

**Adult Social Care**

**Earn and Learn College Placements**

**Blueprint**

This Blueprint was developed as one of the workstreams of the Joint Social Services Taskforce (JSST), co-chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA. The Taskforce has been taking forward short to medium term actions to address priority issues for the social care and social work workforces. This Blueprint aims to address issues of recruitment into the Adult Social Care sector, while supporting people to undertake relevant qualifications. This model is not intended to be a mandatory approach for social care employers or colleges, and there is no specific funding stream to support its adoption. It offers employers an option for consideration when developing recruitment plans, taking into account their own business models and affordability within their organisation.

## **Introduction**

This Blueprint offers support and ideas for Adult Social Care employers who are considering recruitment within their organisations, and ways they can support new entrants into careers in social care.

College placements are a supported entry route into a career in the sector, providing students with relevant learning and opportunities to undertake practical activities in a social care setting. Students who are employed and paid by their placement providers gain valuable experience and can also provide valuable staffing hours in workplaces: this scenario is referred to as an earn and learn college placement.

This Blueprint builds on examples of earn and learn college placement models already underway, highlighting how colleges, social care employers and students can work effectively in partnership to facilitate these opportunities within their local areas.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach for earn and learn college placements, and this Blueprint aims to offer high level principles of how these opportunities can be facilitated. Colleges and employers have flexibility to build specific approaches for their own local contexts.

## What is an earn and learn college placement?

An earn and learn college placement is where students receive wages for the placement hours they undertake as part of the course requirements of a social care course or qualification they are studying. The student becomes a part-time employee on a fixed short-term contract, subject to the usual terms and conditions of employment. The costs of paying the wages of a student comes from an employer's own budget.

This type of arrangements can also sometimes be referred to as 'internships', or 'paid college placements', 'employed placements' or 'employed status students'.

Earn and learn college placements can be used to help study towards a range of qualifications which support entry routes into social care roles, including those required for professional registration with the SSSC.

This Blueprint is not aimed at supporting employees who are already in permanent social care employment studying for social care benchmark qualifications as part of their existing role. It focuses on supporting students who are new to the sector.

Courses which require students to undertake a placement which could be undertaken through earn and learn college placements include:

NC Health and Social Care (SCQF Level 6)

SVQ Social Services and Healthcare (SCQF Level 6)

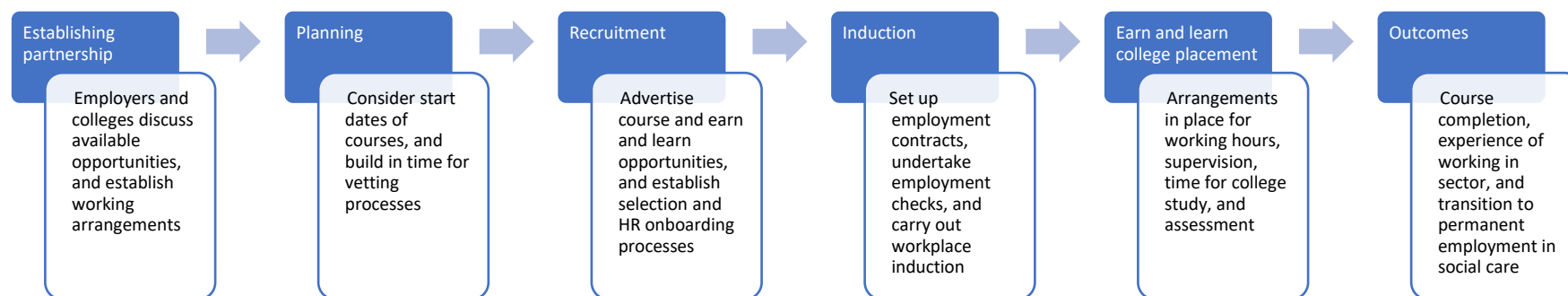
SVQ Social Services and Healthcare (SCQF Level 7)

HNC Social Services (SCQF Level 7)

