

Social Work Practice Learning Funding: Research and Evaluation

Prepared by Egzon Sadiku, Barrie Levine, and Sarah McCulloch
from the *Learning Network West*

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Glossary & list of abbreviations

GDPR - General Data Protection Regulation

HEI - Higher Education Institutes

IPE – Independent Practice Educator; self-employed Practice Educator

LA - Local authority

Link Worker – in the absence of a workplace PE, staff member based in the workplace, providing day-to-day supervision of the student

LNW - Learning Network West

NQSW - Newly qualified social worker

NSWA - National Social Work Agency (Scotland)

OCSWA - Office of the Chief Social Work Advisor

PE – Practice Educator; supervisor of students on practice learning opportunity

PG - Postgraduate

PL - Practice Learning;

PAP - Practice Assessment Panel

PLO – Practice Learning Opportunity; also known as Placement, Supervised Direct Practice or Supervised Practice Learning.

PNMSB - Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery Student Bursary (PNMSB)

PSG - Placement Support Grant

SFC - Scottish Funding Council

SiSWE - Standards in Social Work Education

SSSC - Scottish Social Services Council;

SWEP - Social Work Education Partnership

Tutor – University-based link for students on practice learning opportunity

UG - Undergraduate

Executive summary

Social Work in Scotland faces a growing set of challenges in meeting increasing demand for services at a time when budgets are under pressure through cuts in public expenditure. Building and maintaining a robust, confident social work workforce is a key priority in responding to identified challenges. However, social work, in common with other public services, faces major difficulties in recruitment and retention, particularly of qualified social workers.

The *Setting the Bar for Social Work in Scotland* report of 2022 identified key workforce issues. Along with an ageing workforce where 19% of social workers are nearing retirement, data indicates that at least 25% of newly qualified social workers have left the profession within six years of qualification. As a result, pinch points exist both at entry and exit stages of the workforce, and in combination with high demand for services, leads to increasing pressures on teams and individual social workers. A further consequence is the difficulty in developing and maintaining experienced layers of social workers who are able to fully support student social workers and NQSWs; and provide stability and continuity of service provision.

Educating and training future social workers who are well prepared for the demands of the profession is, therefore, a key priority and needs to be fully integrated into a comprehensive system of workforce planning. Investment is required to develop a more integrated approach to academic and practice learning, with more emphasis on ensuring that student social workers have the depth and quality of experience that prepares them to transition effectively from student to NQSW as a process towards developing a long-term career in social work.

Practice Learning as a component of social work education is, arguably, in its current form, poorly resourced, poorly coordinated, and provided through a system of informal and unregulated arrangements. In contrast to nursing or other health professions where there are no financial incentives for practice education, practice learning within social work has developed on the basis of a series of financial transfers that have become required to facilitate student placement provision. As a consequence, the system serves to marginalise practice learning and make it an exceptional activity rather than fully integrated to social work practice and education.

This report was commissioned by the SSSC and SWEP to directly review the funding arrangements and related systems in place for practice learning. The report also addresses financial support for students, which is equally in need of review towards a whole-system, holistic approach to social work education funding.

We offer a number of observations based on our analysis of current issues and structures. Specific recommendations are made about the future of practice learning funding. As funding for practice learning is directly related to the system/s in place to support this, the report therefore also considers the wider system of practice learning within social work education, and makes recommendations about future options and potential improvements.

Our analysis is based upon a combination of desktop research, a review of existing literature, interviews and focus groups with stakeholders and students, written submissions and comparisons with other professional education systems in the UK.

Social Work Education in Scotland

Social Work education in Scotland, and the UK more generally, has undergone a number of changes and transformations since it emerged from the post Seebohm and Kilbrandon reports in the 1960's. The Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) was introduced in 1975 and later superseded by the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) in 1991 and subsequently by the four-year Honours Degree in Social Work (and two-year postgraduate pre-qualifying Masters) in 2004. All versions of social work qualifications have involved a combination of academic and practice-based learning.

There are nine HEIs in Scotland with all but one providing social work courses at Undergraduate and Postgraduate qualifying level. One HEI only provides a PG programme. There are therefore eighteen different social work programmes on offer currently in Scotland. The average total annual number of admissions over the five years from 2016-21 was 606 and the average annual number of those qualifying as a social worker was 462 (SSSC (2021:20)). There is no available analysis which indicates whether the current scale of provision of social work education programmes is adequate or otherwise in meeting workforce needs.

As Social Work is currently not a controlled subject, there are no agreed intake targets set by the Scottish Government. There is increasing weight to the argument that Social Work should become a controlled subject along with Medicine, Dentistry, Initial Teacher Education, Nursing and Midwifery Pre-Registration, and Paramedic Education.

All nine HEIs are involved in the provision of practice learning, though systems, assessment processes and arrangements vary. Some HEIs arrange practice learning independently; others arrange PLOs in partnership, such as in the West through the auspices of the Learning Network West. SWEP are at an early stage in the development of new practice learning coordination systems across Scotland with the appointment of Regional Managers. Improvements in the coordination and planning of practice learning would be highly beneficial along with a streamlined and agreed

national approach to the assessment of student practice. This would avoid the current scenario of PEs having to work with up to nine different assessment systems for practice learning which are all based on the same Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE).

Issues in Practice Learning

The provision of sufficient and suitable Practice Learning Opportunities (PLOs) for student social workers underpins this report. There is evidence that practice learning in social work as a distinct area of work has become eroded over time, is perceived as overly time consuming and furthermore, of relatively low status and priority. There are no structures which support practice learning for social work unlike the systems in place in the NHS in Scotland where practice education sits within the NES NMAHP directorate.

There are a number of key issues which were identified in the course of the research:

- Limited availability of PLOs (placement opportunities)
- Not enough placements within the statutory sector and reducing availability of statutory placements
- Growing reliance on PLOs within the Third Sector, with the majority of PLOs now in the third sector overall
- Too few Practice Educators (PEs) in the statutory sector
- Growing reliance on Independent Practice Educators (IPEs) to supervise PLOs
- Lack of regulation of IPEs who are self-employed, unregulated and not subject to set criteria for their role
- Absence of national guidelines for practice learning
- A lack of centralised and consistent management information and planning structures in relation to practice learning provision

Whilst issues are aggregated in the report, different circumstances arise in different parts of the country. Arrangements and needs for practice learning vary considerably across the country with different challenges in urban and rural areas. For example, in the urban conurbation in the West served by the Learning Network West, there is a particularly high demand on placements and a regular shortage, especially in the statutory sector. Whereas in rural settings, there are fewer students, fewer placement opportunities, and more evidence of workplace-based distance learning.

A further factor is that for rural authorities also facing recruitment challenges, a 'grow-your-own' system of developing local recruits already in the workforce is more effective than relying on output of graduates from traditional HEIs who are less likely to

relocate. Therefore, future systems of practice learning funding need to be flexible enough to meet differing needs and circumstances, and provide relevant incentives to stakeholders.

Current systems do not facilitate a planned approach to practice learning, are often ad-hoc, and are driven by financial arrangements that do not automatically involve Local Authorities in the planning of practice learning provision. A closer connection between Local Authority workforce planning needs, HEI provision in 'traditional' bricks and mortar universities, scope for innovative local training solutions such as 'apprenticeships' or trainee schemes, involvement of the Third Sector in a more structured way, provision of more PEs and planning to meet identified placement needs are required as key outcomes of future arrangements.

Evidence from local authority stakeholders suggests that in a growing number of instances newly qualified social workers are not suitably prepared for practice in statutory settings. This is reported to be due to the limited availability of statutory placements for students and there are reported instances of students having no statutory experience in either of their two placements. This has significant consequences for statutory employers, requires higher resources to support NQSWs, and may contribute to social workers becoming burnt out and leaving the profession.

Whilst it is important to emphasise that social work is not only carried out in the statutory sector and that third sector PLOs can be extremely rich learning experiences, there is a concomitant need for graduating students to be competent in statutory settings and comfortable with the exercise of statutory authority. With over 50% of placements now taking place in the third sector, the trend is shifting further from statutory PLOs. Redressing the balance of placement provision to reverse this trend is therefore critically important and again, needs to be a key outcome of future funding arrangements.

From a student perspective, placement experience is seen as the most important element of their courses. Evidence from students is that they see their future employment prospects as directly linked to their placement experience. Previous reviews of social work education have identified the continuing need to integrate theory and practice and develop the curriculum accordingly.

A further element that needs urgently addressed is how students are funded and supported during their professional education. Student perspectives have rarely featured in previous structural reviews of social work education, and our aim is to attempt to redress this balance. Key to this would be the introduction of enhanced financial support for social work students.

Funding of practice learning

Practice learning is currently funded through three distinct streams:

- Practice Learning Daily Fee
- Practice Learning Administrative Fee
- Placement Support Grant (PSG)/ Resumption of Placement Grant/ Travel and Subsistence Grant

The Postgraduate Bursary is a further distinct stream and is discussed separately.

Research Objectives

The objectives as set out in the research brief are as follows:

- Examining in depth the current funding streams, how they operate in practice, and current usage
- Identifying gaps in the current funding arrangements
- Analysing emerging issues impacting on the provision of practice learning
- Provide recommendations to address identified gaps in funding and maximise use of current budgets
- Review current funding for postgraduate students, consider the position of undergraduate students, and make recommendations for funding all social work students

Key Findings

Current funding

Total government funding into practice learning has fluctuated in the last 3 years due to various changes of the funding arrangements and contingency measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Funding for PLOs has traditionally followed a 'daily' calculation mirroring the length of placements. The daily rate system makes the process of tracking and verifying funds challenging, adds to administrative work for all stakeholders, and provides a limited insight into the overall costs of practice learning per student.

Further, the financial administration of the funding streams is a complex system, whereby the Scottish Government channels funds via SSSC to the 9 HEIs who then are responsible for dispersal of the funds to local authorities, third sector agencies, and

independent practice educators (where applicable). Each HEI applies its own administrative system to the receipt and claiming of the funds further contributing towards an overall lack of standardisation. The funds are unnecessarily channelled through various intermediaries before reaching the intended recipient. These current arrangements have led to a convoluted landscape characterised by inconsistency and inequity among partners.

The total annual budget for 2022-23 was £3,588,300, for all funding streams, which equates to an average of £35 for one PLO day.

Practice Learning Daily Fee

This is the largest component of the total budget for practice learning with an approximate budget of £3,000,000 for 2022-23. It funds local authority provision, third sector placements, and independent practice educators. This is the key budget which is administered by HEIs based on the number of practice learning days. Its usage and application varies across Scotland and tracking of these funds is not possible in the current landscape in the absence of reporting mechanisms.

Currently, the rates for the PL daily fee are:

- Local Authorities:
 - £28 per day for assessed PLOs
 - £18 per day for non-assessed PLOs
- Third (or private) sector: £28 per day for both types of PLOs (with funding usually split between provider and IPE - £10 and £18 per day respectively)

Administrative Fee

This component is provided to HEIs for administering the Practice Learning Daily Fee and Placement Support Grant. It is also intended to be used for development purposes in relation to provision of the required number of PLOs, and in quality assurance. It is calculated on the basis of £2 per student/day with a minimum of £18,000 and a maximum of £40,000 that can be claimed annually per HEI. The total annual budget provided by the SSSC is approximately £220,000, on average.

Placement Support Grant

This component was originally termed Travel and Subsistence Grant for students. It was redesignated as 'Resumption of Placement Grant' during the recent pandemic and aimed to address the increased need to support PLO providers in mainly purchasing IT

equipment suitable for online learning. This grant of £300 per PLO was automatically available for all PLO providers to be used flexibly for their needs to arrange practice learning provision.

The 'Resumption of Placement Grant' was further redesignated into the 'Placement Support Grant' in 2022-23 with the intention of providing greater flexibility in meeting various PLO-related costs. HEIs now have the discretion to determine how the grant is used on an individual basis with some funding directed to students and some to PLO providers. Total annual budget for 2022-23 for this component is £375,000.

Emerging issues

Funding

Social work education differs significantly from health-related systems of student learning in that practice learning is arranged on the basis of PLO providers being paid for the provision of PLOs.

That being said, most research participants report that the current level of funding is not sufficient in supporting the provision of practice learning. However, there are concerns in relation to the current funding not being utilised to support practice learning, and funding being absorbed into general local authority budgets. As a result, the funding intended to directly support practice learning may be utilised to support other areas of work.

Payment for PLOs is administered retrospectively and no prior financial planning is undertaken or required. Therefore, funding has not been utilised strategically which has further contributed to the development of a reactive rather than proactive approach to provision of practice learning. In the absence of financial planning and accountability mechanisms, practice learning funding has not been utilised strategically to address gaps and issues stakeholders face.

Inconsistency

The application of practice learning funding is characterised by numerous inconsistencies across the country. Discussion about these inconsistencies and proposed solutions expose the depth of division between stakeholders on various issues in relation to practice learning.

Issues of inconsistency emerge in relation to:

- Financial remuneration of practice educators: Rate of payment varies from £0 to £1500.

- Financial remuneration of link workers: This is not standard practice among local authorities or third sector agencies.
- Employment of IPEs: While some local authorities employ or utilise IPEs as a way to address the shortfall of in-house practice educators, others have avoided this practice due to various concerns including quality assurance, access to client information systems and confidentiality.
- Levels of payment for PLO providers and IPEs: Different stakeholders have instituted various rates of payment for PLO providers and IPEs
- Student travel: Different mileage rates (20p - 45p) apply across Scotland. The HMRC recommended rate is set at 45p.
- Funding of non-assessed PLOs: Only a minority of HEIs arrange non-assessed PLOs, however PL daily fees are claimed to support this
- Usage of the Placement Support Grant: Inconsistent application and usage as a result of lack of clarity and interpretation of guidance.
- Number of assessed PLO days: HEIs apply slightly different requirements, leading to variable length of placements between HEIs.

Inconsistencies originating from fragmented systems of financial administration and lack of clarity over usage of funds have encouraged the development of a competitive environment in the practice learning sector and, essentially, an inequitable system.

Lack of standardisation in the current practice learning landscape is not restricted to the strictly financial aspect of practice learning. It emerges in other aspects such as assessment, written reports, expectations for practice educators, and student experience in general. These inconsistencies also have financial implications as they require more time and resources for all stakeholders.

Shortage of PEs and PLOs within statutory settings

This is a complex issue which has arisen due to a number of factors. The shortage of PLOs in statutory settings is attributed to resource issues, social worker vacancies, workload factors, lack of PEs, or PEs not being prepared to supervise students. Some authorities have introduced incentives such as financial remuneration, but there is no clear evidence as to how effective this is as a solution. The data collected identified the following factors impeding PEs from taking students:

- Time constraints and caseload management

- Issues with recruitment/vacancies in teams
- Newly qualified social workers requiring additional supervision
- Limited support for practice educators or the importance of practice education as a core activity from management

Other issues which impact on the situation and require attention include:

- Limited post-qualifying routes to career progression for social workers
- Inactive PEs within LAs registered as self-employed IPEs
- Increasing practice of employing IPEs to supervise students in PLOs in statutory settings

The unavailability of PEs is also associated with the limited post-qualifying paths or training opportunities leading to career progression. In some cases, Local Authorities sponsor employees to train as PEs who, upon completion of the Practice Learning Qualification (PLQ) course, are promoted to team leaders and managers with no time for practice education in their new role.

There is evidence of a reluctance amongst some social workers to take on the role of Practice Educator. Some Local Authorities have instigated systems of financial reward for supervising students. Others have tried to implement systems of caseload management which provide greater recognition of the time involved in effective student supervision and support. Future systems need to ensure greater numbers of PEs are trained. In addition, a cultural shift is required towards developing a practice education role being the norm for social workers, rather than the exception. Furthermore, PEs need to be resourced to and expected to take students on a continuing basis, not once or twice and then deciding to drop out of future supervision. In this context, the PLQ course is often perceived more as a vehicle towards promotion rather than as a component of continuous professional development. The PLQ course is also lengthy and with limited provision which contributes to a limited number of new PEs.

Further issues arise within LAs with PEs not taking students in their workplace, but becoming IPEs and working for other authorities or within the third sector in addition to their own substantive posts. This is increasingly problematic and contributes to the shortage of PLOS in statutory settings. Developing comprehensive and consistent national guidance for practice education, expectations of the role of PE and clear criteria for IPEs would help to address this set of issues.

Role of the Third Sector

Contrary to their current contribution to the field, third sector agencies are not heavily involved in discussion and planning regarding social work education. With students on third sector placements generally being supervised by independent practice educators, only a small component of available funds is available to third sector agencies, normally £10 per day out of the £28 total.

Further, link workers without a social work background managing students on a daily basis can impact the quality of PLOs in the absence of in-house practice educators. Limited training opportunities are available to third sector agencies for developing their own in-house practice educators. Further exploration into practice learning in Third Sector should be undertaken to provide a platform for their inclusion and to explore a strategic national approach.

Role of Independent Practice Educators

IPEs report a sense of devaluing of their work and the unsustainability of their situation through the current funding arrangements. They argue the current pay rate and employment conditions are not commensurate with their skills and contribution to practice learning. IPEs generally receive £18 per placement day, are treated as self-employed and do not receive contributions towards NI, sick pay, pension etc.

Lack of quality assurance mechanisms and feedback for IPEs also directly correlates to the quality of PLOs and, fundamentally, the student experience and their preparedness to practice.

Additional issues in relation to IPEs are identified for further consideration:

- A national IPE register does not exist. This makes it impossible to track whether an IPE meets the professional standards for practice education.
- Employment of IPEs is often determined through informal channels of communication and word-of-mouth assessments of performance.
- IPEs are not required to register with any regulator. Thus, there are no CPD requirements or other regulatory processes in place.
- PVG disclosure is not required. With no national register and lack of communication between regions, there are significant concerns regarding the protection of vulnerable groups involved in practice learning.

Further consideration needs to be given to IPEs and their role in social work education in the future. The resulting system can then be supported and encouraged by financial incentives and support from practice learning funding.

Student funding

Overview

Currently, only Postgraduate Social Work students receive a bursary toward the cost of their studies. Undergraduates are only eligible for SAAS funding in the form of loans. Students are therefore experiencing severe financial hardship and are required to work to support themselves and their families. This is particularly problematic when students are involved in practice learning. The combination of full-time placement, working long hours in paid employment in addition to academic requirements, is highly stressful, damaging to student well-being, and not conducive to learning.

Undergraduate students have raised these issues directly with the SSSC and Scottish Government, and in a Petition to the Scottish Parliament. Specifically, they have requested the introduction of a student bursary in line with the Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery Student Bursary (PNMSB) scheme in years 3 and 4 of the degree when they are on placement. The petition also raised the need for a review of the Postgraduate Bursary.

Undergraduate funding needs

Undergraduate students in Scotland are disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in Wales, England and NI who all receive some form of financial grant incentive towards their studies. In Scotland, Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery (PNM) students receive £10,000 per annum as a non-repayable grant on top of other funding. Social work students make the argument that in addition to the real difficulties in combining paid employment, full-time placement and academic study, they feel they are being treated less favourably than other student groups, which to them further indicates that social work is less valued than other professions.

Postgraduate bursary issues

Postgraduate students currently receive a bursary for both years of study, although the value of the bursary has reduced considerably as it has not increased in real terms since its introduction over 20 years ago. 321 bursaries are currently provided across the 9 HEIs in Scotland at an annual budgeted cost of £2,655,293 for 2022-2023.

Students receive a flat rate contribution of £3415 per annum towards tuition fees, a means-tested maintenance grant coupled with dependants' allowance where applicable, and a flat rate travel grant of £510 per annum (uplifted to £600 for 2023-24). The average upper-level student award for all components is approximately £7,000 per annum.

HEI tuition fees have increased substantially over the period since the bursary was introduced, and now range from £5380 to £13,000 per annum, with the average £7,500 approximately. This means that almost all of the student bursary award is utilised to pay tuition fees, leaving the majority of students in debt before considering living expenses and travel.

Students without high levels of savings or financial support from relatives therefore require to work long hours on top of study and placement, and/or borrow from banks or credit cards as they are not eligible for SAAS loans. The combination of these factors results in postgraduate students facing the same set of issues as undergraduate students, and in some respects being even worse off financially despite being in receipt of a bursary.

International Students

There are particular issues for international students as highlighted in the main report which relate to fees and the impact on already stretched PL resources. Further specific research is required to identify the issues in more depth and develop a national strategic plan for international social work students.

