

**Submission by
The Open University in Scotland**

A National Care Service for Scotland

November 2021

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Improving care for people

Improvement

Q1. What would be the benefits of the National Care Service taking responsibility for improvement across community health and care services? (Please tick all that apply)

- Better co-ordination of work across different improvement organisations
- Effective sharing of learning across Scotland
- Intelligence from regulatory work fed back into a cycle of continuous improvement
- More consistent outcomes for people accessing care and support across Scotland
- Other – please explain below

We believe that continuous improvement is at the heart of best practice. It should ensure that the care provided to those most in need is informed by research informed evidence from across a wide range of agencies. The inclusion of improvement within a National Care Service should ensure that improvement is central to service delivery and can allow a broader sharing of learning across the country.

The Open University had supported the implementation of The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 by developing with Scottish Government funding an Open Learn course enabling the dissemination of knowledge and understanding of this ground-breaking act. ([KG097 1 - OpenLearn - Open University - KG097 1](#)). The University has developed a wide range of free open access courses to support the development of best practice in relation to caring and in particular addressing issues related to Ageing ([The Ageing Well Public Talks - OpenLearn - Open University](#)).

Q14. What elements would be most important in a new system for complaints about social care services? (Please select 3 options)

- Charter of rights and responsibilities, so people know what they can expect
- Single point of access for feedback and complaints about all parts of the system
- Clear information about advocacy services and the right to a voice
- Consistent model for handling complaints for all bodies
- Addressing complaints initially with the body the complaint is about
- Clear information about next steps if a complainant is not happy with the initial response
- Other – please explain:

Continuous improvement must be central to any new complaints system. There must be robust processes put in place to ensure that lessons learned are acted upon and that appropriate staff training and development follow from any recommendations arising from the complaints process.

Residential Care Charges

Q18. Free personal and nursing care payment for self-funders are paid directly to the care provider on their behalf. What would be the impact of increasing personal and nursing care payments to National Care Home Contract rates on:

Self-funders

Care home operators

Local authorities

Other

The consultation document rightly highlights that there are funding challenges in meeting the nursing requirement that individuals accessing social care may need. Changes to the funding of nursing care should include the scope to improve working terms and conditions of nurses and nursing care staff and support for these staff in their ability to build a nursing or carer career which has parity with the NHS. Support for study leave should be included in considering workforce development.

Supporting the education for care home nurses to hold a Non-Medical Prescribing qualification and an advanced practice qualification will enhance and support other health service and GP contacts in social care. This has the potential to improve the ability of social care nurses to provide person centred care for individuals who need to access appropriate assessment and advanced care practice thus improving their wellbeing and enjoyment of life.

Similarly, those individuals who access social care services within mental health, learning disability, prison, youth justice or children and young peoples' services which are delegated to community healthcare services should be able to have their care needs met by nursing and midwifery staff with the right qualification and skills to enhance health and wellbeing at the point of need. However, use of a public health model which looks to reduce inequality in health and wellbeing should be a primary focus as it is well evidenced that working with families, children and young people at an early stage has lasting effects on parenting, mental wellbeing, likelihood of offending and physical health during a person's life.

Therefore, any changes for payments of nursing care should include consideration of how education, study-leave and training costs will be managed.

National Care Service

Q20. Do you agree that Scottish Ministers should be accountable for the delivery of social care, through a National Care Service?

- Yes
- No, current arrangements should stay in place
- No, another approach should be taken (please give details)

Workforce planning and development is central to the effectiveness of a National Care Service to ensure that all staff across the country are trained, and developed to provide best care to all. Recommendation 25 stresses the importance of all matters relating to workforce planning and development, data and research, IT and national and regional planning and highlights why this must be a key function of a National Care Service.

Social Work and Social Care

Q32. What do you see as the main benefits in having social work planning, assessment, commissioning and accountability located within the National Care Service? (Please tick all that apply.)

- Better outcomes for service users and their families.
- More consistent delivery of services.
- Stronger leadership.
- More effective use of resources to carry out statutory duties.
- More effective use of resources to carry out therapeutic interventions and preventative services.
- Access to learning and development and career progression.
- Other benefits or opportunities, please explain below:

The role of social work is wide ranging to ensure that those most in need of care, support and protection within society are looked after. Integral to social work's effective functioning within society is the multi layered partnerships with colleagues across health, social care, education and the third sector. It is important for social work to be located within the National Care Service to ensure that individuals in need of care and protection can be supported when and how they require.

