

SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

Report to: Council
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Title: Reviewing the Impact of Registration – key findings
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Executive summary

Since August 2014, the SSSC has been speaking to people about what impact they think registration has had since it was introduced for the social service workforce in 2003, and analysing the information we gathered. We wanted to explore the extent to which there was evidence that registration had achieved its initial objectives, and we wanted to gather evidence and information that would inform the development of registration of the social service workforce in the future.

We used a variety of methods to gather information, and had contact with over 1200 people during the process and this included registered workers, employers, people who use social services and key stakeholders. The amount of material generated from this survey has been great in volume and complexity, giving us a rich source of intelligence and evidence. This provides the SSSC with feedback about the impact of our work to date, and provides evidence for future direction, both strategic and operational. Much of what we have learned is 'good news', and we have also identified some areas where we think we need to find out more, as well as areas which we can already identify as work we need to begin or continue.

This is an interim report which provides some of the high level findings to Council, and will be followed by a full report. The full report will be distilled into a series of infographics for distribution via web and social networks, to both provide an update to the social service workforce and key stakeholders, and as a basis for further discussion and engagement with social service workers. What is clear from the work we have done to date, is that the impact of registration can only be fully achieved only through active partnership between the regulator, the employer, the registered worker and the public, and further work to continue this dialogue and strengthen this partnership is important.

Recommendations

That the Council:

- i. Notes the content of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This is an interim report, describing some of the high level findings arising from the review of the impact of registration. The review was agreed by Council in 2014, and was completed by an independent contractor, with advice from Glasgow Caledonian University. The purpose of the review was to examine the extent to which registration had achieved its primary purpose¹ as defined when registration was introduced:

- Improving public protection through introducing standardised checks of identity and criminal records to evidence suitability for registration.
- Improving the quality of education and training of social service workers through setting minimum qualification requirements specific to job role and function.
- Increasing the skill, competence and confidence of the social service workforce through qualification, registration and the development of their identity as part of a wider social service workforce.
- Setting clear standards for conduct by developing Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers, and a means of addressing poor practice through a legal process to investigate workers who failed to meet the requirements of the Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers.
- Increasing the public perception of social service work through developing the professionalism of social service work through regulation.

1.2 Several challenges arose in carrying out the review: the lack of baseline evidence gathered at the beginning of the registration process, and throughout the registration timeline; the difficulty in providing comparator data across different parts of the register as each part had opened at a different time, and was at a different stages of maturity in the registration journey; the continuous opening of new parts of the register (which is still ongoing). These factors meant that much of the SSSC activity has necessarily been focused on continuously introducing and implementing the registration process to a new wave of registered workers, rather than following a linear development (as might have happened if a single group of workers had been registered in 2003). The other significant issue that arose was the individual characteristics of each part of the register, we were not comparing like with like in terms of qualification level, role recognition, social service identity etc.

1.3 These limitations have impacted on the data we have been able to gather and present, and the extent to which we are able to demonstrate impact, however there are some key messages from this work which indicate the difference that regulation is making, and some key questions arising from this work which will inform the work of the SSSC going forward.

¹ As summarised in Modernising Social Work Services: A Consultation Paper on Workforce Regulation and Education (Scottish Executive 1998); Aiming for Excellence (Scottish Executive 1999); The Way Forward for Care (Scottish Executive 2000); the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2002

