

CCPS Briefing: Current realities and impacts of changes to qualification timescales for the sector

Introduction

The Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland (CCPS) is the voice of not-for-profit social care in Scotland. Our vision is for individuals and families to thrive through a rights and relationship-based care and support system. We have 85 provider organisations in our membership with remits spanning care and support for children, young people, and families; disabled people; older people; people with learning disabilities; people in the justice system; people experiencing homelessness, and more. Our members work in every local authority area in Scotland.

As of June 2024, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) introduced changes to Registration, as part of the SSSC's Future Proofing Programme, a systemic review of the SSSC's operation to better serve the sector. This included reducing the timeline for frontline workers to receive the required qualifications for their posts, from five years to three years.

Many of the changes through the Future Proofing Programme were welcomed by the membership. CCPS members value and have actively championed the professionalisation and development of the social care workforce. However, CCPS members have consistently expressed concern over this reduction in timeline, as it would place additional burdens on an already stretched not-for-profit social care sector and workforce.

This briefing outlines both the future impacts of this decision and the current realities of the wider context that our members and their workforce are operating in – a context that has rapidly changed since the announcement was first made in June 2024. For example, the withdrawal

of key tenets of the National Care Service reforms, changes to Employment legislation, enactment of the Disclosure Act and unprecedented changes to Employer Contributions to National Insurance have all occurred within the last six months.

Although implementation was postponed to June 2025 following strong feedback from the sector, this has only provided brief respite. **CCPS is calling for an immediate and sustained pause to reducing the timescales for mandatory qualifications.** It is crucial that the SSSC collaborates with the sector and uses available data to agree on a suitable implementation timeline, to ensure that qualification frameworks are achievable, sustainable, and beneficial to both workers and the people they support.

Context

It is crucial that this decision is not displaced from the current reality that CCPS members are operating in. In 2025, not-for-profit social care organisations are navigating upheaval and challenges that have significant implications for the viability of the sector, the sustainability of the sector's workforce and the delivery of essential social care and support services for people in Scotland.

Recruitment and retention

The recruitment and retention issues in the social care sector are well known, and persist at a time when services are experiencing ongoing pressure. The Care Inspectorate and Scottish Social Services Council's [Staff vacancies in care services 2023 report](#), published in March 2025, found that as of 31 December 2023, 48% of care services reported vacancies.

According to the [2022-23 Social Care Benchmarking Report](#) published in July 2024, 95% of respondents report that frontline posts were either 'quite difficult' or 'very difficult' to fill. In CCPS' workforce quarterly data for September 2024, the median vacancy rate of the 29 providers we surveyed was 7.3%; however, some providers were operating at double this rate of vacancy.

Staff turnover rates in our quarterly survey sit consistently around 24% of the workforce per year (median across 2023, and across first three quarters of 2024). For comparison, from March 2023 to 2024, the turnover for [NHS Nursing and Midwifery staff](#) was only 7.1%.

The wider consequences of these staff shortages are significant: workers are being asked to cancel or change pre-booked annual leave, withdraw from essential training, and have their supervision and team meetings postponed — all of which are vital for service quality and workforce development and well-being.

Workforce Development funding streams

Post-pandemic, CCPS members have also reported that workforce development funding has been increasingly difficult to access. Previous findings from research with the CCPS membership found that providers face a variety of challenges in accessing workforce development funding. These included inconsistency in funding availability, eligibility criteria, and application processes disrupting planning and consuming HR resources; withdrawal of key funding streams, such as the unexpected and sudden withdrawal of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund causing significant operational disruptions; lack of centralised Information on funding options, requiring HR staff to undertake extensive research; and lengthy and inflexible application processes.

Risks to sector viability

CCPS has also received reports from our members that organisations are facing the stark reality of declining new support packages, handing back existing ones, or even withdrawing from existing contracts altogether. This disruption is having a devastating impact on the people who rely on these services, as they face the withdrawal or reduction of their support or face the difficult process of building trust with a new provider and staff.

These disruptions have now progressed to viability risks for the sector and its services at large, with the UK Government's introduction of changes to Employer National Insurance contributions (eNICs). In response to a February 2025 survey covering 50 major not-for-profit providers in CCPS membership, with £850m income, 28,000 staff and supporting 230,000 people in total, we found:

- 57% are considering handing back contracts with 55% seriously considering reducing available support;
- 92% said if eNICs changes are not fully re-imbursed it will negatively impact planned pay awards, with 88% saying it will negatively impact differentials; and
- 67% are planning to reach financial balance through using reserves and of these, 91% would not expect to be a going concern within four years if they had to continue to do so.

Mandatory qualifications

As noted above, in June 2024, the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) announced plans to reduce the timeframe for completing mandatory qualifications from five years to three. Intended to raise standards, the move has drawn sector-wide concern, with CCPS members warning it overlooks operational pressures and disproportionately affects smaller providers, part-time staff, and those with limited training access.

Although implementation was postponed to June 2025 following strong feedback, key issues remain. A survey conducted in February 2025, and cited in the [Workforce Skills Report 2025](#), found all service types face challenges accessing required qualifications – particularly the difficulty of completing them during personal or work time.

Members report rising pressure on overstretched staff, high turnover before qualification completion, and experienced workers leaving rather than undertaking late-career study. The loss of key funding has weakened access to quality training, and many providers still rely on manual tracking systems, adding to the burden. Qualification demands also deter internal progression, with some staff declining promotions due to study requirements seen as unnecessary for experienced practitioners.

Future impacts

Looking ahead, the combination of increased qualification requirements, rising service demand, and workforce shortages could place the sector under unsustainable strain. Without improved funding and more flexible qualification timescales, providers may struggle to retain experienced staff and invest in the development of new recruits.

There is a particular risk that inflexible registration timelines could limit access to career changers, those returning to work, and young people, particularly where learning must occur in personal time. For the voluntary sector – often operating without parity of funding – this creates a disproportionate risk to workforce sustainability and service continuity.

A lack of alignment between qualification expectations and realistic learning conditions may lead to increased turnover, stalled progression, and reduced morale. If qualifications become a barrier to recruitment rather than a development tool, the sector may face widening gaps in care delivery, especially in rural and specialist services.

Conclusion

The decision to reduce the timescales for mandatory qualifications must be reversed – it was made at a time when the sector was in a markedly different place, before the cumulative pressures of rising demand, funding stagnation, recruitment shortfalls, and the erosion of vital training infrastructure had fully taken hold. Further undermining sector sustainability, the wider financial instability caused by the loss of workforce development funding and the impact of unreimbursed increases to eNICs should not be overlooked. As outlined in this briefing, these combined challenges are bringing providers to breaking point. To proceed without addressing the wider context and unresolved workforce impacts risks tipping the sector over the edge. It is essential that this policy change is reconsidered in light of current realities, and that any future reform is shaped in full partnership with those delivering care and support every day.