. This will also provide a foundation for professional pathways when they are developed.

Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW)	a person in their first period of registration as a social worker who has not yet successfully met their NQSW continuous professional learning requirements or equivalent.
Social worker	a social worker who has successfully met their NQSW continuous professional learning requirements or equivalent.
Advanced social worker	a social worker in a position of first line management, or another area of specialism, for example, a practice education, mental health officer, academic.
Strategic social worker	a social worker who has a senior level of management and is involved in strategic planning for social work services.

The current structure has three sections:

- a description of the standard
- what this means for that broad category
- how the standard may demonstrate the standards through their practice.

The [NQSW descriptors](#) provides an overview of the current structure of the standards.