

Education and Gaelic Committee
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Submission from the National Social Work Agency to the Scottish Parliament Education and Gaelic Committee

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The National Social Work Agency was launched on 17 March 2026, as a new executive agency of the Scottish Government, led by the National Chief Social Work Adviser (NCSWA), a role outlined in the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. The Chief Executive has a dual role also as Chief Social Work Adviser to Scottish Ministers, providing advice on social work policy and on protecting people at risk of harm. The Act also required Ministers to establish the National Social Work Agency to support the NCSWA in carrying out these responsibilities.

The Agency's [Corporate Plan \(interim\) 2026 to 2027: Leading excellence, driving change in social work](#) sets out a number of strategic objectives:

- drive national leadership of social work
- provide impartial social work advice across government
- promote continuous improvement in design and delivery of social worker education and learning
- plan for a sustainable future workforce
- strengthen improvement and implementation across social work
- foster excellence in our organisation.

As part of the Agency's duties, there is a specific focus on the social work workforce and social work education and learning, ensuring Scotland has a sustainable and skilled workforce to improve the lives of people across the country. Given the breadth of the NCSWA's remit, this submission and evidence provided at the Education and Gaelic Committee will focus on the social work workforce and the National Social Work Agency's contribution to improving outcomes for looked after and care experienced children and young people through leading excellence and driving positive change for the social work workforce.

This year's Programme for Government recognised the unique role social workers play and the need to work collaboratively to *ensure a sustainable social work workforce and the best support for them to help deliver on our shared priorities*. As demand for social work has grown, so too has the complexity of practice, with children's social work increasingly operating at the interface with adults' services and responding to a wider range of interconnected needs. These challenges are occurring against a backdrop of significant resource pressures across the wider care system, including ongoing challenges in securing appropriate placements and access to the specialist provision required to meet the needs of some children and young people.

Since the publication of The Promise in 2020, Scotland has established a programme of reform supported by national delivery plans, oversight arrangements and legislative change. Progress has been achieved through a range of policy and legislative developments, including investment to expand whole family support, commencement of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, implementation of provisions within the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 to strengthen sibling relationships, and delivery of key provisions of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, including ending the use of Young Offender Institutions for under-18s. In addition, the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 will introduce new statutory responsibilities and expectations across children's services. These reforms demonstrate a continuing commitment to children's rights, trauma-informed practice, family relationships and care-based responses for children and young people.

The ambitions of The Promise rely on a suitably qualified, experienced and sustainable social work workforce. Many of the principles underpinning The Promise, including relationship-based practice, trauma-informed support and promotion of children's rights, reflect established social work practice. The National Social Work Agency welcomes this alignment and will continue to support, strengthen and champion the profession as it plays a leading role in delivery of The Promise and wider reform of the care system.

The children's care system reform agenda increasingly recognises that keeping The Promise is a whole-system responsibility. Social workers play a central role in leading and delivering support for infants, children, young people and families within Scotland's National Practice Model Getting It Right For Every Child, working alongside colleagues across education, health, housing, justice, adult services and the third sector.

This is of particular relevance when considering the expansion of aftercare, where there is also a need for greater focus on the interface between children's and adult services, particularly for care-experienced young people with disabilities, neurodevelopmental differences, complex physical or mental health needs, or other circumstances that may require ongoing or lifelong support. The needs of these young people do not neatly align with organisational boundaries, and successful implementation will therefore depend on effective transition planning, shared accountability and clear pathways between children's and adult services. This will be essential to ensuring continuity of support and avoiding gaps in provision as young people move into adulthood.

If the ambitions of The Promise and wider care system reform are to be fully realised, adequate resources need to be in place not only for social work services but across the wider system of support on which care-experienced young people rely. Whilst strong foundations are in place, the principal and ongoing challenge will continue to be implementation and the capacity of the workforce to support this additional activity. Future progress will increasingly depend on workforce sustainability, placement availability and the capacity of local services to deliver high-quality, relationship-based support.

Successful implementation of care system reforms also require suitable education and professional learning, alongside careful consideration of the support required to enable social workers to meet new duties and deliver positive outcomes for children, young people and families.

The National Social Work Agency has an important role to play in understanding system readiness and workforce implications, working in partnership with COSLA, Social Work Scotland and other partners, whilst recognising the central role of local authorities as employers and corporate parents, and their responsibility for coordinating support across our children's services. The National Social Work Agency also has a key role in working with those leading care system reform to understand and articulate what the profession will need to support effective implementation. Through the Scottish Social Work Partnership, we will continue our strong working relationship with COSLA and Social Work Scotland and will develop a strategic plan to set out our shared commitment to strengthen the social work profession.

NATIONAL SOCIAL WORK AGENCY