Summary of Key Recommendations

Practice learning funding

Current arrangements are complex, are not used to maximum effect and do not allow for meaningful planning or coordination of practice learning. Accordingly, we propose the following high-level changes to the three current funding strands:

- Replace the Practice Learning Daily Fee with a flat-rate amount per placement, paid directly to practice learning providers and no longer administered by HEIs
- Utilise the Administrative Fee currently paid to HEIs to fund PLO sourcing and development at regional levels
- Re-establish the Placement Support Grant purely for student support for travel costs in advance of a new national system of travel support
- Consider an uplift to current practice learning funding – estimates suggest that if funding had kept pace with inflation, this would equate to 38%

The new proposed funding model is based on a system of planning and reporting. At present it is not possible to indicate clearly what the biggest proportion of funding (daily fees) is being spent on. The new system will allow budgets to be allocated on the basis of submitted plans and monitored through a reporting structure, thus enabling better financial planning at a national and local level.

Funding under the proposed model of replacing the Daily Fee and Administration Fee consists of two elements:

Element A	Two different flat rate fees based on the type of assessed PLOs - First PLO and Second PLO - corresponding to the two assessed PLOs students need to undertake to qualify as social workers.
Element B	<p>Flat rate fee per placement paid for the sourcing, matching, coordinating, quality assuring PLOs, and supporting link workers and PEs/ IPEs.</p> <p>In the West, Element B could take the form of grant funding to Learning Network West to cover the costs of its operations.</p>

Key elements to be developed as part of the new system:

- *Central financial administration system for practice learning funding* – A central system disbursing funds directly to providers that could possibly be located at the SSSC subject to resources being available to support the new structure.
- *Financial planning systems for PLO providers*. Aimed at Local Authorities and larger third sector providers, introduce a system of forward planning detailing intended outcomes. This could for instance cover the intended number of placements, expenditure on placement infrastructure, any remuneration for PEs, expenditure on supporting PEs and LWs, training of new PEs, professional and administrative support. Plans would be drawn up in consultation with local planning/coordination structures and partners. Plans would be submitted to the central administration in advance of funding.
- *Reporting mechanism for PLO providers*. Introduce a monitoring and reporting system linked to financial plans submitted by providers. This would enable monitoring of expenditure, tracking of outcomes, transparency in budget allocation, and greater accountability.
- *National guidelines on financial responsibilities and expectations for all stakeholders*. Develop and implement a set of national guidelines specifying financial responsibility for specific practice learning costs. This will reduce ambiguity and inconsistencies, identify specific expectations for each stakeholder and address additional issues such as placement breakdowns with clear procedures and financial processes for how these are dealt with.

PLO providers

- PLO providers should retain full financial control of disbursed funds and utilise such funds flexibly for their needs subject to financial planning and reporting.
- PLO providers should explore ways to introduce financial remuneration for practice educators and link workers in dialogue with their respective staff.
- Explore and introduce mechanisms to reduce caseloads for local authority Practice Educators and Link Workers when supervising students.
- Increase the availability of PLQ opportunities for LA staff
- Entrance to PLQ courses should be linked to a contractual agreement over what is expected of trained PEs in taking students
- Training opportunities for current Practice Educators should be made available beyond PDAPL qualification to maintain and develop skills and knowledge

- Formalised support systems and networks should be made available to all practice educators and link workers.
- PLO providers should explore practical mechanisms to avoid the practice of in-house PEs working as IPEs in other local authorities or third sector agencies.

Higher Education Institutions

- HEI planning in relation to student intakes should be informed by workforce planning needs.
- Implement a standardised length for PLOs across all HEIs. This would contribute to the uniformity of student experience across Scotland and assist PLO providers in planning and provision of practice learning opportunities.
- Non-assessed PLOs should no longer be eligible for funding from PL budgets
- Assessment systems for practice learning should be standardised across all HEIs to streamline systems and create uniformity of experience for students and PEs

Independent Practice Educators

- Increase and standardise the level of payment for Independent Practice Educators.
- Independent Practice Educators should be subject to regulation through the SSSC.
- A national register should be established to ensure that IPEs meet professional standards for practice education.
- Independent practice educators should be required to hold PVG membership in order to supervise students.
- Quality assurance and feedback mechanisms should be established to ensure quality and consistency of service

Third Sector

- Structures need to be developed to involve the Third Sector more formally as partners in the provision of practice learning and contribute to a national strategic approach.

- Local partnerships would provide a forum for third sector agencies of differing size to engage with statutory partners in the organisation and delivery of PLOs
- Funding for, and access to PLQ courses should be made available to third sector agencies to develop in-house practice educators.

Student funding

Postgraduate bursaries

- Urgently review and increase the PG Bursary rates on an interim basis covering fees, subsistence and travel costs.
- Future subsistence levels need to achieve parity with any provision introduced for UG students and ideally be set at similar levels to the PNMSB scheme
- The fee component needs reviewed and in dialogue with HEIs, postgraduate tuition fees should be capped to avoid bursaries being spent purely on fees
- Bursary rates need to be regularly reviewed in line with inflation and/or recognised cost of living indices.
- PG students should be able to access loans through SAAS without impacting on bursary eligibility
- Ensure no detriment for students in receipt of the Care Experienced Students' Bursary
- Review eligibility criteria and means tested components in line with other student funding schemes
- Review eligibility criteria for young students under 25 based upon guidance within the Family Law (Scotland) Act 1985 and 2006 which relates to parental income
- Within the SSSC budget for PG bursaries, there is an accumulated underspend including carry forward from previous financial years, partially related to covid input, totalling £369,070. Unless allocated, consideration could be given to how this money could be used for one-off purposes.

Undergraduate students

- Establish a grant-based bursary scheme for undergraduate students in years 3 and 4 of social work programmes

- Future bursary levels should achieve parity with provision for PG students and ideally be set at similar levels to the PNMSB scheme
- Bursary rates need to be regularly reviewed in line with inflation and/or cost of living indices
- Ensure no detriment for students in receipt of the Care Experienced Students' Bursary

Travel & subsistence

- Under current arrangements, as a short-term measure to address student hardship, the Placement Support Grant could be designated to cover student travel costs solely and be made available to all students
- A clear national system of funding travel expenses both during and outwith placements needs developed and implemented, applicable to undergraduate and postgraduate students
- All student travel should be compensated at the recommended HMRC rate at 45p per mile (for cars and vans), 24p per mile (for motorcycles), and 20p per mile (for bikes).
- Enable students to access regular additional allowances for travel costs – taking account of exceptional expenses and rural locations

Administration of future student funding

- To ensure a consistent national bursary scheme is provided to UG and PG students and is integrated with other forms of student funding, it is arguably preferable that SAAS should administer all student funding, including PG bursaries and travel and subsistence schemes.

Issues for further consideration

- To improve and develop workforce planning, it is recommended that Social Work become a Controlled Subject in Scotland under the auspices of the SFC
- As local workforce needs vary across Scotland, and taking account of rural provision, scope is needed to ensure local initiatives for training, recruitment and retention are facilitated

Conclusion

The research has examined the funding streams associated with Practice Learning and explored the views of stakeholders and students towards a set of recommendations. Recommendations have necessarily taken account of financial and wider system-related issues.

Funding for student social workers and practice learning requirements has, arguably, been under-resourced for some time. Few of the recommendations are cost neutral, but the firm view of the research team is that greater investment is needed to redress specific issues in social work education, otherwise there is likely to be continued problems in the longer-term recruitment and retention of a resilient, professional social work workforce.

In addition to greater investment, more effective use of existing financial resources allied to improved planning and coordination structures would be highly beneficial in improving and developing systems of practice learning.

Effective partnerships need to be built between providers of practice learning along with quality assurance systems to ensure the provision of high-quality practice education. Greater emphasis on student experience and feedback needs integrated into monitoring and evaluation to ensure future provision meets agreed priorities and requirements.

Introduction

Overview

Social Work in Scotland faces significant challenges in responding to increasing demand for services while operating in an environment of complex social issues and scarce resources. Educating and supporting ‘a skilled and valued workforce’ that is equipped to meet a range of increasingly diverse needs is an established priority of the Scottish Government, as set out in *The Promise*¹¹.

Social work¹⁸ provides services to the most vulnerable groups in society and has a range of statutory functions which are the responsibility of local authorities (LAs). These functions primarily focus on adults, children and families, and criminal justice services. Safeguarding of adults and children sits alongside the supervision of offenders whilst at the same time providing care, support and empowering individuals and communities. This ‘duality’ of ‘care and control’ makes social work a unique and sophisticated profession that requires the ability to work in various settings and roles and manage complex relationships.

Scotland faces specific challenges in health and social care. Key amongst these is the impact of persistent long-term and endemic poverty on individuals and communities. Recent data from 2022 indicates that on average, 24% of children, 21% of working-age adults and 15% of pensioners live in relative poverty in Scotland⁹. Strains on household finances have been further exacerbated by the cost-of living crisis which has seen increases in the costs of food and energy. Furthermore, particular geographic areas and communities bear a heavier burden resulting in acute problems and greater concentrations of poverty and ill-health, particularly in urban conurbations and rural areas.

Scotland’s population is ageing with an estimated 1 million of Scotland’s residents aged sixty-five years or older in 2020. By 2040, it is estimated this will rise to 1.4 million, equating to 25% of the population³. This has particular implications for an already stretched health and social care system beset by scarce resources and increasing demand for services. Long-term chronic health conditions are increasingly experienced by older people with consequent implications for health and care services. Further issues such as persistently high levels of problematic drug and alcohol use, growing levels of mental ill-health, limited availability of social housing and relatively high levels of homelessness all impact further.

Developing a professional social work workforce which is able to respond to these issues, work in statutory and non-statutory settings, and has the required set of skills to

do so is a key priority. The education and training of social workers needs to prepare future social workers with not just knowledge, but with the practice skills and resilience to work effectively and sensitively with complex issues and challenging behaviours.

Workforce Analysis

As identified in the *Setting the Bar*⁶ report, social work is facing a number of complex and interlinked challenges across the profession. The total social services workforce in 2020 was 209,690, roughly 8% of the national workforce. The overall number of registered social workers is approximately 10,000 with approximately 6000 registered social workers based in LAs. The workforce is ageing, with approximately 19% of social workers nearing retirement. *Setting the Bar* identified that social workers are

‘...struggling with administrative burdens, fearful of making mistakes, and living with the moral distress of having to work in a way which doesn’t align with their professional values.’

High caseloads and high levels of administration are identified as contributory factors to the high turnover of staff in the profession, with 25% of new graduates leaving before 6 years in the job. Alongside stress and burnout, recruitment and retention of social workers and social care staff is a major issue for employers, and from responses as part of this research, is a particularly acute problem in rural authorities.

Approximately 500+ social work students graduate annually from Scottish Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), although the specific numbers who go on to work in local authorities or in the third sector is not known. Further, the current lack of clear outcomes of workforce planning at national and local levels means that the number of social workers required now and in the future is not established. This has a knock-on effect for HEIs, with nine Scottish Universities providing social work education programmes recruiting students to courses on the basis of their internally agreed targets rather than linked to national workforce planning needs.

The financial arrangements for the practice education of social workers is the primary focus of the report, however this cannot be looked at in isolation. Planning and integrating social work education as part of a continuing process of pre and post qualifying education and development is necessary to counter the current degree of compartmentalisation that exists.

Policy Initiatives

There are a number of major policy initiatives which will have a direct bearing on the future shape of social work in Scotland. By extension, there will be knock-on impact on

social work education and the provision of practice learning which cannot be predicted at present

- National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care⁴ – aims to achieve the vision of ‘*a sustainable, skilled workforce with attractive career choices where all are respected and valued for the work they do.*’ The strategy addresses recruitment and retention, along with plans to develop improved practice career pathways for social workers with an advanced Social Work practitioner role; developing a graduate apprenticeship for an on-the-job social worker qualification, and plans for a mandatory supported year for newly qualified social workers (see following)
- NQSW Supported Year¹⁴ – currently in pilot stage encompassing induction, supervision, professional development, protected caseloads, peer support and mentoring, protected learning time, continuous professional learning
- National Care Service – an outcome of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care (The Feeley Review, 2021)¹. The proposed legislation would create a major change to the organisation and delivery of services. The initial focus would be on adult services developing consistent national provision.
- National Social Work Agency (NSWA) – discussed as a component part of the National Care Service Bill¹⁷, the proposed NSWA would be responsible for workforce planning, leadership, education and training and quality improvement amongst other areas of responsibility.

Social Work Practice Learning

Social Work education in Scotland is provided and assessed under the terms of the *Framework for Social Work Education*¹² and the revised *Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE)*²³, as published in 2019. As part of the Framework, there is a requirement that students spend 200 days in practice learning, of which at least 160 must be spent in supervised direct practice in service delivery settings. Universities have tended to split assessed practice learning into a first placement (or PLO) which ranges from 60 to 80 days; and a second PLO that ranges from 80 to 100 days. Funding for PLOs has traditionally followed a ‘daily’ calculation mirroring the length of placements. However, given the number of organisations and individuals involved, the financial system currently involves a complicated administrative structure. Refining and simplifying this are discussed later.

The SSSC Review of Social Work Education²¹ in 2015 identified a number of emerging issues which are of continuing relevance and pertinent to the organisation and delivery of Practice Learning

- Improving consistency
- Consideration of a core curriculum
- Developing shared learning in academic and practice settings
- Addressing practice learning availability and quality assurance through a national framework
- Exploring whether a statutory placement for all students should be mandatory
- Consideration of practice educator registration

Since the publication of this report, its follow up in 2016²² and subsequent related reports, additional factors have impacted the sector, in particular the Covid pandemic. Social Work education and PLO systems were severely interrupted by the pandemic in conjunction with temporary changes to working arrangements across the social work field. In the West of Scotland, students affected by the pandemic and resulting cancellation of their first PLO, experienced one 120-day PLO which was linked to the introduction of an Advanced Skills Module (ASM). These extended PLOs only finished completely in 2023 for the students affected. A further impact of the pandemic was to accentuate and accelerate a set of issues in relation to practice learning which are systemic and need to be addressed if the overall vision of an “...excellent and shared approach to professional learning...” is to be achieved.

Key issues include:

- A shortage of Practice Educators (PEs) in LAs
- A shortage of Practice Learning Opportunities (PLOs) in LAs
- Greater reliance on Third Sector settings for PLOs due to shortages of statutory PLOs
- Greater need for Independent Practice Educators (IPEs) to offset the shortage in local authorities and supervise students in Third Sector settings
- Evidence that some students have not experienced a statutory PLO
- Reports of students not being suitably prepared for practice on completion of their courses

HEI Provision of Practice Learning

Nine HEIs in Scotland provide Social Work programmes including the Open University. All HEIs bar one provide both undergraduate and postgraduate routes to qualification. One HEI provides only a PG programme. There are, therefore, 18 slightly different Social Work Programmes across Scotland. Seven of the HEIs offer campus-based programmes. Robert Gordon University is both campus-based and also offers a distance learning route. The Open University provides distance learning programmes only.

Sourcing adequate numbers of PLOs and in suitable settings is reported by all HEIs and the Learning Network West (LNW) as being a constant and highly problematic issue. This situation is exacerbated further by fluctuating numbers of admissions to HEIs on an annual basis, and the absence of clearly defined workforce planning targets and requirements.

As Social Work is not a controlled subject, recruitment numbers to Undergraduate programmes are in the majority of cases determined by Central Admissions Teams at Universities rather than by Social Work academic teams. Numbers of admissions have been growing gradually from what they were when the current systems were established.

In some HEIs, cohorts admitted to Year 1 of the Undergraduate Programme are now reported as being on average between 50 and 80 students annually, although accurate numbers are not readily available or collected centrally. Increased numbers of admissions puts additional pressure on academic teams, impacts on the student learning experience, and, critically, at times puts extreme pressure on the demand and availability of suitable PLOs.

Students interviewed shared their experiences concerning the allocation of PLOs, the benefits of 'good' placements and concerns that poor quality placements would have on their practice and future employment prospects. One student interviewed (having just completed her programme) indicated that this was felt by the majority of students on her cohort, she herself had not had a statutory placement out of her two PLOs, as a result felt unprepared for the rigours of social work, and in terms of her last placement which she felt was unsuitable, had 'gripped her teeth and got through it'. This does not reflect the experience of all students, but is significant in terms of the issues raised, and highlights some of the problems related to the availability of PLOs. It suggests that alongside any reforms to the financial system of practice learning, a broader review of practice learning arrangements is required.

There is a complex set of processes involved in the sourcing and provision of PLOs. Simplifying and streamlining the financial processes which underpin the practical arrangements is recommended elsewhere in the report. Changes in this respect should contribute to streamlining and improving the arrangements for setting up PLOs whilst allowing local flexibility in provision.

The following table outlines the current different arrangements for sourcing PLOs across the nine HEIs. The process involves liaison between HEIs and/or the Learning Network West (LNW) with local authorities and numerous third sector agencies. Planning to identify the required numbers of PLOs is complicated by varying student intakes and lack of precise information about numbers of students admitted to UG and PG programmes. As indicated, systematic and early collection of admission numbers to HEI Programmes would be beneficial to enable effective planning to take place.

HEI	Practice Learning Arrangements
Robert Gordon	Source own PLOs <i>and</i> via Learning Network West (LNW) for PLOs in LNW partnership area
Dundee	Source own PLOs
Edinburgh Napier	Source own PLOs
Edinburgh	Source own PLOs
Stirling	Source own PLOs
Strathclyde	Source PLOs via Learning Network West
GCU	Source PLOs via Learning Network West
UWS	Source PLOs via Learning Network West
Open University	Source own PLOs <i>and</i> via LNW for PLOs in LNW partnership area

Funding of Practice Learning

Practice learning is the keystone of preparing students to become qualified social workers and is what students themselves focus on as the most important element of their courses. However, practice learning is not always afforded the priority it requires for this to be achieved. This is a complex issue in itself with evidence of a degree of

disconnect between practice learning and academic aspects of social work education identified in previous reports and literature.

Reviewing and improving the system/s of funding for Practice Learning is a component part of achieving the agreed vision of 'shared learning', but cannot be divorced from the system/s and models of practice learning more generally. The financial components of funding practice learning have not been substantially reviewed for over 20 years and need modernisation, streamlining, reorganisation along with substantial financial uplift to build the social work workforce needed to meet the challenges of the future.

At the same time, financial solutions are not the only (or in some instances the required) measures needed to improve practice learning. Practice-related elements of the current system require improvement and change, and are identified in the report as appropriate.

Research Objectives

- Examining in depth the current funding streams, how they operate in practice, and current usage
- Identifying gaps in the current funding arrangements
- Analysing emerging issues impacting on the provision of practice learning
- Provide recommendations to address identified gaps in funding and maximise use of current budgets
- Review current funding for postgraduate students, consider the position of undergraduate students, and make recommendations for funding all social work students

Student Centrality

Previous reviews of social work education and practice learning have tended to emanate from and focus on organisational issues and the perspectives of HEIs, employers, and government. In some respects, mirroring the shift to a person-centred approach to service delivery in Social Work, there is a need to emphasise a student-centred approach to the organisation and delivery of social work education.

The student perspective has been largely missing from previous reviews and needs to be redressed if we are to properly acknowledge the identified issues facing NQSWs, and create a resilient workforce. The report will attempt to address this gap and make specific recommendations for improving the financial support to students as part of a broader programme of change within practice learning.

Methodology

This research has reviewed the funding of practice learning in Scotland utilising both qualitative and quantitative approaches. By providing diverse platforms for our participants, our aim was to gather valuable insights and develop a sound understanding of the funding arrangements and associated issues. The section below outlines the recruitment, data collection, and analysis method, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Recruitment and data collection

The recruitment process began with the identification of key stakeholders of practice learning funding. Various communication channels, in line with GDPR requirements, were utilised to ensure a wide reach and engagement throughout the research process. We employed various data collection methods to ensure a broad and deep grasp of the issues:

- Desktop research
- Statistical data from SSSC records
- 29 Online Survey responses
- 4 Virtual Focus Groups (group size varies)
- 15 semi-structured Interviews
- Written submissions

The diagram visually represents our data collection methods and stakeholders involved:



Quantitative data

The quantitative data, in the form of statistics, provided information regarding actual expenditure of the 3 relevant streams of funding (SSSC does not administer the placement support grant). Access to this data was granted by SSSC and retrieved from SSSC records. Placement support grant data, however, was retrieved through SWEP as reported by individual HEIs.

The SSSC has designed a new system of statistical data collection as part of their reporting mechanisms. SSSC indicates that this will further contribute to planning for practice learning by providing the foundation for evidence-based future decision-making. Access to the new system for the purposes of this research was limited.

Online surveys

Three unique online surveys were designed specifically for three groups of stakeholders: HEIs, local authorities, and third sector agencies. Each of these three groups of stakeholders was asked different sets of questions to gather relevant data about their specific circumstances (e.g: the set of questions for HEIs were different from ones for Local Authorities). This approach ensured that stakeholders were asked only about funding they had access to.