## Benefits of earn and learn college placements

For the sector	For the employer	For the student
<p><b>Partnership working:</b> Building capacity within the workforce and meeting recruitment needs of employers, while providing paid employment for college students undertaking study for social care roles.</p>	<p><b>Building capacity:</b> Building experience of supervision within an employer’s existing workforce, potentially assisting with work towards relevant professional qualifications. Colleges can support existing staff in developing mentoring and coaching skills.</p>	<p><b>Paid employment:</b> Students earn money through their placement, which helps support them while they study. If there is secure employment and income for the duration of the course, this can support retention.</p>
<p><b>Recruitment:</b> Supporting new entrants into a social care career, while giving hands-on experience. Earn and learn college placements make entry routes accessible, helping to remove financial barriers for young people or career changers. A joint approach to recruitment between employers and colleges can link to workforce development plans for a sustainable recruitment pipeline, and save costs and time.</p>	<p><b>Supporting service provision:</b> students will be motivated to complete their course and obtain a permanent position. Students can also bring fresh perspectives to discuss with workplace supervisors, helping to develop care practices. Clients may welcome students as an opportunity to meet new people, and younger clients may be able to relate to students in a similar demographic.</p>	<p><b>Completion Rates:</b> Existing practice has shown high completion rates for courses with placements which are undertaken on paid basis, demonstrating the value of both financial and practical support. Alongside development of the student’s knowledge and skills, pastoral support for any arising issues can be provided both by the college and employer.</p>
<p><b>Retention:</b> Students gain experience of social care employment early in their career journey, and employers can consider suitability for permanent employment, helping with continuity in provision. Experience gained also supports future progression within an organisation, with students building a strong foundation of knowledge.</p>	<p><b>Developing students’ awareness:</b> Employers have the chance to build awareness of the types of roles on offer and show that social care is a rewarding career, while also highlighting the expectations of paid employment.</p>	<p><b>Real-world experience:</b> Students gain practical paid work experience that complements their studies and builds their skills, while working towards a career in social care. They can also find out the types of roles they are well-suited for, and their strengths in a workplace environment.</p>

## Steps to establish earn and learn college placements



### Establishing partnership

Establishing earn and learn college placements provides a great opportunity to build partnerships with your local college on recruitment, while supporting students in their learning. As a first step, you can approach the college in your local area, and discuss opportunities within your organisation and how they fit with your recruitment needs. Alternatively colleges, or individual students, may contact you direct to highlight opportunities to support an earn and learn placement.

#### *What this looks like in practice:*

- These initial discussions will cover the types of roles on offer within your organisation, how many are available and the location of the posts. The college can discuss how the courses they run fit with your roles, and how the timing of course placements align with your planning for available posts.
- Colleges have key points of contact you can discuss placement opportunities with. This could be a Workplace Co-ordinator or Head of Department. As the placement progresses, a Course Tutor or Guidance Lecturer at the college will be the contact for any operational or individual student issues.
- You will discuss arrangements for ways of working with the college, including how to keep in regular contact, to start the process of planning for the delivery of the earn and learn college placement.

- These early discussions should build a common understanding of requirements, and break down any barriers relating to language or jargon.
- Colleges will take steps to assess your workplace on providing a suitable learning environment for the student, following their usual placement Risk Assessment process.
- There may be opportunities to work collaboratively on designing courses which meets employers' and students' needs (e.g. Glasgow Clyde College case study below). Capacity for developing these types of arrangements should be discussed with your local college, and time built in for planning and design before recruitment takes place.

### Planning

Once you have established a positive partnership with the college, you can start the planning for the placement. Close working at this stage will help to make the arrangements a success for both you and the students. It's important to build in enough lead time to get arrangements in place.

