

## Registration of the social care workforce – a UK agenda

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*“Registration will provide clarity. It will enable older people and their families to have complete confidence in the people who care for them, or their loved ones.”*

*(Liam Byrne, Care Services Minister, February 2006)*

### Introduction

Four care councils have been established to take responsibility for the registration and regulation of social care workers in the UK. A sector skills council (Skills for Care and Development) has also been created and will play a vital role in supporting the registration agenda. Skills for Care and Development will work in partnership with employers to reduce skill gaps and shortages and help improve skills, standards and services.

The registration of the workforce is very much in vogue at present, although this policy is not a new concept. Teachers, nurses and doctors already have their own registers – the first edition of ‘Nursing Times’ (published in the early 20th century) contained a three page editorial advocating the introduction of a register for nurses, while the register for dental care professionals in the UK opened on 31st July 2006.

A major drive is now underway to register the social care workforce, and Britain is leading the way. Countries such as New Zealand have established a voluntary register for social workers, but the UK is the first nation to make registration compulsory for many segments of the social care workforce. Devolution has ensured that different approaches are taken throughout the four home nations. Some policies appear to be relatively consistent across the UK – social workers will have to comply with post registration training and learning requirements during each three-year registration period, for example. Staff will not be required to join the relevant register for social care if they are already registered with an equivalent organisation in another field – the Nursing and Midwifery Council, for example. Legislation has also been introduced which makes it illegal for an individual to use the title ‘social worker’ unless they are registered with a relevant body.

This article briefly examines the nature of Britain’s social care workforce and look at the progress underway to register these workers. The article also briefly outlines some initiatives and routes taken to help meet the registration challenges faced by social service employers.

### Scotland

Scotland has opted to use the term ‘social services’ instead of ‘social care.’ The Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 established the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The SSSC is responsible for promoting high standards in the social services workforce – it also acts as the Scottish arm of Skills for Care and Development.

Scotland has approximately 138,000 employees in the social services workforce, including 9,000 social workers. Scottish social services provide care and support to 500,000 people. The voluntary sector is the fastest growing area of provision, and now accounts for a quarter of the total employees, while 23% of the workforce operates in the private sector. Approximately 81% of the workforce is female, although the percentage of male workers has experienced considerable growth during this time.

The SSSC’s registration timetable for social service workers commenced in April 2003 with the registration of social workers – staff within residential child care services and managers of care homes for adults were subsequently asked to register as part of this first phase. Phase two of the SSSC’s registration timetable commenced in October 2006 with the registration of workers in day care of children services. The register for workers in adult residential care is due to open in 2007 and for housing support workers in 2009. Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements have also been set for staff. Approximately 12,000 social service workers have registered with the SSSC as of December 2006.

Various initiatives are in place to help support organisations to prepare for and fund the cost of registering the workforce in Scotland. Four regional learning networks have been established to support the development of the social services workforce. Learning networks aim to foster cross-sector working to support the registration of staff and embed continuous professional development for the social services workforce. The voluntary sector is the fastest growing area of social services provision in Scotland, and the Scottish Executive has a Voluntary Sector Development Fund which offers £1 Million of support annually to help these organisations comply with registration requirements. The Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit was also created in 2005 to provide guidance, advice, support and networking opportunities for employers in the sector.

## England

The Care Standards Act (2000) established the General Social Care Council (GSCC). The GSCC has a remit to “register social care workers and regulate their conduct and training.” Sector skills functions for the English social care workforce are undertaken by Skills for Care and the Children’s Workforce Development Council.

England has approximately 1.6m paid workers (this figure includes care workers in early years and the NHS – the country has a ‘core’ workforce of approximately 929,000). Over 25,000 employers provide care to 1.7m people, while approximately 84% of the workforce is female. There are 80,000 registered social workers in England (including 5,000 from overseas), and 11,000 social work students. More than 50% of English social care workers are now employed in the private sector.

The English register is open to qualified social workers and students. England is now examining how it will register the next tranche of staff – this group will include approximately 750,000 employees working in domiciliary and residential care.

The GSCC has recommended to the Government that the initial period of registration for domiciliary and residential care staff is six years, with re-registration occurring every three years; initial registration would also carry a stipulation that anyone undertaking a qualification must begin working towards this award during the first three years of their registration period. Workers will be required to undertake thirty days of PRTL in a six year registration period or fifteen days in a three year period. At the time of writing these recommendations have still to be finalised by the Government.

Skills for Care aims to support employers by promoting engagement in workforce development issues within adult residential care, while the implementation of the children’s services workforce strategy falls within the remit of the Children’s Workforce Development Council. Organisations such as the National Care Forum also play a key role in ensuring the voices of the not-for-profit sector are heard. Employers in England have begun considering various options to comply with registration requirements. Barchester Healthcare, for example, has developed three new learning centres – The Chef Academy, The Leadership Academy and The NVQ Academy. Barchester now employ a trainer in each of their 160 homes with skills and qualifications in Learning and Development – particularly coaching, facilitation, action learning and evaluation. Barchester is also working to develop role models for employees preparing to undertake qualifications – these include IT and NVQ ‘champions’.

## Wales

The Care Standards Act (2000) also established the Care Council for Wales, with a remit to promote “high standards for social care workers.....to improve the safeguards for users of social care services.” The Council also acts as the Welsh arm of Skills for Care and Development. Social care services in Wales employ approximately 72,000 people and care for approximately 150,000 children and adults at any given time. Approximately 80% of the workforce is female. The nature of Welsh social care services has changed considerably in recent times – approximately 90% of adult care homes are based in the private sector.

