

National Social Work Agency: NCS Bill Amendments



Introduction

This briefing gives an update on plans for a National Social Work Agency now that the Scottish Government has published its [Stage 2 amendments](#) to the National Care Service Bill.

Parliament's Health, Social Care & Sport Committee will be taking evidence about these revised plans including the National Social Work Agency amendments, and UNISON will be responding to its Call for Views.

For a full overview of what the NSWA would look like, its remit and responsibilities see [Briefing 140](#) (Feb 2024).

For details of the process by which the Agency is being developed see [Briefing No 124](#) (May 2023). Planning for the NSWA has been underway since January 2023.

Background

The Agency will be a formal partnership between Scottish Government/OCSWA, local government (COSLA) and Social Work Scotland (the national body for Chief Social Work Officers and other social work managers) in line with the Verity House and shared accountability agreements. Work is in train to establish the NSWA as a public body, in the form of an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government, staffed by civil servants. Being part of Government is seen as the best way to increase social work influence within national policy development.

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

The remit of the NSWA is for qualified social workers and paraprofessional social work staff. UNISON has made the case for Occupational Therapists to be included and this is still under consideration.

Update on NCS bill developments

Originally the bill made no reference to the National Social Work Agency as its development was seen as related, but not contingent upon the National Care Service and not requiring legislation. However, the Government now proposes to amend the NCS bill at Stage 2:

- to put the role of the National Chief Social Work Adviser on a statutory footing.
- to identify the National Social Work Agency as the body which will support them.
- to enable the Agency to take on ministerial functions for workforce planning in relation to social work.

KEY POINTS:

- **Amendments to the National Care Service Bill will confirm the role of a National Social Work Agency**
- **The Agency will be a formal partnership between the Office of the Chief Social Worker/Scottish Govt, COSLA & Social Work Scotland**
- **It will be created as an Executive Agency of Scottish Government led by the National Chief Social Work Adviser.**
- **Branches are encouraged to input to UNISON's response to the Call for Views**



Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:

Susan Galloway
s.galloway@unison.co.uk

Stephen Low
s.low2@unison.co.uk

Fiona Montgomery
f.montgomery@unison.co.uk

The rationale for the amendments is 'to promote and reinforce national leadership of the social work profession'. This will be the purpose of the NSWA. Currently the Scottish Government sets the overall strategic framework for social work delivery but there is no single national body which has oversight or provides leadership.

The amendments do not explicitly refer to or reflect the fact that the Agency is being established as a partnership between Social Work Scotland (SWS), COSLA and the Scottish Government/Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA). However, the revised Policy Memorandum confirms that this is the case (para 153) and that the preference for a public body is because it enables the Agency to be established based on a formal partnership arrangement.

The amendments require Scottish Ministers to designate one of their civil servants as the National Chief Social Work Adviser and requires that person must be a registered social worker.

The Government's revised plans for a National Care Service involve reform of the existing Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) and the creation (in 2025/26) of a National Care Service Board (NCSB). The NCS Board will be a new Non-Departmental Public Body rather than part of government, to ensure that it is independent of Ministers.

There will need to be close working and reporting arrangements between the NSWA and the NCS Board. It is intended that the NCS Board will have oversight and be responsible for workforce planning for the social care workforce and the NSWA will lead on workforce planning for social workers and social work students.

What happens next?

The new provisions in the NCS bill for the creation of a National Social Work Agency will be scrutinised in September by the lead parliamentary committee. UNISON will be submitting evidence (see Action for branches). A public Call for Views is open **until 30 August 2024**.

UNISON is represented on the Advisory Group taking forward these plans and its subgroups. The process for establishing the NSWA as a new public body is being worked through. The three principal partners - OCSWA, SWS and COSLA – are working on the practical details of how shared accountability and NSWA governance will work. Should the NCS Bill complete its passage through Parliament it is anticipated that the NCS Board would be established in 2025-2026. The establishment of the NSWA is likely to share this timescale but is to be confirmed.

The NSWA Leadership & Culture workstream is developing a national Vision for Social Work to inform the new Agency's priorities. UNISON is closely involved in this work. The first stage of this (spring 2024) involved a national survey of social workers to gather views on 'What needs to change for social work in Scotland'. UNISON social work members were encouraged to take part in this. The survey analysis, undertaken by the University of Strathclyde, will inform the next stage.

Action for local government branches & Social Work Issues Group

- Please share this briefing with your social work members including OTs and discuss at your branch committee.
- Please submit views and comments about the National Social Work Agency plans set out here to Susan Galloway in the Bargaining & Campaigns team.

Additional reading

[Govt draft Stage 2 amendments to the National Care Service Bill \(June 2024\)](#)

[How the NSWA is being developed \(May 2023\) UNISON Briefing No 124](#)

[What the NSWA will look like \(Feb 2024\) UNISON Briefing 140](#)

[Occupational Therapists and a National Social Work Agency UNISON Briefing No 125](#)

[Revised Government plans for a National Care Service \(Jan 2024\) UNISON Briefing No 139](#)

[UNISON's alternative Towards a REAL National Care Service](#)



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