#### *What this looks like in practice:*

- There is some flexibility on the time of the year you can work with colleges to agree earn and learn college placements for upcoming courses. Colleges can discuss course start dates and timelines with you, and it's often helpful to make arrangements well in advance of a course commencing to allow time for college and employer HR processes to be completed. For example, this might include ensuring lead time for students to apply for college funding, or for their qualification registration with SQA or other awarding body.
- Students won't be able to commence an earn and learn college placement until the PVGs and other vetting is complete, so time for these processes should also be built into plans.
- It's beneficial for students if placement arrangements are in place for the early stages of their course, so they can learn and build their practical skills in line with progress through their college course work.
- You may prefer to set placements up close to the student's course start date, to fit with 'real-time' staffing changes and supervision availability within your organisation, and this could be discussed with the college.
- There should remain an element of choice for each student on whether they want to undertake their course placement hours on a paid or unpaid basis. Where a course has been set up for the whole cohort to undertake placement hours through paid employment, this expectation will be discussed with the student at the outset.

*“Earn and learn college placements reflect our belief in fair recognition of candidates’ contributions and demonstrate our commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.” – Mary McKechnie, Abbotsford Care*

## Recruitment

This is the stage when you get to meet students interested in a career in social care. Working with a college on recruitment can bring a range of benefits, tapping into a wider audience of potential candidates who are keen to undertake courses which can help them meet their career goals.

*What this looks like in practice:*

- You can take a joint approach to recruitment work with your college. Colleges hold information sessions or open days to highlight courses and placement opportunities for learners, and you can support this work with college staff, helping to discuss early on with potential candidates what positive opportunities social care offers, and what roles involve.
- There may be opportunities to link in with wider recruitment initiatives the college is engaged with, such as DWP local jobs fairs, Developing the Young Workforce events or social care recruitment events. Working together on these types of events can save resources and time.
- Together you should consider how recruitment for earn and learn college placements fits with your usual recruitment and corporate processes e.g. you may use My Job Scotland as your recruitment portal, while colleges usually work on the basis of a student application.
- A joint selection process could be developed and agreed that meets the needs of both you and the college, but doesn’t involve the applicant repeating actions. This could include, for example, joint interviews with representatives from the college and employer both involved in the selection process.
- Some students may seek out and secure an offer of short-term employment to fulfil the course placement requirements on an individual basis, rather than through a joint or wider recruitment exercise.
- Colleges may have capacity to support the student prepare for recruitment, for example through their Employability Advisor.
- It can be helpful at this stage to be clear with students what the next steps are once they finish their course, such as any support for entry into longer-term employment, through offers like guaranteed interviews.

## Induction

Arranging a positive induction experience for the student ensures they can make a great start in their new role, while setting out the expectations of paid employment and meeting your own corporate requirements. As they will have accepted an offer of employment they will be deemed to be an employee, and the usual induction and onboarding should be made available as for any new employee.

### *What this looks like in practice:*

- The student will become an employee of your organisation, covered by your terms and conditions. You will be responsible for setting the relevant employment requirements for the student, and the student will follow all expectations and HR processes. This should also involve setting out the salary and any benefits, such as arrangements for accrual and use of a pro-rata annual leave entitlement.
- During induction, working together to build an understanding of the responsibilities of the employer, college, and student is important:
  - expectations for the student will be set out through a short-term fixed contract – an example of a contract from Glasgow HSCP is available as [separate document](#).
  - the college and employer may also wish to draw up a memorandum of understanding or agreement on their respective roles during the student's placement – an example of this from Forth Valley College is available as a [separate document](#).
- You should put in place appropriate insurance for the student for the role they will be undertaking.
- This may be the first employment experience of a student, so expectations should be clear from the outset. Contracts should set out the work the student is expected to undertake, including any considerations where they are under-18, and time should be set aside to discuss this with the student.
- As with other employees, the student will need to be registered with the SSSC and be PVG checked.
- The application for the PVG check should be carried out by the organisation who makes the 'suitability decision' – i.e. whoever decides whether the individual student is suitable for the role. For earn and learn college placements, where the employer is taking the decision to make an offer of employment to the student they will carry out a PVG scheme check.
- Where international students have been recruited, visa requirements should also be considered. There may be limitations on the number of hours which international students are able to work.
- Where you are facilitating earn and learn college placements for a cohort of multiple learners, joint workplace inductions may be an option, to streamline the process and make best use of staff resource.



