

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1993](#): ‘Reform the financial support for social work students on work placements’, lodged by David Grimm and Lucy Challoner**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

The petition is seeking to ensure that students undertaking studies preparatory to becoming a social worker receive bursaries during work placements.

#### **Becoming a registered social worker**

In order to qualify to be a registered social worker, an individual needs to have completed either an honours degree or postgraduate qualification in social work approved by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

All courses include practice learning placements where the individual is assessed in work placements in a variety of social work settings. Work placements are an integral part of a social work qualification. The [framework for Social Work education in Scotland](#) stated—

“[Courses must ensure that] all social work students spend at least 200 days in practice learning, of which at least 160 must be spent in supervised direct practice in service delivery settings. This practice learning must be assessed. Up to 60 days of the supervised direct practice element can be subject to credit from prior experiential learning.”

The final two years of an undergraduate course, or in both years of a post graduate course, will typically include significant time on placements.

#### **Funding available**

Fees for Scottish domiciled first full-time degrees are funded. The SSSC provides bursaries for students studying full-time postgraduate social work courses in Scotland, which currently can include support for tuition fees and a maintenance grant.

Students can apply for cost of living support. Payments are made in the form of repayable loans or non-repayable bursaries depending on the age and

household income of the student and the course they are studying. More information can be found in [a 2022 SPICe Blog](#).

## The petition

The petition seeks bursaries for undergraduate Social Work students in their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years and for the criteria for assessing bursary applications for postgraduate applications to be reformed.

The petition references the bursaries that are available [to paramedic, nursing and midwifery students](#). These students are eligible for a bursary of £10,000 per year in their first to third years of study and £7,500 in their fourth year.

Another example of a bursary for a professional qualification is the [Scottish Government's STEM Bursaries](#). This provides a limited number of £20,000 bursaries aimed at individuals wishing to undertake a one-year secondary PGDE ITE course in Scotland that leads to the award of registered teacher status in the hardest to fill STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) subjects.

Bursaries for postgraduate social work students [are administered by the SSSC](#). SPICe was unable to locate details on this scheme on the SSSC's website, however various universities provide some more detail. For example, the [University of the West of Scotland's site](#) states—

“Postgraduate Bursaries are available for nominated and eligible students studying the MSc Social Work at UWS. This is administered through the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). Funding is limited and subject to a quota. Students must be nominated by the University, who will have a set number of funded places. Nominations are at the discretion of the academic teaching team, who you should contact directly with any questions relating to this process.

“The bursary is made up of:

- Tuition fee contribution is paid directly to the University on your behalf. The maximum award is a contribution and does not cover the full cost of the course. You will be responsible for meeting the cost of the shortfall so do plan accordingly.
- Means tested maintenance grant and additional allowances depending on circumstances. ...
- Sundry expenses - all eligible students will receive a one-off payment towards placement travel and other expenses.”

The Scottish Government, ultimately, funds bursaries whether through SAAS or SSSC. In a number of questions answered last summer (e.g. [S6W-09558](#)) the Government stated, “Over the last five years the Scottish Government has provided over £25m to support the training of social workers, including for post-graduate bursaries and support for practice-based learning to increase the number of entrants into the profession.”

The [Social Workers Union reported](#) on 22 December 2022 that Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, has responded to a letter from the petitioners (and others) in this topic and has agreed to meet in early 2023.

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6 January 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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