

**Graduate Apprenticeship in
Social Work: Additional
information for course providers
2026**

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Introduction

This information is for higher education course providers in Scotland who are seeking approval for a graduate apprenticeship in social work. It must be read in conjunction with the key documents listed below.

A graduate apprenticeship (GA) in social work is a work-based learning programme designed to offer an alternative entry route for anyone wishing to enter the profession, by combining paid employment with study.

The GA provides the opportunity for employers and universities to work in partnership to develop the social workers of the future. It is important that course providers ensure that employers fully understand their role in the work-based learning element of the GA before committing to involvement in it.

All social work courses including any GAs are subject to SSSC approval and must meet the Scottish Credit and Qualifications (SCQF) Level 10 requirements for an undergraduate degree and the SSSC Rules and Requirements for Social Work Education. The course must be mapped against the Standards in Social Work Education and Ethical Principles (SiSWE) and aligned to the Skills Development Scotland Graduate Apprenticeship (GA) Framework for Social Work - SCQF Level 10 Occupational Profile.

Successful completion of an approved GA in Social Work will result in the award of BA (Hons) Social Work or equivalent and eligibility to register with the SSSC as a social worker in Scotland.

Any providers wishing to deliver graduate apprenticeships must also meet the requirements of the Graduate Apprenticeship Framework for Social Work. You should refer to the Skills Development Scotland's (SDS) website for further information.

Key documents

The following documents are essential reading for any prospective application.

[The Graduate Apprenticeship Framework for Social Work](#) (SDS, 2025)

[The Graduate Apprenticeship – Social Work – SCQF Level 10 Occupational Profile](#) (SDS, 2025)

[Rules for Social Work Training](#) (SSSC, 2003) – set out the overall structure for the approval and continued monitoring of courses

[Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education](#) (SSSC, 2024) – lay out the entry requirements for social work qualifying programmes

[The Standards in Social Work Education and Ethical Principles](#) (SSSC, 2026) – the standards against which social work students are required to be assessed

[SSSC Handbook for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#) (SSSC, 2022)