- 1.4 The review consisted of a number of phases, and used a range of qualitative and quantitative methods:
- Survey of a limited set of questions prior to the start of the main body of work, which was used to identify some of the areas of inquiry (330 responses).
 - Internal timeline produced by SSSC staff reflecting their views on how registration had progressed since 2003.
 - Detailed online survey containing open text and closed selection responses (599 responses²).
 - Semi-structured interviews (6) with key people who have been involved in implementing registration from practitioner, academic, employer, regulator and Scottish Government representatives across the registration timeline.
 - Focus Groups (20) with registered workers and key stakeholders held across Scotland (296 people contributed to this).
 - Online engagement using SSSC social media accounts and the SSSC website.
- 1.5 Over 1200 people responded in some way to the review, and while this is a relatively small number in relation to our registered workforce numbers, there was a consistency in the responses that indicate that the findings may be reflective of the wider workforce. Just under 50% of the detailed online survey respondents were registered social service workers, 14% were service providers or employers of social service workers. Most of the remainder were other stakeholders, with a very small proportion of people who use services.
- 1.6 The focus groups had a slightly different split, with 49% being social service workers and employers and 51% being people who use social services, most of whom were part of the Advisory Committee to ENABLE Scotland (ACE) advocacy group. One of the limitations of the review is that the involvement of people who use services was low, however this highlights one of the areas we need to work on, identified later in the report. The ratio of public, private and voluntary sector employers/providers responding was similar to the current split recorded in national statistics.
- 1.7 We are very grateful to everyone who responded to the surveys or came to meet with us over the course of this review, as it is very important that the SSSC has a range of data sources from which to measure impact and effectiveness – we cannot do this through self-evaluation alone.
- 1.8 The richness and complexity of the data gathered during this review has proved to be challenging to analyse, and work on this continues. However, we have been able to define some high level findings to share with Council as an interim report as the final report is being developed. The report will be developed in-house as the independent contractor has completed his work and developed into infographics for easy sharing with

² All survey respondents did not answer every question so not all percentages in the report can be interpreted as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

the workforce. The Council report will be available on the SSSC website for stakeholders to read the interim report.

2. HIGH LEVEL FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW

2.1 These high level findings have been drawn from the detailed online survey and some of the qualitative data from the focus groups. In the final report, the focus group data and the individual interview data will be used to flesh out and provide examples to illustrate the analysis from the survey (which is mainly comprised of more limited quantifiable data), and to provide challenge to some of the assumptions that may be drawn from the quantifiable data. For clarity and ease of reading in this interim report, the 53 questions from the survey have been grouped into themes. In the final report, all of the data will be available, with a detailed analysis of the implications.

2.2 What is important in delivering social services?

We asked people to identify from a list the three most important qualities in delivering social services, in order of importance:

- Being aware that social service workers are trained and qualified and perform to set standards.
- Having confidence that people providing social services do so in a way that benefits the people who use services.
- Focusing on the quality of care.

2.3 Do we need registration and is it working?

Over 70% of those who responded to the online survey believed that registration was necessary, and 90% knew that the SSSC was required to keep the social service register. In the focus groups, awareness of the role and task of the SSSC in implementing registration was consistently high. This was reflected equally across groups who have been registered for a long time, and groups who have just come on to the register. Amongst service users and carers, understanding of the role and function of the SSSC was significantly lower, with very few participants in the focus groups knowing what the SSSC did. Once the role and function was explained to them, they felt very strongly that this was something that the public should know more about, so that people understood what to expect, and what they could do if they experienced poor practice. This level of awareness and understanding may not be indicative of all groups who use social services, particularly as some organisations ensure that everyone they work with understands the role of the SSSC and the expectations laid out in the Codes of Practice.

We asked social service workers to select statements which described registration. The most popular responses were that registration provided an assurance that:

- You are gaining the relevant practice skills, knowledge and competence relevant to the job through achieving qualifications.

- You have an increased understanding that you are part of the wider social service workforce.
- Increased professionalism.
- Recognition of your role in social service work.
- Recognition of the contribution you are making to the wellbeing and safety of the public.

Just under half of those who responded said that registration had helped to raise the quality of care in social services. Only one third of social service workers responding to the survey said that registration was a financial burden to them.

In the focus groups we asked people about what they thought registration has achieved for the public, employers and employees. Responses that came up regularly were 'safety', 'accountability', 'reassurance'.

Focus group participants discussed the registration processes. Most expressed satisfaction with the online application and renewal service and the telephone enquiry service, but also cited occasional conflicting information and advice. Focus group participants said that some of the registration processes were confusing, and appeared to duplicate some of the employer recruitment processes. Employers stated that although registration was an individual employee responsibility, they were spending increasing amounts of time encouraging employees to register, particularly as new parts of the register opened, to ensure that they were acting legally. Some expressed relief that 'it would all be done by 2020.' Overall, there were more positive comments about SSSC registration processes than negative.

