

Housing education and professionalism



Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Scotland

Key messages

- Investing in qualifications, education and continuing professional development (CPD) builds assurance among social landlords and board/committees that staff have the skills and knowledge to deliver on tenants' priorities. Evidence shows that CPD requirements are highly valued for individual employees by giving them a foundation of knowledge and confidence to do their job well and for businesses as they offer ongoing confidence around compliance and consistency. All of which improves outcomes for tenants.
- We want the Scottish government to introduce a registration scheme for housing management practitioners to support increased professionalism. This would be supported by national standards of practice and CPD requirements for those working in housing management. This will ensure housing professionals are part of a dedicated workforce similar to social workers, teachers and nurses, ensuring they are supported to continually improve their skills and knowledge and make them better at their job on behalf of tenants.
- In England, the UK government has introduced qualification requirements for senior social housing managers. This qualification has an explicit focus on housing management professionals. Whereas in Scotland letting agency staff are expected to hold a qualification and commit to 20 hours of CPD every three years. Requiring a commitment to learning among social housing professionals will support better professional practice by creating higher expectations for the posts.

1. Context for change

Scotland's rented sector manages around one million homes and is growing. It employs tens of thousands of practitioners to help manage these homes and support their tenants. The vast majority of landlords and staff across all tenures engage well with their residents and listen to them with respect.

The publication of Housing to 2040 makes it clear there will be increasing expectations on landlords, letting agents and housing practitioners to deliver even more value for tenants and a higher level of service for tenants across all tenures. As such, there is a responsibility on housing organisations to ensure they have a skilled, knowledgeable and ethical workforce that can improve housing outcomes for their communities.

In addition, we note the financial challenge facing the social housing sector with arrears at record levels in 2022/23 and the rise in the number of registered social landlords (RSLs) reporting deficits. 15 reported in 2021/22 compared to seven and five in the prior two years - the highest number recorded since 2014/15 although figures for 2022/23 are not yet available. The challenge for the sector at this time of change, transformation and uncertainty is not to shrink and disengage with its peers but instead recognise the essential nature of new knowledge, skills and learning to manage the change.

A principal component of this is the approach to staff recruitment, development and retention. How can housing organisations ensure they are employing the right candidates and supporting staff with the values, skills, behaviours and knowledge that they need? This briefing sets out the case for how CPD and a statutory underpinning to the role of housing professionals can support Scotland's housing organisations to improve their own performance for the benefit of their tenants and communities.



2. Why do we need professional registration?

Being registered means housing practitioners are part of an identified professional workforce like social workers, teachers and nurses. As well as registering as a housing practitioner, individuals would be expected to adhere to a relevant code of practice. Failure to meet the standards of the code could ultimately lead to an individual being removed from the register and in turn, losing their job.

The process of professional registration creates a public transparency around the skills and knowledge of housing practitioners. It also gives wider confidence to service users and stakeholders of the competency of the sector and the workforce.

As part of the registration scheme, all practitioners would be required to achieve a certified level of CPD. This would be determined by the registering body.

We also consider that individuals who are registered with other relevant regulatory bodies such as SSSC or HCPC would not be required to also obtain a housing registration.

Once registered, housing professionals would be able to access a range of resources to support their learning, improve their skills and confidence in their roles and meet their CPD requirements.

3. How would it work in practice?

The existing [CIH code of conduct and code of ethics](#) and [professional standards](#) provide an existing example of the standards housing management practitioners could be held to and expected to meet in their everyday work.

Practitioners themselves would be responsible for making sure they meet the required standards and that nothing they do, or don't do, harms the wellbeing of tenants and customers.

The code of practice, however, would only be part of a wider package of legislation, practice standards and employers' policies and procedures that housing professionals must meet.


We would also expect any code to prescribe the CPD required from housing professionals to ensure they remain professionally competent and up to date in their learning.

The registration body would audit practitioners' compliance with CPD and ensure that it is met.

The registration body would also take action where practitioners do not meet the standards of the code, up to and including de-registration. CIH is an existing professional body that could manage social housing registration and CPD.

4. How would CPD improve professional practice?

A commitment to lifelong professional development can drive improvement in performance and tenant housing outcomes where CPD requirements are overseen by an appropriate registration body. These CPD requirements include:

- **Specific (customer):** Practitioners clearly know what activity counts as CPD, how long it will take to complete and how to report it in a timely manner.
 - **Measurable (customer):** Practitioners know how much each activity contributes towards their target, how much of their CPD target remains and how long they have left to complete their CPD within each window.
 - **Achievable (customer):** CPD must be challenging for practitioners but also achievable. The registration body must provide a library of options to support practitioners to achieve their desired CPD outcomes but also recognise the relevance of other providers in providing CPD that meet the registration body's CPD thresholds.
 - **Improves performance (customer):** CPD offers practitioners an opportunity to reflect on exercises and consider how it will improve their performance.
 - **Measurable (registration body):** The registration body will be able to assess members to ensure that CPD has been met in a pragmatic and proportional way.
- 

- **Appropriate cross sector (registration):** The registration body must offer enough content to support learners wherever they work in the housing sector and at whatever level. This must be available both in person and online to meet the needs of members where they work.

A [2023 review of mandatory letting agent CPD](#) and qualifications in Scotland shows there were tangible benefits of mandatory qualification and CPD in the letting agency sector. Alongside improving professional practice and public trust, the benefits of the qualification were evidenced as:

- Giving individual employees a foundation of knowledge and confidence to do their job well and providing opportunities for career development, with qualification in the sector now being far more common than it was three years ago.
- For businesses, the qualification and CPD give ongoing assurance around compliance and consistency, and it is considered to improve reputation in the sector as a whole.

Beyond the findings of the review of letting agent CPD and qualification, we know that actively pursuing professional development ensures that knowledge and skills stay relevant and up to date. It also allows practitioners to be aware of changing trends and directions in the sector and helps ensure academic and practical qualifications do not become out-dated or obsolete, allowing individuals to continually 'up skill' and ultimately delivering benefits to the individual, their profession and the public.

5. What CPD is currently available?

CPD helps housing practitioners to develop their knowledge and advance their careers. It also ensures practitioners can better meet the needs of tenants and gives them the knowledge and skills to manage risk, identify potential problems, access a network, provide challenge, and provide assurance.

Depending on their job role, practitioners can choose to access different types of housing qualifications through different centres across the UK, including the University of Glasgow, University of Stirling, City of Glasgow College, Dundee and Angus College, New College Lanarkshire and SHARE. These institutions, alongside the CIH Housing Academy, provide CIH accredited housing qualifications from Level 2 to Level 5 as well as post graduate qualifications.

Alongside this, a range of providers such as SFHA, CIH, SHARE, and Homes for Scotland offer a range of relevant CPD from attending conferences, to webinars and training to keep on top of the changing policy and regulatory environment.

6. Across the UK

Changes to the Social Housing (Regulation) Act will require social housing managers in England to receive an appropriate-level housing management qualification, regulated by Ofqual, equivalent to a Level 4 Certificate or Level 5 Diploma in Housing, or a foundation degree from CIH. This will apply to senior housing executives and senior housing managers.

It is estimated by the UK Government that these changes may mean qualifications are required for around 20,000 housing management professionals working in England. We expect the Social Housing Regulator in England to consult on how the qualification requirement can be recognised in early 2024 and for any requirement to come into effect from late 2024.