



Executive Summary Candidacy Study

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Introduction

On May 16th, 2016 The Executive Council of the Nova Scotia Government proclaimed amendments to the Social Workers Act, bringing a renewed mandate to the newly named Nova Scotia College of Social Workers. These Amendments placed protection of the public as the priority for the College of Social Workers. It also renewed the organization's commitment to promote the values and the profession of social work.

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers exists to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

The Amendments also renewed the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers Candidacy program. The social worker candidacy period is designed to provide graduates of recognized schools of social work with a wide range of social work learning opportunities and experiences, as well as supervised assistance and guidance in the development of competent social work practice through the integration of academic knowledge, applied skill, and ethical practice

This study was conducted by two Student Research Assistants and examines the current Candidacy program. The study assesses local and professionally-based perceptions of Candidacy by Registered Social Worker's and Candidates. From this, themes were established and relevant recommendations developed for the use of the NSCSW.

Research assistant students were contract employees as part of a Canada Summer Jobs grant, a federal employment initiative for students. Despite the temporary nature of their position, they were treated as NSCSW employees and therefore, there is the potential for conflict, despite their training and efforts in research ethics. The research assistants disclose that they are both white, English-speaking females, of settler heritage and therefore are privileged and part of the dominant discourse, which may shape their perspectives and recommendations.

Finally, the research assistants wish to acknowledging that they are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) people first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations (CAUT, n.d.).

Research

Literature Review

The literature review examined the national and international requirements to social work registration to gain insight on the requirements of other health professions and explore the academic perspectives on social work registration. The literature exemplified how jurisprudence

is shown in a variety of ways in diverse health professions and regulatory social work bodies. No conclusive support was found for the evidence of an entry to practice examination as effective mechanism for jurisprudence in practice. However, as seen in Gursansky, Quinn, & LeSuer (2010), and Rehn & Kalman (2016) the capacity of mentorship has been shown to help new practitioners come to a greater understanding of the ethical intricacies of practice. The analysis of diverse health professions entry to practice requirements also showed no conclusive evidence to support a particular method of jurisprudence standards. Numerous social work colleges and other health professions utilize an exam whilst others enact mentorship and supervision requirements. These requirements are detailed in the tables below.

Social Work Regulatory Body	Method of Assessing Jurisprudence/ Entry to Practice Requirements
Nova Scotia College of Social Workers	Candidacy period (2573 hours for MSW, 3859 hours for BSW)
Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers	Proof of social work education, two professional references (at least one from another social worker)
New Brunswick Association of Social Workers	Proof of social work education, two professional references (at least one from another social worker)
Manitoba College of Social Workers	Completion of professional development hours (within the first year of registration concerning ethics and standards of practice) a professional reference from a recent supervisor
Prince Edward Island Social Work Registration Board	Proof of social work education
Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers	A degree in social work in the last 5 years or relevant experience in the last 5 years
Ordre de Travailleur Sociaux and des Therapies Conjugaux et Familiaux du Quebec	Proof of social work education, proof of expert proficiency in French, completion of specialized professional development opportunities
Alberta College of Social Workers	1500 hours of supervision under a RSW (this can include practicum hours and generally must be completed in a one-year timeframe), proof of social work education
Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada	Social work education, two references (one by a social worker registered with the ASWNC)

Other Health Professional Regulatory Body	Method of Assessing Jurisprudence/ Entry to Practice
Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists (NSCCT)	Two-year candidacy period, supervised 120 hours practicum, Masters Level Counselling Education Program

College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO)	Completion of jurisprudence e-module and a registration exam
College of Occupational Therapists of Nova Scotia (COTNS)	National Occupational Therapy Certification Examination (NOTCE) used to test critical reasoning
College of Registered Nurse of Nova Scotia	Licensing exam (NCLEX-RN) and Jurisprudence exam
Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists	Jurisprudence exam, 20 weeks supervised practice, 560 hours unstructured practice

Primary Research

To assess perceptions concerning social worker candidacy and how it contributes to jurisprudence, two social work research assistants compiled three surveys on SurveyMonkey and issued them amongst three groups of NSCSW members. With the use of electronic contact information obtained from the in-house membership database, Intouch, 1,672 survey invitations were sent to the membership. Complete participant response and attrition rates are given in the table below.