- Support for students during induction will be provided by both the college and the employer. It's helpful to discuss curriculum and timetables with the college to ensure they align with expectations in your organisation. It can also be helpful to set interim milestones for the placement, to support the student in recording their progress.
- Colleges will normally do some relevant induction training/activities with students before they start a placement. You can discuss with the college what the student has already covered. While some induction is nationally recognised (e.g. Manual Handling Passport, TURAS Prevention of Infection) standards around training may vary depending on the role. For example, your service may deal with complex physical needs, requiring detailed or bespoke moving and assistance training.

*“What an opportunity this is - getting paid to learn and make friends is amazing and something I never thought I would be good at.” – Glasgow Clyde College student*

### Earn and Learn College Placement

Once the student is undertaking their earn and learn college placement, this is the real opportunity for them to gain experience of working in paid social care employment, and build their knowledge and skills alongside providing staffing hours within your organisation.

#### *What it looks like in practice:*

- The student will be supervised on placement by an experienced member of staff. The supervisor should have information on the expectations of the student, and be supported to have a mentoring conversation with them. You may wish to explore professional learning opportunities in coaching or mentoring for the supervisor, to support their own career development, alongside providing effective support for the student.
- The SQA units within courses which lead to qualifications will have specific hours and learning requirements which need to be completed during a placement – the college and employer should work together to ensure the course requirements are met, particularly where the specific objectives might not be part of a standard paid role at a similar level.
- A flexible approach to placement hours, agreed in conjunction with the college, employer, and student, is a good starting point. Where there are expectations of shiftwork and set hours for particular roles, it can be useful to include this as part of the placement.
- You should liaise with the college and student to ensure students have protected time to undertake their college learning, and flexibility on shifts should be offered to enable attendance at college. The employer should not have the employee on shift on dedicated college dates.

- Where the student may take on additional shifts during college holidays or non-teaching days through, for example, bank arrangements, any student in employment will continue to adhere to their terms and conditions.
- The responsibility to assess students against the course requirements remains with the college. Content delivery and assessment approaches will be agreed in advance, to avoid repetition for the student and over-assessment by college staff. College tutors and workplace supervisors should maintain regular contact to look for opportunities to assess practical skills, therefore reducing the assessment burden. Developing a plan of milestones can support assessment planning.
- Systems should be put in place for any areas of concern to be raised by the college, employer or student. An early monitoring system can help to ensure any issues can be addressed quickly, to avoid any problems with continuing with the course and placement. This should consider how to deal with performance issues, both in terms of meeting employment standards, and/or course requirements.

*“The students demonstrate such warmth that I would be happy for any one of them to look after me.”* – Glasgow HSCP staff member

### Outcomes

Through the earn and learn college placement, you will have supported the student to gain a social care qualification, helping them transition to a permanent role in the social care sector. You will have had a first-hand experience of employing the student, which will help you to consider their suitability for a long-term role in your organisation.

#### *What this looks like in practice:*

- Students on earn and learn college placements can add real value to your workforce, often demonstrating enthusiasm and willingness to learn.
- You can consider offering guaranteed interviews, where students from placements can apply for a permanent post within your organisation, in recognition of the learning and experience the student has gained.
- Employing the student on a permanent basis can support continuity in service provision, with the student having already become familiar with your practices and built relationships with your service users.
- Where the student takes up permanent employment in the social care sector, colleges can advise on additional courses or qualifications the individual could undertake in the future, to support their ongoing career development.

## Cases studies

### **Glasgow Clyde College – Partnership with Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership**

At Glasgow Clyde College we are committed to ensuring our courses are relevant and our students are well-prepared for their future careers. Our commitment to working with industry partners involves engaging in open and honest discussion about our curriculum portfolio offer and how we can work together to meet the needs of the future workforce. As the largest Health and Social Care provider in Glasgow/Scotland, we already worked closely with Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership (GHSCP) to arrange placements and work opportunities for our students and we began to discuss the challenges the sector faced in workforce recruitment and the skills, knowledge and resilience required as our students transition into employees in the future workforce.