The surveys were sent to the stakeholders in line with GDPR requirements. The respondents of the survey were self-selecting and occasionally represented the views of multiple staff members involved with practice learning completing the survey collaboratively. Below is a summary of the survey responses received:

- Local Authority responses: 16 (out of 32 approached)
- Higher Education Institutes: 8 (out of 9 approached)
- Third Sector agencies: 4 (out of 18 approached)

Virtual Focus groups

The virtual focus groups involved various group sizes. To ensure an inclusive approach for all participants, a tool called Mentimeter was utilised. This allowed participants to submit written responses to a set of questions in real time. Participants' responses were visible to all in the group and generated an open dialogue about various issues. All focus group discussion guides are contained in the Appendices.

The focus groups generally provided a tool to gather insights on macro-level issues as experienced first-hand by participants and explore recommendations about the way forward. The information collected through focus groups was used to supplement and triangulate data from the individual responses (surveys and interviews). Further details are provided in the table below:

Focus group	Number of participants
LA Leads	27
HEI leads	7
PEs (LA)	7
Students	3

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals identified as key informants on practice learning funding. Due to the breadth and varying professional roles of our interview participants, interview structure and themes required a more flexible individual approach. Hence, the structure of the interviews was formulated on an individual basis where discussion themes and guiding questions were customised before each interview.

Written submissions

Written submissions consist of letters (such as petition statements) and other written materials submitted to the researchers by various stakeholders. These are analysed and integrated in the findings of this research.

This method also served as a platform for contributing to the research as an alternative to interviews and focus groups.

Analysis

The research employed a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data. This approach allowed the researchers to summarise numerical data and provide visual representations of trends and patterns in practice learning funding.

The qualitative data, on the other hand, was analysed using a combination of comparative analysis and thematic review of the data. Comparative analysis captured variations and differences in how the PL funding is used and allowed researchers to explore emerging issues. Thematic review was used to identify and explore overarching themes from the data collected.

Limitations

- After disseminating the surveys, the researchers had little knowledge of how survey respondents were being selected to participate. Although their role or position was reported on the responses, there was no control over the recruitment criteria within Authorities, institutions, or organisations.
- This research had no scope to carry out an audit of how current funding is utilised. Findings rely solely on the data provided by participants and further verification was not undertaken.
- Limited timescale available for the research may have negatively impacted participant engagement with the data collection tools utilised here. This may have influenced both the quality of data and the number of participants.
- Data collection and level of stakeholder engagement was also impacted by the time of the year (summer) the research was undertaken.
- The amount and format of the quantitative data limited the extent of researchers' engagement and analysis.

Ethical considerations

All appropriate measures were undertaken to adhere to the ethics guidance in place by the Scottish Government which aligns with the UK-wide Government Social Research (GSR). During the recruitment process, the confidentiality and privacy notice (Appendix I) was shared with all participants before they participated. The notice clearly outlined how the data will be used, stored, and presented in this report. The researchers will ensure anonymity as much as possible to provide protection for all participants' identities.

It is important to note the researchers' current professional involvement in the field of practice learning through the Learning Network West and Strathclyde University. Despite this active involvement, the research was undertaken with integrity and independence and conflict of interest was avoided as much as possible both in data collection, analysis, and proposed recommendations.

Findings

Overview of practice learning funding

Funding streams

The current practice learning funding landscape consists of three streams of funding:

- Practice Learning Daily Fee
- Practice Learning Administrative Fee
- Placement Support Grant (PSG) - previously designated as Resumption of Placement Grant and prior to this, Travel and Subsistence Grant

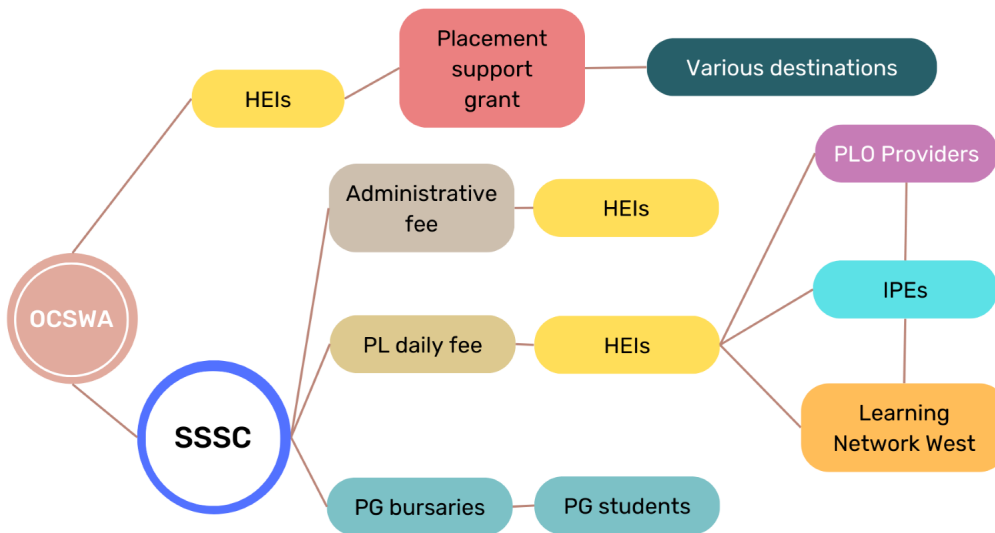
The Postgraduate Bursary stream supports social work education and emerging issues regarding this stream will be discussed separately.

Financial administration and distribution

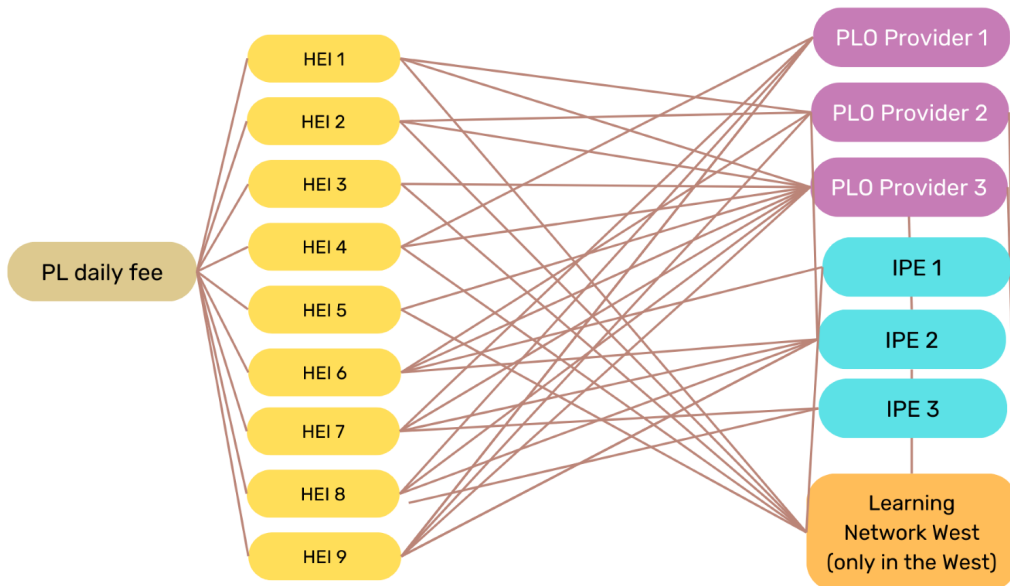
The four streams of funding supporting social work education, including practice learning, are paid by the Scottish Government through the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) via the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and HEIs. In the West of Scotland, Learning Network West (LNW) is also involved in the process of financial administration as an additional tier.

- The **PL daily fee** is administered by SSSC and distributed by HEIs to PLO providers and Independent Practice Educators (IPEs). In the West, LNW pays IPEs instead of HEIs. Occasionally, LAs employ IPEs to supplement their own capacity and pay them directly
- The SSSC pays the **PL administrative fee** to the HEIs
- The **Placement Support Grant** is paid by the SG to the individual HEIs who report back on how this funding is used
- The **Postgraduate Bursary** is paid by SSSC to postgraduate students. Each HEI has an allocated number of bursaries available each year.

The following is a visual representation of the distribution of the funding streams supporting social work education in Scotland.



The diagram above depicts a systematic distribution of the funding streams. However, in practice, the distribution and administrations of funds is more complex. The diagram below uses only one of the funding streams, the PL daily fee, to demonstrate its complexity. In the diagram, only 3 individual PLO providers and 3 individual IPEs are shown (although in fact 100s of PLO providers and IPEs are involved in this process).

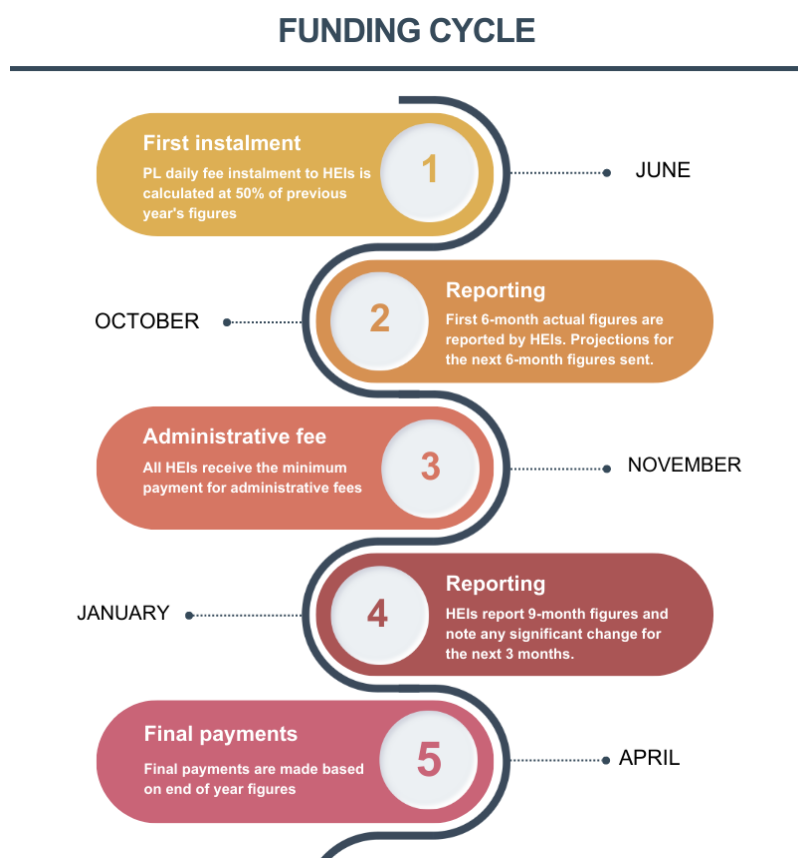


Each line not only indicates the flow of funds, but also different claiming processes, paperwork, partnerships, and contributions. The funds are channelled through various intermediaries before reaching the intended recipient. These current arrangements have contributed towards several inconsistencies in the current landscape which are discussed later.

Funding cycle

The PL daily fee and administrative fee streams use a unique funding cycle. In June, HEIs receive the first instalment (50%) of the PL daily fees calculated on the basis of the previous year's figures. In October, HEIs are asked to return actual figures for the last 6 months and projected figures for the next 6 months. Meanwhile, in November, all HEIs receive £18,000 in administrative fees - the minimum amount to which all HEIs are entitled. In January, HEIs return actual figures for the last month and projected figures for the last 3 months before the end of the financial year in April. Finally, in April, final payments are made based on the returned final actual figures.

The chart below describes the funding cycle for practice learning funding.

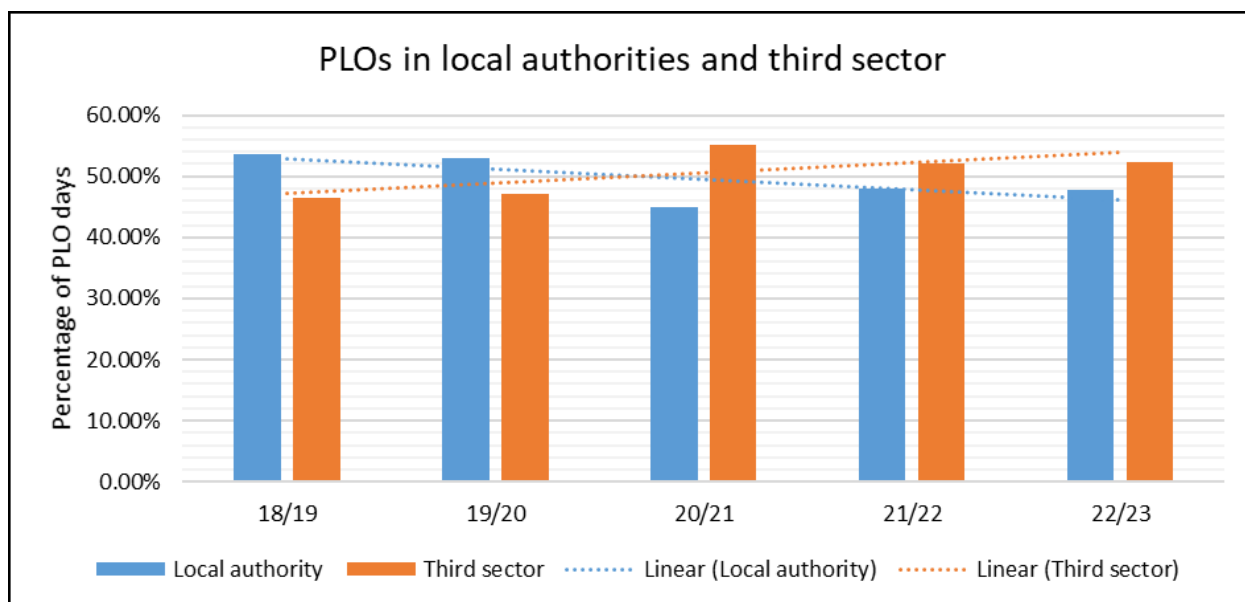


Funding for the Placement Support Grant and Postgraduate Bursaries do not follow this same cycle.

Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO) providers

Currently, both statutory and voluntary services are key to practice learning provision. The absence of a national infrastructure to support practice learning and lack of service level agreements with PLO providers means that practice learning depends on the goodwill of PLO providers: local authorities and third sector organisations.

Having experience in contrasting settings is generally accepted as being beneficial for student learning in practice settings. Third Sector placements can and do provide rich learning environments for students, however, third sector PLOs will generally not provide experience of exercising statutory functions. Experience of the statutory role is necessary to prepare students fully for employment in the statutory sector and PLO availability needs to reflect this. However, as shown in the graph below, the availability of PLOs in statutory settings has been on a downward trend since the pandemic. This means more future social work students will qualify without any statutory experience which poses further challenges to local authorities both in recruitment and training of their new staff.



The graph above shows the number of PLO days in Local Authorities (blue) and Third Sector (orange) settings during 2018-2023.

Non-assessed & Assessed PLOs

The current practice learning landscape has two types of PLOs: assessed and non-assessed.

Non-assessed PLOs, also known as observational PLOs, provide students with an opportunity to engage with frontline social work practice either in local authorities or third sector organisations. The aim of observational PLOs is to expose students to real-world practice and help prepare for the upcoming assessed PLOs. They are usually short (3-15 days) and do not involve evaluation and assessment of the student's practice. Only a minority of HEIs arrange and provide non-assessed PLOs.

Assessed PLOs, on the other hand, involve regular supervision and direct observation of the student's practice in service delivery settings. Students are assessed and supervised by a Practice Educator (PE) or Independent Practice Educator against the SiSWE standards with further input by Link Workers (LWs) where appropriate. Students are expected to undertake two assessed PLOs (first and second) as part of their qualification programmes. For undergraduate students, the first assessed PLO occurs in their third year and the second PLO in their fourth year of the study programme. For postgraduate students, the first PLO occurs in the first year and the second PLO in the second year of the programme. The length of PLOs vary depending on the programme provider (60-100 days) with second PLOs being longer in duration.

Daily rate and related systems for allocation of funding

The four current funding streams employ different methods of calculating amounts paid and distributed to the various stakeholders.

Both the PL Daily Fee and the Administrative Fee are calculated on the basis of the number of placement days undertaken by students. As the number of days on placement varies between HEIs, PLO providers are regularly involved in submitting varying claims to the relevant HEI. This process leads to a degree of inconsistency and greater levels of bureaucracy in the administrative systems.

In contrast, the Placement Support Grant is established as a flat-rate grant per student, rather than calculated on a daily rate. However, the grant is used inconsistently - in some instances for student travel support and alternatively for PLO providers in line with the fund's previous function as a Resumption of Placement Grant.

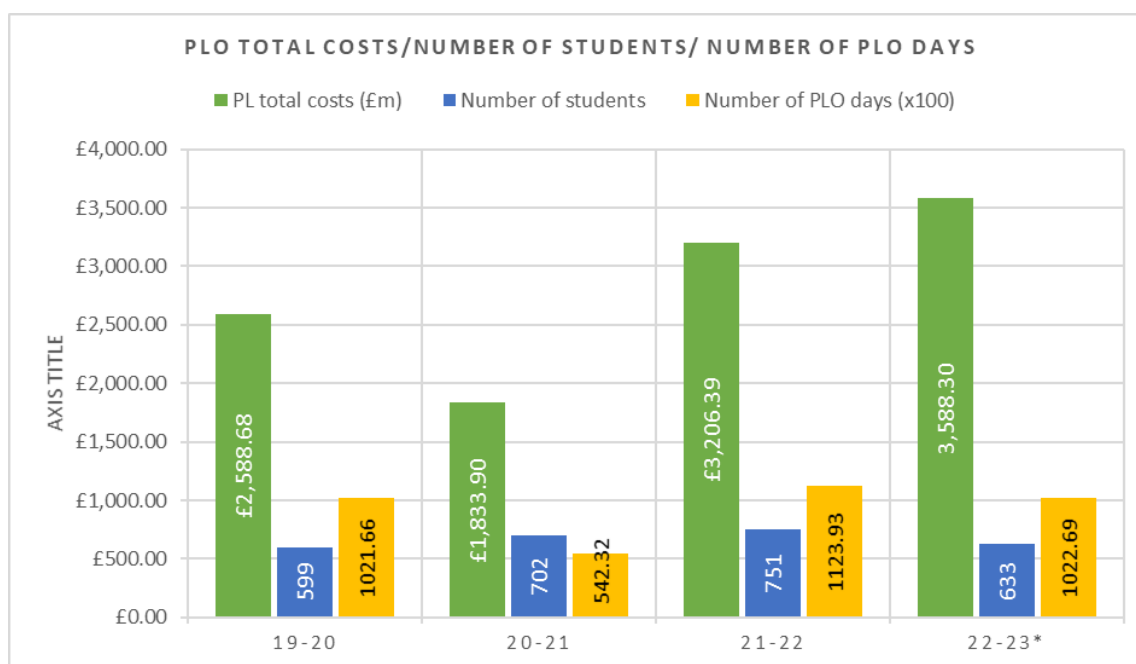
The inconsistencies associated with the various funding streams is further discussed in the Emerging Issues section.

The Postgraduate Bursary is assessed on a different basis and discussed separately.