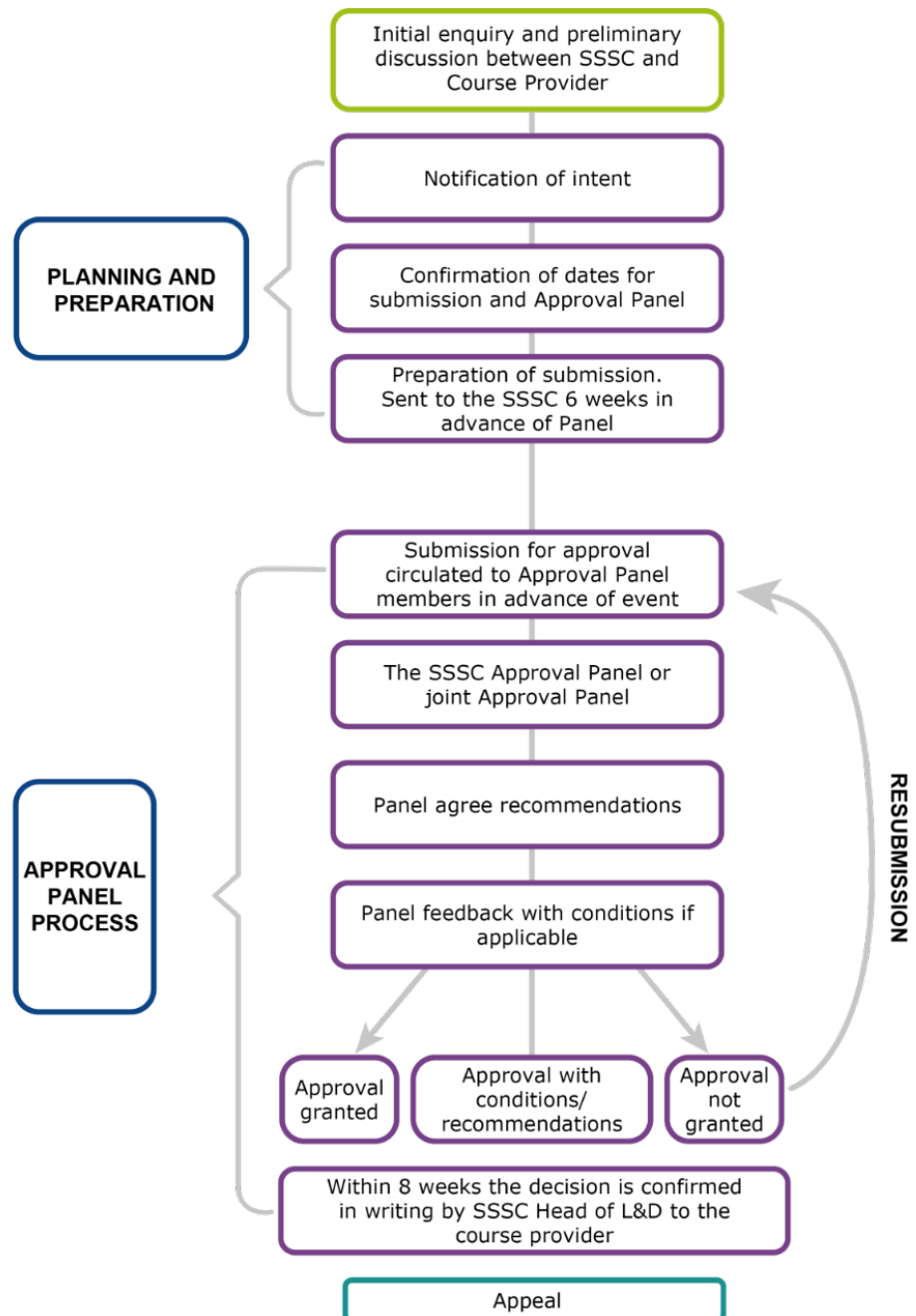


Approval process

Our approval process is designed to assess institutions and new courses to ensure they are structured and resourced to meet the rules and requirements and deliver education and training to the standards set by the SSSC, ensuring students and graduates are safe, effective and fit to practise.

The approval process is lengthy and will take a minimum of nine months. Interested providers should contact the SSSC at an early stage to discuss the process including agreeing timescales for submission and delivery.

Approval process



You can find full details of the initial enquiry and approval process in our [Handbook for Quality Assurance and Enhancement of SSSC Approved Programmes](#) (2022).

Application for approval of awards in social work

There is an expectation that the relevant Rules will be met in full at the point of approval unless there are exceptional circumstances. We recognise that the course may not yet be operational, however it must be at an appropriate stage of development for the application to show planned inputs and processes following engagement with key stakeholders to develop the course.

Following the initial enquiry and notification of intent, course providers will complete an application form and submit this along with any additional documentation and appendices. All folders and documents should be submitted electronically as agreed with the SSSC.

It is helpful if the application folder, any sub-folders and document titles clearly identify the content and are referenced in the application form as appropriate. Keep document titles short to prevent technical problems associated with very long file paths. Please check any hyperlinks to ensure that these are accessible outside your organisation.

When applying, we expect to see additional documentation specific to the graduate apprentice programme that reflects the unique aspects of the degree, including key roles and work-based learning. **This includes, but is not limited to:**

- evidence that Scottish Funding Council has approved delivery
- a template of the tripartite agreement between the graduate apprentice, the employer and the course provider
- evidence of collaboration between the provider and employer(s) in developing the course's approach to work-based learning, for example minutes of meetings, feedback or draft agreements
- policies relevant to graduate apprentices, including recruitment, selection, progression and complaints
- a proposed timetable for delivery of modules level 7 through to level 10, including arrangements for practice learning opportunities
- graduate apprenticeship handbook
- an example of a graduate apprentice learning and development plan
- course specification and module descriptors which include relevant work-based learning (WBL) and are mapped to the Occupational Profile and SiSWE
- teaching and assessment strategy which includes how any work-based learning will be assessed and contribute to the overall award
- evidence of planned processes and procedures for the quality assurance and standardisation of all aspects of educational provision, including those elements delivered by employers eg work-based learning
- details on the academic and employer support provided to apprentices
- evidence of ongoing and planned future engagement with stakeholders (including people with lived experience, employers and students/graduate



apprentices) in the design, proposed delivery and evaluation of the graduate apprenticeship course.

Key considerations

These questions may be helpful in informing your application. The graduate apprenticeship is a new route into social work education. We will update this section as needed.

Do I need approval if already offering a degree for an approved course?

Yes, the graduate apprenticeship is a distinct course from other approved social work courses and requires separate approval to be aligned to the national Graduate Apprenticeship in Social Work Framework (SDS, 2025), as well as the Framework for Social Work Education¹ (2026).

The delivery of a GA course is different from most taught social work courses and requires specific arrangements and resources. Please consider how you intend to meet any resource requirements eg staffing that might impact on course development and delivery of the graduate apprenticeship when considering applying for approval.

Does the title of the award need to include Graduate Apprenticeship?

The entitling qualification is BA (Hons) Social Work or equivalent. Course providers can decide to name the award BA (Hons) Social Work (Graduate Apprenticeship) for their own purposes; this is not a requirement of the SSSC.

Is there a specific duration or format for the programme?

Graduate apprenticeships are expected to take up to 48 months to complete. Flexibility in duration and models of delivery can be considered if the design and content meet the SSSC rules and requirements. The ethos of graduate apprenticeships is to widen access and opportunity so course design must include content for delivery from SCQF level 7 and have robust recognition of prior learning (RPL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) processes to support advanced entry where appropriate.