The Health and Social Care sector faced significant pressures during the COVID pandemic years and continues to see challenges in sustaining a resilient workforce as the recovery years evolve. In particular, adult social care was identified as an area which was hard to recruit and retain staff for with many care homes struggling to fill vacancies.

It became clear from discussions that our offer of standard full academic year, full-time NQ courses no longer matched the needs of GHSCP as an employer and their future workforce recruitment strategy. They needed staff to be trained well and to be able to join their workforce at pace. Collectively, we planned an offer that would create a bespoke 18-week course (SCQF Level 5) involving college learning and, importantly, an ongoing paid internship with the GHSCP. On successful completion, students are guaranteed an interview for a full-time position with GHSCP, offering job security and a clear career progression pathway. Students enrolled in the course are paid the Glasgow Living Wage - the first social care course in the UK to offer an earn and learn placement as part of its programme.

Having an earn and learn placement makes this course unique within the sector and offers huge benefits to the students on the course. The course was designed for those with a genuine interest in pursuing a career in adult social care and provides the opportunity to learn and develop the skills required to succeed in the sector, both in the classroom and on the job. Students were matched to placements with their location, skills and interests in mind to offer a bespoke and tailored approach to learning.

This innovative approach ensures our students gain valuable experience and are well-equipped to transition into their future roles, helping to address the ongoing challenges in the Health and Social Care sector.

We agreed to offer one pilot cohort, with a second in mind following evaluation and with potential to model this across other sectors.

Before the course planning and design started, both organisations identified key staff who would be responsible for liaison and communication. This was critical in ensuring applicants experienced a seamless recruitment process. Both parties provided in-person input at a number of information sessions, and these were supported by colleagues who could provide expert advice, for example, Student Funding from the college and HR from the partnership.

Significant time was spent in joint planning of course content and design to meet the needs of future workplace roles. This included teaching content in a logical and sequential manner to complement the workplace activities, with college staff redesigning some existing materials and producing new, bespoke content. This joint and systematic approach ensured that learning and teaching was building on workplace experience at the right time and in the right place.

The first cohort were recruited in August 2023, with 11 students successfully completing in January 2024. The impact of the benefit of this experience for these students cannot be underestimated. Some in the cohort had never worked before and successfully navigated the process to become a caring, reliable and successful employee. Staff really valued the experience of delivering this new model positively with feedback that an accelerated pace of learning and capacity to grow in confidence in the workplace was clearly evident and how quickly the students flourished into skilled employees.

A mid-way evaluation took place and amendments to the second cohort, who started in January 2024, were agreed. A full evaluation of the year has once again resulted in many positive outcomes and recommendations for the future.

Regular operational meetings supported the development of really positive relationships between GHSCP and GCC staff, always keen to evaluate and improve. As a result of this, our scope into working with more organisations and other sectors is expanding on a similar model for 2024/5.

The full impact of this collaboration for GHSCP can be seen in this video, along with feedback from students, which has been overwhelmingly positive: <https://youtu.be/IU7AXkPml4U>.

The programme was highlighted in the Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement Achievement report 2023/4 [https://www.sfc.ac.uk/assurance-accountability/outcome-agreements-listing/#dearflip-df\\_54184/3/](https://www.sfc.ac.uk/assurance-accountability/outcome-agreements-listing/#dearflip-df_54184/3/)

We are in discussion with a number of other organisations to discuss similar models based on this for their future workforce recruitment and SSSC are following our progress in line with potential future developments in certification and qualification.