Costs of practice learning

Current funding

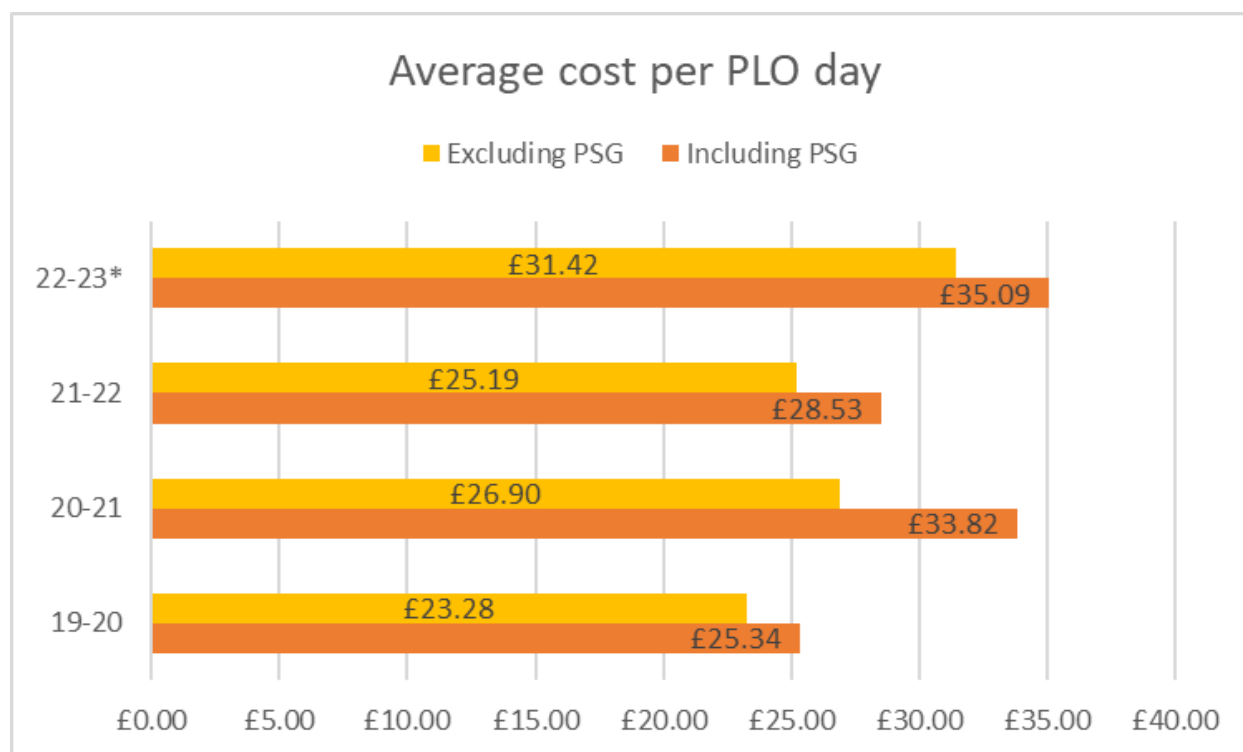
Total government funding into practice learning has fluctuated in the last 3 years due to various changes of the funding arrangements and contingency measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, exploring financial trends and calculating costs per student is challenging. The graph below represents total practice learning funding (including Placement Support Grant), number of PLO days, and corresponding student numbers (both Undergraduate and Postgraduate degrees) for years 2019-23:



The number of students completing PLOs varies from the lowest, 599 in 2019-20, to the highest, 751, in 2021-22. The data point for the number of PLO days in 2020-21 represents an outlier corresponding to the introduction of lockdown restrictions and suspension of PLOs. Similarly, this anomaly is also reflected on the average cost per PLO day in the graph below. The increase in the funding, on the other hand, is noted in 2022-23 as a result of the revised rates for Local Authorities (* - based on assumed figures by SSSC)

The graph below shows the increase of the average costs per PLO day in the last 4 years. The average cost encompasses all streams of practice learning funding except for the postgraduate bursary and is calculated using total costs for the combined assessed and non-assessed PLO days. The average cost per PLO day in 2022/23 is

£35 (inc. Placement Support Grant) and £31.4 (excl. PSG). As an alternative calculation, the average cost for one PLO was approximately £1,910 (inc. PSG) and £1,750 (excl. PSG) This figure is calculated using the total number of PLOs for 2022-23 for both non-assessed and assessed PLOs. If only assessed PLOs are considered, the average cost for one assessed PLO for 2022-2023 was approximately £2650 (inc. PSG) and £2370 (excl. PSG).



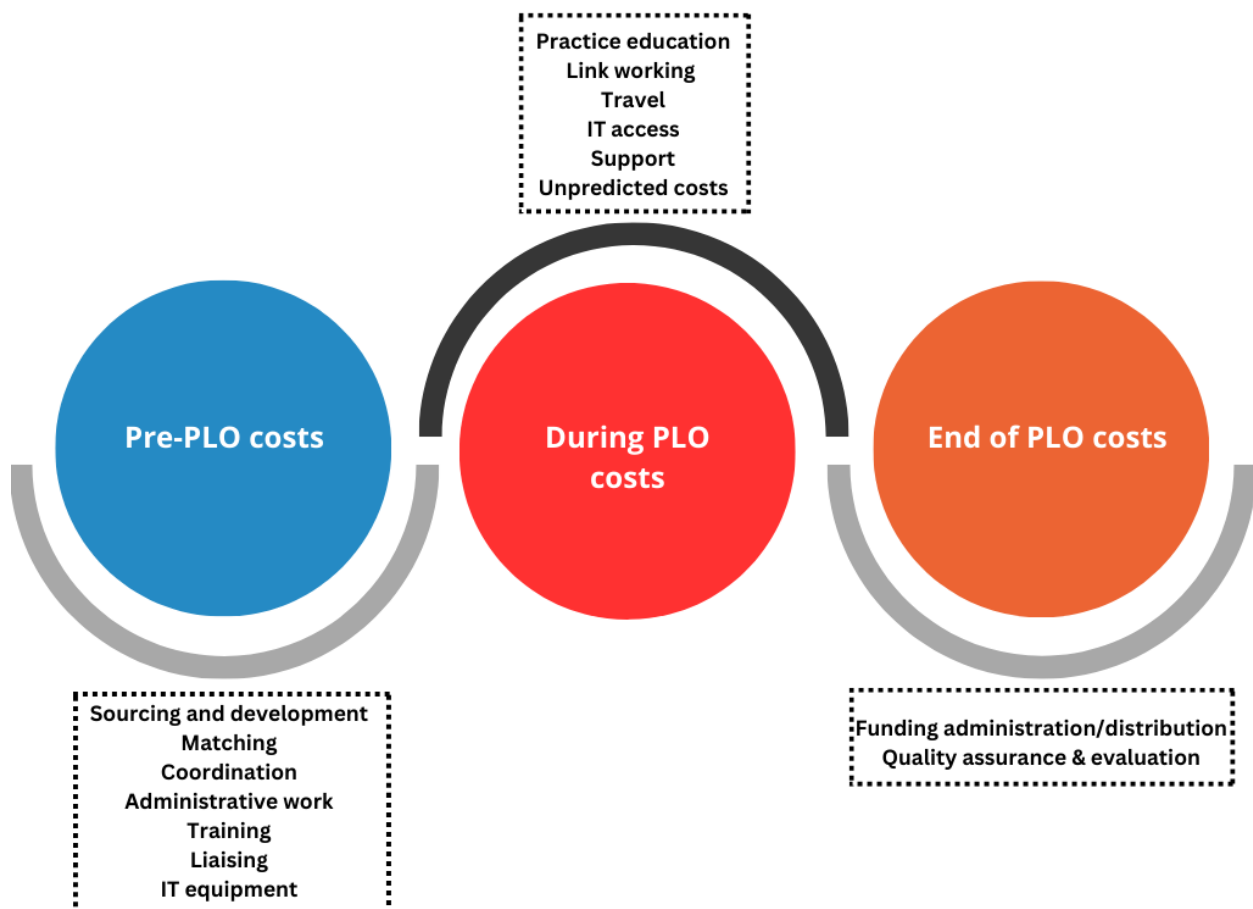
Funding injected by the Scottish Government to alleviate the impact of Covid-19 pandemic is excluded from the above average costs per PLO day. Additional government funding in relation to covid recovery supported the following initiatives:

- Development of the Advanced Skills Module for the West of Scotland – an online skills module designed to provide elements of practice learning in a virtual environment.
- Sourcing and development of new PLO provision (mainly third sector) – funding applied to Learning Network West and HEIs to address the shortage of PLOs as a result of the pandemic.

Costs of Practice Learning Opportunities

In this analysis of indicative costs of PLOs, costs are defined as both time and money. Practice learning costs can be divided into costs corresponding to three phases:

- **Pre-PLO costs:** sourcing and development, coordination and matching, training, accessibility, and IT equipment
- **During PLO costs:** practice education, link working, travel, IT access, support, and other unpredicted costs
- **End of PLO costs:** financial administration (invoices), quality assurance and evaluation



Pre-PLO costs

Sourcing and development

The absence of service level agreements with PLO providers necessitates a continuous process of sourcing and development of new ones, both in statutory and voluntary settings.

In local authorities, practice learning coordinators (or other members of staff where the coordinator role does not exist) liaise with their service managers, team leaders, and staff to determine the number of PLOs they can provide. The number is reported to HEIs and Learning Network West (in the West) with the shortage of PLOs in statutory settings needing to be filled by PLOs in the third sector.

In the third sector, the process of sourcing and development of new PLOs requires more time and resources. It starts with researching potential new agencies and approaching them formally. Agencies expressing interest to host social work students require further information on expectations and details regarding practice learning. Virtual meetings and/or in-person visits are arranged to provide agencies with comprehensive information. In this process, pre-assessment of agencies is undergone to examine the suitability and availability of learning opportunities that allow students to meet the standards in social work education.

The time input into sourcing and development of PLOs in the third sector is significant and difficult to quantify. It is important to note only a small percentage of the agencies contacted develop into partnerships providing PLOs. The process also requires completion of paperwork such as partnership agreements and agency profiles which involves further administrative work.

Matching and coordination

Before the practice learning experience begins, a student is allocated a practice educator and PLO provider. This process, called matching, involves collecting and reading student profiles, practice educator preferences, and agency information to create a suitable match. The match ideally prioritises students' needs and considers their interests and previous experience, locality (related to travel time and public transport connections), driving ability, access to own car, caring responsibilities, and reasonable adjustments required.

Due to the many factors involved in the matching process, the process requires extensive coordinating work between students, PLO providers, HEIs, PEs/IPEs, and Learning Network West (where applicable). The goodwill approach to PL provision and lack of service level agreements equate to more time and resources devoted to liaising,

coordinating, and relationship-building. In the West of Scotland, the sourcing, matching, and coordinating of PLOs is delegated to the Learning Network West. However, staff responsible for coordinating PLOs are required in each stakeholder involved in practice learning provision.

Once a match is established, everyone is informed about the arrangement and more paperwork (induction list, PVG scheme declaration) is completed before the practice learning team meets for the pre-PLO meeting (where a learning agreement is drawn up).

The overall process is time-consuming, potentially cumbersome and raises expectations amongst students which are difficult to meet in a context of scarcity of PLOs. The problem is exacerbated further by being applied to much larger numbers of students than the system may have originally been designed for. Future consideration may need to be given to a more streamlined system of placement allocation with less expectation of choice.

Matching and coordination costs are significant but difficult to quantify as they occur across all stakeholders. As a comparison, in the Wales model of practice learning, local authorities are responsible for sourcing and coordinating all PLOs in their partnerships. The payment for the sourcing and coordinating of one PLO is £300.

Training

Link workers and practice educators, who are heavily involved in practice learning, undertake different training. Although not a requirement, link workers generally attend a short one-day training course focusing on the role of the link worker. Link work training is available through the government-funded national link work training. Practice educators, on the other hand, undertake the Practice Learning Qualification (PLQ) course. The course takes 12 months to complete, and costs vary depending on the course provider.

Training costs are a valuable investment into practice learning, although measures are required to ensure trained practice educators and link workers continue to supervise students after completion of their training.

Additional costs

PLO providers are expected to make reasonable adjustments to remove or reduce the disadvantages related to a student's disabilities. Depending on the reasonable adjustment required, the cost for PLO providers vary. While most adjustments are simple and low-cost, there are some that require a significant investment which smaller organisations find challenging to cover.

Students also need access to IT equipment during their PLO. This is an additional cost to the PLO provider, particularly new ones in the third sector, that may need to purchase laptops, phones, or desk accessories. Costs of IT equipment varies and can be significant. However, once purchased, it would be anticipated that the same equipment can be used for future student placements.

	Activity type	Description of activities	Costs in monetary value/time
Pre-PLO costs	Sourcing and Development	Researching and developing partnerships with PLO providers	<p>Usually associated with the administrative fee (£2 per student/day)</p> <p>Time input can be significant – approximately 10 hours per new PLO provider</p> <p>In the West, HEIs delegate this task to Learning Network West in exchange for a fee</p>
	Coordination and matching	Matching student, PLO provider, and PE/IPE (Reading student profiles, agency forms, and IPE preferences)	<p>Usually associated with the administrative fee (£2 per student/day)</p> <p>Administrative support and coordination from PLO provider side is attached to the PL daily fee (£28 per student/day)</p> <p>In the West, HEIs delegate this task to Learning Network West in return for contributions</p>
		Administrative work: email correspondence (HEIs, IPEs, agencies, students, etc), induction checklists, partnership agreements, IPE contracts	
		Liaising with agencies	

	Training	Link work training	Additional funding by SG for National Link Work training (£20,000) to Learning Network West
		Practice Learning Qualification (PLQ) or Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (PDAPL)	PLQ course fees vary - £650 - £1,060 + other costs: books, SQA registration fee, etc For members of LNW - £350
	Additional costs	Reasonable adjustment (investing in accessibility)	Investment in accessibility varies based on reasonable adjustments required
		Purchasing IT equipment (laptop, phones)	Price for laptops and phones vary: phones: £20-£50, smart phones: £100-£400 laptops: £300-£1,000

During PLO costs

Practice education

Practice education is one of the main costs of assessed PLOs. Practice educators are responsible for the weekly supervision of students where they discuss student progress and evaluate learning opportunities provided by the PLO provider. Furthermore, the assessment element consists of a practice educator evaluating a student in at least three direct observations and completing written reports as evidence of the student's fulfilment of standards in social work education (SiSWE).

Practice educators are also tasked with supporting the students throughout the practice learning opportunity. The level of support required depends on the student, their prior experience and personal circumstances. This can be significant particularly in cases where the student faces various professional, academic, or personal challenges.

Financial remuneration of independent practice educators and in-house practice educators varies across Scotland.

Link work

Link workers are utilised in settings where the PE is not based in the agency itself. LWs are responsible for the day-to-day management of the student's workload, oversight of practice, student support, liaison with PEs and contribution to supervision sessions. Link workers may also conduct one of the three direct observations and provide regular feedback on the student's practice.

Link work is essential in creating an environment conducive to learning and development for the student. Like practice educators, link workers provide support to students and are an integral part of the placement team.

Although difficult to quantify, the time input for link work is significant - a minimum of 4 hours weekly.

Travel

Travel costs incurred during PLOs can be significant for students. Travel itself can be categorised into two categories:

- Travel to and from a student's home/accommodation to their placement
- Travel whilst on PLO (visits, meetings)

Students are often required to travel significant distances to arrive at the PLO provider using public transport or their own car. Travel issues are exacerbated in rural or semi-rural settings where public transport is less available and distances greater.

Depending on the PLO provider, students may be expected to travel during the practice learning experience to meet service users. While some PLO providers provide pool cars, there are many that expect students to use their own car which adds to the costs of travelling. Some PLO providers provide in-placement travel expenses, whilst others do not. Equally, some HEIs provide travel expenses to students and others not.

For comparison purposes, the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) mileage rate is set at 45p per mile for the first 10000 miles. However, when mileage is paid to students, the mileage rate varies from 20p to 45p with no consistency in provision. .

Additional costs

Additional costs include IT access (setting up accounts and purchasing licences) and formal forums for IPEs, PEs, and link workers. Costs for IT access vary widely depending on the systems used by PLO providers. Access to IT accounts and IT equipment is essential to enable students to participate fully in the work of their team.

Formal or informal forums, where they exist, support IPEs, PEs, and link workers throughout the PLO. Forums can be utilised as a platform for sharing best practice, discussing practice learning challenges and exploring creative solutions. While such forums are not universal costs or a requirement, where they do exist, they are beneficial in contributing to good practice in the support and supervision of students.

There are also unpredicted costs associated with PLOs. Practice assessment (PAP) and fitness to practice (FTP) panels are convened in HEIs when required and there is varying practice in this respect. Furthermore, when PLOs break down, the process may restart again with sourcing, matching, and coordinating depending on the issues involved. This adds additional time and resources into the existing process.

	Activity type	Description of activities	Costs in monetary value/time
During PLO costs	Practice Education	Pre-PLO meeting with student, link worker, and tutor Drafting a learning agreement Student weekly supervision (including travel if not online) Direct observations (including travel) Student assessments (written reports)	PLOs with IPE: fee varies £18-£28 per PLO day For PLOs with in-house PE: fee varies 0 - £1500 or an hourly rate of £22
	Link working	Day-to-day management of the student Direct observation Assist PE with student assessment	Time input is significant – min. 4 hours weekly Financial remuneration for Link workers varies £0 - £300
	Student Travel	Travel to and from PLO providers	Can be significant (up to 4 hours per PLO day) and varies based on locality – Car usage: current mileage rate 20p to 45p For PG students this is limited to £500 for bursary recipients

		Travel during PLO - Visiting service users and other PLO related travel	Depends on the agency - an increasing number of agencies require students to have access to their own car Mileage rate 20p to 45p
	Additional costs	IT access (opening accounts, purchasing Microsoft licences, phone bills, etc)	Depends on IT systems an agency uses Licence fees vary up to £300-£400 Phone bills vary: £10-£25
		Support for practice learning teams - PE/IPE forums, Link worker forums, students etc.	Time input: 3-4 hours monthly
		Practice Assessment Panels, Fitness to Practise, PLO breakdowns	Occasional costs Usually associated with the administrative fee (£2 per student/day)

End of PLO costs

Financial administration

PLO providers and IPEs generate invoices based on the number of PLO days they have worked with the student which is sent to HEIs for verification and payment. Payment is executed retroactively as it depends on the final number of PLO days. In addition to the financial administration, this process involves providing information about the claiming processes and addressing any questions. New PLO providers and IPEs require additional information.

Financial administration also involves tracking of expenditure, data collection, and reporting. While these elements are necessary for accountability, transparency, and future decision-making, they are not well-developed in the current practice learning landscape.

Quality assurance

To ensure a high quality of PLOs, feedback mechanisms need to be established to capture the experience of PLO providers, practice educators, link workers, and students. Collection and analysis of the data is required to address the feedback in a strategic way and develop appropriate action plans. These mechanisms are time-consuming and require resources to complete. Issues with quality assurance are discussed in the PL daily fee section.

	Activity type	Description of activities	Costs in monetary value/ time
End of PLO costs	Funding administration/ distribution	Administrative work – financial administration, database maintenance and data reporting, Generating invoices Sharing information on the process of claiming fees Executing payments for PLO providers, IPEs, students	Significant time input Usually associated with the administrative fee (£2 per student/day)
	Quality assurance & evaluation	Quality assurance of PLOs and PEs/IPEs Providing constructive feedback to PLO providers and PEs/IPEs	Quality assurance and feedback mechanisms are time-consuming as they need to be undertaken on an individual basis

Funding streams - usage and emerging issues

Practice Learning (PL) daily fee

The paper *Confidence in Practice Learning*¹⁹ issued in January 2004 developed a new framework to support the delivery of practice learning in Scotland. This framework placed practice learning at the heart of the social work degree as a way to blur “the line between so-called ‘classroom learning’ and ‘learning in practice’”. Although the paper deemed practice learning to be “everybody’s business to support” as it would contribute to the future social workforce, it also introduced a funding element – the PL daily fee - to support the required number and quality of PLOs.

The PL daily fee contributes towards the provision of practice learning opportunities for social work students. It incentivises agencies to host social work students on PLOs. The fee aims to cover the costs PLO providers incur whilst the student is on PLO.

Furthermore, this stream of funding intends to impact the quality of practice learning opportunities. Hence, the daily fee has a dual role, to positively impact the quality of practice learning opportunities and to increase the overall number of PLOs available. While the availability of PLOs makes experiential learning possible, high-quality PLOs ensure social work students hone the necessary skills to be fit for practice upon qualifying.

Currently, this stream of funding operates as an uncapped funding stream led by demand, which means the total annual costs vary depending on the number of social work students admitted to university each year. The SSSC administers the payment of the daily fee to HEIs based on the number of PLO days social work students undertake.

The 2004/05 guideline stipulated different rates for PLOs between local authorities and the third sector. Initially, the fee for PLOs in a local authority was set at £12 per student per PLO day. The rate for PLOs in the Third or private sector was set at £20 per day. These rates were reviewed by the revised guidelines²⁰ on funding of PL in 2008/09 which set the daily fee at £18 for PLOs in local authority settings and £28 for PLOs in the Third and private sectors.

These guidelines therefore set the framework for fees for PLO providers and have remained largely unchanged since 2008. The guidelines have also had the effect of enshrining disparity in rates paid to different types of providers. However, in August 2022, a change was made to the payment rate for local authorities, with the daily fee being increased from £18 to £28.

Currently, the rates for the PL daily fee are:

- Local Authorities: £28 per day for assessed PLOs and £18 per day for non-assessed PLOs
- Private and Third sector: £28 per day for both types of PLOs

All local authorities welcomed this change in fees, as stated by one of our survey participants:

“...the increase in fee to £28 last August was particularly welcome and made this a fairer distribution of funding.”

The change in the PL daily fee eliminated the payment discrepancy between all PLO providers and aimed to encourage local authorities to increase the overall number of PLOs provided in the statutory setting. The total budget for the Practice Learning Daily Fee for 2022-23 is approximately £3,000,000. Except for this recent change affecting rates for local authorities, payment rates have remained static since their revision in 2008/09.

How is the PL daily fee used?

