

**Transitions Guidance: from student social worker  
to Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW)  
May 2024**

# The transition from social work student to NQSW

## Overview and context

The Supported Year for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) will become a mandatory, national approach on 1 October 2024. Navigating the transition from university to Supported Year can be complex and challenging, and students and NQSWs need information, guidance, and support during this process.

The NQSW Supported Year will improve consistency in the support available to all NQSWs working as registered social workers in Scotland. It is aligned to Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registration and the responsibilities and entitlements that are afforded to registered social workers.

The NQSW Supported Year will support learning and professional development and enhance how NQSWs meet the Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) registration requirements as set by the SSSC. Overall, the aim of the approach is to nurture and retain the next generation of social work leaders and ensure an increasingly confident and competent workforce for people, families and carers.

The period of transition may vary from person to person, however, this paper offers guidance to those directly involved in the transition process from the latter period of a university-based social work qualifying course (generally from the end of the final practice placement) to the first period of an NQSW's employment (till the point of the Initial Professional Development Discussion), that will normally take place within the first six weeks of the Supported Year).

Partnership arrangements promote best practice and mutual understanding, supporting a smoother transition process for qualifying social workers.

The [Core Learning Elements](#) for NQSWs lay out a defined set of descriptors for the Core Learning Elements and mandatory learning activities that support NQSWs to meet the CPL requirements for the Supported Year. These, and requirements for employers' support for NQSWs, inform the structure and process for NQSWs to successfully complete both the developmental progress and registration requirements in the NQSW Supported Year. Full information can be found on the NQSW Supported Year and CPL requirements on the [NQSW website](#).

An effective transition requires universities, social work employers and the SSSC to strengthen connections between the organisations and develop a collaborative approach to transitions.

A key component of the transition from student to NQSW is the Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

It is vital that all students leave university with an ILP, having been supported by their university's transitions curriculum. The ILP should be seen as an essential requirement and

feed into the early stages of the NQSW Supported Year, particularly the discussions at the Initial Professional Development Discussion.

To inform the transitions process, three transition principles have been developed, drawing on findings from [Newly qualified social workers in Scotland: a five year longitudinal study \(2022\)](#) and the [Report of the Project exploring the transition from student to newly qualified social worker](#) (2023) as well as examples of good practice already in place within and between universities and social work employers across Scotland.

Supporting the principles, the overarching expectation is that there is partnership working between universities who offer social work qualifying courses, social work employers, students, NQSWs and SSSC to ensure an effective transition into the NQSW Supported Year. Full information can be found on the NQSW Supported Year and CPL requirements on the [NQSW website](#).

## Transition Principles

### **Overarching expectation:**

Partnership working between universities, employers, students, NQSWs and SSSC is required to ensure an effective transition.

### **Transition principles:**

Principle 1: Professional learning underpins the transition.

Principle 2: The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey.

Principle 3: Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition.

These principles reflect shared responsibility for students and NQSWs to fully engage in the transitions process and learning opportunities, and for employers, universities and the SSSC to actively invest in and support the transition process, as laid out below.

## Responsibilities of students

### **Professional learning underpins the transition**

Students should engage fully in learning opportunities provided by universities, social work employers and the SSSC to support the transition process.

### **The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey**

Students will develop an ILP, in line with the expectations of their university.

Students should engage in opportunities to reflect on their learning, identify their strengths and their learning needs and develop an ILP.

### **Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition**

Students should engage with peers and colleagues as they progress through the transition process.

## **Responsibilities of universities**

### **Professional learning underpins the transition**

Universities must develop a transitions curriculum to enable students to develop knowledge and skills for future employment and the supported year.

Universities should work in partnership with employers to deliver learning to students to ensure confident, research-minded practitioners.

Universities should work in partnership with employers to deliver learning to NQSWs to support their development as reflective practitioners with a strong, ongoing grasp of research.

### **The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey**

Universities will deliver formal learning to students on the NQSW Core Learning Elements and ILP during their final year at university. Universities should facilitate opportunities for students to engage with NQSWs and social work employers about the ILP and the NQSW Supported Year.

### **Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition**

Universities must ensure that, during their final year, students have opportunities to engage with graduates currently in social work employment.

Universities must ensure that, during their final year, students have opportunities to engage with employers, SSSC and others involved in the broader social work environment.

## **Responsibilities of NQSWs**

### **Professional learning underpins the transition**

NQSWs must meet the CPL requirements for continued SSSC registration. To ensure they meet the CPL requirements, NQSWs should follow the learning opportunities laid out by their employer to support the NQSW Supported Year.

Alongside the learning opportunities laid out by their employer, NQSWs should seek a wide range of learning opportunities to maintain professional knowledge and skills and support their professional development. This can be done in conjunction with their supervisor and on their own initiative.

NQSWs will contribute to development and learning within their teams and organisations during the transition process.

### **The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey**

NQSWs must complete an ILP before finishing their social work course. This will follow a standard format, though the process in each university will vary.

NQSWs should use their ILP in preparation for moving into the workplace. They should ensure that the ILP is shared with their supervisor and forms part of the preparation for and discussion at the initial professional developmental discussion.

### **Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition**

NQSWs must engage with the opportunities offered by their employer to enable peer support and mentoring.

NQSWs should engage with peers and colleagues as they progress through the transition process.

NQSWs have a role in contributing to the development and support of others. This could include support of colleagues and engaging with social work students to provide information about their experience of the NQSW Supported Year.

## **Responsibilities of employers**

### **Professional learning underpins the transition**

Employers participate in opportunities to engage with universities and provide information to students about the professional role, organisation and NQSW Supported Year.