*Claire Glen*  
*Assistant Principal, Glasgow Clyde College*

**Partnership between Fife College, Fife HSCP and Abbotsford Care  
Piloting earn and learn placements for HNC Social Services**

At Abbotsford, we are committed to providing individuals with meaningful opportunities to explore a career in care. By offering earn and learn college placements, we ensure that candidates have the chance to become a part of our team while experiencing the full scope of a care assistant's role.

This immersive experience allows individuals to understand the day-to-day responsibilities, challenges, and rewards of working in the care sector. It also enables them to develop practical skills, build confidence, and form genuine connections with colleagues and residents.

Earn and learn college placements reflect our belief in fair recognition of candidates' contributions and demonstrate our commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. Through these opportunities, we aim to inspire and nurture future care professionals, ensuring they are well-prepared and motivated to deliver the highest standards of care.

*Mary McKechnie, Training, Development and Onboarding Co-ordinator  
Abbotsford Care*

I am eternally grateful for the opportunity Fife College presented me - I think it is a fantastic initiative. Abbotsford were a top tier company to work for and I enjoyed every shift I had with them; if it wasn't for that placement I wouldn't have the job I have now.

If I had any concerns/questions, I could take this up with either college lecturers or my assigned SQA assessor, or indeed Abbotsford themselves.

Abbotsford were always considerate towards the fact that I was a student employee. They don't expect you to be up to the standards of the other staff straight away. I started off shadowing for a week or 2, then began to do the easier tasks and worked my way up from there. I gained valuable experience and made strong relationships with my co-workers while on the placement. I even stayed on the bank staff when the placement was finished and continued to do shifts as I enjoyed it that much.

When on placement I was required at times to write up about my experience in order to gain my SQA qualification, yet another valuable perk of the placement.

The placement was 9-3 Monday and Tuesday and then college on the other days of the week which I found more than manageable. I enjoyed the routine I had while I was at college and on placement, and it made me appreciate my college course a lot more knowing that they provided me with this opportunity.

*Fife College HNC Student*

### **Forth Valley College - Securing employment for placement on HNC Social Services**

*In this case study the student describes her experience of approaching an employer and agreeing a part time contract in a local care home. She explains that this gives her the opportunity to earn a salary while completing the HNC Social Services at Forth Valley College*

In August 2024, I began my HNC Social Services course at Forth Valley College, securing a practical placement was essential to meet the course requirements. During my interview, the college informed me that paid employment would be acceptable as my placement. The placement needed to align with unit criteria for SVQ assessments, and the college student placement assessment as an appropriate learning environment.

To fulfil this requirement, I approached Glenbervie Care Home, Larbert where I expressed interest in a care worker position that could meet my 15-hour-per-week placement requirement. After discussing with me my academic goals and responsibilities, the management agreed to accommodate my needs, giving me short term part time contract. This has enabled me to gain hands-on experience while meeting the course's expectations.

This role has proven beneficial on multiple levels. Financially, the paid employment helps meet my household obligations and social needs, allowing me to concentrate more fully on my studies. Additionally, being a paid employee has positively impacted my integration into the organisation. I feel a stronger sense of belonging and team contribution, which has, in turn, enriched my experience and commitment to the role. Overall, this position has provided a valuable balance between academic and practical learning, which I believe will strengthen both my personal and professional development in social care.

*Forth Valley HNC Student*

## Further information

- Information on colleges which offer social care courses can be found within the ['Next Steps'](#) section of the SSSC Careers Toolkit
- Skills for Care, the workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England, have produce a [guide](#) on employing workers aged 16 and 17.
- ACAS have produced [advice](#) on the pay and hours for younger workers
- HSE information on [young people at work](#), including on training and supervision
- Support on issues relating to international recruitment can be found within the [Centre for Workforce Supply' Recruitment into Adult Social Care Toolkit](#)
- Further information on student visas can be found on the [UK Government website](#)

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Abbotsford Care  
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College Development Network  
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Fife Health and Social Care Partnership  
Forth Valley College  
Glasgow Clyde College  
Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership  
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Scottish Care  
Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)  
Society of Personnel Development Scotland (SPDS)  
South Lanarkshire College