The PL daily fee funding stream is flexible and utilised in various ways by PLO providers. Below is a summary of the variety of usages highlighted by the research participants:

- Supporting practice learning infrastructure: administrative support, fully or partially covering designated posts for Practice Educators, PL development officers, and PL coordinators.
- Setting up required IT access during PLO: purchasing laptops and phones for students and PEs, purchasing licences for account setup, creating new email addresses, IT maintenance costs, phone bills,
- Financial reward for the practice learning team: payment to Practice Educators, payment to Independent Practice Educators, payment to Link Workers
- Payment for IPE travel costs
- Sponsoring candidates to undertake the PLQ course
- Enhancing practice learning resources: purchasing books
- Supporting other CPD and training opportunities: sponsoring candidates to undertake the MHO Award, Adult Service Support and Protection Award, Child Welfare and Protection Award

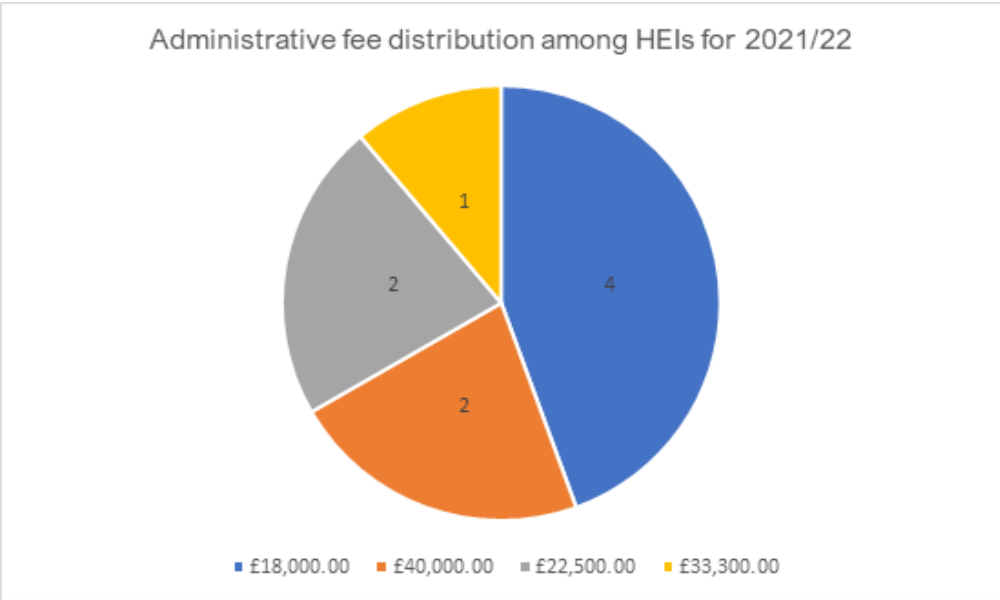
- Supporting student, PE, and link worker forums
- Supporting team development activities and events
- In some local authorities: funds are merged with general Social Work or L&D team budgets and accessed as required
- In the third sector practice varies depending on the size and location of the agency, although in one instance of a large national agency, funding received was collected nationally and subsumed into national budgets
- Financial contributions to Learning Network West (only applies to members of the Network)

Practice Learning Administrative fee

The practice learning administrative fee is provided to the HEIs providing social work programmes. *Confidence in Practice Learning* introduced the administrative fee to support HEIs in developing the “required number and quality of practice learning opportunities for their students”. The *Revision of Funding Guidance for Practice Learning* published in May 2008 recognised the administrative fee also “as a contribution to the costs of meeting the additional responsibilities arising from the funding process.” The funding process refers to the current responsibility of HEIs to distribute the PL Daily Fee to PLO providers. Therefore, the PL administrative fee supports HEIs both in PL development and financial administration.

The responsibility for the quality and quantity of practice learning opportunities rests solely with HEIs. In the west of Scotland, practice learning brokerage is outsourced to the Learning Network West (LNW) responsible for developing PLOs and matching for all five partner HEIs. The LNW acts as a broker between the HEIs, LAs, and third sector organisations. All participating stakeholders fund the LNW at full cost recovery.

Similar to the PL daily fee, the administrative fee is calculated based on the number of PLO days organised by the HEIs. Although the fee is set at £2 per student per PLO day, HEIs can claim a minimum of £18,000 per year and a maximum of £40,000. Namely, all HEIs are eligible to claim the minimum £18,000 regardless of the number of PLO days they have organised. The HEIs surpassing the minimum threshold can claim the exact amount based on the actual number of PLO days up to the maximum allowed. The chart below shows the total amounts paid to HEIs for 2021-22. The total annual budget provided by the SSSC is approximately £220,000, on average.



How is the PL administrative fee used?

HEIs utilise the administrative fee funding stream for various purposes:

- Dedicated posts for practice learning development and administration, such as Practice Learning Manager or Practice Learning Development Officer.
- Payment to Learning Network West for sourcing, development, and matching
- Financial administration

Placement Support Grant

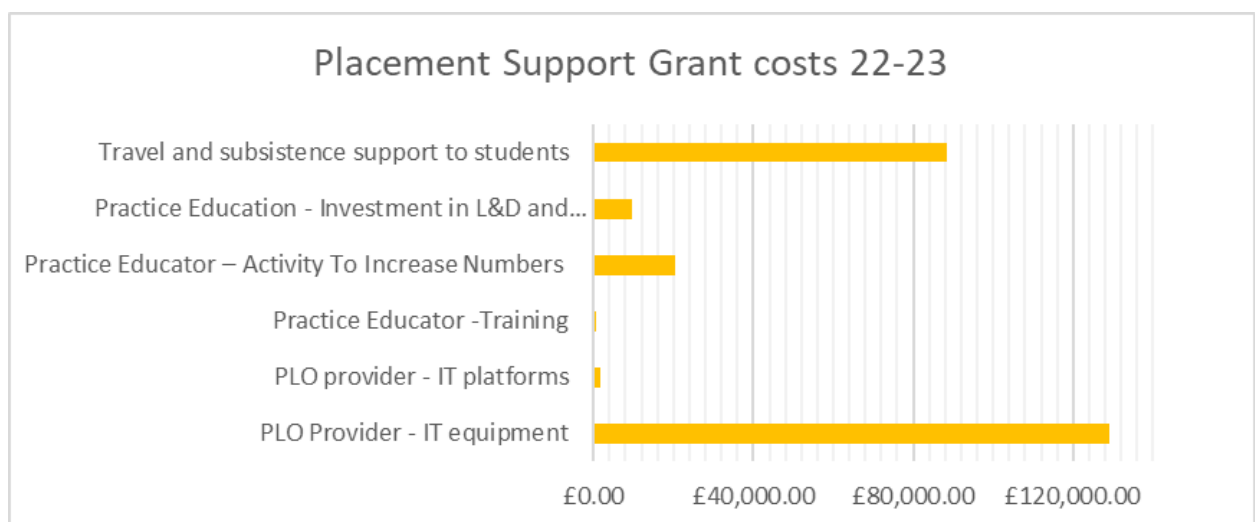
Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government provided demand-led funding for travel and subsistence costs students incurred on PLOs. The budget for the travel and subsistence costs was approximately £0.280m in 2019/20. In August 2020, travel and subsistence funding underwent a reconfiguration as a response to a significant reduction of travel costs during the pandemic. The funding stream was termed ‘Resumption of Placement Grant’ and aimed to address the increased need to support PLO providers in mainly purchasing IT equipment suitable for online learning. The grant of £300 per PLO was automatically available for all PLO providers to be used flexibly for their needs to arrange practice learning provision. A total budget of £375,000 was allocated in 2020/21. It is important to note that this was repurposed funding in response to the pandemic and the challenges faced across the practice learning sector. There was no additional option to claim for travel and subsistence costs.

The 'Resumption of Placement Grant' was redesignated as the 'Placement Support Grant' in the financial year 2022-23 and intended to provide greater flexibility in meeting various PLO-related costs. The grant was not automatically available to PLO providers and the HEIs were given the discretion to determine how the grant would be used on a case-by-case basis. The Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser indicated that the funding should no longer be made available to PLO providers at £300 per day, but student travel and subsistence should be prioritised instead. The funds could, however, still be made available to new PLO providers at the HEI discretion. Total annual budget for 2022-23 for this component is £375,000.

How is the Placement Support Grant used?

Below is a summary of how the Placement Support Grant has been used:

- Delivery of an in-house advanced skills practice module
- Purchase of IT equipment (such as laptops and phones) and computer software to support remote working
- Creating part-time posts (LAs)
- Training on using online platforms for remote supervision
- Student travel and subsistence
- Activities to increase the number of practice educators
- Support increased training, learning and development for practice educators.
- Accessing more places on the Practice learning qualification course



Emerging issues

Funding

Practice learning or the requirement for work-based-placements is incorporated in many health and non-health related academic programmes (such as nursing and midwifery, education, engineering, etc). However, social work education differs significantly from health in that practice learning is arranged on the basis of PLO providers being paid for the provision of PLOs. This issue is highlighted by an HEI participant:

“Supervision of students undertaking health related programmes is a professional, and often mandatory, expectation of other health professionals.”

That being said, in the current practice learning landscape, the issue of insufficiency cuts across all funding streams and is highlighted by all stakeholders. Most research participants report that the current level of funding is not sufficient in supporting the provision of practice learning. They argue that the actual costs of PLOs are not equivalent to the allocated level of funding which fails to recognise the complexity of practice learning provision.

While local authorities indicate that the current funding fails to recognise the actual costs of providing PLOs, there are also concerns about funding being absorbed into general local authority budgets. As a result, the funding intended to support practice learning is utilised to support other areas of work. This highlights the financial restrictions of the current budgets for local authorities which, in turn, have an impact on the usage of practice learning funding.

Flexibility of the current funding arrangements allow PLO providers to utilise the funds according to their specific needs. However, payment for PLOs is executed retroactively and no prior financial planning is undertaken or required. Therefore, funding has not been utilised strategically which has further contributed to the development of a reactive rather than proactive approach to provision of practice learning. Similarly, there are no reporting mechanisms in place which further contribute to a lack of accountability, monitoring, and evaluation of the usage of funding. The absence of reporting mechanisms has negatively impacted the practice learning landscape and future decision making as there is limited data on the actual use of the funding. This poses a challenge in identifying gaps and addressing them appropriately and strategically. As one LA respondent stated:

“...there is no direction from a national level about what the practice learning income can be used for. This results in the income going into council funds which then means it can be used for a variety of tasks.”

Reports from the HEI participants also indicate current available funding in the form of the administrative fee to be insufficient for developing, coordinating, and supporting PLOs. The HEIs emphasised the need for a “greater realisation of the true cost of the development and maintenance of provision of high quality robust social work programmes.” Developing a formula that meets this aspiration whilst balancing existing income streams including SFC funding and postgraduate tuition fees requires further consideration.

Specific recommendations in relation to funding are highlighted in the Looking Ahead section on page 65.

Inconsistency

The application of practice learning funding is characterised by inconsistencies across the country. Discussion about these inconsistencies and proposed solutions expose the depth of division between stakeholders on various issues in relation to practice learning.

Financial remuneration for PEs is one of the most debated issues with various approaches implemented among local authorities. Some LAs perceive practice education as part of the social worker’s role in developing the future social workforce and do not support the idea of additional financial remuneration for PEs. Others who opt to compensate PEs for supervising students utilise varying systems (hourly or flat rate) and level of payments. The rate of payment for PEs varies from £100 to £1500.

A similar issue of inconsistency emerges in relation to financial remuneration of Link Workers and employment of IPEs in local authorities. Financial remuneration for link workers is not standard practice among local authorities. Similarly, some local authorities have abstained from employing independent practice educators due to concerns about confidentiality. Other local authorities perceive independent practice educators as a way to address the shortfall of in-house practice educators.

Data indicates inconsistencies originating from the current fragmented financial administration. The current arrangements have resulted in varying rates of payment for IPEs and PLO providers and different claiming procedures. The same IPE working for two different LAs or Third sector organisations may be compensated at different rates for similar amounts of work.

“The flexibility provided to HEIs can also make it difficult for LAs to navigate and understand practice learning funding processes, requiring more time and capacity from LAs to understand individual HEIs ways of working.”

The lack of standardised financial administration systems makes tracking funds and data collection challenging resulting in inadequate reporting and accountability.

The situation is further exacerbated by a lack of clarity over certain funds such as the Placement Support Grant (PSG) which has led to HEIs' individual interpretation on how the funds can be utilised. The issue of clarity is also apparent in cases where PLO providers, particularly in the Third Sector, were not aware of the existence of the PSG and, hence, could not access it at all. These inconsistencies not only add to the confusion of individuals involved but have also encouraged the development of a competitive environment in the practice learning sector and, essentially, an inequitable system. Further, the issue has negatively impacted the existing partnerships between various stakeholders and has initiated a cycle of assigning blame to one another.

The theme of irregularities emerges also in relation to the financial responsibility for student travel and reasonable adjustments. Each case is handled differently depending on the stakeholders involved and this arbitrariness has led to an unfair and uneven treatment of students. The student experience has been directly impacted by the absence of national guidelines specifying the responsibilities of each stakeholder.

Funding of non-assessed PLOs presents another inconsistent practice among HEIs. Only a few HEIs arrange non-assessed PLOs and claim funds to support it. This has financial implications and also exposes the non-uniformity of the social work student experience across Scotland.

Lack of standardisation in the current practice learning landscape is not restricted to the strictly financial aspect of practice learning. It emerges in other aspects such as number of PLO days required, assessment, written reports, expectations for practice educators, and student experience in general.

Specific recommendations to address inconsistency:

- Implement a standardised length for PLOs across all HEIs. This would contribute to the uniformity of student experience across Scotland and assist PLO providers in planning and provision of practice learning opportunities.
- Non-assessed PLOs should no longer be eligible for funding from PL budgets
- Assessment systems for practice learning should be standardised across all HEIs to streamline systems and create uniformity of experience for students and PEs

Shortage of PEs and PLOs within statutory settings

The shortage of PLOs in statutory settings is usually associated with the unavailability or inactivity of PEs and the issue of financial remuneration for PEs. While PE research participants agree that a financial reward would be welcomed as recognition for their

contribution and additional work as practice educators, our research has found there are other underlying issues that pose challenges to PL provision.

PEs report many barriers to performing their role regularly and effectively:

- Time constraints and caseload management: No reduction of workload to allow time for students
- Limited support from service managers
- Poor levels of supervision
- Issues with recruitment/vacancies in their team
- Newly qualified social workers requiring additional supervision
- Previous experience of conflict with students

The unavailability of PEs is also associated with the limited post-qualifying paths or training opportunities leading to career progression. In some cases, Local Authorities sponsor employees to train as PEs who, upon completion of the PLQ course, are promoted to team leaders and managers with no time for practice education in their new role. While this issue may require a more systematic approach, there are also practical measures that can be implemented to address the issue at the local level (e.g.: sponsoring employees to undertake the PLQ course with a time commitment for practice education upon completion).

Further consideration needs to be given to the issue of PEs employed in local authorities but registered as self-employed independent practice educators. The fragmented landscape of practice learning allows such practice to occur in the third sector or, occasionally, in other local authorities. Exploring practical modalities to avoid this practice are required and introducing a financial reward for practice education may partially address the issue.

The practice of independent practice educators supervising students in local authorities is becoming more prevalent. While this may provide a short-term solution to the issue of availability of in-house practice educators, it brings about other issues, financial or otherwise. In financial terms, it costs more to employ an independent practice educator than to train a new practice educator. Training in-house practice educators is a long-term investment and solution if sponsorship of the PLQ course is caveated with a time commitment for practice education. Further, local authorities also note that employment of IPEs in statutory settings gives rise to additional concerns in relation to confidentiality and access to local authority systems. However, recruitment and retention issues have prevented local authorities from training more practice educators.

To increase the number of PLOs in statutory settings, participants suggest:

- Financial incentive built into wage rather than flat rate payments – a different salary band for active PEs
- Developing training opportunities for current PEs
- Reduction in caseload when supervising students
- Formalised support such as PE forums
- Support from HEIs
- Standardisation of HEI expectations and paperwork

Specific recommendations in relation to PLO providers, practice educators, and link workers:

- PLO providers should retain full financial control of disbursed funds and utilise such funds flexibly for their needs subject to financial planning and reporting.
- PLO providers should explore ways to introduce financial remuneration for practice educators and link workers in dialogue with their respective staff.
- Explore and introduce mechanisms to reduce caseloads for local authority Practice Educators and Link Workers when supervising students.
- Increase the availability of PDAPL (PLQ) opportunities for LA staff
- Entrance to PDAPL (PLQ) courses should be linked to a contractual agreement over what is expected of trained PEs in taking students
- Training opportunities for current Practice Educators should be made available beyond PDAPL qualification to maintain and develop skills and knowledge
- Formalised support systems and networks should be made available to all practice educators and link workers.
- PLO providers should explore practical mechanisms to avoid the practice of in-house PEs working as IPEs in other local authorities or third sector agencies.

Role of the Third Sector

The third sector's low participation in the research is reflective of their lack of inclusion in the discourse on practice learning and social work education. Although more than 50% of PLOs occur in a voluntary setting, they are not heavily involved in the

decision-making processes at a level they should be, considering their current contribution to the field. Further research into practice learning in Third Sector should be undertaken to provide a platform for their inclusion and to explore a strategic national approach.

Students on placements in third sector agencies are generally supervised by independent practice educators from a distance. Therefore, the main portion of the PL daily fee in the third sector is used toward payment for IPEs leaving third sector agencies with a small portion to cover additional costs of having students on placement. Third sector agencies report that willingness to provide PLOs is not a result of the financial incentive since the amount received, while welcomed, is small compared to the effort and contribution of their teams.

With IPEs supervision from distance and link workers in the third sector generally not trained as social workers, additional issues can emerge in relation to the quality of PLOs as a result of limited understanding of the SiSWE. Although third sector agencies report willingness to train in-house practice educators, training opportunities and access to the PLQ course have been limited. With a higher involvement of third sector agencies in social work education and practice learning, opportunities to train in-house practice educators need to extend to the third sector.

A Third sector participant has raised another significant issue around the actual value of PLOs in the Third sector and its perceived 'lesser value' due to employers' expectations for social workers to have experience in statutory settings:

“It's an enormous benefit to the community and the students to have these placements happen. It tackles stigma and gives students a real insight into the struggles being experienced by the community. At times, we have been made to feel like we offer a 'lesser' placement than a Social Work department which is frustrating.”

The issue of 'lesser value' leads to discussions about the definition of social work, professionalism, and the role of social workers.

Specific recommendations in relation to third sector agencies providing PLOs:

- Structures need to be developed to involve the Third Sector more formally as partners in the provision of practice learning and contribute to a national strategic approach.
- Local partnerships would provide a forum for third sector agencies of differing size to engage with statutory partners in the organisation and delivery of PLOs

- Funding for, and access to PDAPL courses should be made available to third sector agencies to develop in-house practice educators.

Role of Independent Practice Educators

The IPE research participants report a sense of devaluing of their work and the unsustainability of their situation in the current funding arrangements, which have remained static for over 20 years. In a letter addressed to MSPs and the SSSC, two representatives of a larger IPE group note their concerns regarding current pay and work conditions:

“IPEs have been self-employed for 23 years at the same rate of pay with no provision for regular training, no regular support or supervision, no access to employee benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay or pension, and no allowance for expenses, which increase year on year.”

The IPE research participants argue the current pay rate and work conditions are not commensurate with their skills and contribution to practice learning. The payment, they note, does not recognise many aspects of their work such as:

- Preparatory work before the student starts (including pre-PLO meeting)
- Travel expenses and travel time for direct observations and supervision
- Individual student’s needs – struggling students require more time and support
- Providing support for students at all times – no set working hours
- Flexibility required when PLOs extend
- Termination of PLOs affects the total payment amount – challenges with financial planning
- Shorter PLOs require similar output with more intense workload – daily rate allows no recognition of this as payment is set based on the number of PLO days

Employment of independent practice educators, in its introduction, was intended to address gaps in the availability of practice educators. However, the practice of IPEs supervising placements has grown over the years into the most prevalent practice for PLOs. PLOs with IPE supervision are more costly for the PLO providers, both local authorities and third sector agencies, and give rise to other issues as discussed earlier. Further consideration needs to be given to the IPE group and their role in social work

education in the future. The resulting system, then, can be supported and encouraged by financial incentives and support from practice learning funding.

IPE participants also accentuate the lack of support, feedback and quality assurance. “You send a report into the void and there is nothing back” is how they describe the situation with feedback on the quality of their work. There are no adequate mechanisms in place to quality assure their work and offer constructive feedback. The issue of quality assurance of IPEs directly correlates to the quality of PLOs and, fundamentally, the student experience and their preparedness to practice.

Additional issues in relation to IPEs are identified for further consideration:

- A national IPE register does not exist. This makes it impossible to track whether an IPE meets the professional standards for practice education.
- Employment of IPEs is often determined through informal channels of communication and word-of-mouth assessments of performance.
- IPEs are not required to register with any regulator. Thus, there are no CPD requirements or other regulatory processes in place.
- PVG disclosure is not required. With virtual supervision becoming increasingly common practice, IPEs can offer their services across the country. With no national register and lack of communication between regions, there are significant concerns regarding the protection of vulnerable groups involved in practice learning.