The general expectation is that most of the graduate apprentice's time will be spent in the workplace on direct learning, typically following an 80/20 split. Skills Development Scotland's website has examples of how this might work for example day or block release.

Is work-based learning a requirement for a graduate apprentice degree?

Yes – work-based learning is a significant and central part of the GA that will lead to a professional qualification in social work. Considerable thought needs to be given to the planning of work-based learning (WBL) and how it will be assessed and quality assured by course providers. Any academic credit that is awarded for WBL must be delivered and assessed by an appropriately trained and qualified party.

WBL consists of authentic structured learning opportunities that allow graduate apprentices to apply and integrate areas of subject and professional knowledge, skills and behaviours to enable them to meet course learning outcomes. Learning should be

¹ The framework contains the The Standards in Social Work Education and Ethical Principles (SiSWE) (2026) and the Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (2024).



assessed through a range of activities, using a variety of tools, leading to the development of a portfolio. This serves as a bank of foundational knowledge and skills, helping support the transition to practice learning and the professional social work role.

The SSSC expect course providers to evidence collaboration between them and employer(s) in the development of plans for delivery of work-based learning in their application. For example, discussions with employers on identifying the content and practical activities of WBL, such as identifying job shadowing, delivery of a specific project or in-house training.

Does the graduate apprenticeship programme need to be a structured learning experience?

Yes - a graduate apprenticeship is a structured learning course. The work-based learning content is formally planned and assessed through the apprentice's learning and development plan and associated portfolio, that is monitored through a series of meetings across the academic trimester. This live record identifies learning needs, maps them to opportunities within the workplace and to academic modules, and tracks progress towards achieving the 12 graduate apprenticeship learning outcomes, each of which is aligned to the Standards in Social Work Education and Ethical Principles (SiSWE) (SSSC, 2026).

The SSSC expect course providers to include an assessment strategy, detailing how the graduate apprentice is assessed and arrangements for the ongoing oversight, review and quality assurance of the learning in their application.

Can the graduate apprenticeship programme be delivered and assessed entirely through work-based learning?

No, to ensure that the SiSWE is delivered, the course must contain a combination of academic learning and work-based learning. Subjects that are mainly theory based are likely to be classroom taught, whereas more practical subjects may be taught through a combination of work-based learning and classroom activity. The course provider is required to work closely with the employer to identify opportunities for work-based learning and ensure this work is aligned to classroom-based activity. The SSSC expect course providers to map the opportunities to evidence learning against the SiSWE in their application.

Is the course provider required to monitor the quality of evidence gathered for the graduate apprenticeship's portfolio?

Yes, the course provider is responsible for monitoring the graduate apprentice's academic progress and will ensure that the course content meets the SiSWE (2026).

A plan must be in place for the course provider to monitor the learning and development plan and associated graduate apprenticeship's portfolio, to ensure structured learning opportunities are being provided and satisfactory evidence accumulated, that demonstrates that the relevant competencies and standards are being met. The method and level of monitoring will depend on the arrangements for the assessment of work-based learning. In all cases there should be a robust and comprehensive quality assurance process and procedures in place to ensure that all WBL meets the Rules and Requirements for Social Work Education and Training (2003a, 2024) and the 12 skills set out in the Graduate Apprentice Framework in Social Work (SDS, 2025).



What are employer's responsibilities as part of the programme?

These should be set out in the tripartite agreement. Employers must offer graduate apprentices 20% of their working time to undertake study. This could be day release pattern of four days a week at work and one study day in a five-day working week but can vary depending on the programme or the employees' working hours. Skills Development Scotland's website can provide more examples of typical work study patterns.

Each academic year will most likely consist of 120 SCQF credits which is a notional 1200 hours of study. This will be a combination of independent study, work-based learning and learning delivered by the course provider. Course providers should discuss with employers how this will be facilitated and liaise with relevant others, such as trade unions, where appropriate. Arrangements for the required practice learning component must be included in these discussions.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidance for universities on the delivery of graduate apprenticeships for academic year 2025-26² states course providers must ensure that students have a reasonable amount of time to complete study and assessment related to their GA within their working hours. Course providers will need to evidence how they will monitor the graduate apprentice's workload to ensure that the appropriate time is given to work-based learning activities and there is sufficient time for learning.

Having a clear understanding and agreement with employers will be essential to the delivery of a graduate apprenticeship. The SSSC expect course providers to provide evidence that employers are aware of what will be required of them to ensure their commitment and that they have the resources to deliver them in their application. For example, they must be able to provide staff for key roles eg assessor, mentor and for the length of time required, in addition to providing job duties and a range of work-based learning opportunities necessary to meet the SiSWE (2026).

