

Title of Report	Review of the principles and criteria applied to the assessment and approval of qualifications for registration.
Public/Confidential	Public
Summary/purpose of report	The report provides an overview of the proposed changes to the principles and criteria applied to the assessment and approval of qualifications for registration.
Recommendations	The Council is asked to approve the revised principles and criteria.
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Responsible Officer	Laura Lamb Acting Director of Workforce, Education and Standards
Link to Strategic Plan	The information in this report links to: Outcome 1: Trusted People who use services are protected by a workforce that is fit to practise. Outcome 2: Skilled Our work supports the workforce to deliver high standards of professional practice. Outcome 3: Confident Our work enhances the confidence, competence and wellbeing of the workforce.
Link to Risk Register	Risk 2: We fail to ensure that our workforce development function supports the workforce and employers to achieve the rights standards and qualifications to gain and maintain registration.
Impact Assessment	An Impact Assessment (IA) was completed.
Background papers	Assessment Principles Strategic Approach to Sector Qualifications and

	Learning Impact Assessment
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The functions contained in Section 58 of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 are delegated by Scottish Ministers to the SSSC. This includes ascertaining what education or training is required by persons who are, or wish to become, social service workers and setting standards for such workers.
2. The SSSC has a qualification-based register and sets the qualification requirements for each register group.
3. The SSSC applies principles and criteria to the assessment and approval of qualifications accepted for registration. They form the foundation of assessment for qualifications we accept.
4. The principles and criteria have been reviewed to ensure they:
 - remain fit for purpose and reflect current practice
 - are clear and easy to understand
 - continue to align with the other UK social service regulators and Standard Setting Organisations (SSOs) approach to qualifications.
5. Changes have been made to the language and structure of the principles and criteria to provide clarity and ease of use. The one substantial change is the removal of “meets registration criteria set by a nationally recognised regulatory body”. In practice we no longer do this as there are some qualifications accepted by other regulators that we do not accept or are accepted subject to a compensatory measure as they do not meet our standards.
6. The Council is asked to approve the revised principles and criteria.

BACKGROUND

7. There are four SSOs within the UK who collectively, under the umbrella of Skills for Care and Development (SfCD), have responsibility to maintain and develop the national occupational standards for the sector. The SSOs are:
 - Skills for Care (SfC) – England
 - Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) – Northern Ireland
 - Social Care Wales (SCW) – Wales
 - Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) – Scotland
8. The SfCD partnership have agreed [Assessment Principles](#) and a shared [Strategic Approach to Sector Qualifications and Learning](#) ensuring a high quality workforce for early years, children and young people’s services, social work and social care (both adults and children) across the UK.

9. The principles set the minimum standards required for approval and assessment of qualifications throughout the UK.
10. Using the same overarching principles across the four nations promotes transferability across the UK of recognised qualifications within the sector which ensures consistency in practice and supports movement of the workforce. This approach also supports alignment in the qualification requirements set by each of the social service regulators.
11. The SSSC principles and criteria for the assessment of qualifications are based upon, and align with, the shared UK approach.
12. On average we assess 505 UK qualifications and between 10-25 non-Uk social work qualifications per year to determine if they meet our requirements for registration. Qualifications can be accepted, rejected or accepted in part with a compensatory measure.
13. The SSSC regularly responds to enquiries and complaints from individuals when the qualifications they present for assessment do not meet our requirements.
14. When responding registrants, employers and learning providers are directed to the principles and criteria to explain why their qualification is not accepted.
15. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that the current principles and criteria are not easily understood, and often further explanation is required.

REVIEW FINDINGS

16. The overall approach we take to the assessment of qualifications remains fit for purpose. The principles continue to underpin the qualifications we accept and develop for registration.
17. Our principles and criteria continue to align across the UK.
18. Review of feedback from our stakeholders through our enquiries and complaint processes highlighted changing the language, structure within the current SSSC principles and criteria would provide further clarification for individuals.
19. It was identified that there was a lack of clarity about which standards and frameworks the principles and criteria were referring to.
20. In practice the SSSC no longer automatically accepts qualifications that meet the registration criteria set by another nationally recognised regulatory body. For example, a number of English social work

qualifications are no longer generic and focus only on adult or children’s social work and therefore do not fully meet the Scottish Standards in Social Work Education. Individuals holding such qualifications applying to register with the SSSC are therefore registered subject to a compensatory measure. In order to protect the integrity of our Register and to ensure the SSSC is not required to adhere to decisions made by other regulatory bodies, this particular criterion should be removed.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA

21. To address these issues and to provide clarity for individuals, it is proposed that the principles and criteria be changed as follows:

Current wording	Proposed wording
<p>The key principles are that any award must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrate observed, assessed practice and learning • be recognised within a national qualification's framework • recognise the importance of underpinning knowledge and a value base that is consistent with the Code of Practice for Social Service Workers. 	<p>The key principles are that any award must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrate observed, assessed practice and learning • support safe and effective care that aims to enhance the well-being of individuals • reflect the standards of practice, values and behaviour that are consistent with the SSSC Code of Practice for Social Service Workers.

<p>The criteria we set for qualifications is that any award:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporates assessment against occupational standards or is based on the assessment of work-based competence • is designed to match a particular function or range of functions within social services, or meets registration criteria set by a nationally recognised regulatory body • is subject to a recognised and regulated form of external • verification or assessment. 	<p>The criteria we set for qualifications is that any award must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include direct observation of naturally occurring practice throughout the assessment process • be based on National Occupational Standards (NOS), designed for the needs of the social work, social care and children and young people's workforce • be included at the relevant level on either the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) ○ the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) for England Wales and Northern Ireland and endorsed by Skills for Care • be accredited by regulated, approved and quality assured awarding bodies.
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CONSULTATION

22. The principles and criteria have been reviewed in consultation and through engagement with:

- UK partner SSOs and regulatory bodies
- Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF)
- Scottish Awarding Body Forum which represents:
 - employers
 - Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
 - external qualification verifiers
 - SQA Accreditation
 - independent learning providers
 - further education representatives

RISKS

23. Developing and setting the standards for practice, setting the qualification requirements, and quality assuring the education and training are part of our regulatory function. There are principles, criteria, established rules and

requirements set around assessment and standards that we must adhere to. When the guidance allows, we take a proportionate approach, however we are bound by the legislative framework that exists therefore we have a cautious risk appetite.

24. Failure to implement the revised principles and criteria will result in continued confusion leading to enquiries and complaints which could damage our reputation.

IMPLICATIONS

Resourcing

25. There are no additional resourcing requirements identified as part of this report.

Compliance

26. There are no compliance issues required as part of this report.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

27. An Impact Assessment was completed. The proposed changes to the principles and criteria largely have a neutral impact although positively impact on employers and individuals providing additional clarity and ease of understanding. The changes also reduce the possible inequity of accepting qualifications for registration with the SSSC that have set and assessed by other regulators rather than assessed against our standards, principles and criteria.

CONCLUSION

28. The Council is asked to approve the revised principles and criteria.
29. Due to the Future Proofing Programme go live date of 3 June 2024 it is proposed that, if approved, we delay communicating the changes until August 2024.