Several focus groups commented on the 'rigidity' of the register, tightly defining people into functional roles, when the demands of the service meant that they had to work more flexibly, particularly as this was likely to become more common as the integration of health and care progressed. Concerns were expressed about the social service workers who were not included in the current timetable for registration because they belonged to small groups or had been missed out for some reason, and participants thought that there should be a 'scooping up' exercise to include them on the register.

2.4 Does registration help protect the public?

Over two thirds of respondents believed that registration has increased the protection of people who use social services, and just under half of social service workers who responded said that they were very confident or extremely confident in reporting instances of poor practice. They said that this confidence mainly came from their professional expertise, their job related qualifications and training, and their knowledge and awareness of the Codes of Practice for social service workers.

Two thirds of social service workers said that registration made them feel moderately to extremely confident that they were fit and suitable to

perform their jobs. Significantly, 28% described themselves as not at all confident or slightly confident in this.

Over two thirds of respondents agreed that improving the professionalism of the workforce makes social services safer for the people who use them. The majority of social service employers, providers and social service workers said that identity and criminal records checks reduced the risk of unsuitable people working in the sector.

Respondents who are not involved in the delivery of social services were asked if they thought that registration protected people who use social services from poor practice. Over 70% agreed. However, only 34% were slightly confident or not at all confident that workers with poor practice would be removed from the register (30% were very confident or extremely confident that this was the case).

Focus group participants expressed a high level of confidence in the fitness to practise work carried out by SSSC, but frequently cited long delays in fitness to practise complaints coming to conclusion, and the difficulty this caused the individual and the organisation. The processes for making referrals and receiving advice were perceived to be complex (processes have been improved since this survey was completed). A significant proportion of participants believed that the threshold at which SSSC became involved in concerns about practice was too low. Overall, the work of the SSSC in fitness to practise was perceived as being valued, specifically encouraging safer recruitment and ensuring workers were accountable for poor practice.

2.5 Does education and training make a difference?

More than 96% of people who responded to the survey were aware that social service workers must complete training and learning to maintain registration, and 68% knew about the SSSC responsibilities for the training and education of the workforce. Over half of respondents believed that social service workers were undertaking more training now than they had before registration was introduced, and over two thirds said that registration had helped set consistent standards across Scotland by setting minimum qualification levels. Over two thirds of employers, providers and social service workers said that it was important that people doing the same job were skilled and qualified to the same level.

When asked how confident respondents were that registration means that social service workers are continuously maintaining and improving skills related to their job role, two thirds were moderately to extremely confident that this was the case. A significant proportion (30%) was slightly confident or not at all confident that this was happening.

We asked who should be responsible for the workforce being appropriately skilled and qualified. Social service workers said that employers, individual employees and the regulatory body should be responsible for this.

Just over 40% of social service workers believe that qualifications are fit for purpose to meet the changing needs of practice and approaches to social service delivery, and only 26% were very or extremely confident that registration processes would continue to fulfil their professional training or development needs

Two thirds of respondents who are not involved in the delivery of services were moderately to extremely confident that social services workers who needed to register with the SSSC were well qualified and trained.

In the focus groups, participants frequently commented on the need for a more structured CPD programme, more appropriately aligned to job function to encourage continuous professional development. Focus group participants had variable views about qualifications, some believing that the qualifications for registration were set at the right level, and others stating that they believed that previous work experience should carry more weight in determining the necessity for qualification. Several of the focus groups talked at length about the challenge of working out whether a previously achieved qualification was suitable for registration.

Several of the focus groups discussed that different levels of qualifications required for children's social service work and adult social service work, and said that they believed that this contributed to there being a lower 'value' given to adult social service work. They were keen to see the same level of qualification required for working with children and with adults.

2.6 Increasing the skills, competence and confidence of the workforce

Over 49% of respondents said that registration increases the skills of social service workers. Nearly two thirds of social service employers and service providers agreed that registration contributed to having a consistently skilled and qualified workforce. Almost half of this group described registration as being a financial burden, reflecting the costs of providing education and training.