When developing any arrangements with employers we expect to see defined roles and responsibilities for various elements of the course (for example admissions decisions, allocation of practice experience, and what happens when things go wrong).

Does the course provider have to provide training for mentors and work-based assessors?

Yes, the course provider must provide induction, training and ongoing support to the mentors and work-based assessors to ensure they fulfil their agreed roles and meet the relevant standards required. The responsibilities of work-based assessors and mentors need to be clear from the outset, and the course provider must have a clear mechanism for quality assurance and feedback.

Does the work-based assessor have to be a practice educator?

A work-based assessor must be a registered social worker however they do not need to be a practice educator. As mentioned above, the course provider must provide induction, training and ongoing support to carry out the role.

Practice learning opportunities are separate from work-based learning and must be assessed by a registered social worker with a relevant practice learning qualification.

² This guidance is annually updated so please refer to the latest version via the Scottish Funding Council's website.



The practice learning opportunities must meet the requirements outlined in section 2 of the Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (2024) (Requirements O-T).

Can one employer provide both placements?

The social work qualification is generic in nature and entitles registered social workers to practise across all areas of social work. The SSSC expect course providers to detail how they identify and quality assure practice learning opportunities to ensure Rule 6.1(j) and associated requirements are met in their application.

Practice learning opportunities must ensure students receive the broadest range of professional learning experiences to meet their assessed needs, rather than a narrow range that an employer might be able to provide.

Providing that the course provider is satisfied that an employer can offer the required breadth of contrasting experiences between the two practice learning opportunities and the students ordinary place of work, in line with The Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (2024), then a single employer could potentially offer both practice learning opportunities.

In other circumstances, the course provider will need to identify additional/or alternative practice learning opportunity outside the graduate apprentice's employer organisation and a practice educator who can support these opportunities when necessary.

Can you have the same practice educator for both practice learning opportunities?

No – as outlined in the Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education, graduate apprentices must have a different practice educator for each period of assessed practice learning.

Do course providers have responsibilities for PVG?

Yes - course providers must meet their responsibilities as set out in Disclosure Scotland PVG scheme: Regulated roles guidance 2025. The course provider is responsible for ensuring the suitability of graduate apprentices before and during the practice learning opportunities that they arrange. It is not sufficient to rely on PVG checks carried out by the SSSC to register graduate apprentices or as part of employer recruitment processes. Additional information developed in line with Disclosure Scotland is included in the application pack.

Do graduate apprentices need to undertake preparation for direct practice given that they are working in a social work setting?

While graduate apprentices may be employed and have substantial relevant work experience, under the Scottish Requirements for Social Work Education (2024) course providers must include assessed preparation for direct practice as part of their delivery, to ensure graduate apprentices are safe and competent to carry out practice learning as a student social worker in a service delivery setting. Assessed preparation for direct practice is different from direct practice and must not count towards the placement days (Requirement Q). The SSSC expect course providers to detail how this requirement will be met and arrangements for graduate apprentices assessed as not ready for placement in their application.

What should a course provider do about student support?

It is essential to consider what support will be available to the graduate apprentice from the course provider and what will be available from their employer. Are there likely to be any issues that graduate apprentices might experience in comparison with other students? The SSSC expect to see evidence of what support will be provided to graduate apprentices by the course provider and at their workplace.

Does the requirement that students attend 80% of taught sessions apply for apprentices?

Yes, Requirement J applies regardless of the mode of delivery. Course providers are expected to have a robust attendance and engagement policy and procedure in place and recognise that lack of attendance and engagement may indicate difficulties and a need for support.

Are graduate apprentices eligible for the Practice Learning Support Grant (PLSG)?

Students on a GA programme are classed as sponsored students and therefore currently not eligible for the Practice Learning Support Grant (PLSG). You can find information about graduate apprentice tuition fees on the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) website at this address <https://www.saas.gov.uk/full-time/graduate-apprenticeships-funding>.

Further sources of information

[The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\), UK Quality Code - Advice and Guidance Work-based Learning \(2018\).](#)

[The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\), UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024](#)

[The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\), Characteristics Statement: Higher Education in Apprenticeships \(June 2022\)](#)

[Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\) https://www.apprenticeships.scot](https://www.apprenticeships.scot), [graduate apprenticeship homepage](#).

[Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\), Graduate Apprenticeship Delivery Toolkit \(nd\).](#)

[Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\) The Graduate Apprenticeship Framework for Social Work \(2025\).](#)

[Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\) Occupational Profile for the Graduate Apprenticeship \(GA\) Framework - Social Work - SCQF Level 10 \(2025\)](#)

[Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\), Guidance for universities on the delivery of Graduate Apprenticeships in Academic Year 2025-26. \(2025\).](#)





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