Category	total sent	total bounce backs	total surveyed	attrition rate	responses	response rate
RSW	1062	48	1014	4.52%	187	18.44%
SWC	293	10	283	3.41%	86	30.39%
SWCS	317	7	310	2.21%	80	25.81%
TOTAL	1672	65	1607	3.38%	353	24.88%

Survey Discussion

Within the collected open-ended, qualitative data three noticeable themes emerged from response content: Program Structure, Communication and Life-long Learning. These three themes (noted by research assistants as category one themes) were used to gain a greater understanding of the areas of interest as stated by participants.

Communication

Communication was widely identified as an area that needs improvement, as it is something that affects the perception of candidacy and overall perception of the NSCSW. Participants expressed frustration with the communication process during candidacy and with the NSCSW in general. A lack of online presence and candidacy resources was of particular concern. In relation, participants expressed the need for communication with the membership

and social work students in regard to the purpose and benefits of the candidacy program and the NSCSW Standards of Practice.

Survey respondents identified a need for increased professional presence of the NSCSW. In particular, respondents expressed the need for candidate and supervisor recognition, post-completion of candidacy. Respondents identified how a group format of candidacy could benefit the communication between supervisors and supervisees.

Lastly, survey respondents identified the frustration of the lack of time and scheduling constraints to meet supervision requirements, and that the inclusion of online methods could reduce such concerns.

Program Structure

It was widely noted throughout the survey responses that there is general frustration with the program structure of candidacy, largely the perceived rigidity of the program and the lack of support for candidates and supervisors. This included issues with program guidance and access to information on approve supervisors. Survey results purported general confusion amongst the membership regarding the process of registering with the NSCSW as a social worker. Additionally, all groups of respondents expressed concern over the length of the candidacy program. Reviews of active legislative bodies and academic literature support this concern by suggesting the use of a one-year candidacy or mentorship program.

Life-long Learning

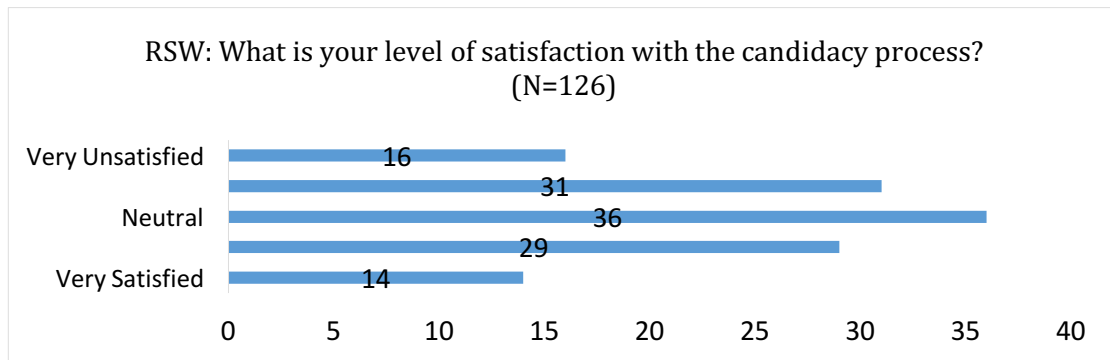
The literature review showed no conclusive support for the evidence of an entry to practice examination focusing on jurisprudence in practice. However, as seen in Gursansky, Quinn, & LeSuer (2010), and Rehn & Kalman (2016) the capacity of mentorship has been shown to help new practitioners come to a greater understanding of the ethical intricacies in practice.

Despite the expression of frustration for the current candidacy program, many participants acknowledged the purpose of and opportunities available through a mentorship program. The recommendations that respondents gave were numerous, showing an interest in improvement of the program. Attitudes among respondents were positive toward life-long learning, and there appears to be a general recognition of life-long learning as a crucial piece to ethical social work practice. However, there is also frustration toward the mandatory nature of the candidacy program, particularly when one feels that they are adequately prepared for the field, as in highly educated individuals or practitioners that are inter-provincially mobile.