We asked who gives you greatest recognition of professional skills and knowledge. Social service workers top three responses, in order of popularity, were employers, colleagues and people who use services. Almost half of the respondents agreed that registration means that people who use services feel more confident in their worker's skills.

Focus group participants spoke positively about the learning approaches, learning resources and learning events provided by SSSC, and described examples of how they have supported positive improvements in practice. Some expressed a view that the SSSC needed to do more to publicise the resources and support their use.

In the survey and in the focus groups, potential links can be made between the confidence of the workforce and the perceived value of social service work.

2.7 The Codes of Practice

99% of social service workers and 94% of employers knew about the Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers, and 87% knew that the SSSC was required to publish Codes of Practice. Most had heard about the Codes from their employer or from SSSC. Only 84% of employers knew about the Codes of Practice for Employers. Over 78% of respondents said that registration makes social service workers moderately to extremely accountable for their standards of conduct and practice.

Over three quarters of social service workers, employers and providers agreed that the Codes of Practice provide a clear framework for practice which maximises the quality of care they can deliver.

During the focus groups, there were no negative comments about the Codes of Practice, with over 80% of comments being positive and supportive of the Codes, eg people describing the Codes of Practice as helpful in helping to promote best practice as well as help to identify poor practice. A focus group of social service workers said that the Code of Practice for social service workers had a strong value base which reflected social service values. The focus group participants involved in the delivery of social services generated rich evidence about how the Codes of Practice are being embedded in organisational governance and processes. Confidence in the impact of the Codes of Practice appeared to be lower within the focus groups of people who use social services, however their understanding and awareness of the Code of Practice was also lower.

Some of the focus groups of social service workers, employers and providers commented that the Code of Practice for Employers should be stronger and make them more accountable.

2.8 Professionalism

We asked if increasing the professionalism of those who work in social services improves the quality of services, over 70% agreed. More than half of the respondents overall said that regulation had strengthened and supported the professionalism of the social service workforce, but only 46% of social service workers agreed with this. A significant proportion of respondents were not convinced that this was the case.

In the focus group discussions, views about professionalism were varied, with professionalism often being seen as positive, and registration providing an underpinning structure which increases professionalism. However in light of discussions about the changing nature of social service work to a greater focus on enabling and empowering, several participants said that professionalism can distance social service workers from people who use services. Several respondents said that what people understood as professionalism was too varied, and perhaps a clearer shared definition would be helpful.

Focus group participants did not think that increasing professionalism was achieved through registration alone, but was a collective responsibility for all involved in social service work.

2.9 A collective identity for the social service workforce

Views on this were mixed, with respondents talking about the breadth, range and specific characteristics of social service roles, and how that could make finding a collective identity difficult. During the focus groups, discussion touched on the 'hierarchy' of social service groups, which appears to be changing as the register increases, moving from 'social workers' and 'everyone else', to a more complex hierarchy with each register group having its own characteristics and perceived position within the hierarchy.

Focus groups and interview participants talked about the way in which registration has provided a platform for groups such as early years workers to develop an individual identity. Many people talked about the challenges to a collective identity arising from the integration of health and social care and the demise of 'social work departments', which had previously provided much of this identity. Some focus group participants expressed a view that the role of the SSSC in promoting a collective identity for social service workers through its activities was now becoming more important.

2.10 The role of the SSSC

Knowledge and awareness of the role of the SSSC in establishing and keeping a register of social service workers was high in the online survey, and most people were aware that the SSSC published Codes of Practice. When the register was first established, registered workers expressed some confusion about the role of the SSSC in acting as a collective voice for the social service. This survey demonstrates that this appears to be more clearly understood now, with most social service workers responding to the survey saying that they did not see the SSSC as providing the functions of a professional body.

Many participants in the focus groups and some respondents in the survey did not understand the difference in the role of the professional regulator (SSSC) and the service regulator (Care Inspectorate). Some thought that there was duplication in what they did, and confusing lines of accountability. Similar views were expressed in relation to the role of Disclosure Scotland and the SSSC. Having to produce different sets of paperwork for different organisations was bureaucratic, and time consuming.

Focus group participants who used social services had very little understanding of the role of the SSSC, and thought that the public should know more.