Specific recommendation in relation to independent practice educators:

- Increase and standardise the level of payment for Independent Practice Educators.
- Independent Practice Educators should be subject to regulation through the SSSC.
- A national register should be established to ensure that IPEs meet professional standards for practice education.
- Independent practice educators should be required to hold PVG membership in order to supervise students.
- Quality assurance and feedback mechanisms should be established to ensure quality and consistency of service

Additional issues for further consideration

Financial system cannot be discussed in isolation from the wider systems of practice learning. Therefore, additional issues are identified for further consideration.

Many local authorities face challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff. Frontline capacity directly correlates with the capacity of services to provide PLOs. Additionally, the composition of staff - mainly newly qualified or early career workforce – further impedes LAs’ capacity to host student social workers as PEs and experienced employees focus on developing and training their team. The availability of PLOs also relates to student preparedness and the level of support they require during their practice learning experience.

These issues, and additional ones such as complexity of cases and increased number of referrals, are clearly emphasised by a participant here:

“Teams with higher proportions of newly qualified or early career staff, vacancies, increased referral rates and complexity of caseloads for those experienced staff who remain mean that capacity is significantly impaired. A wider lens is needed to ensure growth in the funding of frontline social work, administrative and organisation capacities if we are to address the shortage of placements adequately and systemically.”

In response to the issues of recruitment and retention, some LAs (particularly rural ones) have developed ‘grow your own’ schemes, as they are known, enabling existing staff the pathway to social work qualification. Part of the rationale is that local staff, already living in the area, will remain and work in the locality, thus obviating difficulties in attracting new staff from outside who may be less willing to relocate. This model is replicated in other LAs along with similar ‘trainee’ schemes elsewhere. Flexible funding should be provided to local authorities to foster the development of these models and other innovative ideas. Serious further consideration should be given to the value of ‘grow your own’ schemes in the future landscape of social work education and practice learning.

At the same time, the development of ‘Grow your own’ and apprenticeship schemes highlight some philosophical disagreements about the function and role of social work education. The tension and disagreement between social work employers and educators is highlighted by Sharpe, Morriarty, Manthorpe, and Hussein (2011)⁵ here:

“employers seem to be looking for social workers who are functionally ready and need help to fulfil their tasks in the workplace, whereas educators are aiming more at providing students with a broad professional base of abilities and understanding to be built upon through practice experience and CPD over time.”

Looking Ahead

Any future recommendations for practice learning funding need to address the emerging issues stakeholders have emphasised. The emerging issues have been used to develop overarching themes for a new approach to funding. Our recommendations will be based on these overarching themes as derived from the voices of the research participants and analysis of existing systems.

- **Sufficiency:** Injecting more funds into the practice learning landscape
- **Consistency:** Establishing a clear and consistent funding application across the country
- **Accountability:** Ensuring a reporting mechanism and future decision making based on evidence and data
- **Equity:** Developing partnerships based on an equitable footing in which all partners feel valued and equal
- **Planning:** Setting targets, driving innovation, and ensuring funds are effectively utilised to support provision of high quality PLOs
- **Simplicity:** Designing a more streamlined process
- **Flexibility:** Catering to different needs of stakeholders and allowing them to identify how funding is best used

There are five main recommendations which emerge as a result of the above themes and issues. They are listed as follows and discussed separately in depth:

- Increase funding and develop a simpler funding model
- Develop a central financial administration system
- Introduce a financial planning component for PLO providers
- Introduce a reporting mechanism for PLO providers
- Develop clear guidelines on financial responsibilities and expectations for each stakeholder

Recommendation 1: Increase funding and develop a simpler funding model

There is clear evidence from the data that practice learning is not sufficiently funded and an immediate funding increase is necessary. Payment rate options will be discussed in

the financial projections section. However, we recommend that a new simpler funding model accompany the funding increase and replace the current funding streams.

In order to create a simpler funding model, we recommend the introduction of two funding elements (mirroring the Welsh financial model):

Element A	Two different flat rate fees based on the type of assessed PLOs - First PLO and Second PLO - corresponding to the two assessed PLOs students need to undertake to qualify as social workers.
Element B	<p>Flat rate fee paid for the sourcing, matching, coordinating, quality assuring PLOs, and supporting link workers and PEs/ IPEs.</p> <p>In the West, Element B could take the form of grant funding to Learning Network West to cover the costs of its operations.</p>

Currently, the PL daily fee and administrative fee utilises a daily rate of pay. The daily rate seems to originate from the requirement for the number of PLO days that each social work student needs to undertake before qualifying. The daily rate makes the process of tracking and verifying funds challenging, adds to administrative work for all stakeholders, and provides a limited insight into the overall costs of practice learning per student. The responsibility for verifying the number of PLO days a student has undertaken should not rest on the financial element of practice learning. While HEIs and practice learning teams should ensure the students meet the standards and criteria for qualifying, the financial element should only support the provision of PLOs.

The flat rate fee shifts the focus from time input into desired outcome and results. This approach requires a scheme to be drafted with clear expectations and responsibilities for all stakeholders who receive payment in return for their services and involvement in practice learning. This is discussed further in recommendation 5.

Flat rate fees would further encourage HEIs to develop a shared approach to practice learning and ensure a uniform academic experience for all social work students. In this context, having uniform length placements across all HEIs would be beneficial in terms of planning and provision amongst practice learning providers.

The flat rate fee makes costs of practice learning predictable in the overall landscape and would allow for better financial planning at a Scottish government and local level.

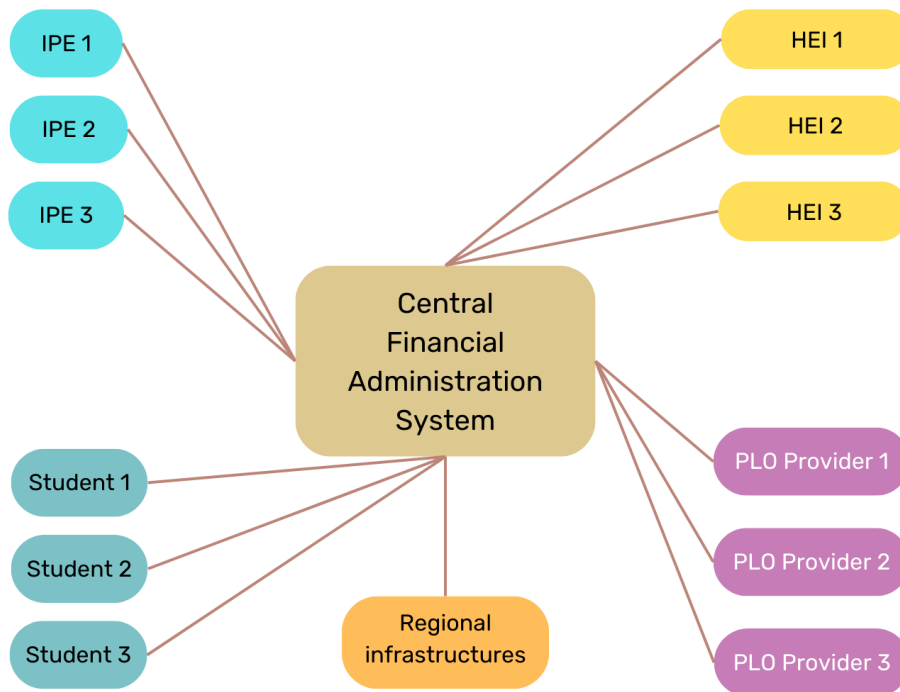
Non-assessed PLOs are not common practice among HEIs. Therefore, financial responsibility should shift to HEIs that decide to arrange non-assessed PLOs for their

students. This recommendation encourages more consistency and equity among stakeholders.

Recommendation 2: Develop a central financial administration system

The data indicates that the source of numerous inconsistencies in the current landscape originates from the current fragmented system of financial administration. Current arrangements have allowed for various interpretations over the usage of funds, different payment rates for IPEs and PLO providers, and have contributed to a competitive environment in practice learning.

A central financial administration would eliminate intermediaries and multiple unnecessary tiers through which current funding is channelled. There would be only one claiming process and the funds would directly reach the intended recipient as shown in the graph below.



The current funding streams lack the infrastructure for planning, reporting, and accountability mechanisms. A new central financial administration system would create the infrastructure for such mechanisms, make data collection easier, and data more accurate. Accuracy and abundance of data will offer a solid foundation for evidence-based future decision making.

The responsibility of financial administration also contains an element of authority. This element has had a negative impact on some stakeholders who do not feel they are equal partners in existing partnerships. By developing a central financial administration, a monetary transactional element is removed from existing partnerships, shifting the focus to collaboration and a shared approach between equal partners.

In the current arrangement, SSSC already administers most funding streams to the HEIs for dispersal and they would be best placed to manage the central administration system. The administration and direct dispersal of the PG bursary by SSSC is a testament of a well-functioning system and its effectiveness can be replicated for practice learning funding with additional resources. Initial costs for developing the system may be significant as a database will be required. Its maintenance and functioning would require two full-time staff responsible for administering the funds and reviewing the initial planning and accountability reports from the PLO providers (recommendations 3 and 4). The financial administration system should also communicate with other systems in place for matching and coordinating of PLOs across Scotland.

The new system will pave the way for an equitable approach to practice learning funding.

Recommendation 3: Introduce a financial planning component for PLO providers

Currently, funds are disbursed to PLO providers to be utilised flexibly for practice learning purposes. However, the research participants report that often funds end up in the overall budget of PLO providers, and do not serve their intended purpose in supporting practice learning specifically.

We recommend that PLO providers retain full financial control and utilise the practice learning funds flexibly for their needs. However, a budget planning requirement should be introduced in order for PLO providers to report in advance how they plan to effectively utilise the funds to support practice learning and social work education. This requirement will provide PLO providers with the flexibility to establish a financial plan that aligns with their specific needs while ensuring the funds are effectively utilised for their intended purpose.

Prior financial planning will not only encourage PLO providers to allocate resources strategically, but will also communicate their capacity to provide PLOs. This will encourage all stakeholders to identify gaps in practice learning provision and proactively develop a plan to address those.

We recommend PLO providers receive the funds only after initial planning forms have been submitted to the central financial administration entity which will be able to transfer, monitor, and evaluate the usage of funding.

Recommendation 4: Introduce a reporting mechanism for PLO providers

Currently, there are no reporting or accountability mechanisms that allow the monitoring and evaluation of the use of practice learning funding. Introducing a reporting mechanism for PLO providers would improve transparency, accountability, and tracking outcomes. While the prior financial planning component (recommendation 3) will encourage PLO providers to strategically plan and set targets ahead of practice learning opportunities, the reporting mechanisms will allow them to report how the funds have been utilised to meet these targets.

Recommendation 5: Develop clear guidelines on financial responsibilities and expectations for each stakeholder

Lack of clarity regarding financial responsibility and expectations in the current practice learning funding landscape has engendered inconsistencies across Scotland. Developing a set of national guidelines which specifies who is financially responsible for specific practice learning costs will reduce this ambiguity. Furthermore, the guidelines also need to identify the specific expectations for each stakeholder and address additional issues such as placement breakdowns with clear procedures and financial processes for how these are dealt with.

Financial projections

The new model recommended above (recommendation 1) is a departure from existing practice and makes it challenging to compare to current arrangements or with the rest of the UK. However, we believe it provides significant benefits, and on this basis, would suggest three options for potential practice learning rates.

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
First PLO	£2,050	£1,650	£2,900
Second PLO	£2,300	£1,950	£3,300
Element B	2 x £300	2 x £300	2 x £300
Total PLO cost per	£4,950	£4,200	£6,800

student			
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Option 1 - based on the current budget

This option will utilise the current annual budget to calculate the approximate total practice learning costs for one student in the new model (which excludes non-assessed PLOs). Assuming the total annual budget for practice learning (excl. PSG) remains the same (**£3,213,000**) as in 2022/2023, here is a detailed conversion into the new model:

Element A - total of **£4350** per student for two years:

Flat rate fee for first assessed PLO: **£2,050** per student (47% of the total cost of element A)

Flat rate fee for second assessed PLO: **£2,300** per student (53% of the total cost of element A)

Element B:

Flat rate fee for Element B: **£300** per PLO

Costs per student & total annual budget

The total practice learning cost per student can easily be calculated from the formula:

First PLO rate + Second PLO rate + (2 x Element B) = £4,950

So, under the suggested terms, the total practice learning costs for one student to qualify would be **£4,950**. The total annual budget for practice learning remains the same under these terms. The calculations assume 1,300 assessed PLOs per year (an approximation based on 2022-23 figures).

Option 2 - based on Wales financial model

The financial projections for this option mirror rates in Wales. Although Wales employs a daily rate system, below these rates are calculated based on our proposed flat rate model (recommendation 1). The calculations assume that the first PLO is (on average) 80 days, whereas the second PLO lasts 100 days (on average).

Element A - **£3,600** per student for two years:

Flat rate fee for first assessed PLO: **£1,600** per student (£20 per PLO day x 80 PLO days)

Flat rate fee for second assessed PLO: **£2,000** per student (£20 per PLO day x 100 PLO days)

Element B:

Flat rate fee for Element B: **£300** per PLO

Costs per student & total annual budget

The cost per student can be calculated using the same formula:

First PLO rate + Second PLO rate + (2 x Element B) = £4200

So, under the suggested terms, the total practice learning costs for one student to qualify would be **£4,200**. The total annual budget would approximately be **£2,730,000**.

Option 3 - based on inflation

Element A - **£6200** per student for two years:

Our recommended flat rate fee for first assessed PLO: **£2,910** per student (47% of the total cost of element A)

Our recommended flat rate fee for second assessed PLO: **£3,290** per student (53% of the total cost of element A)

The difference in the payment rate corresponds to the difference in length, on average, between these two types of PLOs.

Payment is payable in full to PLO providers with in-house practice educators.

Our recommended rate for PLO providers with IPEs: **£1,000 per student for both types of PLOs**

Our recommended rate for IPEs for first PLOs: **£1,910 per student**

Our recommended rate for IPEs for second PLOs: **£2,300 per student**

With a central financial administration system (recommendation 2), the proposed rates for IPEs and PLO providers will be easy to implement across Scotland and establish an equitable funding practice.

Element B:

Flat rate fee paid for the sourcing, matching, coordinating, quality assuring PLOs, and supporting link workers and PEs/ IPEs.

Our recommended flat rate fee for Element B: **£300 per PLO**

This element is payable directly to the entity - based on the model proposed by SWEP - responsible for the tasks above.

Cost per student & total annual budget

The cost per student can easily be calculated in the proposed funding model:

First PLO rate + Second PLO rate + (2 x Element B) = £6800

So, under the suggested terms, the total practice learning costs for one student to qualify would be **£6,800**.

Assuming there are 1300 assessed PLOs yearly, the total annual budget would be **£4,420,000** - a 38% increase compared to the current annual budget for practice learning.

Student Perspectives and Funding Issues

Social Work student experience varies across Scotland but has been relatively under-researched in relation to experiences of study, practice learning and financial support. Practice Learning and the pressures experienced on placement create particular challenges for students.

Current funding arrangements fall into two different strands:

- Funding to source and provide placements – Practice Learning daily fee, Administrative Grant, Placement Support Grant
- Student funding
 - For UG students – SAAS funding mainly and other non-specific sources
 - For PG students – Bursaries for those eligible and nominated by their HEI, administered by the SSSC

Funding for PLOs and Administrative Support is dealt with separately in the report. This section addresses funding and support issues impacting students, particularly in relation to practice learning.

Student Perspectives

Interviews and focus groups were held with a selection of students as part of the research process. Although the sample size was small, those participating stated clearly that they felt they represented the views of their fellow students. Interviewees included two of the student originators of the recent petition to the Scottish Parliament¹³ who reflected views of other students involved in the campaign to reform funding for social work students.

Views were also obtained from SASW (Scottish Association of Social Work), SWU (The Social Workers Union), and the Campaign Collective which is allied to the SWU and helped students raise the recent petition to the Scottish Parliament. The petition called for bursaries for all third and fourth year undergraduate social work students in Scotland and reform of post-graduate bursary funding. The petition has to date attracted over 2100 signatures, and was raised following a letter about student funding sent to the Minister for Higher Education, OCSWA, SSSC, SAAS and SFC, and signed by 300 students.

Separately, SASW have recently carried out a survey of social work students into placement experiences which received 340 responses. This is yet to be published, though initial findings were shared by SASW with the authors and agreement given that the results can be shared as part of this report. Data kindly provided by SASW is preliminary but confirms the views of student participants of this report. Some of the main themes emerging from the SASW report relate to financial issues, and although provisional, include the following:

- Considerable financial strain on students, particularly during placement
- The large majority of students had to juggle placement work with academic work and the need to work high numbers of hours in paid external employment to fund themselves through university
- Over 60% of students reported adverse impacts on their finances as a result of being on placement
- Adverse impact on mental health reported by at least 25% of students as a consequence of the strains of combining work, placement and academic requirements

Issues identified by SASW were very much reflected by students interviewed for the purposes of this study in relation to practice learning. Some issues apply both to undergraduate and postgraduate students, although others are specific to the particular route students are pursuing. Specific issues for each group will be addressed separately, although what did come across very strongly from both groups was a desire for equity in the treatment of all social work students, and *between* social work students and other professional groups such as nursing. Further issues arise in relation to International students which will be addressed separately.

The main cross-cutting themes which emerged from interviews with students included:

- The inadequacy of current funding arrangements
- Impact of the cost of living crisis in devaluing existing levels of financial support
- High levels of financial hardship including food and fuel poverty
- High levels of debt accrued – bank loans, pay-day loans, SAAS loans where applicable, borrowing from family and friends
- Difficulties in meeting accommodation costs, loss of accommodation in some instances

- Frequent reliance on university hardship funds for basic living expenses
- Reliance on food banks in some instances
- Students having to work to supplement funding as a matter of necessity – this was particularly problematic during placement when long hours working on placement were followed by long hours in paid employment.
- High levels of stress amongst students as a consequence of managing competing demands of work, placement and study
- Adverse impact on personal relationships and mental health as a consequence of stress factors
- Major inconsistencies in provision of travel costs from agencies and universities during placement – common for students to have to pay own travel and parking costs
- Placement agencies requiring car drivers - ensuing financial difficulties in maintaining car ownership made even more difficult as a result of the increase in fuel costs
- Issues of travel, car ownership and associated costs even more acute for students in rural settings
- Strong feelings of injustice that students are ‘working for free’ on placement with limited financial support and accruing high levels of debt
- Strong feelings of social work students not being valued when compared to other student professionals
- Major inconsistencies in practice learning experiences
- No assistance with clothing grants or other ‘hidden’ placement costs

Whilst there were numerous concerns raised by students what was also clear was that students were committed to the values and ideals of social work. All wanted to work within the profession although some did not feel well prepared for this due to poor practice learning experiences and the stresses of study and placement.

Students raised many broader issues concerning practice learning experiences which were related to the quality of PLOs and lack of direct social work experience. These are felt to fall outwith the scope of this study, but need further consideration. In this context, it is recommended that future model/s of practice learning need to ensure that:

- Sufficient PLOs are available

- Practice Educators have adequate time to support and supervise students
- Consistent quality assurance systems for practice learning are developed and implemented across all settings
- Students experience at least one statutory placement

International Students

A further issue identified in the course of the research was that of the position of International Students and how their situation interacts with current provision. University internationalisation strategies have focused on recruiting students from outwith Scotland to PG courses which lead to professional social work qualification. This is likely related to financial drivers and university business models rather than meeting identified workforce needs.

There is limited information on the number of RUK, EU and International students who currently take up places on programmes, so accurate estimates are not possible. Further, there is no available information on the percentage of international students who remain in Scotland after completing their courses and taking up employment in social work agencies.

Following Brexit, fees for International and EU students have converged at a number of HEIs and are in line with other taught Masters programmes. International fees per annum are set out in the table of tuition fees below. There are particular issues which arise as a consequence of the costs for studying social work which are highlighted in the following example drawn from interviewing an international student from Nigeria.

The student is liable for tuition fees of approximately £16k per annum which were reduced in year 1 but not year 2, therefore totalling about £28,000 for the two years. The student has a dependent with her and is not entitled to any bursary. She was required to find her own accommodation, pay rent on a Housing Association flat, pay travel costs, food, fuel, subsistence, health costs, visa and other expenses. In total she will need to pay something approaching £70,000 for the two years of study. The student is working as a support worker and has received small payments from the SSSC hardship fund. There has reportedly been little help or advice from the HEI. In addition, the student was currently on placement and having to travel back and forward to Edinburgh daily taking two hours each way, despite living and studying in the West/Centre of the country.

The student evidenced strong feelings of distress during the interview, which was uncomfortable to experience. Whilst this is one particular example, the issues are

concerning, and further research is recommended into the experience and circumstances of international students studying social work in Scotland.

