

National Social Work Agency: Update



Introduction

The Government intends to establish a National Social Work Agency (NSWA).

The proposal and the process by which the Agency is being developed is explained in [Briefing No 124](#). Planning for the new Agency has been underway since January 2023. UNISON is represented on the Advisory Group taking forward the plans and its workstreams.

The National Social Work Agency is intended to be part of the proposed National Care Service (NCS) and so parts of its design are dependent on the shape of the future NCS. In light of the new revised proposals for an NCS (see [Briefing No 139](#)) this briefing sets out the current proposals for a NSWA. These are still under discussion and may be subject to further change.

A National Social Work Agency – what it will look like

As currently proposed, the NSWA will be a partnership between Social Work Scotland (SWS) and the Scottish Government/Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA).

It will be located within the Scottish Government which SWS, SASW and COSLA agree will give social work greater influence within national policy development.

There will be a NSWA Board. In keeping with the shared accountability agreement between local and national government, the Board will jointly report to both COSLA and Scottish Ministers and will be jointly chaired by OCSWA and COSLA.

The Board will have representation from COSLA, Scottish Government, SASW and SWS. Key 'stakeholders' will be on the Board including Health (IJBs), SSSC, Care Inspectorate, NHS Education Scotland (NES), UNISON and the Society of Personnel Directors Scotland.

Which parts of the workforce will it cover?

The workforce will be a main focus for the NSWA. Its remit is qualified social workers, social work assistants (i.e. paraprofessionals, which have many different job titles) and Chief Social Work Officers. Occupational Therapists working in social work teams are not currently included in the remit.

Following the agreement between Scottish Government and COSLA, social work pay, terms and conditions will remain the responsibility of COSLA and part of Scottish Joint Council local government collective bargaining.

The plans include a commitment to use established networks of committees and practice groups to put the voice of social workers at the heart of the NSWA.

KEY POINTS:

- The NSWA will be a partnership between Social Work Scotland and the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser, and based within the Scottish Government.
- It will be accountable jointly to COSLA and to Scottish Ministers.
- UNISON has helped develop "[What needs to change to support social work in Scotland](#)." Our social worker members will be consulted on this via a survey open until 22 March 2024.



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What the National Social Work Agency will do

The NSWA will support and invest in the social work profession, providing national leadership and oversight in the areas of:

- Education (pre- and -post qualifying), training and professional development;
- Workforce planning.
- Improvement and scale-up of good practice.

The NSWA will:

- Provide a central resource for local authorities, with data analysis & support and assistance with implementation.
- Work with local authorities to develop national workforce planning.
- Make sure there are consistent opportunities for training and an Advance Practice Framework for social workers.
- Support the delivery of the National Improvement and Support Framework and national practice standards for social work.
- Enhance the CSWO role, to ensure a direct link between national and local professional leadership.

It should be noted that these plans have implications for existing organisations such as the SSSC, CELCIS and IRISS, and these are subject to ongoing discussion.

Social Work and the revised National Care Service plans

The agreement reached between Scottish Government, COSLA and the NHS has led to revised plans for a NCS ([see Briefing No 139](#)). The Government intends to substantially amend the NCS Bill at Stage 2 to achieve this.

For social work, the main changes agreed are that:

- Councils will keep their statutory duties and responsibilities for the delivery of social services,
- Social work and social care staff will continue to be employed by councils.
- Assets like buildings will remain with local councils.

When will the National Social Work Agency happen?

The revised plan is for the National Care Service to be up and running 3 years later than intended - by 2029 rather than 2026. This pushes it into the next Parliamentary term. However the national level part of the NCS is expected to be established during 2025-26. The expectation is that the National Social Work Agency Board will be established in this timescale, although this has still to be confirmed.

UNISON's role

UNISON has engaged with the proposal for a NSWA and has raised concerns regarding some proposals. These have been taken on board and the revised proposals are more acceptable. However we will continue to advocate for a stronger voice for the workforce and for a NSWA to adopt a vision that promotes social work values of human rights, early intervention and empowerment. To this end, UNISON has worked with SWS and SASW to develop [key statements](#) based on what we've heard our members say, called "What needs to change to support social work in Scotland," to help us begin to build a long-term vision for the profession.

ACTION for local government branches

- **Please share this briefing with your social work members** including OTs and discuss at your branch committee.
- UNISON will be contacting its social worker members directly during Feb-March 2024 to consult about the key statements. **Please publicise and promote the survey consultation within your branch.**

Additional reading

How the Agency is being developed

[UNISON Briefing No 124](#)

Occupational Therapists and a National Social Work Agency

[UNISON Briefing No 125](#)

Revised Government plans for a National Care Service

[UNISON Briefing No 139](#)



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