Care and protection needs can fluctuate across the lifespan requiring an integrated approach by a range of professionals at different stages. Ensuring that social work planning, assessment, commissioning and accountability rests within a National Care Service would improve outcomes for service users and families and afford more consistency of service delivery across the country. Central to effective delivery is a well-trained and developed workforce; who can progress and develop as their careers unfold.

A National Care Service could develop and facilitate more fluid pathways for social care workers to progress across professions from social care to social work.

Nursing

Q35. Should the National Care Service be responsible for overseeing and ensuring consistency of access to education and professional development of social care nursing staff, standards of care and governance of nursing? Please select one.

Yes

No, it should be the responsibility of the NHS

No, it should be the responsibility of the care provider

Please say why

Access to education and professional development should be equitable, fair and meet the needs of service users. Therefore, a logical step would be for this oversight to be managed by the National Care Service as they can be independent of internal drivers and will have a good understanding of the needs of service users in a non-NHS environment. It would however have to work in alignment with regulatory body requirements and professional standards and is not seen to replace regulatory bodies.

The Open University can support the Scottish Government's ambitions in this area through our flexible, supported distance learning programmes. The Open University has extensive experience in Scotland and the UK of designing, delivering and evaluating apprenticeships in a wide range of subjects. Currently we have over 22,000 students studying with us based in every parliamentary constituency from the Shetland Isles to Dumfries and Galloway we are the fourth largest university in Scotland. This represents 14% of all the OU undergraduates in the UK. This makes us the fourth largest university in Scotland and with over three quarters of our students combining work and study, the largest provider of part-time higher education.

We already offer career development from a health care support worker (HCSW) through registration to advanced practice and research. Our programme offers flexibility for study which helps employers and students. We would be willing to discuss with the Scottish Government how with the appropriate support we can develop our courses to offer a national programme of training and development to support not only the delivery of care but the recruitment and retention of staff. 85% of OU students remain in their local community after completing their studies.

National Social Work Agency

Q54. What benefits do you think there would be in establishing a National Social Work Agency? (Tick all that apply)

- Raising the status of social work
- Improving training and continuous professional development
- Supporting workforce planning
- Other – please explain

In principle, a national agency would be advantageous to Social Work education in Scotland. Although there are many complexities that it would need to address, the current fragmented approach is not fit for purpose and has not been for some time. Effective national workforce planning is central to the design and development of responsive educational opportunities at qualifying and post qualifying levels. A national agency could develop accessible and consistent career pathways from pre-qualification to post qualification across the country enabling the development of a locally grown social work workforce rooted in the communities they support and protect.

Furthermore, a national agency would foreground social work raising its status alongside other key professions such as health and education. In addition, a national agency would be able to address seemingly intractable long-term challenges within social work education; the inconsistent and inadequate availability of practice placements across the country. Without adequate, good quality practice placements available for social work students who are the future social work workforce, there is a huge risk to the whole workforce and service provision.

A national agency would have the capacity to support the infrastructure and accountability that could enable the consistent provision of quality placements as well as developing effective national and regional infrastructure to ensure the ongoing viability of properly planned provision on a national level.

Q56. Do you think a National Social Work Agency should be part of the National Care Service?

- Yes
- No

Please say why

Social work education should be considered as a central part of a National Social Work Agency. Consistent and equitable access to social work education needs to be framed as a vital early stage in workforce planning. All local authorities have an experienced and dedicated social care workforce with limited and variable access to career development despite providing the foundations for service delivery. Ensuring pathways into social work education is a vital part of workforce planning to address the severe challenges facing the profession.

Taking a broad view of workforce planning from admission numbers onto University courses, through to Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW), training and development and specialist advanced practice (such as Mental Health Officers and Practice Educators), the National Care Service addressing gaps in national and local level data would only enhance the profession.

Q57. Which of the following do you think that a National Social Work Agency should have a role in leading on? (Tick all that apply)

- Social work education, including practice learning
- National framework for learning and professional development, including advanced practice
- Setting a national approach to terms and conditions, including pay
- Workforce planning
- Social work improvement
- A centre of excellence for applied research for social work
- Other – please explain

Professions that Social Work often draws parallels with, such as Education and Health, are supported by degree programmes that are 'controlled subjects'. This means that the intake numbers onto these courses, as well as aspects of course content and admission criteria, are influenced by targets and limits set at Scottish Government level. At present the Social Work degree programme at undergraduate and postgraduate level is not a controlled subject, and intake numbers are not directly influenced by workforce demand and data.

Due consideration should be given to whether the Social Work degree programme ought to be a controlled subject. Or alternatively whether an approach to the alignment of practice learning opportunities with workforce requirements could be mandatory to ensure that practice learning opportunities reflects the sector employment requirements for statutory social workers.