A further issue raised by LAs, and PEs is the resource issue associated with international students. One CSWO interviewed expressed particular concern about already scarce PLOs being taken up by International students who do not intend to remain and work in Scotland after qualification. At a more general level PEs, HEIs and LAs have identified that some International students require additional support, have no experience of the policy or legislative base for social work, and are unfamiliar with working cultures and practices.

These are complex issues which need further exploration and consideration. The research team were concerned about the issues which were identified in the above example. The issues lie outwith the scope of this study, but we recommended the following:

- That detailed research is carried out into the circumstances, experiences of international students
- Support needs explored and identified
- Outcomes post-qualification are explored
- Resource issues are explored and identified
- A national strategy is developed which balances the internationalisation agendas of HEIs with the needs of international students, workforce planning requirements and practice learning provision.

Undergraduate Student Funding – Specific Issues

Undergraduate social work students in Scotland are supported financially through access to SAAS funding. Eligible students have tuition fees paid and can take out student loans to cover living costs. Typically, it is estimated by the Campaign Collective that students will borrow between £21,600 and £36,000 over the course of their four years of study. The vast majority of students require to work in addition to taking out SAAS loans, both in vacation periods, and during term-time. There was particular unhappiness with the almost universal experience of having to apply to University Discretionary Funds to supplement daily living expenses, and as more than one student put it, '*it feels like begging*'.

In addition to the cross-cutting issues identified above, Undergraduate students made a range of suggestions for improvement in the course of the focus group and interviews. The key suggestions include:

- Introduction of a bursary for UG students in years 3 and 4 of the Honours programme to coincide with time spent on practice learning – this would reduce debt, reduce the need to work excessively during practice learning and recognise the student contribution to workplaces
- Ensuring that introduction of any bursary complemented access to SAAS funding in years 1 and 2 of the programme
- Ensuring that any bursary introduced did not disadvantage students in receipt of the Care Experienced Students' Bursary
- End the stigma associated with having to apply for hardship/discretionary payments for basic needs
- Introduction of a fair, consistent and comprehensive travel scheme for travel to and from placement and travel during placement
- Introduction of a small grant to all students prior to practice learning for work clothes, etc
- Equitable access to necessary technology whilst on placement

Students expressed their frustration with the current funding arrangements that they felt very strongly were putting barriers in their way, and hindering their opportunity to learn and prepare for practice. As one student put it:

“They’re screaming out for social workers, they should be investing in people”

Postgraduate Student Funding – Specific Issues

Postgraduate students interviewed for the purposes of this study were appreciative of the principle of receiving a bursary, and were very positive about the process of administration of the bursary by the SSSC. However, as the Bursary scheme has not been reviewed substantially for over 20 years, it has devalued in real terms, not kept pace with inflation or cost of living rises, and not taken account of substantial increases in tuition fees.

The cross-cutting issues identified above apply equally to Postgraduate students, although due to the conditions attached to the Bursary students are in some respects financially worse-off than their undergraduate peers. This is due to Postgraduate

students not being eligible to apply for SAAS funding and therefore being reliant on a limited bursary that barely covers fees in total.

Students therefore also have to maintain paid employment, and are further reliant on hardship payments and borrowing from formal and informal sources. The pressures are considerable particularly as the Postgraduate course is a compressed two-year, intense version of the four-year Honours degree. The following section analyses the Bursary scheme in detail and identifies the key pinch-points with current arrangements.

Postgraduate Social Work Bursaries

Current Scheme - Overview

Postgraduate social work students in Scotland are currently eligible for a bursary which is administered by the SSSC. The Scheme is governed by the Student Support (Scotland) Regulations 2022, supplemented by guidance and procedures produced by the SSSC.

The scheme has been administered by the SSSC since 2004 and was originally introduced to expand the number of students entering social work programmes through providing funding to students with a first degree who would not be eligible for student funding.

The total number of bursaries currently offered is 321. When the scheme was first introduced, there were 6 HEIs providing postgraduate courses. This has now grown to 9 with all HEIs providing PG courses in addition to UG courses. The most recent additions to the scheme are UWS, Napier and the Open University. Delivery of postgraduate programmes amongst HEIs has developed less related to workforce planning needs, and perhaps more related to University business models and associated financial drivers.

As far as can be identified, the growth in postgraduate provision has not arisen through expansion of the bursary scheme, or increased demand for places. As the overall budget has remained relatively constant, the overall allocation of bursary places to each HEI has therefore reduced to some extent, because of the development of new courses. It could be expedient in the context of any revision to the bursary scheme to review the total number of funded postgraduate places in Scotland.

HEIs are given an allocation of bursary places annually and are then free to nominate students to the SSSC for assessment of eligibility for bursary provision. Criteria for nomination are determined by each HEI although there is an argument that consistency would be beneficial through the introduction of a set of national criteria. Each HEI splits

their bursary allocation between first and second years of their programme which results in some fluctuation of new intake due to the size of second year cohorts.

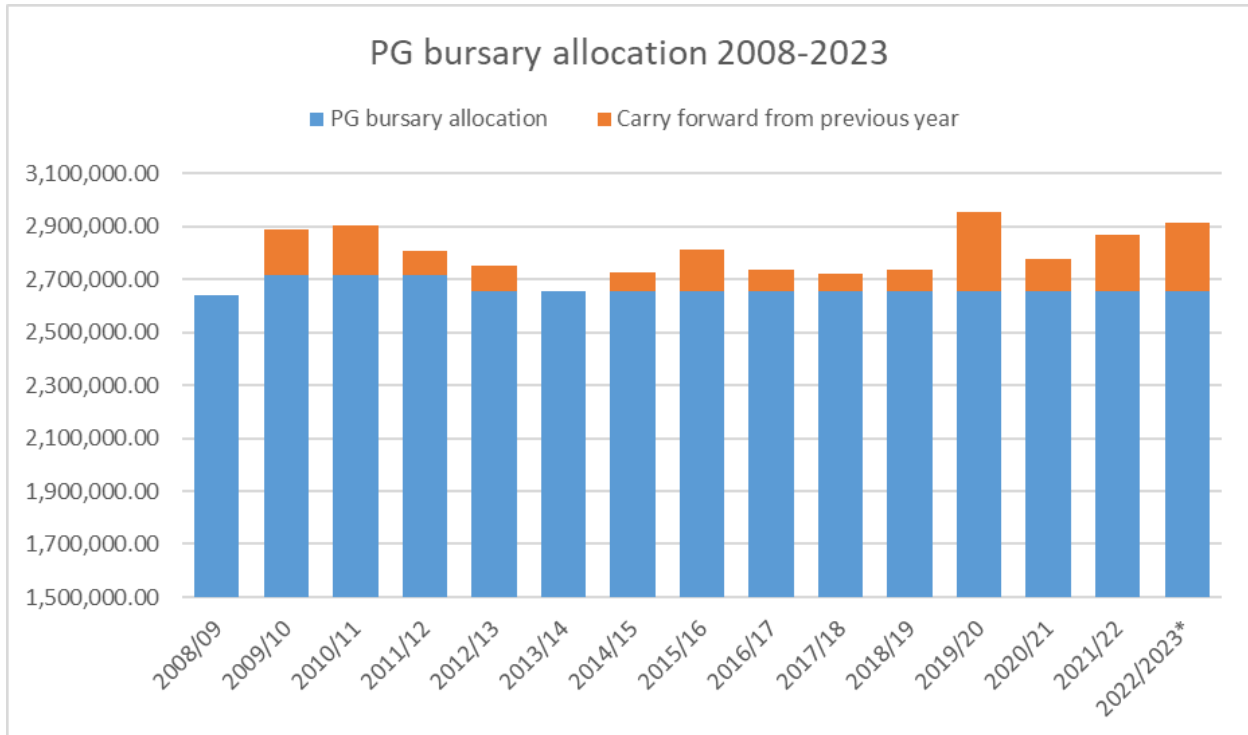
Students not nominated for a bursary are invited to self-fund their studies along with RUK, EU and International students. Whilst some students take this up, evidence from the SSSC suggests that not all bursaries are utilised by HEIs due to a range of factors. Anecdotal evidence suggests the financial burden of studying and the limited value of the bursary may be contributing to a reduction in the take up of postgraduate places on programmes. However, evidence from some HEIs suggests that demand for Bursaries outstrips supply. The SSSC are in some instances able to move 'spare' bursaries to other HEIs but this can lead to annual allocations being adversely affected at individual HEIs.

Financial Analysis

Bursary provision for postgraduate students comprises a separate budget from that of Practice Learning Funding and although connected in financial terms due to issues arising from travel costs, requires to be reviewed in its own right.

Comprehensive financial information on Bursary expenditure has been provided by the SSSC. Figures made available date from financial year 2008/09 to 2022/23, although figures for the most recent financial year are provisional. The budget for 2022-23 is £2,655,293 with a provisional projected underspend of £110,000, which is within normal parameters. In addition, there is also covid-related carry forward of approximately £258,000 from previous financial years. Therefore, for the financial year 2023-2024, there is a projected carry forward totalling £369,000.

The overall budget has remained reasonably stable with an annual budget of £2,641,336 in 2008/09 compared to £2,655,293 in 2022/23 (actual budget as opposed to budget including carry forward, as stated above). The budget was reduced in 2012, but otherwise has only been subject to minor fluctuations. There tends to be an annual underspend due to various reasons including residence eligibility, uptake not matching the quota or nominations, last minute withdrawals, withdrawals part way through the course, students not eligible for means-tested elements, or being eligible for fees only. The underspend tends to average out at approximately £100,000 per annum, although figures in the past few years were skewed by the impact of Covid.

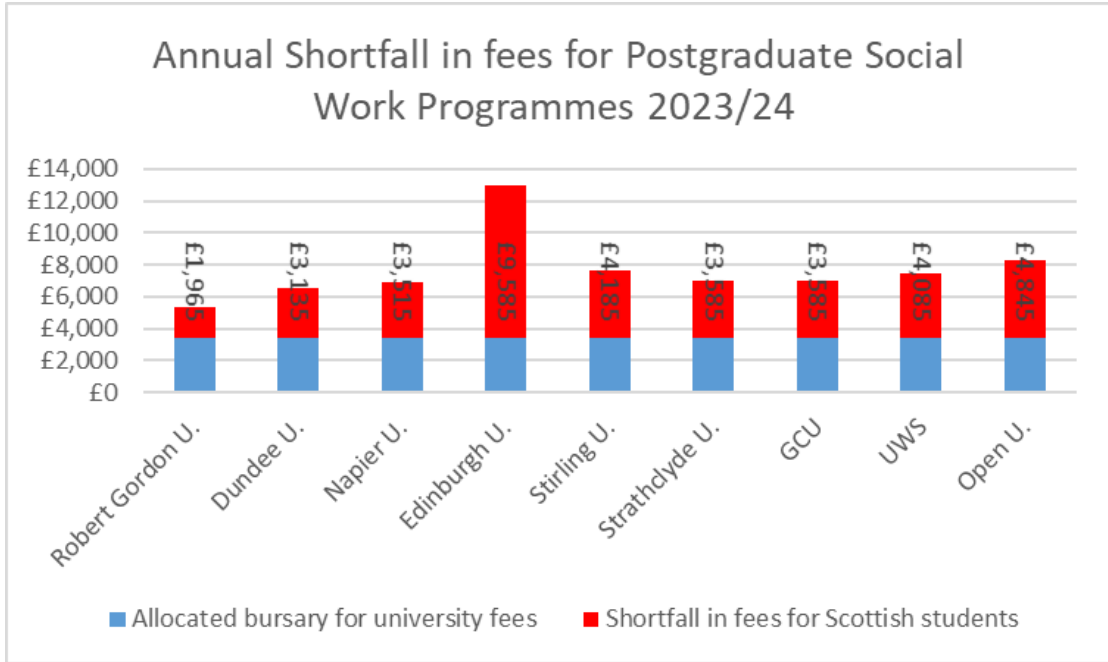


Significantly, there has been no change to the Schedule of Rates which determines the amount paid to students since 2009. Prior to 2009, the Rates were adjusted annually for inflation, however, this practice has not been continued and in overall terms, the amounts paid to students remain substantially unchanged since 2002.

The impact of the Bursary having been largely 'frozen' in monetary terms for approximately twenty years has been very serious in relation to student income as identified above. In addition to the overall erosion of the bursary's value, postgraduate fees at HEIs have increased over the period and are normally reviewed upwards annually.

The table below sets out current fees for postgraduate programmes. The maximum Fee component of the Bursary paid to students is £3,415 per annum. Given the level of fees charged by HEIs, this automatically leaves students in debt regarding fees and needing to pay the balance. Annual shortfall amounts that students require to pay are detailed in red on the table and visually represented in the graph below.

Annual Tuition Fees for Postgraduate Social Work Programmes 2023/24					
HEI	Scotland	Shortfall in Fees for Scot. Students	RUK	EU	International
RGU	£5380	£1965	£6380	£6380	£16260
Dundee	£6550	£3135	£6550	£6550	£20900
Napier	£6930	£3515	£6930	£17090	£17090
Edinburgh	£13000	£9585	£13000	£27100	£27100
Stirling	£7600	£3685	£7600	£7600	£17775
Strathclyde	£7000	£3585	£7000	£15400	£15400
GCU	£7000	£3585	£7000	£15500	£15500
UWS	£7500	£4085	£7500	£15250	£15250
Open U.	£8260	£4845			



Bursary Provision

There are three main components to the Postgraduate bursary:

- Tuition fees component which contributes a maximum of £3415 per annum
- A means-tested maintenance grant coupled with dependants' allowance where applicable
- Travel expenses/books/sundries component of £510 per annum (uplifted to £600 for 2023-24)

The total students are awarded varies depending on their circumstances and is means-tested by the SSSC. Students with child or adult dependents are entitled to some additional allowances. Some students are only eligible for fees and students under 25 are assessed against parental income, even if not living in the parental home. Assessment of young students for bursary funding is complex and calculations are determined by Scottish Government policy as stipulated in Family Law (Scotland) Act 1985 and 2006.

In financial terms, it is difficult to provide accurate information on the amount students are awarded, but an average upper figure of £7,000 per annum can be estimated. This is the *total* annual figure, including the Fee component and the £510 travel allowance (uplifted to £600 for 2023-24).

Therefore, due to the fee shortfall, the majority of students are having to use a major proportion if not all of their bursary award on fees alone.

After fees, students are left with very limited amounts, if anything, for subsistence, accommodation, fuel bills, food, clothing and any other costs. Postgraduate students are not able to access other forms of financial support such as student loans from SAAS. Discretionary funding can be applied for from the SSSC through the Hardship Fund, but this is limited in scope and in terms of awards. As a result, unless they have significant savings, postgraduate students have to work a high number of hours to maintain themselves during the two years of the programme. Many have to access hardship payments from their Universities, depend on partners for financial support, borrow from relatives and friends, and there are even reports from students of some having to use food banks.

The situation is intensified further during practice learning when students need to juggle the demands of full-time placements, academic work on top of that and working as many hours as is possible to fund themselves. The levels of stress impacting students was evident from interviews and focus groups. As one student commented, apart from

the financial hardship involved, going on placement "...is equivalent to working for free for 6 months."

The research team regard this situation as unsustainable, deleterious to the health and wellbeing of students, negatively impacting the ability of students to focus on study with a consequent negative impact on the preparedness of students to commence practice at the end of their programmes.

It is therefore recommended that an urgent review of the rates paid to postgraduate students is required and that a combination of short-term and medium-term measures are needed to avert severe financial hardship amongst students.

In the interests of equity and simplification of systems, should any form of bursary be introduced for Undergraduate students, it is recommended that rates be set at the same levels for Postgraduate and Undergraduate students.

Travel Costs

The issue of travel costs arose in every discussion with students, HEI staff and local authority representatives as a key example of inconsistency and unfairness in the experience of students on placement. There are currently no clear national guidelines on the payment of travel costs and expenses. Considerable variation in practice exists and confusion amongst HEIs and employers as to what arrangements should be in place. In some instances, students are provided with full mileage costs in line with staff of agencies; and in others receive nothing. The use of the Placement Support Grant to fund travel by HEIs is equally inconsistent.

Students expressed considerable frustration about the arrangements and expectations of them having to pay for travel for carrying out agency work. One particularly egregious example was of a postgraduate student in a local authority who had no access to pool cars, had to use his own car in a semi-rural environment, received no mileage expenses from either the local authority or HEI, and to add insult to injury, had to pay for parking in a local authority car park at his place of work despite working for the local authority. In essence, the student was subsidising the Local Authority from his own growing personal debt, having used his £500 travel allowance to pay off some of the shortfall in tuition fees, whilst providing services to the local authority's service users.

As one HEI stated,

"Travel costs should be available to UG and PG students regardless of bursary and based on a nationally agreed scheme, what is covered, travel to and from placement and on placement...Students in rural areas face even greater challenges in this respect which needs acknowledged."

This formulation is helpful in setting a potential framework for a consistent, equitable national travel scheme and it is recommended that a national scheme covering all students be developed and implemented.

Specific recommendations in relation to travel & subsistence:

- Under current arrangements, as a short-term measure to address student hardship, the Placement Support Grant could be designated to cover student travel costs solely and be made available to all students
- A clear national system of funding travel expenses both during and outwith placements needs developed and implemented, applicable to undergraduate and postgraduate students
- All student travel should be compensated at the recommended HMRC rate at 45p per mile (for cars and vans), 24p per mile (for motorcycles), and 20p per mile (for bikes).
- Enable students to access regular additional allowances for travel costs – taking account of exceptional expenses and rural locations

Options for Review and Uplift of Postgraduate Bursary Rates

In line with the recommendation that PG bursary rates are increased, options are presented for consideration. These are based on comparisons with schemes in place across the rest of the UK and with the PNMSB scheme in Scotland.

As part of the research process, discussion was held with Social Care Wales to explore and clarify aspects of their funding of Bursaries and practice learning arrangements more generally. Suitable contacts for similar discussion within England were not available to the researchers.

Option 1 - Based on parity with the scheme in Wales

The Welsh scheme (SWBS)¹⁶ is established as an incentive award scheme with the aim of the SWBS being ‘...to contribute to the growth of a sustainable social care workforce in Wales.’

For the academic year 2023/24 postgraduate students are awarded **£12,715** per year.

The Bursary is non-income assessed. Students are expected to pay their fees from the £12,715 per year and use the remainder for living expenses. Average fees in Wales are £8000, therefore leaving around £4715 for living expenses.

In addition, students can claim means-tested allowances for adult dependants' grant, parents' learning allowance and a childcare grant. These amounts are income assessed. Disabled students' allowance is also available if eligible.

Students are also awarded a Practice Learning Opportunity Allowance (PLOA) which covers placement costs including travel and is paid in advance of placement. The amount varies on length and level of the placement and students can claim excess travel and accommodation if needed beyond the flat rate element. The PLOA is set at £7.50 per placement day, equating to £600 for an 80-day PLO.

Thus, the total flat-rate bursary element minus any means-tested component is approximately £13,315 per annum.

Taking the Welsh model of bursary provision, if applied to Scotland, the *minimum* costs would be calculated as follows:

321 (current no. of bursaries) x £13,315 = **£4,274,115**

Additional costs for means-tested allowances need to be factored in - adult dependants' grant, parents' learning allowance, childcare grant and the disabled students' allowance. Specific figures are not available to highlight specific costs, but such allowances are contained within the current overall budget for PG bursaries held by the SSSC.

Excluding these elements, the minimum uplift required to the current budget for Postgraduate Bursaries would be £4,274,115 minus the current budget £2,655,293.

Total *minimum* uplift - **£1,618,822**

Option 2 - Based on Parity with the scheme in England

For academic year 2023/24, students are awarded £4,052 towards tuition fees, a non-income assessed basic grant of £3,362.50 a year (outside London), and an income assessed rate up to £2,721 a year (outside London)⁷. The Bursary includes an allowance of £862.50 towards placement travel costs. Placement providers may pay travel on top of this. In addition, students can also claim adult dependants' allowance, childcare allowance and parents' learning allowance. Disabled students' allowance is also available if eligible.

The total for the three flat-rate elements of the bursary is **£10,135** (exc. London weighting). If applied to the Scottish context and based on an average tuition fees amount of £7000, this would result in a flat-rate subsistence and travel amount of £3135 approximately after fees.

Taking the English model and if applied to Scotland, the *minimum* costs would be calculated as follows:

$$321 \times \text{£}10,135 = \text{£}3,253,335$$

Excluding the means-tested elements as in Option 1, the minimum uplift required to the current budget for Postgraduate Bursaries would be £3,253,335 minus the current budget £2,655,293.

Total *minimum* uplift - **£598,042**

Option 3 - Based on parity with the PNMSB scheme in Scotland

The PNMSB scheme is available to eligible students in Scotland taking Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery courses. There is a strong argument that in professional terms, social work students should be funded similarly to their peers in health professions.