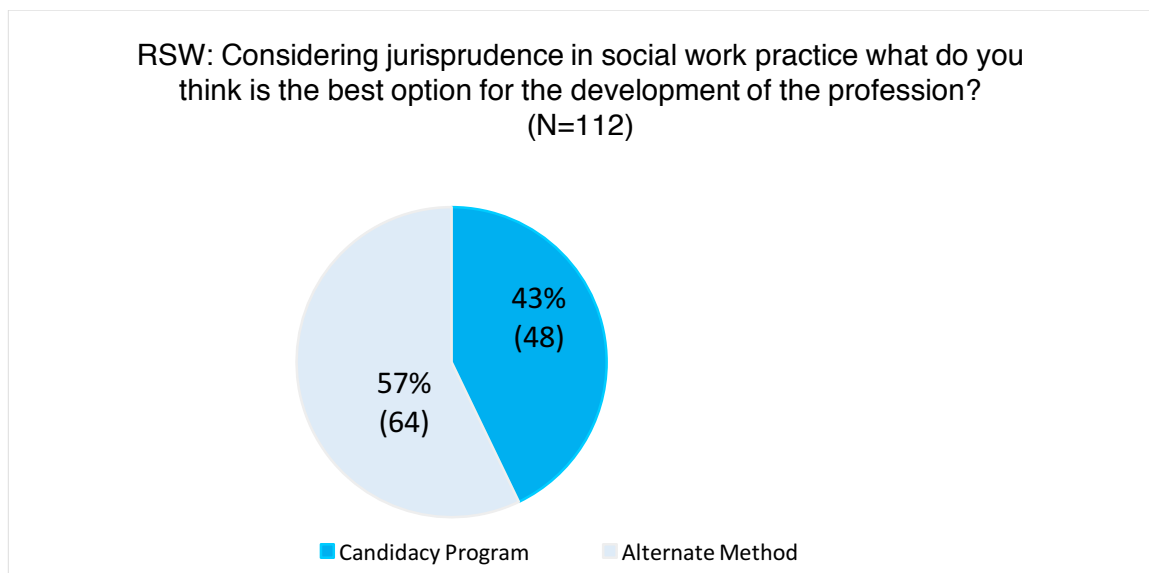
Graphical Representations

The below graphs detail general perceptions of candidacy amongst RSWs, SWCs, and SWCSs. Responses for the full question sets can be found in the “Nova Scotia Candidacy Program and Jurisprudence” report.

RSW Graphs



RSW respondents were asked their level of satisfaction overall with the candidacy process. The 126 responses display normal distribution, with a neutral level of satisfaction being the most popular response (29%), with rates decreasing towards more extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

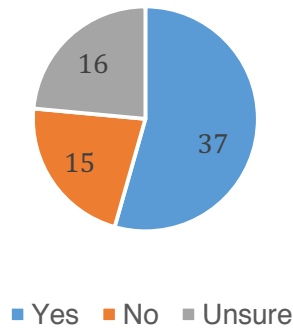


When asked about whether practitioners would consider candidacy or an alternate method for initial registration considering jurisprudence 57% responded that they believe an alternate method to be more suitable whereas 43% responded that they believe candidacy to be the best method to ensure jurisprudent practice.

SWCS Graphs

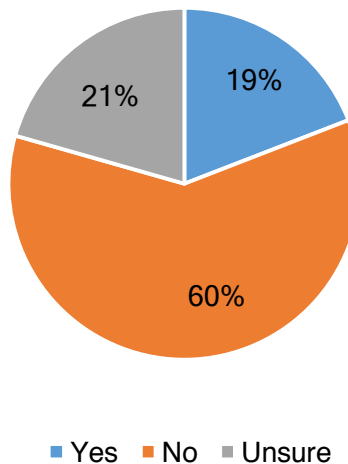


SWCS: Do you feel that candidacy helps SWCs come to a greater understanding of the CASW Code of Ethics and NSASW Standards of Practice? (N=68)



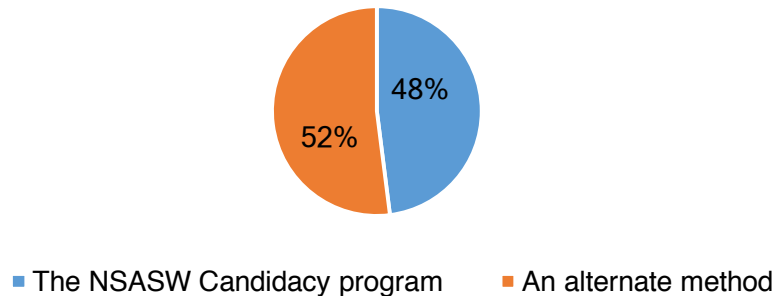
When asked if candidacy helps SWCs come to a greater understanding of the CASW Code of Ethics and NSASW Standards of Practice 54% responded “yes”, 22% responded “no”, and 24% were “unsure”.