Induction processes must be in place. They should take account of the requirements of the NQSW Supported Year and of each individual NQSW's specific experience and needs.

Within the first six weeks of an NQSW's Supported Year, the employer must ensure that an initial professional development discussion takes place. This should include discussion based on the NQSW's ILP and lead to the co-production of an Individual Development Plan for the NQSW.

Employers ensure robust structures are in place for the delivery of professional, reflective supervision.

Supervisors provide opportunities for NQSWs to engage in activities which develop knowledge, professional identity, and leadership during the transition.

Employers should ensure that continuous professional learning is embedded in the organisation through the provision of structured training and learning opportunities. For newly qualified social workers, this must be supported and guided by the processes laid out in relation to the NQSW Supported Year.

### **The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey**

Supervisors must use the ILP at the initial professional development discussion to develop the Initial Development Plan along with the NQSW. Supervisors must use the ILP to help plan appropriate learning opportunities in the early stages of the Supported Year.

### **Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition**

Social work employers ensure NQSWs have an appropriate network of support. The network of support must include mentoring, whether informal or structured, from more experienced colleagues.

Social work employers ensure that NQSWs have regular, coordinated time with other NQSWs which enables opportunities for ongoing, mutual peer support.

## **Responsibilities of SSSC**

### **Professional learning underpins the transition**

SSSC will provide up-to-date information during the transition period about the NQSW Supported Year, the NQSW Core Learning Elements and continuous professional learning.

SSSC will provide inputs for students on the CPL requirements for registered social workers.

SSSC should look for ways to engage with NQSWs and their employer organisations to support the understanding of the NQSW Supported Year and the CPL requirements.

SSSC will develop and maintain the NQSW website, with up-to-date and accessible information.

SSSC will work with universities and employers to ensure that relevant training and other support is available to them in relation to the NQSW Supported Year and the CPL requirements.

### **The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) informs the transition journey**

SSSC will support universities, students, and employers in ensuring that a consistent approach to the ILP is embedded in practice.

### **Peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition**

Guidance on mentoring and peer support will be included in the NQSW website and guidance materials.

## **Practice examples for Principle 1 (professional learning underpins the transition).**

1 To introduce students to the model of the Supported Year at an earlier stage, the NQSW coordinator from East Dunbartonshire Council and an NQSW took part in an employability conference for final year BA and MSc students at Glasgow Caledonian University, which took place during the end stages of the students' final placement. They spoke to the students about the NQSW Supported Year from their different perspectives and provided information about the research which informs our understanding about the support that social workers need early in their career, how social workers learn in the workplace and the structure and components of the NQSW Supported Year, including the development planning process.

2 Dundee City Council encourages NQSWs to read Dr Gillian Ferguson's research paper, *"When David Bowie created Ziggy Stardust" The Lived Experiences of Social Workers Learning Through Work*, to help them think about the ways in which social workers can learn in the workplace. A dedicated session on Dr Ferguson's research is delivered to NQSWs, including group discussions to explore the key learning that NQSWs have experienced so far. This is also embedded within training materials for supervisors, as a means of supporting them to think about learning more broadly, and how some of the key findings can help them identify or create learning opportunities to support the learning of NQSWs and their wider teams.

3 In East Lothian Council, NQSWs are identified to the Learning and Development Team when successful in the recruitment process. A three-way meeting between the NQSW, the Team Leader and the member of the Learning and Development Team is held during the induction process. This covers: the support available to the NQSW to understand registration and CPL requirements; formal training and learning, internal and external; private study/follow up by reading, making contacts etc; and shadowing, buddying, and co-working.

4 In East Lothian Council, support meetings are offered by a member of the Learning and Development Team as agency coordinator who also supports an NQSW in their final submission to SSSC. This person can mediate to ensure that the NQSW is given time to access training or to undertake agreed study time.

## **Practice examples for Principle 2 (the Individual Learning Plan informs the transition journey).**

1 To strengthen the support provided to students during completion of their ILP, the NQSW coordinator and practice placement coordinator from East Dunbartonshire Council convened an ILP workshop for all second placement students from Glasgow Caledonian University on placement in the organisation during the end stage of their placement. The workshop provided a forum for the students to explore the NQSW Supported Year, NQSW Core Learning Elements, the development planning process, and the role of the ILP in supporting and improving the transition. Time was set aside for the students to discuss their own ILP with their Practice Educator, including time to reflect on their practice strengths and areas for development. An NQSW, who had prior experience of completing

an ILP, also attended to provide guidance and encouragement to the students. When the students return to university after their placement, they complete their ILP as part of a module on Professional Identity in Social Work.

2 Dundee City Council and University of Dundee have jointly developed an integration day with a focus on the NQSW Supported Year. They deliver an input to students focussed on the Individual Learning Plan (ILP), emphasising its importance, not only for the NQSW Supported Year, but also as a useful tool to support them to prepare for writing job applications and undertaking interviews. The integration day also provides students with an opportunity to begin compiling their ILP, to have discussions with peers and to seek feedback from and ask questions of Dundee City Council and other Councils as possible future employers.

### **Practice examples for Principle 3 (peer support and mentoring are essential during the transition).**

1 When there are a large number of NQSWs recruited around the same time, East Lothian Council organises a peer support group that crosses adult and children's services. This has been found to forge particularly useful connections and contrasts for the NQSWs' learning.

In setting up the process, a member of the Learning and Development Team act as a coordinator and offers a mentoring role. Where an NQSW identifies a need for more specialist support, a mentor from the relevant team with the necessary level of experience will be sought.

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