The scheme is administered by SAAS and is designed to support students on 3/4 year undergraduate courses. The bursary includes a flat rate element of £10,000 for years 1-3 of the programme and £7,500 for year 4, the Honours year. There are additional means-tested elements in line with all other schemes outlined above, including discretionary funds, dependants' allowance, single parents' allowance, childcare allowance, disabled students' allowance and, clinical placement expenses, which would equate to periods of practice learning within social work. In line with Scottish Government policy on tuition fees, these do not need to be paid by students and are transferred directly by SAAS to HEIs if students are eligible.

For PG social work students, if this option were to be applied, this would ideally need to take account of fees as well as living expenses to achieve the benefit of the annual flat rate allowance of £10,000.

Given the average fee amount of £7000, this would therefore total £17,000 per annum excluding means-tested and discretionary components.

Therefore, to achieve parity with the PNMSB scheme and maintain the same flat rate subsistence element, minimum costs would be calculated as follows:

$$321 \times \text{£}17,000 = \text{£}5,457,000 \text{ annually.}$$

Excluding the means-tested elements, the minimum uplift required to the current budget for Postgraduate Bursaries would be £5,457,000 minus the current budget £2,655,293.

Total *minimum* uplift - **£2,801,707**

If the fee component were to be removed from this option, the figures would more closely align with Option 2, the scheme in England, where students are awarded £10,135 per annum excluding means-tested components.

Northern Ireland

The research team considered a comparison with Northern Ireland as a further option, but limited information was available, and current provision in NI is apparently less than in Scotland. As such, this was disregarded as a further option.

For information purposes, students in Northern Ireland are eligible for a Student Incentive Scheme⁸ which pays £4000 per annum plus a travel allowance of £500 per annum. Fees per annum are capped at £4710. No additional information was available on the scheme and allowances making it difficult to draw out full comparisons.

Specific recommendations in relation to postgraduate student funding:

- Urgently review and increase the PG Bursary rates on an interim basis covering fees, subsistence and travel costs.
- Future subsistence levels need to achieve parity with any provision introduced for UG students and ideally be set at similar levels to the PNMSB scheme
- The fee component needs reviewed and in dialogue with HEIs, postgraduate tuition fees should be capped to avoid bursaries being spent purely on fees
- Bursary rates need to be regularly reviewed in line with inflation and/or recognised cost of living indices.
- PG students should be able to access loans through SAAS without impacting on bursary eligibility
- Ensure no detriment for students in receipt of the Care Experienced Students' Bursary
- Review eligibility criteria and means tested components in line with other student funding schemes
- Review eligibility criteria for young students under 25 based upon guidance within the Family Law (Scotland) Act 1985 and 2006 which relates to parental income
- Within the SSSC budget for PG bursaries, there is an accumulated underspend including carry forward from previous financial years, partially related to covid

input, totalling £369,070. Consideration could be given to how this money could be used for one-off purposes.

Options for Undergraduate Bursary Provision

The research team are strongly of the view that a bursary system needs to be introduced for UG social work students in Scotland. Student hardship is extensive, the lack of student funding is impacting recruitment and retention, and there is a strong argument that equity is required with peers in health-related courses covered by the PNMSB scheme.

There have been recent public demands for social work undergraduate students to receive bursary payments during their social work courses, including a petition to the Scottish Parliament. As UG students in Scotland are eligible to have their tuition fees paid, any bursary introduced would potentially cover subsistence, living expenses, means-tested allowances and travel. Two options are presented for consideration below.

A further factor that needs to be considered is parity between UG and PG students. If bursary provision is introduced for UG students, in the interests of equity, it would be highly desirable that the same level of subsistence is made available to both groups of students.

There are financial implications with the introduction of a new bursary scheme alongside organisational and administrative issues. Financial support for UG students is provided through SAAS, whereas PG students are funded through the SSSC. In the interests of consistency, it would be necessary that financial support is provided from one source with one clear set of eligibility guidelines and procedures. Given the central role of SAAS in student funding, there is a strong argument that all responsibility for the administration of all social work student funding be located with the Student Awards Agency Scotland.

Option 1 - Based on parity with the PNMSB scheme in Scotland

The Petition to the Scottish Parliament raised by social work students made the argument that social work students should be compared to Paramedic, Nursing and Midwifery (PNM) students¹⁰. The PNMSB scheme is administered by SAAS and includes a flat rate element of £10,000 for years 1-3 of the nursing programme and £7,500 for year 4, the Honours year. The reduction for nursing students in year 4 is due to less time spent on clinical placement. There are additional means-tested elements as outlined above.

Social Work students have suggested that the bursary could be applied solely in years 3 and 4 of the UG programme, as these are the years when they are undertaking practice learning and when financial pressures are most extreme.

Therefore, if a similar scheme to the PNMSB were to be introduced for social work students, both years would provide a flat-rate £10,000 payment for subsistence plus other eligible allowances in line with nursing, paramedic and midwifery students.

The SSSC project an approximate annual figure of 358 UG students taking social work courses for the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25. However, the SSSC further stress that admission figures fluctuate and it is accordingly difficult to project student numbers with complete accuracy.

Using this projection as a model, excluding the means-tested elements and any travel or other allowances, the minimum annual cost for a new bursary scheme would be $358 \times £10,000 = \mathbf{£3,580,000}$

Total *minimum* new funding - **£3,580,000**

Option 2 - Based on parity with the bursary scheme in Wales

A further option would be to mirror the bursary model in Wales for UG students *after* the payment of tuition fees, as they do not need to be paid in Scotland if students are eligible.

The living costs element in Wales is £5315 per annum after tuition fees are subtracted.

Therefore, on this basis, the minimum annual cost for a new UG bursary scheme before any means-tested elements would be $358 \times £5315 = \mathbf{£1,902,770}$

Total *minimum* new funding - **£1,902,770**

Recommendations

The research team is of the view that the introduction of a bursary scheme for UG students is necessary to address severe financial hardship amongst students which is particularly experienced during periods of practice learning. There is some indication that the introduction of financial incentives would lead to an increase in admission numbers and by extension the recruitment and retention of social workers in the workforce. Furthermore, parity with students in health-related professions would enhance the professional standing of social work students and as a consequence, the profession overall.

UG and PG students are experiencing similar financial hardship issues despite the provision of the postgraduate bursary. The research team is of the view that current funding arrangements are not adequate for professional programmes and requires urgent improvement.

Specific recommendations in relation to undergraduate student funding:

- Establish a grant-based bursary scheme for undergraduate students in years 3 and 4 of social work programmes
- Future bursary levels should achieve parity with provision for PG students and ideally be set at similar levels to the PNMSB scheme
- Bursary rates need to be regularly reviewed in line with inflation and/or cost of living indices
- Ensure no detriment for students in receipt of the Care Experienced Students' Bursary

Additional recommendation for both UG and PG student programmes:

- To ensure a consistent national bursary scheme is provided to UG and PG students and is integrated with other forms of student funding, it is arguably preferable that SAAS should administer all student funding, including PG bursaries and travel and subsistence schemes.

Issues for further consideration

- To improve and develop workforce planning, it is recommended that Social Work become a Controlled Subject in Scotland under the auspices of the SFC
- As local workforce needs vary across Scotland, and taking account of rural provision, scope is needed to ensure local initiatives for training, recruitment and retention are facilitated

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Appendices

Appendix I

Privacy Notice for Learning Network West (LNW) in conducting research in to Practice Learning Funding for the SSSC and Scottish Government

The Learning Network West (LNW) has been commissioned by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and the Scottish Government to conduct their planned research and evaluation of Social Work Practice Learning Funding in Scotland. This review will focus on four streams of funding:

1. Practice Learning Administrative Fee;
2. Practice Learning Daily Fee;
3. Placement Support Grant;
4. Postgraduate Bursary;

The aim of the research is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current funding structures, assess the existing funding streams and their utilisation, and provide recommendations for an improved practice learning funding landscape. To collect the necessary data for conducting such research, we will utilise both online surveys and semi-structured interviews in order to engage with all stakeholders involved in practice learning. In order to protect survey and interview participants, we have designed this privacy notice that provides details of how the collected data will be handled.

Your Personal Data

The **LNW** will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to this research. This privacy notice will explain how LNW will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting data such as email address/contact details and where relevant, the agency you work for and your role within that agency - in order to meet the requirements of the SSSC and Scottish Government in carrying out the research commissioned by them. In carrying out this research we will record, analyse and aggregate data to draw out themes and issues relevant to the research. We will only collect data that we need in order to meet the needs of the research.

What we do with it and who we share it with

- All the data we collect will be processed by staff at the LNW. Individual participants will not be identified in the final report. The report may mention institutions, local authorities and agencies in a manner that does not link them to the individual data or specific findings from the survey or interviews. We will however, where necessary, share raw data with representatives of the SSSC and Scottish Government as the commissioners of the report.
- We adhere to the ethics guidance in place by the Scottish Government which aligns with the UK-wide Government Social Research (GSR).
- Where we need to refer to specific individuals, institutions, local authorities or agencies in the report, we will ensure anonymisation.
- Electronic data collected will be securely stored on LNW computers protected by password and encryption where appropriate.
- Interviews conducted will be recorded for the purposes of transcription. Once transcribed, recordings will be deleted, and data handled as with electronic data i.e.: stored on LNW computers or and protected by password and encryption where appropriate.
- On completion of the report relevant data will be transferred to the SSSC/Scottish Government in line with GDPR principles.

How long do we keep it for?

Your data will be retained by the LNW only until the report has been concluded and published. After this time, or before, with agreement with the SSSC/Scottish Government, data will be transferred and/or securely deleted.

What are your rights?

You can request access to the information we process about you at any time. If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request to the Lead Researcher at LNW.

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the Lead Researcher who will investigate the matter.

Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at plfresearch@westlearn.org.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

By completion of the online survey, I consent to the LNW processing my personal data for the purposes detailed above and agree I have read and understand how my personal data will be used.

Appendix II

Online survey 1

Target group: 9 Higher Education Institutes

Questions:

1. Name of the institution:
2. Role or position of the respondent within the institution:
3. From your institution's perspective, what are the strengths of the current practice learning funding structure?
4. What are the limitations of the current practice learning funding structure?
5. Can you identify any gaps in the overall landscape of practice learning funding?
6. Any additional comments regarding the current practice learning funding structure or model:
7. What do you use the Administration Fee for?
8. Does the Administration Fee cover all the costs associated with its intended purpose within your institution?
9. If the Administration Fee does not cover all the costs, please provide details on how your institution covers the additional expenses?
10. What is the approximate shortfall your institution covers to supplement the Administration Fee?
11. Please describe specific areas of practice learning that your institution covers to supplement the Administration Fee for its intended purpose.
12. Do you consider the current minimum and maximum parameters of this stream of funding to be adequate in meeting the needs of the administration of practice learning?
13. Can you suggest an alternative to the existing model for this particular funding stream? What features would you like to see in this alternative funding model?
14. How do you use and distribute the Practice Learning Daily fee?
15. Please describe specific areas of practice learning that your institution covers to supplement the Practice Learning Daily Fee for its intended purpose.

16. Do you think HEIs should be responsible for administering payments to Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO) providers?
17. If not, can you suggest an alternative?
18. What is your current approach in administering payments to Independent Practice Educators? What are the reasons that influence this approach?
19. If payment is administered directly by the HEI, what is the current daily rate for IPEs?
20. How are student placement related travel expenses funded by the current funding allocation?
21. Are student placement travel expenses adequately funded?
22. What are the main challenges or issues faced by students in covering their placement related travel expenses?
23. Are there any additional support mechanisms or resources in place to assist students with their placement related travel expenses?
24. What changes could be made to the current funding structure to ensure that student placement travel expenses are adequately funded?
25. Currently, there is no bursary supporting Undergraduate Social Work students during their practice learning experience. Would your institution support this being introduced?
26. With regards to the introduction of practice learning bursaries for undergraduate students, would you support equity with Postgraduate Bursary rates?
27. What do you perceive as the potential benefits of introducing a practice learning bursary for undergraduate students? Do you have any reservations about this introduction? How would such a bursary...
28. Please provide a description of the nomination process used for nominating students for Postgraduate bursaries:
29. Do you find that the potential demand for PG student bursaries exceeds the number of students selected through the nomination process?
30. How can the nomination and bursary allocation process be improved for PG bursaries?
31. Any other comments regarding undergraduate or postgraduate student bursaries?

32. Please can you advise on how this grant has been used?
33. What are you currently using the grant for?
34. Has the guidance around this grant been clear?
35. Is the grant sufficient to fulfil its intended purpose? How do you address the shortfall or surplus?
36. What are some challenges or issues have you faced using this grant?
37. Please use the space below for anything you would like to add or any final comments you would like to share that we may have missed in the survey:
38. Would you be willing to be contacted by our research team to arrange an online interview to further discuss your responses and other relevant issues pertaining to practice learning funding?
39. If yes, please provide us with your contact details:

Online survey 2

Target group: 32 Local Authorities

Questions:

1. Name of the local authority
2. Role or position of the respondent within the local authority
3. From your local authority's perspective, what are the strengths of the current practice learning funding structure?
4. What are the limitations of the current practice learning funding structure?
5. Can you identify any gaps in the overall landscape of practice learning funding?
6. Any other comments regarding the current practice learning funding structure or model?
7. How does your local authority utilise the practice learning daily fee received to support practice placements?
8. In what specific ways is the funding used to meet the costs associated with practice placements?

9. Does the funding received fully cover all the costs incurred by the local authority in facilitating placements?
10. Has the funding allowed your local authority to increase its capacity to offer placements?
11. Has there been any challenges or limitations in utilising the funding effectively to support practice placements?
12. In what ways has the funding enabled your local authority to be innovative in the provision of placements?
13. Are there any specific initiatives or projects that have been implemented using the funding to enhance the quality of placements or increase capacity?
14. What additional support or resources would enhance the impact of the funding in supporting placements?
15. Do you have plans in place to expand the number of placements you provide? What factors influence this plan?
16. Has the Local Authority received the Resumption of Placement Grant/ Placement Support Grant for all students or only some?
17. How did your local authority utilise the Resumption of Placement Grant (£300 per student) received to support practice placements?
18. Was this £300 per student sufficient for its intended purpose or was there a shortfall? How did you address the shortfall or surplus?
19. Is the guidance for the use of this grant clear? Please comment.
20. What issues or limitations did you face using the Resumption of Placement Grant/ Placement Support Grant?
21. What are your suggestions on how the Placement Support Grant could be utilised in the future to effectively address the gaps in the current practice learning funding?
22. What is your Authority's current position on remunerating Practice Educators for taking social work students?
23. What do you think should be the national strategy for remunerating Practice Educators in Local authorities?
24. What is the main motivation for Practice Educators within your local authority to support students on placement?

25. What suggestions do you have for addressing challenges and pressures caused by a limited number of practice educators to support students on placement?
26. Does your Local Authority work with Independent Practice Educators (IPEs) to support students on statutory placements?
27. Please comment on your Authority's views on the use of IPEs in supervising students on statutory placements?
28. Please advise on the daily rate your Local authority pays Independent Practice Educators (IPEs):
29. Any additional comments regarding practice educators and/or independent practice educators:
30. Does your local authority cover travel costs incurred by students whilst on placement?
31. Please share more information regarding the financial support available to students for covering travel costs while on placement.
32. Please use the space below for anything you would like to add or any final comments you would like to share that we may have missed in the survey:
33. Would you be willing to be contacted by our research team to arrange an online interview to further discuss your responses and other relevant issues pertaining to practice learning funding?
34. If yes, please provide us with your contact details:

Online survey 3

Target group: 18 Third sector organisations

Questions:

1. Name of the organisation:
2. Your position/title in the organisation:
3. Your role in practice placements:
4. How long has your organisation hosted students on practice placements?
5. How does your organisation utilise the daily fee received from practice placements?

6. Is the provision of the daily fee a decisive factor in your organisation's decision to provide practice placements? Please comment.
7. In what way does the provision of the daily fee enable you to fund additional support, resources, or opportunities for students during their placements?
8. To what extent does your organisation rely on the daily fee to sustain the provision of practice placements for social work students?
9. Are you aware of the availability of the Placement Support Grant?
10. Has your organisation received the Placement Support Grant for students on placement?
11. How did your organisation utilise the Placement Support Grant (£300 per student) received to support practice placements?
12. Is the guidance for the use of this grant clear? Please comment.
13. Did you face any issues using or accessing the Placement Support Grant? Please comment.
14. Does the Link Worker in your organisation receive any reward or remuneration for their role in supervising students?
15. Do you believe link workers should receive some form of compensation or recognition for their contribution in practice placements? Please comment.
16. Does your organisation cover travel costs incurred by students whilst on placement?
17. Please share more information regarding the financial support available to students for covering travel costs while on placement.
18. Please use the space below for anything you would like to add or any final comments you would like to share that we may have missed in the survey:
19. Would you be willing to be contacted by our research team to arrange an online interview to further discuss your responses and other relevant issues pertaining to practice learning funding?
20. If yes, please provide us with your contact details:

Appendix III

Focus group discussion guide 1

Target group: HEI Practice Learning Leads

Length: approx. 1 hour

Location: MS Teams

1. Introductions
2. Explanation of data collection tool (Mentimeter) and aim of the discussion
3. Research scope and objectives
4. Administrative fee
 - a. What are the current issues that arise in relation to the administrative funding for practice learning?
5. Student funding
 - a. Are you supporting students with travel costs to and from placement and on placement? How are you funding this?
 - b. What systems or resources do you have in place to provide financial support to students on placement? How suitable are these funds?
 - c. How is the placement support grant used?
6. Placement funding
 - a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of HEIs administering payments to PLO providers
7. Looking ahead!
 - a. What questions do you have for administrative funding and payment of PLO providers?
 - b. What suggestions do you have for a more comprehensive system of student funding going forward?
8. Thank participants for their time and participation

Focus group discussion guide 2

Target group: Social Work Scotland Learning and Development Subgroup

Length: approx. 1 hour

Location: MS Teams

1. Introductions
2. Explanation of data collection tool (Mentimeter) and aim of the discussion
3. Research scope and objectives
4. Funding administration
 - a. What are your views regarding the current practice learning funding structure whereby HEIs administer the money based on student per placement day?
 - b. How are finances, in relation to practice learning, managed? Do you have control over the income and expenditure?
9. Practice educators
 - a. Have you faced any challenges in finding PEs to support placements within your LA? If so, what have these been?
 - b. What recommendations would you make that would maximise the number of active PEs in your local authority?
10. Maximising the number of placements
 - a. What, in your view, would lead to an increase in the number of placements available in your LA?
11. Future arrangements – Your recommendations!
 - a. What would be your recommendations for any future arrangements to payment of placement fees to Local Authorities?
 - b. What would be your recommendations for any future arrangements regarding management of the practice learning funding within your Local Authority?
12. Thank participants for their time and participation

Focus group discussion guide 3

Target group: Undergraduate students

Length: approx. 1 hour

Location: Zoom

1. Introductions
2. Explanation of data collection tool (Mentimeter) and aim of the discussion
3. Research scope and objectives
4. Student experience of study at university
 - a. Please tell us how undergraduate students typically fund their four years of the social work course?
 - b. From your knowledge, apart from SAAS loans, are there other sources of funding or grants available to social work students?
 - c. Do universities help with funding support in any way? E.g.: travel, books, equipment, advice and support.
5. Placement costs
 - a. Placements incur additional expenses. From your knowledge, please identify the additional costs students face when on placement.
 - b. Travel to and from placement – are you aware of any financial support for this? From whom?
 - c. Travel during placement – visits, meetings, etc. Are you aware of any financial support for this? From whom?
 - d. Equipment on placement – books, laptops, phones, desk equipment, etc – from your knowledge, how is this provided for?
6. Looking forward!
 - a. What recommendations would you make for the future funding of social work students taking the undergraduate course?

- b. What recommendations would you make for the future funding of social work students taking the undergraduate course?
 - c. Are there immediate changes you can identify which would aid the financial position of social work students?
 - d. In an ideal world where financial resources are not constrained, how would you like to see the position of social work students during their studies?
7. Additional comments
8. Thank participants for their time and participation

Focus group discussion guide 4

Target group: Practice educators

Length: approx. 1 hour

Location: MS Teams

1. Introductions
2. Explanation of data collection tool (Mentimeter) and aim of the discussion
3. Research scope and objectives
4. Motivations
 - a. What motivates you to supervise students?
 - b. What are the benefits in carrying out the role of PE?
 - c. What impact does the PE experience have on your practice?
5. Barriers
 - a. What are the barriers to carrying out the role regularly and effectively?
6. Support systems for Practice Educators
 - a. What systems of support currently exist for Practice Educators in your LA?
7. Looking ahead

- a. What ideas can you suggest for training and supporting practice educators in your authority?
 - b. What would encourage you to continue in the role of PE
 - c. What changes would lead to an increase in the amount of placement opportunities in LAs?
8. Thank participants for their time and participation