Both would offer the potential to enhance workforce planning from the earliest stage. Workforce planning is central to strategic and financial planning in terms of operational delivery but the significance of effective workforce planning for social work education (qualifying and post qualifying) at a national, regional and locality level is critical. The limits of the current approach impact on the ability to reliably judge the true demand for qualifying and post qualifying provision and is therefore unresponsive to the actual needs of the sector.

The many challenges faced across social work education are exacerbated by the current structures and disparities across Scotland and between Local Authorities with regards to pay, terms and conditions. Clear, fair and consistent terms and conditions would support more predictable recruitment and assist in the retention of social workers across Scotland. The variable salaries, structures and incentives to undergo post qualifying learning impact on the workforce. Career pathways in some Local Authorities are non-existent for those who do not want to take on a formal managerial role. In some areas the lack of access to funding for work-based routes mean that experienced paraprofessionals cannot bridge to gap and make use of their experience to become a social worker.

The variable pay awards at qualifying levels can mean that Newly Qualified Social Workers and main grade social workers opt to commence employment or move to higher paying authorities. There is currently no consistency between Local Authorities regarding what a Post qualification means regarding job title, grading and pay. In relation to social work education, this presents particular challenges in ensuring that those who gain the Practice Educator qualification are supported (in workload capacity and pay/terms and conditions) to remain active within the role.

The lack of consistency of payment to employees who provide the vital Practice Educator role can be divisive in that some Local Authorities are reluctant to make use Independent Practice Educators where there are insufficient in-house Practice Educators, as their own staff do not receive remuneration for this role. This impacts on the supply of Local Authority placements on offer to students. A nationally agreed approach as to whether this is part of the job outline of a social worker or consistency in payments would prevent the current variance and perceived unfairness.

In question 1 we said that improvement is clearly at the heart of best practice and ensures that the care provided to those most in need will be informed by research informed evidence from across a wide range of agencies. We believe this principle is equally fundamental to the work of a National Social Work Agency.

Workforce Planning

Q91. What would make it easier to plan for workforce across the social care sector? (Please tick all that apply.)

- A national approach to workforce planning
- Consistent use of an agreed workforce planning methodology
- An agreed national data set
- National workforce planning tool(s)
- A national workforce planning framework
- Development and introduction of specific workforce planning capacity
- Workforce planning skills development for relevant staff in social care
- Something else (please explain below)

Effective, consistent and coordinated workforce planning across the country is required to ensure that those most in need are supported and cared for. Central to planning is the development, training and support of social care staff to ensure that they can provide the level of service required.

Alongside the proposals for a 'Fair Work Accreditation Scheme' to improve the pay and conditions of staff, a national approach to workforce planning across Health and Social care is vital to address the current gaps and inconsistencies in social care provision across the country. A clear understanding of the varying needs across the country is central to planning and would require a nationally agreed data set that could straddle the incompatibility of NHS & local authority databases. In addition, IT and financial support may be required for the myriad of third-sector social care providers to develop compatible databases to support the national data set.

The development of a national workforce planning tool or framework should also incorporate progressive career pathways to embed the development of potential as well as the progression of the workforce. This would enable continual enhancement of the workforce creating improved recruitment to the sector as progression towards professional qualifications could be developed and encouraged.

Training and Development

Q92. Do you agree that the National Care Service should set training and development requirements for the social care workforce?

Yes

No

Please say why

The training and development of the social care workforce is central to the development of an effective national care service. Alongside fair pay and conditions, good quality training and development that is portable and recognised across the country is vital. There is inconsistency across the health and social care sector about which roles require registration that does not support either best service delivery nor effective staff development. All health and social care staff should be required to have a nationally agreed level of training and education which addresses three core issues. Firstly, all health and social care staff should be required to be registered in order to undertake the vital role they perform. Secondly all qualifications should be agreed within a national framework to enable mobility of the workforce and finally all qualifications should be embedded within a recognised career pathway thus enabling workers to gain maximum benefit from their education and training.

A key, untapped aspect of workforce development is the expansion of graduate apprenticeships in the field of social care and social work. The Open University is part of the Social Work Education Partnership which prior to the pandemic started to explore a feasibility study for a social work graduate apprenticeship. Discussions are underway again about the potential for a pilot programme, of which we're supportive.

Such graduate apprenticeships would unleash the potential of the workforce, assist workforce planning, maximise the benefit of the apprenticeship levy in Scotland as well as assist the establishment of clear career pathways using an Apprenticeship framework.