The Council is currently registering social workers and have begun registering other staffing groups too. As of November 2006 there are approximately 5,000 people on the register – the vast majority of these people are social workers but the list also contains adult residential care managers, domiciliary care managers and child care managers. The Welsh Assembly Government believes that approximately 41% of social care workers hold the “recommended qualification” for their function.

The Welsh Assembly Government's draft 2006 publication 'Fulfilled lives, supported communities' noted that "the number of direct care staff in local authorities with a care qualification has risen from 23.2% in 2001 to 41.5% in 2005 but this is not mirrored in private and voluntary organisations" and that qualification levels in residential child care were still "unacceptably low." The document also proposes a major review of long term skills and development needs for the social care workforce.

Local Authorities in Wales have adopted some innovative routes to meet the registration challenges. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, for example, have created a dedicated 'Night Assessor' post to help night-time workers to complete qualifications. Night staff traditionally find it difficult to obtain necessary work-based qualifications but the Council now has a waiting list of employees ready to undertake NVQs. Regional Social Care Partnerships incorporating staff from the public, private and voluntary sector have also been established in Wales – these bodies work together to address some of the recruitment, retention and development challenges facing the social care workforce.

## **Northern Ireland**

The Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 established the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to "protect the public by promoting and supporting confidence, competence and credibility in the social care workforce." The Council also undertakes functions for Skills for Care and Development in Northern Ireland. There are approximately 36,000 social care staff in Northern Ireland (75% of whom work in the private or voluntary sector) providing support to 185,000 individuals, while 83% of the social care workforce is female. Northern Ireland has approximately 4,000 social workers.

Social care staff that are currently required to register in Northern Ireland include:

- Social workers
- Anyone working in a designated "social work post" ;
- Team leaders and all care staff in residential childcare;
- Heads of residential homes and day care centres who are not already registered with another recognised regulatory body.

Over 5000 Northern Irish Social Care Workers have already been registered. The next "priority group" to register in Northern Ireland will include Domiciliary Care Managers and Adult Residential Care workers. Northern Ireland Social Care Council hopes to start registering social care workers in day care, social worker assistants, domiciliary care and staff working in the direct payments scheme from 2008 onwards.

The Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety has set ambitious targets for Northern Ireland's social care workforce. These include a requirement that all social service staff should have an annual performance appraisal with their employer and personal development plan by 2008.

## The British social care workforce: a brief summary (December 2006)

| Country          | Founding Legislation  | Care Council                                 | Sector Skills Functions (UK Skills for Care and Development Partnership) | Number of people accessing social care services (approx) | Size of social services workforce (approx) | Progress   | Number of social workers (approx) |
|------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Scotland         | Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001                          | Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)      | SSSC   | 500,000  | 138,000 (81% female)                       | Phase one (includes social workers, social work students and residential child care) registering from April 2003. Phase two (includes adult residential care and housing support) registering from Oct 2006  | 9,100                             |
| England          | Care Standards Act (2000)                                       | General Social Care Council (GSCC)           | Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council         | 1.7 Million  | 1.6 Million (84% female)                   | Social workers registering from April 2003. Government considering plans for registering domiciliary and residential care  | 80,000                            |
| Wales            | Care Standards Act (2000)                                       | Care Council for Wales (CCW)                 | CCW  | 150,000  | 72,000 (80% female)                        | Individuals with social work qualification registering from April 2003, Social work students from Sept 2000 and Social care managers from 2005. Register is also open to all social care managers and workers  | 5,000                             |
| Northern Ireland | Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 | Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) | NISCC  | 185,000  | 36,000 (83% female)                        | Social workers / residential child care staff / heads of residential homes and heads of day centres registering from 2005; Adult residential workers from 2006, Day care, social work assistants, domiciliary care staff and staff in Direct Payments scheme from 2008 | 4,000                             |

## Summary

*“A more valued, competent and confident workforce will help users and carers to feel valued and respected, part of society, supported to achieve their goals, able to make choices, involved in the selection and training of staff, and more in control of their lives.”*

*(National Strategy for the Development of the Social Services Workforce in Scotland, 2005)*

The registration of Britain's social care workforce is well underway. The four home countries have made major progress by registering social workers – the next challenge is to continue registering more segments of the social care workforce. This process should eventually lead to a decasualisation of the social care profession and (ultimately) to the professionalisation of the workforce.

The four countries have taken differing approaches to induction. England has developed induction standards and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council is conducting a consultation on proposed standards for the sector, which it hopes will be available from January 2007. The Scottish Social Services Council has recently issued 'Preparing for practice – induction guidance for social service employers in Scotland' on CD ROM.

The four countries have also spent a considerable amount of time developing policies to ensure there is service user involvement in learning and development. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council, for example has recently developed (in conjunction with the Social Care Institute for Excellence) a best practice guide to involving service users and carers in social work training on degree courses in Northern Ireland. Similar initiatives are taking place in Scotland, England and Wales.

The routes to registration taken by the four countries may differ but the challenges they face are similar. Strategy documents from each of the home nations note the difficulties that organisations are facing to recruit employees and highlight the spiralling problems of staff turnover rates. Providers throughout Britain have highlighted issues with the clarity, transparency and availability of funding streams that are available to finance registration. Another common complaint is that funding is only available for inappropriate qualifications, while providers have raised concerns about the inconsistent standards delivered by training providers.

The majority of providers would seem to agree that registration is vital. Registration of the social care workforce will play a vital role in delivering a competent, confident workforce. This workforce will ultimately deliver services that are flexible, responsive and take account of the views of service users and carers.

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