2.11 The value of social service work

In the focus groups, some social service workers and employers said that they did not believe that social service work was highly valued outwith the sector. Negative media reporting was cited as a factor which influenced the public. Participants frequently mentioned low rates of pay and how they thought this reflected a lack of value of social service work, and expressed concern about the reduction in funding for social services, and the impact that this may have in them being able to provide a high quality and valued service.

Several focus groups discussed the apparent lack of alignment between rates of pay and qualification levels, believing that they were being equipped to carry out roles and functions that were complex, autonomous and demanding, but not receiving the right financial reward for this.

Generally, focus group participants did not think that the work of social service workers was valued highly enough.

2.11 Initial Conclusions

The review of the impact of registration provides us with valuable evidence in our journey to improvement. There is strong support for registration as a means of ensuring public safety, strong recognition of the role and work of the SSSC amongst social service workers and employers, and clear support for the Codes of Practice as a framework for conduct and practice, but there is still work to be done. Some of the initial questions that we might ask ourselves are as follows, and subsequent deeper analysis of the review findings will provide us with more:

- What more can we do to increase public awareness and value of social service work and of the role of the SSSC?
- How can we simplify our processes for registration, fitness to practise and qualifications further, and make the information easier to access and understand?
- How can we improve our communication pathways with potential registrants, employers and registered workers to improve our relationship with them and increase their confidence in the services we provide?
- Are the registration processes 'fit for the future'? What do we need to do to ensure that registration is 'enabling' new ways of working?
- Does something need to be done about the social service workers who have not been included in the current timetable for registration, such as social work assistants?
- What are we doing to provide a structured post-qualifying programme for all social service workers?
- What can we do to support social service workers to feel more confident?
- To what extent does the gender balance of social service workers impact on confidence and value, and what can we do to address this?
- What can we do to enable a stronger collective understanding about the role that employers, providers, registered workers, SSSC and

people who use services have in making sure that registration is effective?

3. LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 3.1 This report is relevant to all of the priorities identified in the SSSC Strategic Plan 2014-17.

4. LINK TO RISK REGISTER

- 4.1 Strategic Risk 1: the public are not protected
Strategic Risk 5: the work of the SSSC does not increase the skill level and competence of the social service workforce
Strategic Risk 6: the public or employers lost confidence in the SSSC

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no resource implications arising from the content of this report, which is for information only.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out.
6.2 I confirm that the content of this report will have no negative impact on people with one or more protected characteristics and a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report

8. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 8.1 This report is a summary of the stakeholder engagement activities carried out as part of the review of the impact of registration. As well as speaking to key people who have been involved in making significant decisions about the development and maintenance of the regulatory functions of the SSSC, we heard from registered workers, social service employers, social service providers, people who use services and others who have an interest in social service work.

9. IMPACT ON USERS AND CARERS

- 9.1 The primary function of registration is to increase the protection and wellbeing of people who use services and their carers through the regulation and education of the workforce. The content of this review provides third party evidence of the efficacy of the work that the SSSC is doing to protect those who use social services. One of the issues highlighted within the review was the lack of awareness among people who use services and the general public of the role of the SSSC. We are already aware of this, and working towards increasing awareness and

understanding of the SSSC role and the role of the social service worker and the employer in providing safe, high quality social services.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 This report provides the high level findings from the review of the impact of registration. A range of people across the organisation supported the work to undertake this review, and a significant number of stakeholders and registered workers participated. Those who contributed to the review evidence are more likely to be people who have an interest in regulation, however, we are grateful for the continued interest and commitment of registered workers, employers, key stakeholders and our own employees in supporting the SSSC to think about the impact of our work, and hope that this review will provide a platform for continuing discussing about the effectiveness of the work of the SSSC in providing a regulatory function for social service workers.
- 10.2 What has become increasingly apparent over the course of the review is that regulation is not the responsibility of one organisation or one individual. To be most effective, regulation must function as a dynamic partnership between all those who have a stake in making sure that there is an effective means of improving the wellbeing and safety of those who use social services through ensuring that the social service workforce is safe and has the relevant knowledge, skill, competence and confidence to provide high quality, responsive social services.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 There are no background papers.

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