The Open University has extensive experience in Scotland and the UK of designing, delivering and evaluating apprenticeships in a wide range of subjects. Currently we have over 22,000 students studying with us based in every parliamentary constituency from the Shetland Isles to Dumfries and Galloway we are the fourth largest university in Scotland. This represents 14% of all the OU undergraduates in the UK. This makes us the fourth largest university in Scotland and with over three quarters of our students combining work and study, the largest provider of part-time higher education.

The School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care are successfully delivering graduate apprenticeships in Social work across England working collaboratively with many local authorities to meet their

needs to upskill their workforce. The Open University in Scotland has extensive partnerships with employers delivering work-based routes to social work qualification commonly known as 'Grow your own' trainee schemes.

All employer partnerships have expressed enthusiasm for the development of a graduate apprenticeship in social work that could be financially supported by the levy and also enable them to recruit larger numbers of trainees. Many local authorities in Scotland, particularly remote and rural areas, face a recruitment and retention challenge for social workers yet they all have committed and experienced social care workers who undertake complex care and support tasks within their authorities. A graduate apprenticeship in social work would support employers to develop the potential of these crucial workers and address current pressing recruitment and retention challenges within the social work workforce.

In addition to the social care workforce it should also be recognised that carers provide a significant element of service user non NMC registered nursing care. Therefore, carers should be able to access training and development opportunities that support their ability to care for those they care for in an evidence-based manner and which allows them to combine their developing knowledge and skill into recognisable qualifications that support career development if that is their choice.

Many OU nursing students talk about their previous non-paid carer responsibilities in their application to OU BSc (Hons) Nursing Programme, this experience being a motivating factor in them deciding to make nursing a career choice. Carers could begin start building a career whilst caring, a suitable career framework could be created for such individuals linking with other career opportunities that being a carer develops. Carers should help shape what their aspiration are in relation to building a career framework.

Education, including distance learning offers the opportunity for carers to develop life enriching personal connections with other learners and teaching staff. For many carers distance learning is the only way they can access such opportunities due difficulties in them being away from those whom they care for as caring needs are 24hrs a day, 7 days a week. For some carers they may be able to access suitable cover when they need to be away, however some carers like to be close to hand due to the emotional investment they have in the caring relationship. Access to time away from caring responsibility should be an option for all carers.

The OU in Scotland have a significant number of graduates and students who have carer responsibility and experience. Therefore, the OU in Scotland does have a unique network who could engage in gathering views on the needs of the carer population in Scotland.

The OU offers a range of micro-credentials and ways that people can build qualifications such as degree's <https://www.open.ac.uk/courses/choose/ppcopen> . These may be of particular interest to carers.

Q93. Do you agree that the National Care Service should be able to provide and or secure the provision of training and development for the social care workforce?

Yes

No

The National Care Service would most effectively be placed to procure education, training and development from the wide range of existing educational establishments across Scotland. Alongside a framework for registration of the entire social care workforce, an agreed national approach to the accreditation of prior learning would enhance the development of career pathways.

Personal Assistants

Q95. What types of additional support might be helpful to personal assistants and people considering employing personal assistants? (Please tick all that apply)

- National minimum employment standards for the personal assistant employer
- Promotion of the profession of social care personal assistants
- Regional Networks of banks matching personal assistants and available work
- Career progression pathway for personal assistants
- Recognition of the personal assistant profession as part of the social care workforce and for their voice to be part of any eventual national forum to advise the National Care Service on workforce priorities
- A free national self-directed support advice helpline
- The provision of resilient payroll services to support the personal assistant's employer as part of their Self-directed Support Option 1 package
- Other (please explain)

Our [OpenLearn](#) platform offers a free course [Foundations for self-directed support in Scotland](#) designed, with the support of the Scottish Government, to 'enable citizens to become active participants in designing, selecting and using care and support services'. With additional support this course could be updated and enhanced so that those considering working as a personal assistant and/or employing one have the knowledge to make an informed decision.

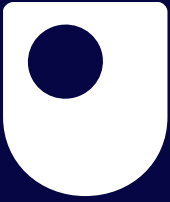
The Open University can support the training and development of Personal Assistants utilising our experience in providing flexible, supported distance learning in the field of health and social care. We already offer career development from a health care support worker (HCSW) through registration to advanced practice and research. Our programme offers flexibility for study which helps employers and students.

We would be willing to discuss the development of a skills portal for personal assistants so that there is a national training and development resource. This could then be linked into our existing courses so a clear career progression pathway would exist where it currently doesn't.

Q96. Should personal assistants be able to access a range of training and development opportunities of which a minimum level would be mandatory?

Yes

No



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