SWCS: Do you receive enough guidance from the NSCSW in your role as a candidacy supervisor? (N=68)



When asked if they receive enough guidance from the NSCSW in the role as candidacy supervisors 60% of respondents answered “no”, 19% answered “yes”, and 21% were “unsure/neutral”.

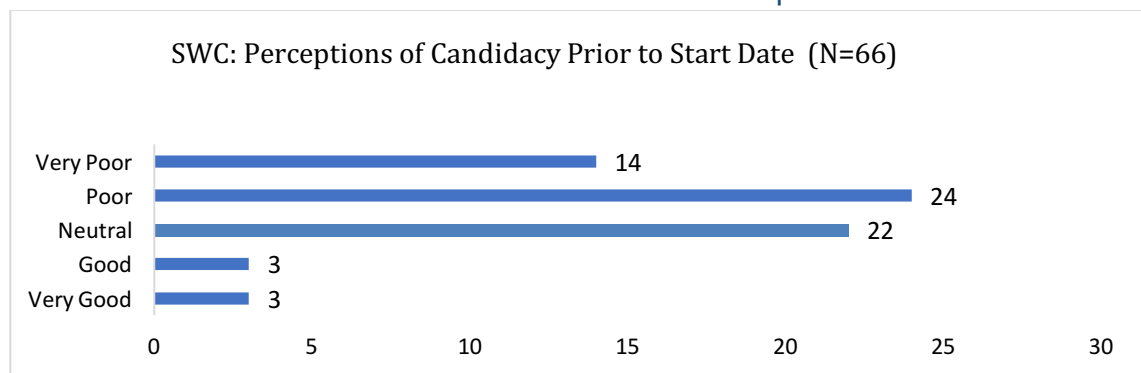
SWCS: Considering jurisprudence in social work practice, what do you think is the best option for the development of Nova Scotia's social work profession? (N=67)



When asked if SWCS supported the candidacy program or an alternate method considering jurisprudence, 52% would support “an alternate method” and 48% continue to support the “candidacy program”.

When SWC were asked of their perceptions of candidacy prior to starting the process the majority (n=46 or 70%) responded either “poor” or “neutral”. A total of six respondents (9%) responded with a “good” or “very good” perception of candidacy prior to starting the process, and 14 respondents or 21% responded with “very poor”.

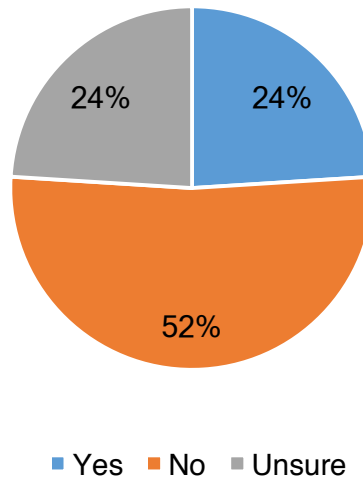
Social Worker Candidates Graphs



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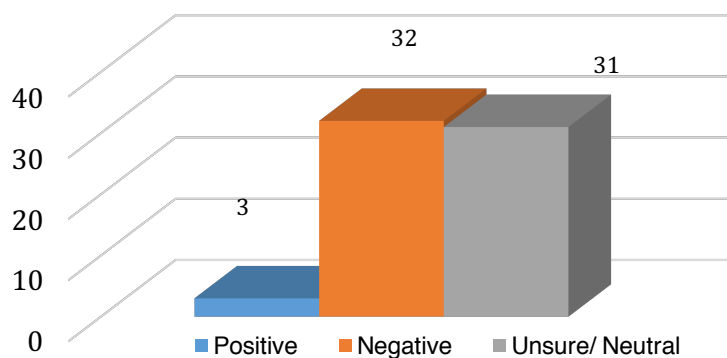


SWC: Do you feel that candidacy has helped you come to a greater understanding of the CASW Code of Ethics and NSASW Standards of Practice? (N=66)



When asked if candidacy helped SWCs come to a greater understanding of the CASW Code of Ethics and the NSASW Standards of Practice 24% of respondents answered “unsure”, 24% responded “yes” and 52% responded “no”.

SWC: How do you feel about the support you have received from the NSCSW throughout the candidacy process? (N=66)



When asked of the support they receive from the NSCSW throughout candidacy 48% responded that the support is “negative” 47% were “unsure”, and 5% stated the support was “positive”.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths of Candidacy Program

	Life-Long Learning	Program Structure	Communication
Candidates	Jurisprudence Life-long Learning Mentor Practical Application Reflection	Jurisprudence Length Mentor Practical Application Reflection Support	Communication* Online Portal Support
Registered Social Workers	Communication Job Function Life-Long learning Mentorship Practical Application SW Education	Job Function Practical Application Program Design SW Education Undefined	(none)

The table above details the strengths of the candidacy program under the themes of life-long- learning, program structure and communication amongst SWC and RSW respondents, while the following table details the weaknesses of the candidacy program under the themes of life-long- learning, program structure and communication amongst SWC and RSW respondents.

Weaknesses of Candidacy Program

	Life-Long Learning	Program Structure	Communication
Candidates	Finding Supervisor	AIT Expense Length Not Practical Application Paperwork Paternalistic Program Focus Program Itself Redundant Repetitive Rigid Stressful Time Struggles	Clarity Communication* NSASW Outdated Questions Competence
Registered Social Workers		Communication Interaction Meeting Difficulties Mobility Neccessity Practical Application Program Design Program Length Program Perception Time Restrictions	Communication*

Conclusion

Communication

It is recommended that the NSCSW work to increase communication with the membership, largely through online methods with social worker candidates and candidacy supervisors. In particular, to support the candidacy program it is recommended that the NSCSW take measures to communicate the value of life-long learning and the relevance of the CASW Code of Ethics and NSASW Standards of Practice to the candidacy program. It is also recommended that there is increased communication with social work students across Nova Scotia concerning candidacy and how to register either as a student or as a candidate upon graduation.

To create a greater sense of professionalization and recognition of the candidacy program, it is recommended that upon completion candidates are sent a certificate of completion to congratulate them on completing the process. Additionally, it is recommended that a measure of gratitude is extended towards candidacy supervisors for volunteering their time, either through a thank you letter or networking event.

The increased option of a group format would allow social worker candidates to more fully benefit from the third perspective of a candidate in their field of practice, recognizing that all social workers, candidates or otherwise, bring a different perspective to the life-long learning process.

Lastly, it is recommended that the NSCSW encourage increased use of online methods of communication (i.e. video conference, phone) to meet the supervision requirements for the candidacy process. Survey respondents identified the frustration of the lack of time and scheduling constraints to meet supervision requirements, and the inclusion of such online methods could reduce such concerns.

Program Structure

A recommendation to address the program content and design concerns amongst the membership is the creation of a more detailed and comprehensive candidacy guidebook, for both supervisors and candidates. This guidebook should offer points for discussion in supervision sessions (i.e. reflective questions for consideration in ethical practice), as well as suggestions for supervisors, detailing the guidelines of acting as a mentor. This candidacy guide should be easily accessible to the membership and detail the benefits and reasoning for candidacy as a requirement for registration, thus acting as a means of communication with the membership.

Candidates can be supported through an online (NSCSW website) provision of a list of available supervisors. This is especially important for SWCs that come from out-of-province and have few connections in Nova Scotia. To increase the effectiveness and support of the candidacy program an adequate number of supervisors for candidates is necessary. It is thus suggested that the NSCSW take an active means of communicating with the membership the

benefits of supervision (i.e. life-long learning) with RSWs and increase the pool of supervisors to a variety of fields of practice.

It is recommended that the NSCSW clearly articulate to the membership the steps necessary to registering as a social worker candidate or registered social worker. This should be done in a digestible, easily accessed, and visually appealing way. The College of Occupation Therapists has created a “9 Steps to Registration Checklist” that offers an example of one such way this can be communicated, displayed via pdf or poster-form with 9 color blocked numeral steps to registering with the regulatory body.

A final recommendation in relation to program structure is to decrease the length of the candidacy program to one year, as supported by the survey responses requesting a decrease and further supported in the literature review. Registered Social Workers, Social Worker Candidates, and Social Worker Candidacy Supervisors largely identified the length of the program as unnecessary and redundant. Encouraging a shorter but more fulfilling program may revitalize the memberships’ perception on the candidacy program.

Life-long Learning

It is recommended that the NSCSW fully utilize the skills of the membership to form a candidacy committee of social workers who guide and re-develop the candidacy program according to membership needs. Self-identified respondents communicated their interest in assisting the NSCSW in re-shaping the candidacy program and their contact information has been relayed to the Executive Director & Registrar.

It is also recommended that the NSCSW consider alternate methods of jurisprudence or methods that can be used in conjunction with candidacy that support the AIT, and permit registered social workers to easily move between provinces and territories.

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